



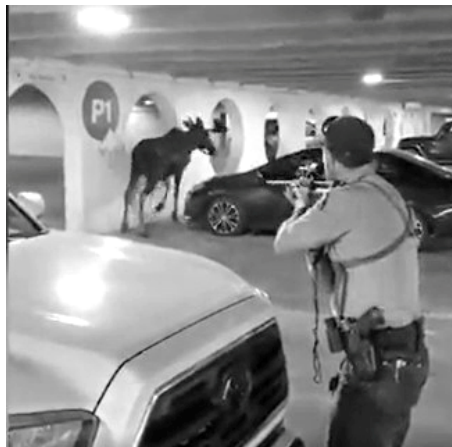
East Vail’s bighorn sheep herd taking a midday lie about in an East Vail residential neighborhood.

Letters to Vail

What’s Next: Open Space and wildlife – Part Four

January 15, 2025

Health officials and wildlife experts applying undisputed environmental and community health standards, say it is not a medically sound practice for humans and wildlife to shelter in close proximity with each other long-term. Wildlife can become habituated to human contact. Encounters with people unaware of wildlife behaviors is a public safety issue for humans and the wildlife. In Vail Village, tourists seeking to take “selfie photos” of a female moose with calves endangered themselves, the moose cow and her calves. If provoked or frightened, wild animals, particularly moose, are prone to violent self-defensive attacks. Vail was never intended to be a wildlife petting zoo. Wildlife can contract diseases from contact with dog feces, domesticated sheep and human refuse.



Wildlife control official using tranquilizer dart to sedate a young moose in the Lionshead Parking Structure. Wildlife that become habituated to human contact and pose a threat in most instances are relocated to uninhabited areas.

The purpose of open space is to serve as fire breaks and grazing lands for migrating herds, allowing animals to circulate as they seasonally pass through the town and surrounding region. Vail was designed by visionary wildlife conservationists. They laid out principles for a community-wide network of open space in the interest of wildfire prevention and wildlife preservation. These principles were based upon international scientific and best practices standards.

Over the years, the TOV has been inconsistent in defending against incursions into publicly controlled open spaces. Management of open spaces is subject to political maneuvering and obstreperous litigation, causing millions in unnecessary expenses and engendered conflict injurious to public interest.

As a property owner, the TOV accepted the responsibility to assist in enforcing property owner covenant protections adopted before the Town was formed. The purpose of the covenants is, in part, to enforce conformity with the purpose of open space protections.

Has the Town adequately fulfilled its responsibility to protect open space and wildlife? The question needs to be answered to restore public trust.

The Booth Heights experience stimulated a resurgence in the community's collective memory about its long-held wildlife conservation principles. Violating these steadfast preservation beliefs triggered the community's resolve to protect wildlife habitat against the incursion of the proposed housing development in East Vail. In the process, a new generation of local environmental activists emerged.

Is it now appropriate to devise a separate publicly elected governing entity with taxing authority to administrate Vail Valley open space and its wildlife populations? The purpose of the entity would be to oversee and assist in administering public and private open spaces on behalf of the indigenous populations across the Valley.

A reader wrote, "I'm writing to say that I hope the VHA continues to serve its very important role as a watchdog and advocate. The VHA's efforts have been invaluable at keeping folks "honest" and letting local government and officials know that someone is watching. The bigger Vail gets, the more the VHA is needed."

VHA is funded by voluntary dues pledged annually from condominium associations and individual property owners. Members are primarily the part-time resident property owners from Vail's founding generations. As Vail grows, traditional assumptions of political activism have also become more complicated and costly.

VHA is a member and reader-supported non-profit. Memberships and contributions fuel the VHA reports, *Letters to Vail* and help VHA respond to important issues, expand our reach and ensure transparency and coverage. VHA is thankful for support and participation from the Vail community. We are pledged to remain at the forefront of advocating on behalf of the mutual interests of full and part-time residents and property owners.

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