

Water Rights Attorney Glenn Porzak to be Recognized with 2019 Vail Trailblazer Award

5 March 2019



Glenn Porzak, the water rights attorney who has worked tirelessly through the decades to advance and protect water rights for Vail and the Western Slope, has been selected as the recipient of the 2019 Vail Trailblazer Award. Presented by the Vail Town Council, the Vail Trailblazer Award has been established as an annual civic recognition to honor those who contribute their time and talent to make Vail a great resort community.

Porzak was formally recognized at the March 5 evening Vail Town Council meeting in which a mayor's proclamation honoring his vast contributions was read into the public record. Recognition will also take place during the Town of Vail Annual Community Meeting on March 12 at Donovan Pavilion.

Porzak has been an ongoing fixture in the Vail community since the 1970s when he served as the water law counsel for Vail Associates (now Vail Resorts) and later for the current and predecessor entities of the Eagle River Water & Sanitation District and Vail Water Sub-district which provides water and wastewater treatment services to the greater Vail community. His nomination for the Trailblazer Award carries the endorsement of five former mayors as well as past and present members of the board of directors of the Eagle River Water & Sanitation District.

Nominators cited numerous examples of Porzak's pioneering contributions in creating the water infrastructure essential for Vail's successful growth as a resort community. For example, in the 1990s he led the effort to negotiate and secure approvals for construction of the Eagle Park Reservoir, located at the headwaters of the Eagle River. This in-basin water storage has been instrumental in supporting snowmaking capabilities on Vail Mountain as well as accommodating Vail's growth through the decades while ensuring adequate streamflows year-round in Gore Creek and the Eagle River. The complicated water and storage rights for Vail Mountain's snowmaking water help to ensure quality skiing and snowboarding, even in the driest of years – such as last year.

Porzak helped continue the development of Black Lakes, which are located at the headwaters of Black Gore Creek near the Interstate 70 Vail Pass exit and are part of the district's water supply system. The two cold-water reservoirs serve as in-basin water storage and reservoir releases enhance streamflows in Gore Creek. They also support fishing, wildlife habitat and recreation through a partnership with Colorado Parks and Wildlife.



Ever the visionary, Porzak was largely responsible for expanding Vail's recreational amenities by making it possible to build Vail's whitewater park, which serves as a major spectator-pleasing venue for the iconic Mountain Games event. Located at the Gore Creek promenade in Vail Village, the park opened in 2000 after Porzak authored a new recreational in-channel diversion category as a test case under Colorado water law. The park withstood a series of legal challenges and the game-changing decree was eventually upheld in a ruling by the Colorado Supreme Court. The 2003 judgement has since been used to create other whitewater parks throughout the state.

As the founding partner of Porzak Browning & Bushong LLP, a Boulder-based firm representing water and land use interests, Porzak is well-known for his expertise in the protection of existing water supplies. In an unprecedented move to protect the water interests of Vail and the upper Eagle Valley, Porzak led negotiations in 1998 that limited the amount of water the Front Range cities of Aurora and Colorado Springs could divert from the Eagle River basin, forever protecting local stream flows and fisheries from out-of-basin development interests. He spearheaded the litigation and subsequent negotiations that resulted in the 2007 abandonment of the Eagle-Piney Water Project for which Denver Water owned extensive water rights. The agreement and abandonment forever protect local stream flows and fisheries from trans-basin development. That water project would have taken hundreds of thousands of acre feet of water each year from Gore Creek and the Upper Eagle River and transported that water through a planned tunnel below Vail Pass to Dillon Reservoir.

In announcing Porzak as the 2018 Trailblazer Award recipient, Vail Mayor Dave Chapin says Porzak's underlying contributions are both vast and visible in most everything we do. "From the water that comes out of our tap, to the amazing recreational amenities we have in this valley, to the protection of our streams from massive transmountain diversions, we owe our gratitude to Glenn for having the courage and the wherewithal to challenge the status quo."

Porzak said he was "speechless" when notified of the award. "It has truly been an honor to represent the greatest recreational based community, Vail, for over four decades," said Porzak.

Throughout his career, Porzak has participated in over 120 water court trials and over 30 Colorado Supreme Court appeals. He has been named a Colorado Super Lawyer by 5280 magazine every year from 2006 to 2019.

In his spare time, Porzak has been a world class climber having summited Mt. Everest and three of the world's other 8,000 meter peaks. He was one of the first persons to climb the Seven Summits, the highest peak on each of the world's seven continents. He is past president of the American Alpine Club and the Colorado Mountain Club.

Porzak has also been the president of the Manor Vail Homeowners Association and led the effort to remodel the hotel and condominium complex at the base of Golden Peak.

The Vail Trailblazer Award was established during the town's 50th birthday celebration in 2016. Porzak is the fourth recipient to be honored and was selected by a Town Council committee from among other deserving nominations.

For more information about the Vail Trailblazer Award and the nomination process, visit the town's website at www.vailgov.com/trailblazeraward.