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## St. Benedict's Monastery ranch for sale for \$150 million

Scott Condon, Aspen Daily News Staff Writer

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A spiritual center and accommodations for visitors are a focal point of the 3,800-acre St. Benedict's Monastery property. It went on the market Thursday for \$150 million.

Courtesy of Mirr Ranch Group

The 3,800-acre St. Benedict's Monastery property in Capitol Creek Valley was listed for sale on Thursday for \$150 million.

The sale has been anticipated for a couple of years after the Cistercian Order of the Strict Observance that oversees the monastery decided the remaining monks would be relocated. The monastery has operated in Capitol Creek Valley since 1956. It includes a

working ranch, with more than 1,000 irrigated acres, and a spiritual center and affiliated cabins for guests. It's one of the most stunning properties in the Roaring Fork basin.

Ken Mirr, whose firm, Mirr Ranch Group, has the listing, said St. Benedict's is a unique property, with 3,800 intact acres close to Aspen and with a history of careful oversight.

"It's a property that's been locked in the safe in a vault since 1956," he said. "They are wonderful stewards of the property. It's one of the largest, intact properties in that immediate area. It's just not cluttered with a lot of stuff."

The unique property will likely attract a special buyer that realizes the land-use limits and the history of conservation that Pitkin County, the Capitol Creek Caucus and individual landowners have nurtured in the area over several decades. The property will likely attract a "high net-worth, conservation buyer," he said.

"What we're not looking for is to waste our time with any buyers who have some kind of high-density residential, high-density resort or something like that," Mirr said. "That is not what we're looking for."



A sign points the way to St. Benedict's Monastery property on Thursday.

Jordan Curet/Special to the Aspen Daily News

St. Benedict's is overseen by St. Joseph's Abbey in Spencer, Massachusetts, according to its website. Mirr said the owners looked at several options of what to do with the property before deciding to sell. Homeowners in the Capitol Creek Valley as well as visitors to the spiritual center have been concerned about its future and formed a group called Friends of the Monastery. They hoped to conserve as much of the property as possible.

David Chase, a member of the Friends of the Monastery, said the group has worked for the last 12-18 months to try to promote conservation options. He said he has the utmost respect for how the monks have cared for the property and the direction they decided upon.

"We respect what they want to do. It doesn't belong to any of us," he said. "Times change and they need to move on."

There's hope that as much of the property remains undeveloped as possible. Dale Will, acquisitions and projects director for Pitkin County Open Space and Trails, said the monastery is one of the "Big Four" ranches in that area that have been highly sought for conservation. The other ranches belong to the Child, Harvey and McBride families. All three ranches have been largely protected from development by voluntary actions of the families through conservation deals coordinated by Pitkin County or Aspen Valley Land Trust.

All told, 7,736 acres surrounding the monastery have been protected, Will said. Some of the conserved land abuts the monastery property.

He said he has discussed the idea of conservation easements with the monks at St. Benedict's for decades. He remains hopeful that Pitkin County can still work toward that goal with a buyer. The open space program isn't an eligible buyer.

"One-hundred-and-fifty million dollars is out of our range for an outright purchase," Will said.



The St. Benedict's ranch in Capitol Creek Valley includes 1,000 acres of irrigated land.

The open space program closed on the largest transaction in its 33-year history earlier this year with purchase of Snowmass Falls Ranch for \$34 million. That property outside of Snowmass Village also is stunning, but significantly smaller at 650 acres.

The monastery ranch features more than 5 miles of frontage along Capitol, Lime and Little Elk creeks. Grand peaks such as Haystack Mountain and Mount Sopris tower over it.

The property has three main structures, according to the Pitkin County Assessor's Office record. The largest is nearly 19,000 square feet. Another is 2,288 square feet and the third is 880 square feet. There also are cabins, a barn and various agricultural buildings.

While Pitkin County has a house-size cap of 9,250 square feet, the Capitol Creek Caucus successfully lobbied for a limit of 5,750 square feet.

Mirr said he understands that some people will be upset or saddened by news the property is listed for sale. Word of the impending listing spread this week. "I think one of the brothers mentioned this at Mass last Sunday," he said.

Mirr said Pitkin County and the Capitol Creek Caucus have created a blueprint for what can happen in the area and the monks have established a great legacy.

"We're trying to market in a way that's respectful for what they've done and how people feel about the area," Mirr said. "I can't promise what's going to happen to it."

He said he will focus on why a person should buy the property and not necessarily what they can and cannot do.

"You should learn how to step into the shoes of being a good land steward because this is a special place with special values with great neighbors," Mirr said. "I hope that's possible."

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