

METHOW CONSERVANCY NEWS

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Creative Conservation in Mazama

Thanks to the shared vision of several private landowners, another important step forward has been made to preserve one of the Methow Valley's signature view corridors at the Mazama Junction. Through a creative and collaborative process, commercial and residential development slated for the gateway to Mazama has been reconfigured to permanently protect 32 acres of open space.



A collaborative effort to protect the scenic beauty of the Mazama Junction has permanently protected 32 acres. This project adjoins an existing 33 acre Methow Conservancy conservation easement to create a 65 acre scenic and farmable corridor at the west entrance to the Methow Valley.

to the existing "town" and protect the rural character of the entrance to the valley. Huge strides were made to protect the junction area in 2000 when a conservation easement was donated by Ben Goetter and Kathryn Hinsch to the Methow Conservancy, protecting 33 acres of agricultural land and open space on the west side of the Mazama junction.

In 2006, the Methow Conservancy completed a comprehensive Conservation Needs Assessment (CNA). This assessment identified the Mazama Junction as a scenic priority area for conservation. Recommendations from the CNA also included watching for opportunities to work with the development community to help shape site planning to achieve conservation goals. As proposals for commercial and residential development began to emerge at this highly visible northern gateway to the Methow Valley our Mazama Junction conservation project arose.

Coexistence of Conservation and Development

With many of our easement projects protecting conservation values can be accomplished while accommodating well-planned development. Home sites or development are reduced and sometimes relocated to achieve conservation goals. In the case of the Mazama Junction, our goal was to help implement the community vision by reducing and relocating the commercial and residential parcels so that the scenic highway corridor and large, open views were protected.

After nearly two years and with thanks to a majority of the landowners at the Mazama Junction, including a group of private conservation investors who formed to assist the project, nearly all of the commercial development that would have been strung out directly along Highway 20 and Lost River Road will now be clustered away from the Highway and closer to the core of Mazama. Additionally, the nine residential parcels that were approved for development in 1992 and would have filled the open field fronting the highway will be relocated and clustered in a stand of trees outside the primary view corridor. The 27 acres of open space created by this project will be protected by the Methow Conservancy thanks in part to a \$250,000 grant from the Federal Scenic Byways Program. An additional 5.7 riparian acres along the Methow River will also be protected. The land in the view corridor will be left as open space with the potential for agricultural use. Additionally, the Methow Conservancy will continue to work to integrate one remaining commercial parcel as part of the overall conservation vision for the Mazama Junction.

Background

The Mazama Junction refers to the large, open fields at the turn into Mazama from Highway 20. The fields are on the north side of Highway 20 between the Highway and the Mazama bridge. In the 1970s, the Early Winters Ski Resort was proposed and the junction was zoned commercial to accommodate the ski area. While plans for the ski resort were scrapped, the commercial zoning at the junction remains today.

During the Comprehensive Plan revision for the Upper Methow (1996-2000), a consistent theme in comments at public meetings was the desire to preserve the view-shed and the open and pastoral feel at the Mazama Junction. Fragmentation and strip development continued to be a worry for many in Mazama including the local planning group, the Mazama Advisory Committee, who wanted to cluster any additional commercial development closer

John Sunderland, the Methow Conservancy's Land Program Manager who helped bring the participating landowners together says, "The success of this project would not have been possible without the cooperation and goodwill of numerous community members and businesses, including the existing commercial landowners, a small group of local residents who invested funds for a shared conservation outcome, and Tom and Sonya Campion. I specifically want to thank Ben Goetter and Kathryn Hinsch, for donating a conservation easement to the Conservancy that gave conservation a foothold at the Mazama Junction and opened up the vision for this project; Morris Nilson and his family, for embracing the concept from the beginning, helping facilitate it, and donating over 6 acres of commercially zoned land at the Junction to the Methow Conservancy; the Patterson Family, for their patience, understanding and flexibility when it would have been easier to follow a conventional path; and finally, the members of the Mazama Corner LLC, for their willingness to take significant financial risk to invest in a community vision for conservation at the Junction." The members of this investment group are Char and Ed Alkire, Laurel Canan and Sara Jinks, Dave Davison, Nancy and Dick Gode, and Bill Pope and Teresa Castner.

Mazama Junction ~ what could have been



This part of Mazama was zoned for heavy commercial and real estate density. All the red buildings indicate homes that could have been built and green buildings indicated commercial structures that could have been built. Just imagine the view from Highway 20 at maximum build out.

Mazama Junction ~ what will be



Thanks to some very generous landowners, a dedicated group of conservation-minded investors, and the Methow Conservancy, much of the development potential from the Mazama Corner has been removed permanently. Commercial and residential development can still occur, but the locations for these future building sites have been moved to more appropriate locations to keep the open view intact and the meadow land still productive. In the end it is a win-win outcome, good for local business, for agriculture, and for conservation.