

Manitou Institute: Spirit & Nature



Baca Grande - The Early Years

The histories of Crestone, the Baca Grande and Manitou Institute have intertwined and taken many turns over the years. The full story could fill volumes! We'll leave that to the serious historians. With a little context from the past, this article is about Manitou Institute, and its role in how this community has evolved, and will develop in years to come.

A starting point is with AZL, Arizona Land and Cattle, which owned something on the order of 2 million acres of land throughout the Southwest, including the Baca Grande Ranch, a huge Spanish land grant encompassing valley rangelands all the way up to some mountain peaks. Through the Baca Grande Corporation, the Baca Grande development was originally conceived as a retirement community, and included over 10,000 lots. But, relocation in an isolated area, without support systems for their sunset years, held little appeal for the intended retiree population. As a plan for the area, and financially, the development was failing. A new vision was needed.

In the late 1970's Maurice Strong and partners acquired the Baca Ranch and the Baca Grande development. In those days, the total population of the Town of Crestone and the Baca Grande was only around 100 people, the brave few contemporary pioneers who chose to settle here.

A look at the longer term history - the people who have lived here and how they used the land - provided direction in the reformation of the Baca Grande. It is known that the Native American peoples who visited and inhabited this area, for thousands

of years, recognized it as a place for spiritual growth and healing - where all aspects of life are more easily permeated by the sacred, and people of awareness can flourish. Later, settlers arrived on the scene and for a time this area positively bustled in a mining bonanza in the Sangres, and for cattle ranching. The local population swelled to many thousands, and dwindled again to very few. The tall trees and tall grasses all but disappeared. Then came the Baca Grande, at the forefront of a trend that continues today throughout Colorado and the west - the breaking up of historical ranchlands and mountain wilderness for residential "mega-developments".

Most would agree that it's fortunate the original vision for the development failed. We fret about the number of houses and people and traffic generated today - imagine the Baca at build out with 8-9,000 households! In revising the Baca, the Strong's removed from the development and consolidated some 5,000 lots in Chalet 3 and the steeper foothills of the Sangres. In keeping with the time honored use

of the land by Native Americans, and expanding on it, this land was dedicated to the practice and preservation of wisdom traditions from around the world. About 1,000 acres were granted to the Carmelites for Nada Hermitage; Aspen Institute - now Colorado College; Lindesfarne - now Crestone Mountain Zen Center; Karma Thegsum Tashi Gomang Tibetan Project, Haidakhandi Universal Ashram and others, in those early years.

Then and since, oral transmissions by various wisdom keepers inspired a four-fold, multigenerational mission for this part of the Baca community, as -

1) a place of retreat; where seekers can reach an eminent state of awareness with the guidance of great masters from the various spiritual traditions;

2) a place where the wisdom traditions of the world can preserve and share their knowledge with others in a contemplative setting;

3) a setting for interfaith dialogue and engagement, to go beyond the dogma that has divided humanity and fueled conflicts and war, and cultivate mutual understanding; transcending differences to meet on common ground, as an example of peace and respect;

4) a unique opportunity to live in harmony with nature, establishing and teaching sustainable living practices, and environmental stewardship.



In 1988, Hanne and Maurice Strong created Manitou Foundation to fulfill these goals for the remaining land to the east of the Baca Grande Chalets and in locations at the periphery of the Grants. See the map on next page, which shows the various parcels owned and conveyed by Manitou, in relation to the downsized Baca Grande.

The Foundation's mission is to provide land to various wisdom traditions for contemplative centers and to educational organizations, with emphasis on sustainable development and land use plans. To ensure that the land is used as intended, Manitou has developed a number of measures and safeguards over the years, such as - Covenants & Restrictions; an Environmental & Architectural Committee and Guidelines, paralleling those of the Baca development to provide a congruent frame of reference in the development of our community as a whole.

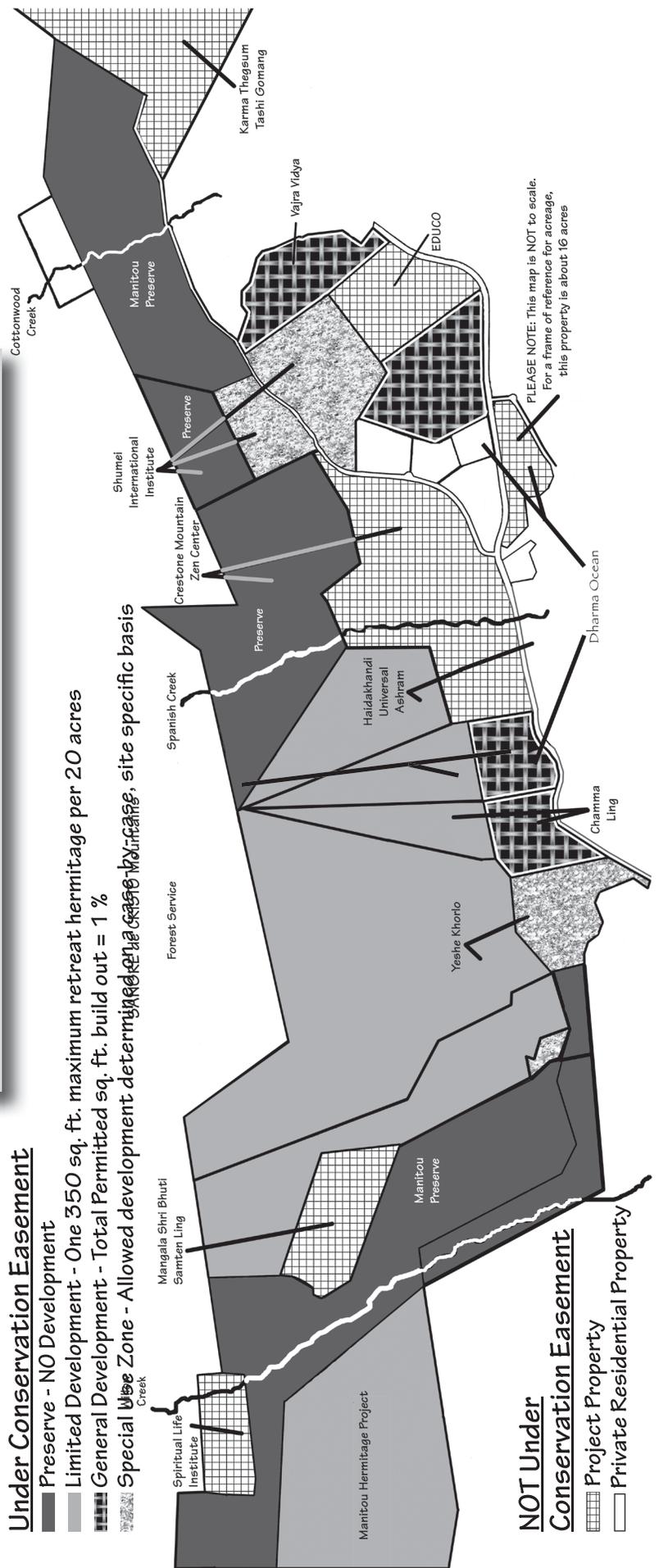
Manitou Habitat Conservation Program - What's it all about?

In the mid 1990's, Manitou and specialists of The Conservation Fund, with generous support of Laurance Rockefeller and the Jackson Hole Preserve, devoted several years to extensive studies of Manitou's mountain properties, culminating in the creation of the Manitou Habitat Conservation Plan (MHCP). Comprehensive assessments were made of the terrain, slope, soil types, drainage and erosion patterns; botanical studies and wildlife patterns - corridors, birthing areas, human interface issues; forest health and wildfire concerns, and so forth. This culminated in a master conservation easement being laid on almost all of the Manitou Mountain Tract to the east of the Chalets.

See maps for up to date detail and key facts about the Mountain Tract properties.

During this same period, Manitou Institute, a tax-exempt, charitable organization was created, to support local spiritual and environmental projects and programs, and to administer the MHCP conservation easements for the long term. The Institute launched the Earth Restoration Corps - now it's own organization, and sponsors programs of Earth Origins Seeds and the Youth Peace Journey.

Manitou Habitat Conservation Program ~ Mountain Tracts



Under Conservation Easement

- Preserve - NO Development
- Limited Development - One 350 sq. ft. maximum retreat hermitage per 20 acres
- General Development - Total Permitted sq. ft. build out = 1%
- Special Use Zone - Allowed development determined on a case by case basis

NOT Under Conservation Easement

- Project Property
- Private Residential Property

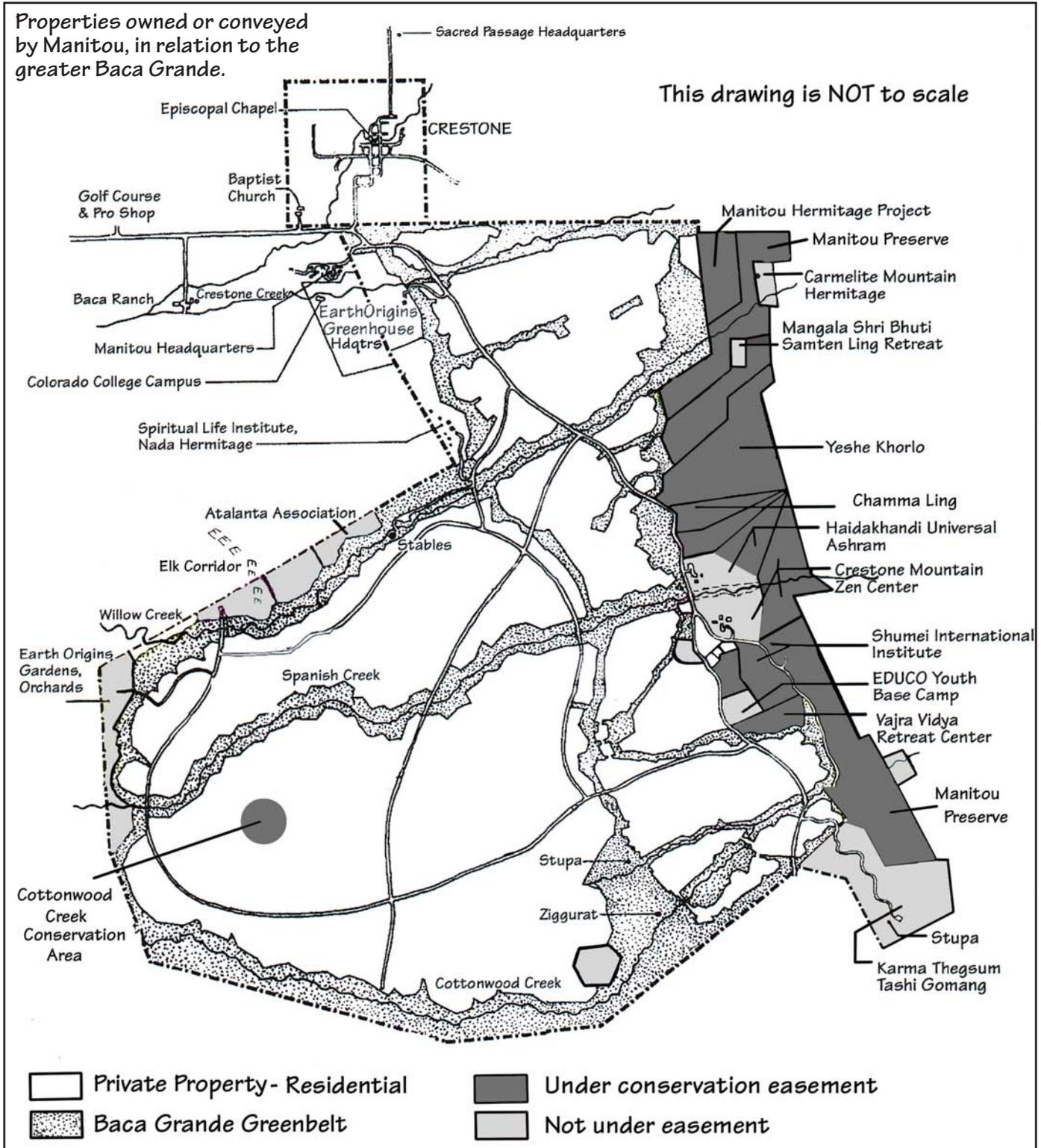
Land Grants & Conservation Easements... Just the Facts

Over the last 17 years, some 750 acres have been granted or sold by Manitou, and approximately 950 acres remain. Of this, about 350 acres will stay in Manitou's stewardship, under a conservation easement as Preserve (NO development). Another 150 acres,

designated as Limited Development (allowing one small solitary retreat cabin per 20 acres), is the home of Manitou's Solitary Retreat Hermitage Program. Two cabins have been built, and five more are permitted.

In the MHCP, the best and only locations for the more active purposes of the spiritual and educational centers were identified

as General Development areas, with maximum building and use parameters pre-determined. The allowable sq. ft. build-out is 1% of that of the property, with a total disturbance area (for parking, trails, utilities, etc.) capped at 15%. At present, Manitou has four larger parcels (35+ acres), one smaller parcel (24 acres) and a few Baca



Grande lots remaining for granting or sale, some under conservation easement and others not.

Acquiring land from Manitou is a rigorous process, and an estimated 90% of those approaching Manitou for land are screened out by themselves or the process, a discernment by both that often takes a year or two. They begin with a Pre-Application outlining their intentions for use of the land. Manitou staff screens these for a possible match, and the vast majority are ruled out due to unsuitable plans for this locale.

The Manitou Board reviews Pre-Applications that appear to fit with its mission and the carrying capacity of the land, and invites full applications from those that seem promising. The full application requires a much deeper level of details and long term planning, and there is considerable attrition of applicants at this phase, as well. The Board, with input from Manitou's E&A Committee reviews the style, profile and substance of applying projects in making its final decisions of which land grants they approve.

In accepting ownership of Manitou land, grantees and purchasers become partners with Manitou, working collaboratively on development and environmental stewardship plans, and any mitigations required to minimize the impacts of human activities and optimize the health and safety of the land. Grantees submit annual reports to Manitou staff, and the E&AC completes planning and site visits to monitor and support development and land use in alignment with the approved purposes of the land grants, or terms of sale, and the requirements of conservation easements.

Other partnerships have arisen from time to time to address issues of our area as a whole. An early special project, was a collaboration with the Crestone/Baca Land Trust in it's formative years, Go Colorado Fund, the Baca Grande POA and The Nature Conservancy, which

now holds an easement preserving sensitive wetlands in the Grants, that were previously lots to be developed. It took several years, and was achieved by the diligence and hard work of many individuals and organizations.

In Present Time & for the Future

Manitou's mission of supporting the cultivation of spirit and the preservation of nature is in its second decade, and the Baca is in its third. As the Manitou properties and the Baca Grande grow and develop, we have no end of opportunities to proactively re-create and co-create a healthy community - socially, environmentally and spiritually. It's not always easy, the vision is unique and the lessons are many. The more

individuals and families, spiritual centers and educational projects that make the Baca their home, the more compelling it becomes to find cooperative ways to communicate and to live and work together.

Overcoming mistakes of the past, facing the obstacles and issues of the present with creativity, and designing the future to our mutual benefit - it is a tall order! But, it's worth every effort in exchange for the joys and benefits of living here, in this unique and amazing place of spirit and nature.

Photos are from Manitou's conservation easement monitoring files on the Mountain Tract land.



Support Spirit & Nature in Crestone/Baca Now and for Future Generations!

**The Manitou Habitat Conservation Program,
Earth Origins Seeds and the Youth Peace Journey
is made possible by charitable contributions.**

Put your charitable dollars to work in your own back yard!

Please make donations payable and mail to:

*Manitou Institute
P.O. Box 118 • Crestone, CO 81131*

**Phone: 719-256-4267 / 4265 • Fax: 719-256-4266
eMail: <spirit@manitou.org>**

**Manitou Institute has IRS 501(c)(3) tax exempt
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