

# Ophir Valley Mining Roads Public Access Preservation Project is now complete

Greg Mumm interviews Glenn Pauls  
Director of PAPA

Off-highway vehicle enthusiasts are often vilified in the press and elsewhere as the bane of all things good when it comes to caring for the land, which simply isn't true. If anything, the truth is just the opposite. Off-highway vehicle enthusiasts do care and work hard to ensure our resources are protected. The following interview demonstrates such an example.

In August of 2008, the BlueRibbon Coalition reprinted an article from one of our partner groups, the Colorado Off Highway Vehicle Coalition (COHVCO).



Glenn Pauls

The article was centered on a recreation preservation project that was being done by OHV enthusiasts near Telluride, Colorado. I would encourage you to read the whole article on our website at <http://www.sharetrails.org/magazine/article.php?id=1619>.

Reading that article, you gain a quick history of the Ophir Valley Mining Roads Public Access Preservation Project. It tells the story of how when the Pauls family first visited the mountains around Telluride in 1976, they were immediately enamored with the area and returned frequently to jeep and motorcycle the trails. Thus began a 34-year, passion-driven project to preserve the mountain lands and historic roads surrounding the valley and the little town of Ophir, Colorado, for recreational activity of all kinds and for all to enjoy.

In June of this year, I had the opportunity to catch up with Glenn Pauls, the key person in the Ophir Valley Mining Roads Public Access Preservation Project. As he showed me around, I talked at length with Glenn about the status of this epic

preservation project, and I think it is important that I share at least part of that discussion with you.

**Question – Greg:** Where are you at in the process of the Ophir Valley project?

**Answer – Glenn:** It is just about done. After spending all these years accumulating over 1100 acres of mining claims in the Ophir valley. I am both happy and sad to say that I decided it was time to begin the process of transferring the land to the Forest Service.

**Q:** How long have you been working on this effort?

**A:** The project was started back in the eighties when I was offered the actual waterfall property in Waterfall Canyon. This was just too beautiful for a Minnesota guy to resist and I started what was to become a mission to collect all the remaining claims in Ophir Valley.

**Q:** Seems like a monumental task. What motivated you to do this and why?

**A:** From the first visit here, I loved it, obviously. I've made the area my home. There is a genuine piece of history here that everyone should have the opportunity to enjoy. For me, the idea of preserving access and the land was there from the beginning, but I had originally intended to do land trades with the Forest Service for land they wanted to dispose of and leave the Ophir Valley with homes only to be built in the town.

As you know, my parents and I have been jeeping and dirt biking here in the San Juan Triangle since the seventies. While enjoying that recreation, we came to realize that the real national treasure here is not only the majestic beauty of the mountains, but the amazing roads that were chiseled into the granite to get to the gold and silver mines. This is one of the only places you can drive or ride back in history to towns, railroads, mines and mill buildings at the very roof of our country.

**Q:** So, how did the Trust for Public Lands get involved?

**A:** As time went by, and the acres accumulated, it became obvious that there was too much land to trade, and we didn't have the expertise. Then, the Trust for Public Land (TPL) came along and solved the problem by offering to facilitate the transfer to the Forest Service through a donation sale. Since they are experts at this, I agreed, and, on Monday, June 22, 2009, all the home sites were transferred to TPL, who will soon start putting them into Forest Service ownership.

**Q:** Tell me about what was preserved and what actually took place here.

**A:** By law, and based on the size of each claim, about sixty homes could have been built on the widely scattered properties. I'm happy to say that, as of today, there is only one home built on a claim, and that was on a claim I had tried, but could not purchase from the owner. "No homes on the high roads" was my main goal, mostly because homes built in any numbers tend to unite and organize to keep others away from their backyard. In this case the backyard is our National Forest. Now, the 1100 acres of what used to be privately-held mining claims will also become part of the National Forest. I did keep several of the very high claims on which I might build one or two 1000 sq ft

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backcountry cabins—not homes. If I ever do sell those. I will attach restrictions on the deeds that will preclude any subsequent owner from opposing public travel or use.

**Q:** Earlier you made the statement, "at the very roof of our country." What did you mean by that?

**A:** I mean this is high country. You can eat breakfast in Ouray then



Greg Mumm

drive over Tomboy road to Telluride for lunch, a road higher (13,600 ft.) than you can fly in a plane without oxygen. The truth is these roads are really what I am trying to save. Myself and other like-minded people who also enjoy using these unique trails formed an organization called the Public Access Preservation Association (PAPA). Through this land transfer to the public and other projects, we are working hard to ensure that the historical mining, logging and ranching roads of the west are preserved and kept open for the people who either can't or choose not to only hike or walk into the public back country. Some are too old, unable, disabled, or simply do not have the time, gear, or knowledge to climb miles back into the mountains. But this is their land also. There should be limited access for all.

Of course just riding these roads for adventure and challenge is great fun as well. So many times I have heard motorized vehicle riders characterized as uncaring slobs who just want to rip everything up and are unconcerned

with the environment. That kind of rhetoric just isn't true. If I had not come to Ouray to jeep and ride, the Ophir valley would by now have homes, dogs, fences and driveways in Swamp Canyon, Water Fall Canyon, Iron Springs and the hillsides above town.

Through our sister organizations, the Colorado Off Highway Vehicle Coalition (COHVO), the BlueRibbon Coalition (BRC), and a multitude of other local clubs, many trails, roads and recreation areas are maintained, signed and mapped for the public at no public cost. Our members also sponsor and work hard on safety, low noise and "Stay The Trail" campaigns. Millions of dollars per year are sent to the state for license fees, which go toward grooming cross-country ski and snowmobile trails, single tracks and public road maintenance. There are always the problem few, but most of us are working to share our public lands respectfully.

**Q:** It had to take a concentrated effort of a lot of people to bring this to fruition, didn't it?

**A:** That is an understatement. People should know that a huge thank you for helping to preserve the lands, the

roads, and the access needs to go to Senators Salazar, Allard, Udall and Bennet, Representative Salazar, TPL, the Forest Service, San Miguel County, the town of Ophir, Grass-Roots volunteers, and all the others who helped in the road preservation effort. I would especially like to thank my parents, Ed and Flo Pauls, who stuck with me and financed a good portion of the acquisitions when I was short.

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**Q:** Everyone involved in this, and especially you, should be commended and the story should be told far and wide. So when does it all finalize?

**A:** The sale to TPL was completed June 22 and TPL is already in the

process of moving the land into the Forest Service, which may take several years. A dedication party will be given by PAPA in late August this summer, the exact date is to be announced.

**Q:** You know that I intend to tell this story to a pretty broad audience. Any last thoughts you would like to share with those folks?

**A:** There is still a lot to do. The Forest Service and BLM are constantly revising travel management plans. To maintain access to these and all our other roads and trails, we need to pay attention and speak up at public hearings, send in comments, talk to public representatives, and get more people to join access groups.

Remember, the next time you are on an old mining road or some trail, think not only of the work by the people that built the route generations ago, but also of the efforts of the people who fight to keep it open, maintained and available for you to enjoy. Please do what you can to help keep these national treasures open for all to recreate on and enjoy.

*NOTE: For more information on the Public Access Preservation Association, the PAPA website is [www.papatelluride.org](http://www.papatelluride.org).*

*For more information on the Colorado Off Highway Vehicle Coalition, the COHVCO website is [www.cohvco.org](http://www.cohvco.org).*

*For more information on the BlueRibbon Coalition, the BRC website is [www.sharetrails.org](http://www.sharetrails.org). \**



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