

July 2013

We did it!

# Royal Gorge saved forever



A thank you  
to our Royal  
Gorge donors

# celebrating Royal Gorge and the story of how it was saved

When the previous owners of Royal Gorge defaulted on a \$16,743,422.91 loan, oddly enough no one was really surprised. Given the extremely high price they paid for the property six years earlier, the indiscernible progress made towards its development, and the worst economy since the great depression, the 950-unit development, once contemplated, seemed more and more unlikely to utterly impossible.

For conservationists, the pending foreclosure of the property, nearly 3,000 acres on Donner Summit, presented an opportunity they had been eyeing for decades; buy the property and protect it forever. Truckee Donner Land Trust was formed, in part, around the protection of this very property.

Although it seemed a bit of an afterthought during a giddy time, one nagging question persisted. How to pay for it?

A few months later, the court placed the property into a receivership. I flew to San Diego with my close friend, Dave Sutton from The Trust for Public Land, to meet with the receiver. We then flew to Kansas City to meet with the bank that was foreclosing on the property. We met with friends of the Land Trust who work in the world of high-stakes real estate. I am not ashamed to say I was feeling out of my league.

After a lengthy negotiation, including walking away from the table twice, we signed a letter of intent to purchase the property with

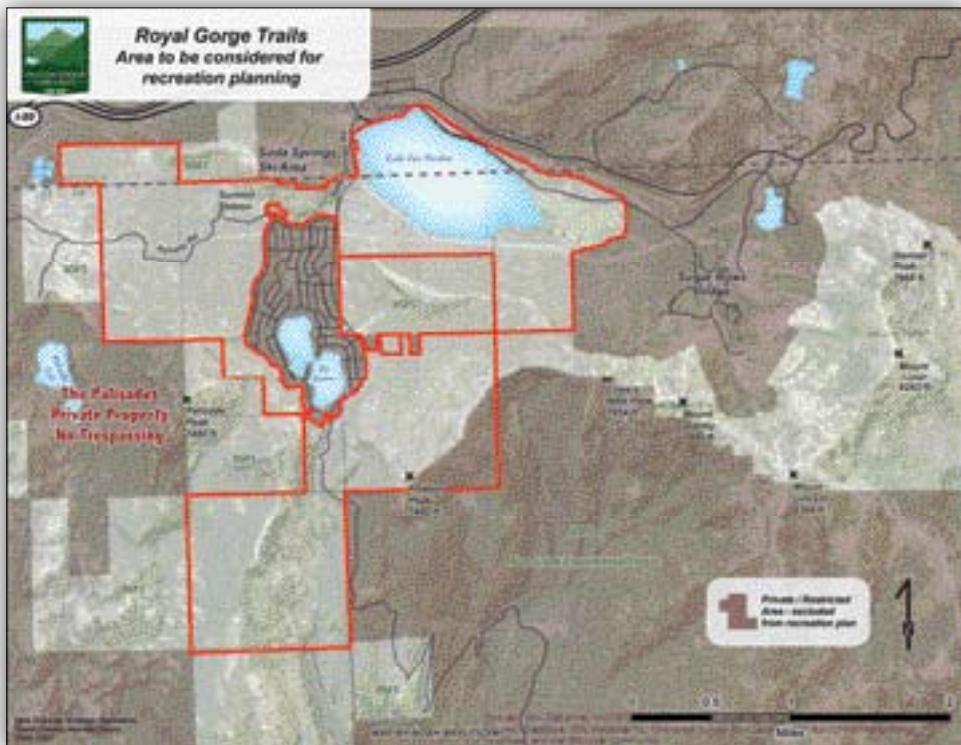
the receiver in July 2012. On August 3, 2012, we executed an agreement to purchase the property for \$11.25 million. The agreement required that we close by mid-December, leaving a ridiculously short amount of time to raise the necessary funds to complete the acquisition.

Cliff Busby, ever the optimist, told me, "You worry too much. It works in our favor. People have got to write the check now."

That's when the real story begins. With only a fraction of the required funds in hand, a series of non-refundable deposits were made. And I am talking serious money here. "You do know what you're doing, right?" our Board President asked.

With a funding plan that fit on the back of an envelope, we started enlisting key partners. Ken Hall, President of the Serene Lakes Property Owners Association, told me over breakfast, "SLPOA can do better than \$3 million." I was dubious and Ken of course was prophetic. Rob Kautz at Sugar Bowl joined in, helping with fundraising and eager to run the Nordic operations. Other groups; The Palisades, the Cedars, Sierra Watch, the Northern Sierra Partnership, Placer County, and hundreds of folks that simply care about Donner Summit, joined the cause and, frankly, ponied-up.

Royal Gorge wasn't just any 3,000 acres. "I went to Donner Summit as a kid," I heard several times from



Map by Noah Brautigam.

donors. "It's the most important square mile in California's history" local historian Bill Oudegeest told me, more than once.

You know the end of the story. The money was raised from nearly 1,400 folks making donations ranging between \$5 and \$1,000,000. The property was purchased on December 20th, 2012. What you may not know is that the deal was only sealed with the Wildlife Conservation's Board commitment of \$3 million on June 4th, 2013. I cannot help but think of Sir Winston Churchill here, "Play for more than you can afford to lose, only then you learn the game."

But the real story here is about a community electing to take destiny into its own hands. It's rare for a community to rally behind saving a piece of land, roll up their sleeves and raise a significant amount of money to protect it. It is even more rare that a community then comes back together to decide how to manage it.

But that is exactly what is happening atop Donner Summit.

What was accomplished and what we are still accomplishing is truly extraordinary, not just in the world of land conservation, but in



*What's a party without dancing?*



*Two key players in protecting Royal Gorge, Ken Hall and Cliff Busby. Give 'em a high five!*



*A joyous crowd on hand at Sugar Bowl's Mt. Judah Lodge celebrating the acquisition.*

the entire non-profit sector. The Land Trust is proud to be part of a community that not only recognizes the value of preserving iconic landscapes, but is also willing to pay it forward, so that future generations can experience Royal Gorge in perpetuity.

*Perry Norris, Executive*



*Becky, Mary and Jim Morgan from the Morgan Family Foundation, key and early supporters that believed we'd "buy it" when few did.*

Photos by Janet Zipser Zipkin, George Lamson and Geoff Griffin.

*Snow Mountain and the Royal Gorge. Photo by David Galson.*



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The Land Trust and its partners gratefully acknowledge the many individuals, businesses and foundations that made gifts to the **Land Trust in support of the Campaign to Conserve Royal Gorge from January 1, 2012 to February 28, 2013.**

*Please note, gifts that were made to the Northern Sierra Partnership, The Trust for Public Land and The Nature Conservancy are not included in this list.*

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A family of Mergansers at Lake Van Norden. Photo by George Lamson.

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Camas Lily; *Camassia quamash*. Photo by Geoff Griffin.

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Paddling the spring high water in the upper reaches of Lake Van Norden. Photo by George Lamson.

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A cool, shady forest beckons summer hikers.  
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