

2020 OWL CREEK MASTER PLAN

Appendix A – Existing Conditions Report

INTRODUCTION

The Owl Creek Planning Area contains approximately 4,891 acres and encompasses the Owl Creek Caucus Area as well as several large privately-owned parcels to the south of the Caucus Area boundary (see Figure 1). The southernmost portion of the Planning Area is comprised of US Forest Service (USFS) lands that encompass the majority of the Buttermilk Ski Area. However, the base area facilities for Buttermilk are located outside of the Planning Area. The Planning Area was modified for this master plan to resolve some boundary issues such as avoiding splitting parcels into more than one planning area. Other changes include incorporating the Eagle Pines Subdivision, and the southeast corner of the federal lands parcel that contains the Buttermilk Ski Area, into the Planning Area. The Eagle Pines Subdivision had been excluded from any planning area to this point. These changes increase the size of the Planning Area by about 225 acres.

The Owl Creek Valley is a unique high-mountain valley situated between Aspen and the Town of Snowmass Village. The valley floor has primarily been preserved for agricultural purposes as it has been used since the first settlers to the area in the 1800's. The area retains its rural character, as viewed from Owl Creek Road, the primary roadway within the Planning Area. Residential homes have been developed in well-sited Planned Unit Developments on both sides of Owl Creek Road. The scenic beauty of the area is spectacular during all seasons. The snowcapped mountains are prominent to the southwest as one approaches the Town of Snowmass Village, and the pastoral valley floor is the predominant feature when heading east towards the City of Aspen.

A neighborhood caucus for the Owl Creek Valley was established in order to provide a local forum for area residents. The Owl Creek Caucus Board functions as a referral body that provides comments to the County on land use issues. The caucus area boundary generally follows property boundaries. It includes the Owl Creek Ranch subdivision to the north of Owl Creek Road, as well as several subdivisions on the south side of Owl Creek Road including, East Owl Creek, Owl Creek Meadows Parcel, Mandalay North, Guber Family Lot Split, and several larger unsubdivided parcels such as the Hines property among others (See Figure 2)

The Planning Area contains properties within the existing Owl Creek Caucus Area, private and public lands within the larger Owl Creek watershed (including larger residential lots at the top of West Buttermilk and the Buttermilk Ski Area), whose development could impact the visual, environmental and rural character of the Owl Creek Planning Area. Specifically, the Planning Area goes beyond the caucus boundary to the south to include the Hines Property in its entirety. The Hines property is accessed from Owl Creek Road, and any development on the property will affect the Owl Creek planning area. This property was approved for subdivision many years ago, but the subdivision plat was never recorded. The Planning Area boundary continues south to the Willow Creek Ridge, which is the southern extent of the watershed. This area includes wildlife habitat that is critical to the overall habitat pattern in the Owl Creek Valley.

Permitted USFS activities in this southern area may also affect Owl Creek. The Pfister Tracts and the Woods Lot Split at the top of West Buttermilk have been included in the Planning Area as they physically relate more to the Owl Creek Valley than to the Highway 82 side, though they are accessed from West Buttermilk Road off of Highway 82. To the north of Owl Creek Road, the Planning Area boundary extends to the ridge that divides the Brush Creek and Owl Creek valleys. The northern boundary incorporates portions of two large undeveloped properties that lie within the Owl Creek Valley.

This appendix includes existing conditions data and information which supports and informs the policies and implementation measures contained in the 2020 Owl Creek Master Plan to which this document is appended. The information contained herein is intended to provide a snapshot of the existing conditions within the Planning Area for each of the policy topics covered in the Master Plan. These policy topics are listed as follows:

- Existing Land Use.
- Zoning.
- Residential Development (addressed under Existing Land Use and Zoning topics).
- Commercial Development (addressed under Existing Land Use and Zoning topics).
- Growth Management.
- Water Use, Quality and Quantity.
- Air Quality.
- Roads.
- Transit.
- Natural Environment.
- Open Space/Trails/Recreation/Tourism.
- Agriculture.
- Scenic Quality.

- Affordable Housing.
- Historic Resources.
- Mineral Exploration/Extraction.

EXISTING LAND USE

In Owl Creek, the larger residential lots, undeveloped land, irrigated hay meadows and remnants of old agricultural buildings result in an area that retains its rural character, regardless of its proximity to the more intense development in Snowmass Village and Aspen. The Snowmass Village Land Use Master Plan describes Owl Creek as a “rural buffer” between the City of Aspen and Snowmass Village. The Owl Creek planning area exemplifies the County policy that supports preservation of rural residential, agricultural and open space areas as distinct from urban development within adopted urban growth boundary areas; to eliminate urban residential sprawl and maintain a clear distinction between urban areas.

The following paragraphs provide a general summary of the existing land uses within the Planning Area. Table 1 provides a breakdown of the existing land use within the Owl Creek Planning Area based on the Type category in the Assessor Parcel Database. Figure 3 is a map which depicts the existing land use pattern within the Planning Area.

TABLE 1
Existing Land Use Breakdown

Existing Land Use Category	Acres
Residential Single-Family	1755.53
Residential Duplex	0.11
Affordable Housing	23.66
Recreation	65.78
Agriculture	542.87
Private Open Space	96.36
Public Open Space	2218.87
Right-of-way (deductive)	28.55
Vacant	158.77
TOTAL	4890.5

As shown in this table, the vast majority of the Planning Area is comprised of single-family residential development and public open space lands. The agricultural acreage identified in this table is nearly all contained within a single

parcel which is known as the Owl Creek Meadows property. It should be noted that while this entire parcel is identified as agriculture, a review of satellite imagery reveals that most of this property is wooded. The agricultural portion of the property is located adjacent to Owl Creek Road and is comprised of irrigated pastures and meadows. The irrigated pastures/meadow area along Owl Creek Road represents approximately 20% of the total parcel acreage.

Subdivisions (Also See Figure 2 - Subdivisions Map)

- Owl Creek Ranch Subdivision contains single-family residences on lots ranging in size from 27 to 83 acres, and a common area, which consists of irrigated pasture. Lot 11 – historic residence restored; approved for one additional residence of 5,750 square feet on the lot (not built).
- East Owl Creek subdivision contains clustered single-family residences on 3-acre to 40-acre lots with a common area consisting of irrigated pasture.
- There are roughly six affordable housing parcels within the caucus boundary that contain residences; and there are several caretaker dwelling units.
- The 321-acre Hines property is as yet undeveloped,. Previous approval for subdivision of this property is null and void, as no subdivision plat was ever recorded.
- The 35-acre Mandalay North tract has approval for one residence and accessory structures.
- The Guber Family Lot Split contains two residences, one employee housing unit and two caretaker dwelling units (total).
- Owl Creek Meadows is a subdivision which was abandoned in 2014. This subdivision had consisted of twelve 35-acre tracts that were intended primarily for undeveloped land and/or pasture. The property has since reverted to a single parcel containing just over 530 acres.
- The Sinclair property is a 44-acre parcel that contains one residence but has been approved as a receiver site for two TDR's which allow a residence of up to 10,750 square feet.
- The old Christensen Ranch parcel, also known as the Glendale Stock Farm, contains two residences and several historic ranch buildings.
- Two-lot Stapleton Subdivision – one lot is developed with a 15,000 square foot residence; the other lot remains undeveloped.
- Both the Owl Creek bike path and Nordic trails run on east/west alignments through the Planning Area.
- In addition, the Airline Trail, which runs from the Owl Creek Bike Path up to the trail system in Sky Mountain Park, was constructed since the last update to the Owl Creek Master Plan.

- Approximately 180 acres of the Sky Mountain Park lie within the Planning Area. Prior to the open space acquisition, Sky Mountain Park included the former Droste property, which had been divided into 35-acre tracts, which have now been retired, as well as a portion of Seven Star Ranch.
- The 128-acre Aspen Lake property remains undeveloped.
- All the five 35-acre Pfister Tracts are developed with residences.
- One of the two Woods Lot Split lots is developed with a residence.
- Due to ongoing skiing operations and the Ski-Rec zoning, which requires master plan approval for any changes in use, it is assumed that there is no potential for residential development within the Buttermilk Ski Area at least for the life of this master plan.

Affordable Housing

In addition to scattered caretaker dwelling units, affordable housing within the Planning Area consists of six employee housing units located on relatively larger lots. These units are located in the eastern portion of the Planning Area. Five of the units are associated with the East Owl Creek Subdivision, including one which is the ranch manager's unit, and the sixth is located on Lot 11 of the Owl Creek Ranch Subdivision.

Public Access

In addition to the public use associated with the Buttermilk Ski Area, there are several trails located on federal- and County-owned lands within the Planning Area. The Government Trail traverses through the southern portion of the Planning Area. Access to this trail can be obtained from the Buttermilk Ski Area parking lot via the Buttermilk Access Road, and through the Maroon Creek Club Subdivision at the base of Tiehack via the pedestrian bridge from the Aspen Recreation Center. Access to the County-owned Sky Mountain Park trail system can be obtained from the Owl Creek Bike Trail via the Airline Trail. An agreement between the Aspen Nordic Council and a private property owner in the Planning area, connects the Owl Creek Trail on either side of the property for Nordic (winter use) only.

Transferable Development Rights

No development rights have been transferred from lands within the Planning Area. However, 10 parcels have been approved as TDR receiver sites. In total, 24 TDR's have been extinguished on these 10 parcels. On all but one of the receiver sites, the TDR's were used to allow additional floor area on a residence. On the remaining parcel, one TDR was used to create an initial development right and a second TDR was used for additional floor area. The parcels that

have been approved as receiving sites are depicted on the TDR Inventory Map (Figure 4) and are discussed in the Growth Management and House Size section of this appendix.

Commercial Uses

With the exception of the upper portion of the Buttermilk Ski Area, there are currently no commercial uses within the Owl Creek Planning Area and no new commercial development is anticipated outside of the Ski area.

ZONING

Zoning Descriptions

The Planning Area contains only four zone districts including AH, LIR-35, AR-10 and Ski-Rec. Table 2 below provides a summary of the intent statements for each zone district and identifies the properties contained within each district (left-hand column). Figure 5 is a map showing the existing zoning pattern within the Planning Area.

Table 2
Zone District Intent

Zone District	Intent
AH (East Owl Creek and Owl Creek Ranch Subdivision Employee Units)	The AH (Affordable Housing) zone district is intended to provide land for the production of Category affordable housing. This zone district is limited to lands located within an urban growth boundary.
AR-10 <i>1 Dwelling Unit per 10 acres – (Bulk of the Planning Area)</i>	The intent of the AR-10 (Agricultural/ Residential) zone district is “to accommodate small scale agricultural activities and large-lot residential development that maintains the rural character and appearance of the land. Because few agricultural activities can be accomplished on a 10-acre lot, the majority of such land will be used for residential uses. Residential development should be clustered and/or grouped at the edges of valleys or wooded areas in order to minimize the visual disruption of the natural landforms and to avoid the appearance of unrelated homes spread randomly across the land.”
LIR-35 <i>1 dwelling unit per 35 acres of land – (Owl Creek Meadows,</i>	The intent of the LIR-35 zone district (Low-Impact Residential) is to allow low-density, low-intensity residential development. The principal land use in this zone district is residential, with typically associated

<p>Mandalay North, Guber Family Trust Lot Split, 7-Star Open Space Parcels A & C, Brush Creek Ranch Parcel)</p>	<p>accessory uses. The zone district seeks to limit the intensity of development to moderate sized buildings and structures, thereby minimizing the impacts of construction, servicing and occupation of the residences to preserve the rural character of the land, protect onsite natural resources, minimize employment generation associated with more intense development, and otherwise limit the demand for public services. Lands appropriate for this zone district are properties that are rural in character with environmental or agricultural resources, or environmental hazards or properties otherwise sensitive to intensive development."</p>
<p>SKI-REC - Development density set by master plan – (Buttermilk Ski Area)</p>	<p>The SKI-REC (Ski-Recreation) zone district is "intended for lands that are used for downhill and cross-country skiing and other uses permitted by a Federal or other public agency, such as grazing, hunting, and passive and other recreational uses. The district also accommodates affordable housing. Development activity within the SKI-REC zone district is subject to a master plan.</p>

Buildout Analysis

Buildout analysis for the Owl Creek Planning Area is summarized in Table 3 below. The hypothetical maximum buildout potential for each parcel is also depicted on the Buildout Map (Figure 6). Table 4 is the buildout analysis table that was done in 2014. Comparison of these two tables provides some insight into recent development activity within the Planning Area, though some differences in the numbers are the result of altering the Planning Area boundaries for this master plan update process, while others may be the result of differences in assumptions, methodology, or other non-growth-related factors. One example of a difference is the number of parcels within the Planning Area shown in the two tables. The 2014 table shows more parcels despite the Eagle Pines Subdivision being included in the Planning Area for the current table. This is the result of the Owl Creek Meadows parcel having been converted to a single parcel, which resulted in the prior 35-acre parcels being retired. The assumptions used for each analysis are described in the notes below the tables.

Table 3
Private Land Buildout Analysis Summary (August 2020)

Zone District	Private Land ¹			Land subject to Conservation Agreements ²		Maximum Buildout Allowed by Zoning (Dwelling Units)	# Dwelling Units Removed from development potential due to Conservation or subdivision restrictions	Buildout Potential after accounting for reduction from Conservation and subdivisions restrictions	# Existing Dwelling Units	Maximum Remaining Buildout Potential (Dwelling Units)	Likely Remaining Buildout Potential (Dwelling Units) ³	% Built Out based on maximum potential (Units)	Avg. House Size (sq. ft. based on heated area)
	Parcels	Acres	%	Acres	%								
Planning Area Acreage: 4891	80	3,095	63%	273	9%	232	32	200	61	139	83	44%	7,890
AR-10	64	2,019	65%	-	0%	200	24	176	52	124	74	42%	8,652
LIR-35	7	930	30%	273	29%	27	8	19	4	15	9	27%	4,870
AH	5	19	1%	-	0%	5	-	5	5	-	-	100%	2,071
Ski-Rec ⁴	4	128	4%	-	0%	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA

¹ Includes privately-held parcels, parcels in conservation easement, Pitkin County-owned parcels and property owned by public entities for civic uses. Does not include right-of-way or USFS lands.

² Includes conservation easements and Pitkin County-owned open space.

³ Likely scenario assumes that approximately 60% of maximum buildout potential is likely to be built due to physical restraints such as slope, avalanche paths, and riparian zones as well as historical development patterns related to economic conditions and growth management. Individual caucuses may wish to work with Community Development Department to revise likely buildout based on local knowledge of properties.

⁴ Acreage for Ski-Rec district does not include portion of Ski-Rec zone that overlaps USFS parcel (733.06 acres)

Table 4
Private Land Buildout Analysis Summary (August 2014)

Caucus Area	Total Area (acres)	Zone District	Private Land ¹			Parcels subject to Conservation Agreements ²		Maximum Buildout Allowed by Zoning (Dwelling Units)	# Dwelling Units Removed from development potential due to Conservation	Buildout Potential after accounting for reduction from Conservation	# Existing Dwelling Units	Maximum Remaining Buildout Potential (Dwelling Units)	Likely ³ Remaining Buildout Potential (Dwelling Units)	% Built Out based on maximum potential (Units)	Avg. House Size (sq. ft. based on heated area)	% Change in potential buildout between 2003 and 2014 ⁴
			Parcels	Acres	%	Acres	%									
Owl Creek	4,431		89	2,808	63%	265	9%	219	23	196	57	139	83	29%	7,497	-32%
		AH	5	19	<1%	-	0%	5	-	5	5	-	-	100%	2,071	
		AR-10	61	2,022	72%	265	13%	196	23	173	48	125	75	28%	8,077	
		LIR-35	18	654	23%	-	0%	18	-	18	4	14	8	22%	7,320	
		SKI-REC	5	113	4%	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Subject to MP	-	

¹ Includes privately-held parcels, excludes Snowmass and Owl Creek Roads, trail paths and ROWs.

² There are no existing Conservation easements, transferable development rights (TDR) sending sites or Pitkin County-owned open space in the planning area. Existing conservation agreement is the Owl Creek Ranch HOA

³ Likely scenario assumes that approximately 60% of maximum buildout potential is likely to be built due to physical restraints such as slope, avalanche paths, and riparian zones as well as historical development patterns related to economic conditions and growth management. Individual caucuses may wish to work with Community Development Department to revise likely buildout based on local knowledge of properties.

⁴ The previous Master Plan indicated Owl Creek Planning Area was 19% built out. The 2003 figures are not directly comparable to the 2014 Build Out analysis due to differing assumptions in the 2014 analysis.

Comparison of these tables shows that the future buildout potential, both under the maximum and likely scenarios, has not changed. The average house size has increased slightly, most likely due to the use of TDR's to increase house size within the Planning Area.

The current buildout analysis indicates that the Planning Area is 44% built out based on the maximum buildout potential. The AR-10 zone district provides the greatest potential for additional residential growth, since this district is only built to 42% of its maximum potential. The 300-acre Hines parcel represents 21% of the maximum buildout potential of the entire Planning Area due to its size and AF-10 zoning. Since the final plat for this subdivision was never recorded, and since the property was never conserved as was intended as part of the subdivision approvals, the current or future owner could pursue a new subdivision application for up to the number of units allowed in the zone district. It should be noted, that it's unlikely that the maximum buildout potential will ever

be realized, since some of the parcels in the Planning Area may be restricted from further development by subdivision approvals or private covenants, which were not available for this analysis, or by physical and access constraints.

The second largest potential for residential growth is in the LIR-35 zone district which could accommodate between 9 and 15 additional units. Most of this potential resides with the Owl Creek Meadows property.

No future development potential was assigned to either the AH or Ski-Rec zones districts in Table 3. Uses in the Ski-Rec district are dictated by the Buttermilk Ski Area Master Plan. The AH zone district is comprised of parcels that are already developed with affordable housing units. Since this zone district is somewhat project-specific and since the zone district does not specify a density standard, no future development potential can be assigned to these parcels. Further rezoning to AH is not anticipated within the Planning Area since the AH zone district is currently limited to lands located within an urban growth boundary and no portion of the Owl Creek Planning Area is located within the Aspen UGB or any other urban growth boundary.

GROWTH MANAGEMENT AND HOUSE SIZE

In Pitkin County, growth management deals with the rate of growth, the location of growth and the quality and quantity of growth. The location of growth is typically determined on a site-specific basis at the time of land use review. Rate and quantity of growth are determined through zoning allowances, annual competition for a specific amount of square footage allowed via the Growth Management Quota system (GMOS), and through growth management exemptions.

In 1998, house size within the Owl Creek Caucus area ranged from 1,119 to 22,455 square feet, with an average house size of 6,033 square feet. In January 2000, new growth management regulations were adopted in Pitkin County, which included a house size restriction. The Owl Creek Planning Area lies within the rural growth management portion of the County. Under the regulations adopted in 2000, new homes within this area are limited to an initial size cap of 5,750 square feet, which may be exceeded subject to purchase of a transferable development right(s) as a growth management exemption or competition for the available growth management quota system allotment. Between 2014 and 2020 the average home size within the Planning Area increased from 7,497 to 7,890 square feet. This increase is likely due to the use of TDR's in the area, though only one of the TDR's approved for use within the Planning Area was issued after 2014.

Five homes were built in the Owl Creek Planning Area between 1998 and 2002, for an average annual growth rate of 2.7%. This was higher than the overall County growth rate at that time (1.6%). The most recent prior buildout inventory, which was done in 2014, showed 57 existing units, while the current buildout inventory identifies 61 existing units. This translates to an annual growth rate (in units) of 1.2% for the 6-year period.

No growth management approvals have been granted through the GMQS competition process to date since 2003.

Table 6 lists the Growth Management exemption approvals that have been granted within the Owl Creek Planning Area. In 2006 the County amended the Land Use Code to eliminate the use of TDR's for initial development rights in the rural area. As a result, most of the TDR exemptions that have been granted within the Planning Area were used to allow additional floor area to an existing dwelling. The parcels listed in the table below are also depicted on the TDR Receiver Sites Map (Figure 4). There have been no TDR's transferred from the Owl Creek Planning Area.

Table 6
TDR Receiver Site Inventory

Parcel ID	Property Name	TDRs Approved	Purpose	Approval Doc	Year Approved
264333301005	Hecht	1	Additional Floor Area	n/a Owl Creek Ranch	
264333401004	Rancho Caliente LLC	1	Additional Floor Area	n/a Owl Creek Ranch	
264334300004	K2 Family Trust	4	Additional Floor Area	HO 05-2011	2011
273504300008	Sunshine Ranch / Crown	3	Additional Floor Area	BOCC 121-2002, HO 09-2008	2002
273504401007	Elf Owl LLC	2	Additional Floor Area	n/a East Owl Creek	
273504401010	Taylor Enterprises Inc	1	Additional Floor Area	n/a East Owl Creek	
273505300007	Sinclair	2	Additional Floor Area	HO 09-2011	2011
273510202007	Eagle Pines Lot 7	1	Additional Floor Area	n/a Eagle Pines	2002
273510203002	Fifield	5	Development Right + Additional Fl Area	BOCC 134-2006 , BOCC 042-2007, AD 62-2010	2006, 2007, 2010
273510210003	West Buttermilk Pfister Tract 5	4	Additional Floor Area	HO 31-2006 (replaces HO 02-2003)	2006

WATER AND SEWER

Drainages

Spring Creek and Owl Creek are the two primary existing drainages within the Planning Area. Both generally flow from southwest to the northeast. There are also a few unnamed intermittent drainages within the Area as shown on Figure 1 (Planning Area Boundary Map). The Owl Creek Ditch also provides irrigation water within the Planning Area.

Water Service

There are two domestic water service areas that cover portions of the Planning Area, including a small area where both service areas overlap, according to the data obtained from the Pitkin County GIS Department. The Buttermilk Metro District serves the Owl Creek Ranch, Eagle Pines and East Owl Creek

Subdivisions, as well as the West Buttermilk Pfister Tracts and Woods Lot Split parcels. The City of Aspen Water Service Area covers the lower portion of the Buttermilk Ski Area and the Eagle Pines Subdivision. As shown on Figure 7 the two service areas overlap in the area of the Eagle Pines Subdivision. While the GIS map shows Eagle Pines in both water service areas, the Aspen Consolidated Sanitation District provides the water for the subdivision. Roughly half of the Planning Area is not included in any water service area. Most of the unserved area is either federally owned land or is characterized by very large rural lots.

The Buttermilk Metro District, a special taxing district service area, was approved in 2000 to address road improvements and water service. The intent of the district is to provide potable water for domestic use and for fire protection for subdivisions which are already approved by the County and partially or fully built-out. The special district service area, as approved, may not be expanded without County approval.

Water Quality

Historically, run-off from Owl Creek road has contained gravel and magnesium chloride which has, at a minimum, impacted wetlands along Owl Creek. It is unknown whether irrigation associated with hayfields and pasture has had any impact on water quality in the area. Since the paving of Owl Creek Road was completed, (see "Roads" section) water quality impacts related to gravel and magnesium chloride may have been lessened or eliminated, though no data has been collected to confirm this result.

Sewage Disposal

Properties within the Owl Creek Planning Area utilize individual septic systems. The County has endeavored to assess the impacts of septic systems on water supply within the Roaring Fork Valley. Given the relatively new age of septic systems within the Planning Area, septic system failure may not be an issue, though data is not currently available.

AIR QUALITY

The City of Aspen and Pitkin County both place a high value on preserving the best air quality possible. The City of Aspen has been monitoring air quality for over 25 years. This is primarily due to the fact that air quality in the upper Roaring Fork Valley was found to be in violation of the EPA's 24-hour standards for fine particulate air pollution (PM-10) as articulated in the Clean Air Act. Figure 8 is a map showing the PM-10 Non-attainment Area which was established as a result of EPA standard violation back in the late 1980's. As seen on this map, the eastern portion of the Planning Area is within the former Non-

Attainment Area. Due to regular monitoring and the enforcement of regulations adopted to address fine particulate air pollution, air quality in the Aspen area was re-designated as meeting the Clean Air Act standards in 2002. The Aspen Environmental Health Department provides current air quality monitoring data on its website: (<https://www.cityofaspen.com/298/Current-Air-Quality>).

A major component of fine particulate air pollution is caused by vehicular traffic. Estimates indicate that up to 83% of the upper valley PM-10 pollution comes from dirt kicked up by traffic driving on paved roads. The popularity of RFTA transit service and changes in road maintenance practices have helped achieve the significant reductions in PM-10 pollution.

ROADS

Service Level and Classification

Owl Creek Road is the only public county-maintained road in the Planning Area. Owl Creek Road is currently designated as a *high service area* road ¹, per the County 2020 Road Maintenance and Management Plan. It is 3.8 miles long, carries 1000-4999 vehicles per day; and is classified as a *Major Arterial* road. (See *Road Map in Attachment B*). County traffic counts for Owl Creek Road are summarized in the following table:

Table 7

ROAD NAME	SERVICE LEVEL	TRAFFIC COUNTS														Average		
		2004		2006		2008		2013		2016		2019		2020		Winter	Summer	
		Winter	Summer	Winter	Summer	Winter	Summer	Winter	Summer	Winter	Summer	Winter	Summer	Winter	Summer			
Owl Creek Road @ Sinclair Divide	High	01/04 2122	7/04 2861	1/06 2262	7/06 3702 5 dy avg		6/08 2568 5 dy avg										2192	3044
Owl Creek Road @ intersection Highway 82	High	3/04 2293	7/04 3177	1/06 2712	7/06 4138 5 dy avg	3/08 3081 5 dy avg	6/08 2909 4 dy avg	1/13 2922	7/13 4053	2/16 1051	6/16 2946 3 dy avg		7/19 4005 3 dy avg		2/20 3018 2 dy avg		2412	3464

Source: Pitkin County Engineering

West Buttermilk Road is designated as a Collector. Collector roads are used for commuting to and from population centers in the Aspen/Snowmass area. The remaining roads within the Planning Area are either private or are minimally utilized and are designated as local roads.

Voluntary Road Closure

At one time, there was a voluntary road closure along Owl Creek Road during the peak of wildlife migration. Currently, the County Sheriff may close the road for short periods on an ad-hoc basis to allow herd movements.

¹ High service area roads receive the greatest level of maintenance by the County and are the first to be plowed in the winter and the preferred surface is chip seal or asphalt.

Planned improvements for 2020

According to the County Engineer, the only currently planned improvement within the Planning Area is to install a retaining wall along Owl Creek Road in the Sinclair Divide area.

The 2003 Asset Management Plan called for paving, widening, and placing drainage improvements along the entire stretch of Owl Creek road from Highway 82 to Snowmass Village. These improvements have since been completed and Owl Creek Road was upgraded to a high service area road. The replacement project eliminated the need for dust control with magnesium chloride. Paving the road surface and other drainage and ditch system improvements that were completed over the past 5 years have reduced the impacts of sedimentation related to road gravel in wetland areas.

TRANSIT

In past years, Owl Creek Road has been considered for use as a potential "Busway," the intent being to improve transit service between Aspen and Snowmass Village and to alleviate traffic pressures on Highway 82 and Brush Creek Road. However, RFTA still does not run buses on Owl Creek Road. Though the road has been paved, residents in the area continue to be strongly opposed to the accommodation of buses on Owl Creek Road. Even given the potential for significant new development in Snowmass and resulting traffic, the Roaring Fork Transit Agency does not currently anticipate use of Owl Creek as a bus way.

Past discussions between the Aspen Skiing Company, elected officials and the Forest Service, that may re-occur, contemplate gondola access between the Buttermilk and Snowmass ski areas. Such an alignment would most likely be located on the Forest Service lands in the southern portion of the Caucus area but could create Wildlife and other impacts on a larger portion of the Owl Creek Planning Area.

NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Wildlife

Open space in the Owl Creek Valley contributes to the scenic value and rural character of the area. Fortunately, the irrigated pastures associated with the Owl Creek Ranch and East Owl Creek subdivisions are protected as common areas and will not be further developed. Sky Mountain Park provides important habitat and has seasonal closures in place to support wintering wildlife. Habitat improvements have been and continue to be important elements of the Sky Mountain Park Management Plan. The most significant open space value

remaining in the Owl Creek corridor is the wildlife habitat to the south of Owl Creek Road. As shown on Figures 9 and 10 this area provides breeding and calving habitat, migration corridor and critical winter range, which are key components of the wildlife use patterns in the broader area.

Migratory Corridor: Mule deer use the western-most portion of the Planning area as a migratory corridor to move between summer and winter range. They migrate from their summer ranges on Burnt Mountain, north through Owl Creek, over the divide between Owl Creek and Brush Creek into Wildcat Ranch.

The Maroon Bells Snowmass elk herd summers across a large area throughout the northern third of the Maroon/Snowmass Wilderness area. Movement north toward winter range begins around the 4th week of September with most migration occurring in late October and early November. It is the southeast facing shale slopes to the north of owl creek road that provide winter range, severe winter range, winter concentration areas and critical habitat for some of the elk that don't continue on to winter range further north. While elk use the entire Owl Creek area to migrate, the primary migration corridor coincides with that used by deer in the western portion of the Planning Area. Owl Creek remains one of the major relatively undisturbed migration corridors for deer and elk populations.

Breeding and Calving: Specific north-facing slopes south of owl creek road contain aspen groves that function as critical habitat, breeding and calving areas for elk. This area also supports a diversity of bird species and small mammals. It is interesting to note that some of the parcels with the greatest remaining development potential are located within the Elk Production habitat, as can be seen by comparing Figures 6 and 9.

Transition Range: Hayfields and pastures are used by deer and elk as transition range during summer and fall until snow makes forage inaccessible.

Moose and Lynx: There is a small area in the southwest corner of the Planning Area which is mapped for Moose summer range and overall range. The mapped area is located on federal lands. Moose habitat in the region has been expanding in recent years due to the Colorado Parks and Wildlife's (CPW) reintroduction efforts which began in 1978. As of 2019, it was believed that the statewide Moose population was in the range of 3,200 animals.

Much of the Planning Area south of Owl Creek Road is also mapped for "Potential Lynx Habitat." CPW defines this habitat type as "*those areas having the highest potential of lynx occurrences in the state. These areas usually contain positive, probable, or possible reports.*" According to CPW Species

Activity Mapping description the mapped area was derived from modeling and potential lynx habitat and does not represent field-verified habitat.

Wetlands and Riparian Areas: While not mapped, wetlands and riparian areas exist throughout the Owl Creek Planning Area. Drainage system and ditch improvements which have occurred along Owl Creek Road in recent years have reduced the amount of gravel and silt from roads that had been impacting at least one wetland on Owl Creek Ranch.

Wildfire

Wildfire hazard must be determined on a site-specific basis, but the area is generally mapped as containing “severe wildfire hazard (brush)” on the southeast-facing, shrub-covered shale slopes in the northwestern portion of the Planning Area and in the Eagle Pines and West Buttermilk Pfister Tracts area. There are also a few East Owl Creek Subdivision parcels, including four of the employee housing parcels, that are encumbered by severe wildfire hazard. However, a majority of the Planning Area is mapped as low hazard, as shown on the Wildfire Map (Figure 11).

Slope

Owl Creek is generally characterized by irrigated meadows and pasturelands and rolling hills. Slopes steeper than 30% in grade exist, but primarily along swales as they climb in elevation to the southwest.

OPEN SPACE/TRAILS/RECREATION & TOURISM

Existing Open Space Easements

Figure 12 shows the USFS and County Open Space lands as well as, private open space. Together these lands represent significant acreage within the Owl Creek Planning Area.

The County obtained a significant open space easement as part of the Reservoir at West Buttermilk Subdivision. However, conveyance of the easement was tied to recording of the subdivision plat, which was never done. If the property owner does not intend to develop lots in the near future, there is no impetus for him to record a plat, or to convey the easement. It’s conceivable that this easement may not be conveyed for some time, if ever. As long as the property remains undeveloped, and is not sold or further subdivided, the calving habitat in this area will most likely remain undisturbed.

There are two easements held by Aspen Valley Land Trust over Sky Mountain Park which may be worthy of mentioning. They are the only conservation easements we have documented within the Planning Area.

Existing Trails

As shown on Figure 12, the Owl Creek Nordic trail generally runs to the south of Owl Creek Road, up to Sinclair Divide and west towards Snowmass Village. In the area where the trail crosses the Owl Creek Meadows property, its use is subject to a revocable license, rather than an easement. Similarly, a short stretch of the existing paved bike path along the south side of Owl Creek Road crosses the Owl Creek Meadows property at Sinclair Divide. A license for use of this section also exists.

Existing trails also include the Owl Creek multi-use trail, Government Trail, trails on Buttermilk and the Sky Mountain Park trail. The Airline and Skyline Trails generally follow the master plan boundary along the ridge. The Sky Mountain Park trails are subject to winter closures to protect wildlife.

Buttermilk Ski Area

The County adopted the current Buttermilk Ski Area Master Plan in 2012. This document defines the uses which are allowed by right, by special review, and those which are prohibited within the ski area boundary. Uses allowed within the Ski-Rec zone district and the Ski Area Master Plan accommodate recreational rather than residential development. The base area of Buttermilk Mountain is located within the Urban Growth Boundary as defined by the Aspen Area Community Plan; and as such, does not come under the purview of the Owl Creek Plan.

AGRICULTURE

Irrigated meadows and pasture exist within the common areas of Owl Creek and East Owl Creek subdivisions and within the Oak Creek Meadows property to the south of Owl Creek Road. While only a modest percentage of the land within the Planning Area, the agricultural lands are critical to the scenic character of the area.

SCENIC QUALITY

One of the qualities that is intrinsic to the rural character of the Owl Creek Planning Area is the quantity of open landscape containing irrigated pastures, meadows, mountain views, and remnants of agricultural buildings. As shown on (Figure 13), the majority of the Owl Creek Planning Area is within the mapped Scenic View Protection Area. As a result, all new development, including

expansions to existing structures, is subject to review under the applicable section of the Pitkin County Land Use Code.

Perhaps the most critical property, in terms of potential scenic impacts from future development, is the Owl Creek Meadows parcel. This parcel abuts the south side of Owl Creek Road for over a mile, starting at the western edge of the Planning Area. The portion of this property adjacent to Owl Creek Road contains irrigated meadows and pastures which are backdropped by the wooded hillsides to the south (see image below).

View of Owl Creek Meadows



Source: Google Earth

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Four affordable housing lots and a ranch managers unit exist on the East Owl Creek subdivision. These lots are zoned "AH," (Affordable Housing). Owl Creek Ranch was originally approved to allow affordable housing units to be built on each lot, but the approval has since been amended to allow owners to pay cash in lieu of building affordable housing, and to build caretaker dwelling units instead if they wish. A ranch manager's unit also exists on Owl Creek Ranch. One caretaker dwelling unit exists on the Reservoir at West Buttermilk property and one caretaker unit is attached to a barn on the Mandalay Ranch property. In addition, the Guber Lot Split allows for two caretaker dwelling units to be built in association with the two approved free-market homes.

HISTORIC RESOURCES

As of 2018, two properties in Owl Creek have been included in the historic inventory completed by Pitkin County (see Figure 14) The historic structures on these properties are protected under the provisions of the Historic Preservation section of the Pitkin County Land Use Code and the Historic Preservation Guidelines.

- The Stapleton House was designated to the Pitkin County Historic Register in 2012, because of its association with the history of agriculture in Pitkin County. William Stapleton came to the area in 1881, became a Pitkin County rancher and built a house which is still standing. The house is representative of early twentieth century dwelling construction in Pitkin County. The exterior of the house has been rehabilitated. The BOCC approved the construction of an additional residence of up to 5,750 square feet as an incentive for the historic designation; the additional residence has not yet been constructed.
- The Glendale Stock Farm/Christiansen Ranch, particularly the ranch house, barn and another fourteen-sided structure is significant because of its association with the history of ranching in Pitkin County. The land was originally homesteaded in 1882. The Christiansens bought the ranch, which contained more than 600 acres in 1924, and raised cattle and Belgian horses; oats, hay and potatoes. The Glendale Stock Farm was considered to be one of the more successful ranches in the County. All, but roughly 9-acres of the ranch are now developed as the Owl Creek Ranch Subdivision.

Glendale Stock Farm



Source: Google Earth

MINERAL EXTRACTION

In recent years, mineral extraction has not been actively pursued in the Owl Creek Planning area.

PLANS AFFECTING OWL CREEK

The following County and municipal land use and management plans potentially influence the Owl Creek Caucus area:

- [Pitkin County Road Maintenance and Management Plan \(2020\)](#)
- [Pitkin County Airport Master Plan \(2012\)](#)

This is the current master plan for the Airport, though there are a number of other planning documents which provide background and direction related to future development and operation at the Airport. With the exception of the northeastern most portion of Owl Creek Ranch, the majority of the Owl Creek Caucus area is separated physically from the airport by a ridge.

- [The Down Valley Comprehensive Plan \(1987\)](#)

This document does not directly influence the Owl Creek Valley. The southern boundary of the Plan appears to coincide with the ridge between the Owl and Brush Creek valleys.

- Aspen Area Community Plan (2012)
The AACP establishes an urban growth area boundary for the City of Aspen which is intended to generally define the boundaries of urban annexation and development. The boundary abuts a portion of the eastern Owl Creek Caucus boundary.
- West of Maroon Creek Plan (2013)
The intent of the WOMP is to take the vision, philosophy, and policies from the AACP, for the area West of Castle Creek, and create clear land use guidance for future uses and decisions regarding the location and scale of development. Additionally, the WOMP seeks to preserve the scenic quality of development within the planning area. Finally, the WOMP couples the previous Entrance to Aspen transportation decisions with future development patterns in order to ensure an improved experience as one travels through the area by bike, car or as a pedestrian. The WOMP Planning Area abuts a portion of the east edge of the Owl Creek Planning Area and overlaps the AACP Planning Area in the Owl Creek area.
- Snowmass Village Master Plan (2018)
The current Snowmass Village Comprehensive Plan (Comp Plan) no longer includes a future land use map. Instead, the Comp Plan includes a “Conservation & Development Map” which provides direction related to future planning and development decisions for the area within the Town boundaries but provides no direction or recommendations for adjacent areas within the County. The Comp Plan does include a brief statement regarding the “Owl Creek Influence Area” but this statement includes little to no direction related to future development or transportation issues.
- Buttermilk Metro District Plan
See section on “Water Service,” page 10 for a description of the Plan.
- Buttermilk Ski Area Master Plan (2012)
The ski area master plan defines the uses and activities allowed within the ski area boundaries. The ski area has minimal impact on the Owl Creek Valley but is included within this Planning area boundary so that it does not become an isolated parcel.

ATTACHMENTS

Figure 1: Planning Area Boundary Map

Figure 2: Existing Subdivisions Map

Figure 3: Existing Land Use Map

Figure 4: TDR Sending and Receiving Sites Map

Figure 5: Existing Zoning Map

Figure 6: Residential Buildout Map

Figure 7: Water & Sewer Districts Map

Figure 8: Non-Attainment Area Map

Figure 9: Elk Habitat Map

Figure 10: Mule Deer Habitat Map

Figure 11: Wildfire Hazard Map

Figure 12: Open Space & Trails Map

Figure 13: Scenic View Protection Area Map

Figure 14: Historic Inventory Map

DRAFT