

Good Neighbors

Life in the County “The Real Story”

The first thing people notice when moving to a rural area is that every part of day to day life slows about three revolutions. The New Ruralite is coming off of a high pace, high-tension existence... to get the skis put on in a hurry!!

So, you've bought a pretty piece of heaven and you want to get to living that "country way," as soon as possible. But wait, you need to get all that necessary paper work that your Realtor told you about done. So first, to the County Courthouse. Where is it? Why in Saguache - as in Saguache County. Oh, by the way, you've asked eight different people how to pronounce Sa-Watch, getting eight different answers. You've told friends and family you're moving to Saguache; they want to know if that's anywhere close to Cleveland?

You visit the historic County Courthouse on Main Street, going to the basement to find the Land Use office, after asking someone upstairs where it is. The Land Use Administrator gives you the appropriate papers. You tell her you want to get started right away, you can't wait to be on your new deck watching the deer, birds and clouds drift by. You tell her you've always wanted to build your own home, use some of those new techniques you've read about, like straw bale or fibercrete for your house. You've heard other people have built them here. (She smiles.)

You ask how to get to your property. The Land Use lady directs you to the Road & Bridge Supervisor. You didn't know there was a guy who supervised roads and bridges! Now you've got to talk to him about the road that goes to your property. As you travel down Main Street you notice the Post Office - the social center of the community, (got to get a PO Box) - is near the Volunteer Fire Department, good to have that in mind! You wonder how these guys could volunteer to put their lives on the line for the county people's homes and property. You know they have to be dedicated and fast!

Then there is the little Saguache County Road Department office. You meet the Road and Bridge Supervisor, (his name is John Ungefug - try saying that three times fast!). He explains the county road system and its limitations. He explains that not all roads to private properties are maintained. Some are gravel or dirt, some paved, and some are primitives "two tracks" (just routes to Forest and BLM Lands). People here love to fish, view arrowheads, hike, hunt big game for meat and trophy and watch the fall leaves turn on their backyard Federal Lands. The Road Supervisor explains that school bus and mail routes get first priority when it snows. He also explains dust abatement, magnesium chloride is offered on gravel roads on a washing list priority.

From the Land Use Administrator, you found out you couldn't get an address for your property until you applied for an access (driveway) permit from the Road Supervisor. There is no cost, but State Statute stipulates you must apply for the permit in writing, to the Road supervisor. (And you won't be able to put in utilities until you have an official address). He'll come out and look at the site you plan for your new circle driveway or entrance where you plan on building that neat archway. The Road Supervisor tells you that you need to put in a culvert pipe for drainage so you won't flood your neighbors horse pasture. In a day or so he writes your permit. Then it's to the Assessors Office to get your address, call the phone company to put in your phone, (the cell phone only works when your standing on the top of the hill, facing east, wind blowing northerly, with one finger stuck in your other ear!!)

There's a lot to learn about other things, like ditches beside the road, (no, you can't put all those extra rocks from your property in the ditch), how often the county maintainer might blade your road, where to put your mailbox so it won't be covered up with snow or how far back to put your fence off the county road (ask the Road Supervisor). How come the neighbor is running his cows down the road? Oh, you find out the Forest Service and BLM allow ranchers to put their livestock on Federal lands in the summer months as they grow grass to feed them during the winter. You find out this also helps with your "defensible land" for your home, so this is a good thing for you too!! The Road Supervisor tells you that stock sometimes get out onto county roads and you'll have to watch for the animals, as well as your neighbor's horses, dogs, cats and sheep.

Your new neighbor tells you, (as you run his cows off your newly planted grass for the twentieth time) that Colorado State Statues say YOU have to fence his stock out. This concept is referred to as Open Range. But since you are a good talker, you try to convince him to foot half the bill for the fence between your properties.

Speaking of talking, how do rural folks get the news in this slice of lovely Colorado? The local newspaper, of course, like the Saguache Crescent which has been in existence for 121 years. It's published on our own one-of-a-kind linotype machine, (not lead) most of which have long since gone the way of the dinosaurs. It only costs a quarter to learn all the pertinent facts of life in Saguache County. But you'll find no pesky, depressing news about work events here, only what lovely shade of blue the neighbors new car is, or who's turning fifty, (and really doesn't want everyone and their dog to know), or someone's life celebrations as they come to the end of that journey. It's the kind of newspaper you can afford to get fifty copies of to send to all your friends and relatives back east with the story of how your son or daughter graduated valedictorian from their class of sixteen. The Crescent, along with the Center Post Dispatch and the Crestone Eagle, make up the official Saguache County newspapers, which carry legal notices and dispatches to the area farmers.

And hey, want to talk trash? Ever wonder what rural folks do with their trash? There are several options, really. Living in the country, it's not uncommon for folks to burn their trash, which is OK, but we live in a very environmentally minded area, and most either have their trash hauled away by our two private trash haulers, or, make the scenic trip to the Saguache County Landfill themselves. We've become nationally renowned for our County Dump! (I really didn't say Dump!) This is a State of Colorado EPA Approved and Permitted Sanitary Landfill, with a twist - it's own Recycling Center, but I'll get in to that in another article. (See Ecology / Agriculture section: Public Landfill and Recycling Center).

So now you're about ready to enjoy your new way of life. You learn to take ten cleansing breaths before you make any snap decisions. You've learned it's OK to wave at every person that waves at you, because we're just plain friendly here! You still can't quite take in all the beauty around you, as there is so much of it to see. And you'll get used to people thinking they know what your up

to, (most time they do!) and feel welcome in a place that feels more like a family than a community.

Well now, if you still have questions, (like how come the garden carrots and radishes are the size of a dime, or what the decorative, antique, little shed with a seat inside and a view is for, call me, I'll be happy to fill you in. The truth is, I've not always been the Savvy Mountain Mama I am today!

Ellen Cox

We love your dogs too, but...

Just because "Buddy" behaves so well when we are around, he still has some of the instincts of his ancestor, the wolf. And "Lady" will still want to teach "Junior" and "Princess" how to hunt at every chance!

Most people do not believe that their dog would chase wildlife, cattle or sheep, but problems with dogs chasing and killing wildlife and ranch animals are increasing, as more people move to this area. "When dogs are let loose, they naturally chase wildlife," said Dean Riggs, District Wildlife Manager in Fremont County, Colorado Division of Wildlife. "It's devastating what a dog can do to an animal. It is very rare for dogs to make a quick, clean kill." Dogs, in their domestication, have lost many of their instincts for making quick kills, and instead chase, harass and terrorize, until the chased animal collapses in exhaustion. When dogs chase deer, the dogs often do not know what to do with it once they catch it. Riggs says, "Coyotes are efficient killers, but dogs will bite the nose and chew the ears. The deer really suffers."

When wildlife or ranch animals have their young, the mothers naturally protect them. If your dog is chasing them, or even in the area, the mother will try to kill your dog, to protect her baby. So when "momma" is out peacefully grazing with "baby" at her side, and she sees a dog or coyote in the distance, her stress level immediately increases. This affects not only her general health, but also her ability to produce milk for her baby. Moreover, the stress is especially hard on pregnant females carrying next year's offspring.

The rancher derives his income from the survival and health of his livestock offspring. To destroy or stress his livestock directly impacts the income of the ranch, his or her livelihood! He or she has a

We love your dogs too, but..., Continued -

right to protect the livestock. Legally, the rancher has the right to do what it takes to keep your pets away from his/her livestock. So if your neighbor has sheep, horses, cattle, mules, llamas, emus, goats, poultry, swine... you see what I mean? If you love your pet, keep it at home so it won't stress, wound or kill other animals, and endanger its own life.

Colorado Laws

Statute 35-43-126, DOG WORRYING STOCK
Any dog found running, worrying, or injuring sheep, cattle, or other livestock may be killed, and the owner or harbinger of such dog shall be liable for all damages done by it.

Local Laws

There are specific Leash Laws for the towns of Saguache and Center. Contact Town Hall for this information. Property Owner's Associations may have additional pet requirements.

Open Range & Fencing

For information, visit the state website:
<http://www.state.co.us>

Click on: "Legislature", then "Colorado Revised Statutes", then chose Title Number 35, Articles 45, 46 or 47. The menu will give titles to the articles to help you in your search.

Light Pollution Solutions Dark Skies Ordinance

The dark night sky, filled with stars and planets, is one of the assets of the San Luis Valley that has inspired the peoples of this land for centuries, and can be preserved to inspire future generations.

The problem of light pollution is not outdoor lighting, but rather the lighting fixtures releasing the light upward into the night sky so the stars are not visible. Light pollution is inefficient lighting.

In 1999, the Saguache County Board of Commissioners approved Article XIII, Section 2.7 of the Land Use Code to set standards for outdoor lighting to reduce light pollution in the county. Good outdoor lighting illuminates only the ground

to assure safe movement in the night and a sense of security. The restriction states all outdoor lighting must be directed downward and must be shielded and a maximum height of 22 feet.

From the survey by the National Parks Conservation Association, people living on the East Coast have become desensitized to the loss of night sky, while in the Southwest, residents consider the dark sky a primary attribute. So many people in America do not have the privilege of dark skies filled with stars. The glare of outdoor lighting has stolen the night sky from them.

Simple steps to reduce light pollution

1. Turn off all outside lights when you don't need them or install an infrared motion sensor. With the "instant-on" characteristic, a motion sensor alerts both you and any intruder by the sudden turn-on of the light.
2. Survey your outdoor lights to see if their lighting pattern matches your needs. On pole lights, install either Hubbell Skycaps over old mercury vapor lights or purchase a cobra-head luminary from the San Luis Valley Rural Electric Cooperative. The cobra-head luminary is a pole light with a flat lens directing the light towards the ground rather than sideways.
3. Install window shades or shield all lights inside your house that may shine into the outdoors. Make sure that you are not shining your lights, either interior or exterior, on your neighbor's property or in their eyes, however far away they live.
4. Contact the International Dark Sky Association at: 3225 N. First Avenue, Tucson, AZ 85719 or <http://www.darksky.org> for more information about ordering efficient light fixtures, municipality ordinances to reduce light pollution or general light pollution facts.

With the installation of efficient and effective light fixtures, the sky over the San Luis Valley can remain dark while maintaining the necessary bright lights to insure safety and security. Only you can prevent light pollution.
Suzanne Frazier