

Lois Adams
201 Lamkin St.
Pueblo, CO. 81003

February 5, 2024

Dear Commissioners Andreatta, Galusha, and Sporleder,

Although my husband, Olan, and I have recently moved out of Huerfano County, it was a move of our heads and not our hearts since now in our 80's it seemed wise to be closer to services we need. Our experience in Huerfano was life changing as we soaked up the history and learned about the lives of folks with such different lives ours

One of things Olan and I are proudest of is our involvement in the county purchase of the Cuchara Mountain Park. So, it was with surprise and sadness that we read of your momentous decision to give the park away! History is important in this county we know, which causes me to wonder if you all considered the history of the Park purchase as you made your decision? From what I've read in the paper It doesn't appear you spoke to anyone closely involved in the monumental 2017 purchase. Had you done so, you would have learned some things that may have led you to keep the Park. For this reason, I'm providing the following information in the hope that given this history you may yet reconsider. Your decision.

1. Had you talked to Jerry and Jovonne Fitzgerald who owned the 48 parcel of land that forms the park today, you would have learned that the Fitzgerald's were going to sell asking \$550,000 it. After meeting several times with a few of the locals and then with Commissioner Max Vezzani, **they agreed to drop the price to \$150,000 with the contingency that it would become a Huerfano County Park open for all to enjoy free of charge.** Because of their dedication to the county, they made the price affordable so the community could raise the money for the Park. They continue to be good neighbors, interested and supportive of the Park from their cabin adjacent to the land. Indeed, the Park is officially named "the Parker Fitzgerald Cuchara Mountain Park" in their honor.
2. Had you asked Max Vezzani who has significant knowledge and experience with public Parks about the purchase, you would have heard him say, "It seemed like a good deal for the county since the total purchase price was coming from the community. And it would give **the county a park in each corner of the county: Walsenburg, Gardner, and now Cuchara.**" Max was closely involved with the park for the time he served as commissioner and saw to it that there was an advisory board and a long-term planning process. He and Commissioner Ray Garcia were supportive of having three county parks, distributed across the county.

3. If you had asked the Cuchara Foundation board, of which I was a member, who voted to donate \$25,000 for the down payment and then raised the remainder of the money, you would discover that the board at that time was not interested in the project if it meant the CF would own the land. However, **when they learned that the county would own it if they could raise the money, they became supportive of the plan, the down payment and the fund raising needed for full payment.**
4. Finally, had you asked any of the many people and foundations that donated to the purchase, you would hear them say **they were comfortable giving money to the project because the Park would belong to the county** and be established for free public use.

As you can see, the history of the Park purchase shows that it was clearly meant to be a county owned park. Here are a few concerns with the plan to give the county to the Cuchara Foundation.

1. Local non-profits, are just that, local and thus transient. Cuchara, the home of the CF is populated primarily by summer people who come to play, not serve on boards. Dedicated, active board membership is always "iffy," putting the Park at jeopardy at any time. The board was never set up to manage or negotiate about the Park, and **board skills and interests change periodically, making ongoing commitment difficult.**
2. **It is hard to understand how the county could just give away such a lovely and valuable piece of land, putting it in jeopardy of continuance.** How is it justifiable to those who contributed to its purchase and volunteered so much time to creating it? What does this say to the voters of Huerfano about the commitment of their county government to local projects benefitting the people? Is there talk about giving the other two parks away or is it only the one in Cuchara? If only Cuchara, what does that say to the folks in that area and the tourists who come about county leadership?
3. Much of the current energy and donations at the Park are centered on fixing and operating Lift 4. Panadero Ski Corp. has done amazing work using mainly volunteers and donations and that group is committed to making the lift run! From what I hear they would sign an agreement with CF to run the Park: one non-profit contracting with another non-profit - all with volunteer community board members. That's wonderful! But what happens if the lift doesn't work? Or if the lift does work but PSC still can't pay the bills? Or if the PSC board gets tired of their time-consuming volunteer work? **There could be significant chaos about this valuable Huerfano treasure.** Hopefully not, but certainly a possibility.

I have been involved with the Park from the very first meeting with the Fitzgeralds. I've served on the Park Advisory board from the beginning, and continued to recruit volunteers, seek donations, and write grants (including the large GOCO one that paid for the bathroom and the pavilion and established the Huerfano Youth Corps) until the county dissolved the Advisory Board and signed an agreement with the PSC to operate it. **I speak from experience as I share**

my concerns about the permanence of the Park if the county gives it away. It and the whole community deserve the stability afforded by governmental ownership.

Wouldn't a good win-win solution be for the county to continue with a solid partnership with PSC to run the Park for a significant amount of time to let them develop and implement their plans? Surely a tight contract can be created, and a trustful relationship built that allows PSC to continue without time consuming, undue oversight from the county? This would provide stability for the Park, the community, and the whole county, and allow grants to be written through both non-profit and governmental processes. It will enhance public trust in Huerfano's government. And, if done well it shouldn't cost the county anything, while bringing you good PR, which never hurts. I acknowledge this is a difficult time for the county, but giving away a valuable asset doesn't seem to help solve the problems, does it?

Last, I can't finish without acknowledging all the people who have shared their skills, talents, and money to create the Park. So many across the county, both summer and fulltime residents, past commissioners, and local non-profits are committed to seeing the Park be sustained and successful! Let's celebrate the work that has been done by all – those involved in its creation and those working on it now. The county is fortunate to have such a wealth of human resources - even if short on fiscal ones! **Taping into those should make it possible for the county to maintain ownership of the facility but without the operating responsibility.**

Thank you for this opportunity to share my recollections from the past and concerns for the future of the Park. **Hopefully, after considering how it came to be and what is at stake, you will reevaluate its ownership by the county.** If so, I understand there may be rules allowing either John Galusha or Carl Sporleder who were on the "winning" side of the last motion to ask for reconsideration? **While there may be some push back from PSC, a solid new contract with between you two parties should allow them to do what they have planned if you gave the Park to the Cuchara Foundation, while offering residents and visitors assurance that the Park will endure for a long time come what may with nonprofit management!**

Although, sadly, I am no longer in Huerfano, I am committed to the county and to the Park's sustainability and **so I share this with you with all due respect and offer my ongoing support in any way that would be helpful.**

Sincerely,

Lois Adams,

Former resident of Huerfano County

One of the founders, and a past president of the Cuchara Foundation

Cuchara Foundation Facebook blog editor with 5,000 followers

Member and a past president of the Cuchara Mountain Park Advisory Board

Past member and secretary of the Huerfano County Historical Society