

## Request to Place Old Man Mountain Property into a Conservation Easement

### RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Board of Trustees authorize the President or their designee to negotiate the placement of a conservation easement on the Old Man Mountain property in Estes Park and, if negotiation is successful, execute all necessary documents.

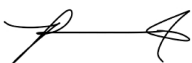
### BACKGROUND

Old Man Mountain is an 80-acre property west of Estes Park, Colorado that UNC has owned since 1956. It was transferred to UNC at no cost by the federal government. The property is largely undeveloped, is directly adjacent to Rocky Mountain National Park, and is a prominent Vision Quest site – sacred lands for indigenous peoples. UNC maintains a small retreat center in the southeast corner of the property used by university programs, which is also available for rental by the public through UNC's Housing department.

UNC has been engaged in discussions with the Estes Valley Land Trust (EVLTL), a nationally accredited non-profit whose mission is to place land in Larimer and Boulder counties into conservation easements, which restrict the development of land in perpetuity. EVLTL has submitted an offer to UNC to "purchase" the conservation easement for \$1.25 million, to account for the diminished market value of the property once the easement is placed. A recent appraisal of Old Man Mountain placed the market value at \$2.56 million if sold.

While a conservation easement would be placed on the bulk of UNC's property restricting any development in perpetuity, UNC and EVLTL would designate a footprint around the current retreat site to exclude from the easement. This would allow for UNC's continued use and improvement of those facilities. UNC would continue to own the entire property and benefit from its usage. Placing a conservation easement would also protect a sacred site for indigenous peoples.

Per Section 9(A) of the Bylaws of the Board of Trustees, the President is not authorized to approve and execute any documents that "acquire, dispose of, or hypothecate interests in real property held by the Board of Trustees or any of its predecessors" without express prior approval of the Board.



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Responsible Staff12/3/2025

Date



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President12/03/2025

Date

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Board Action

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Date

# Old Man Mountain

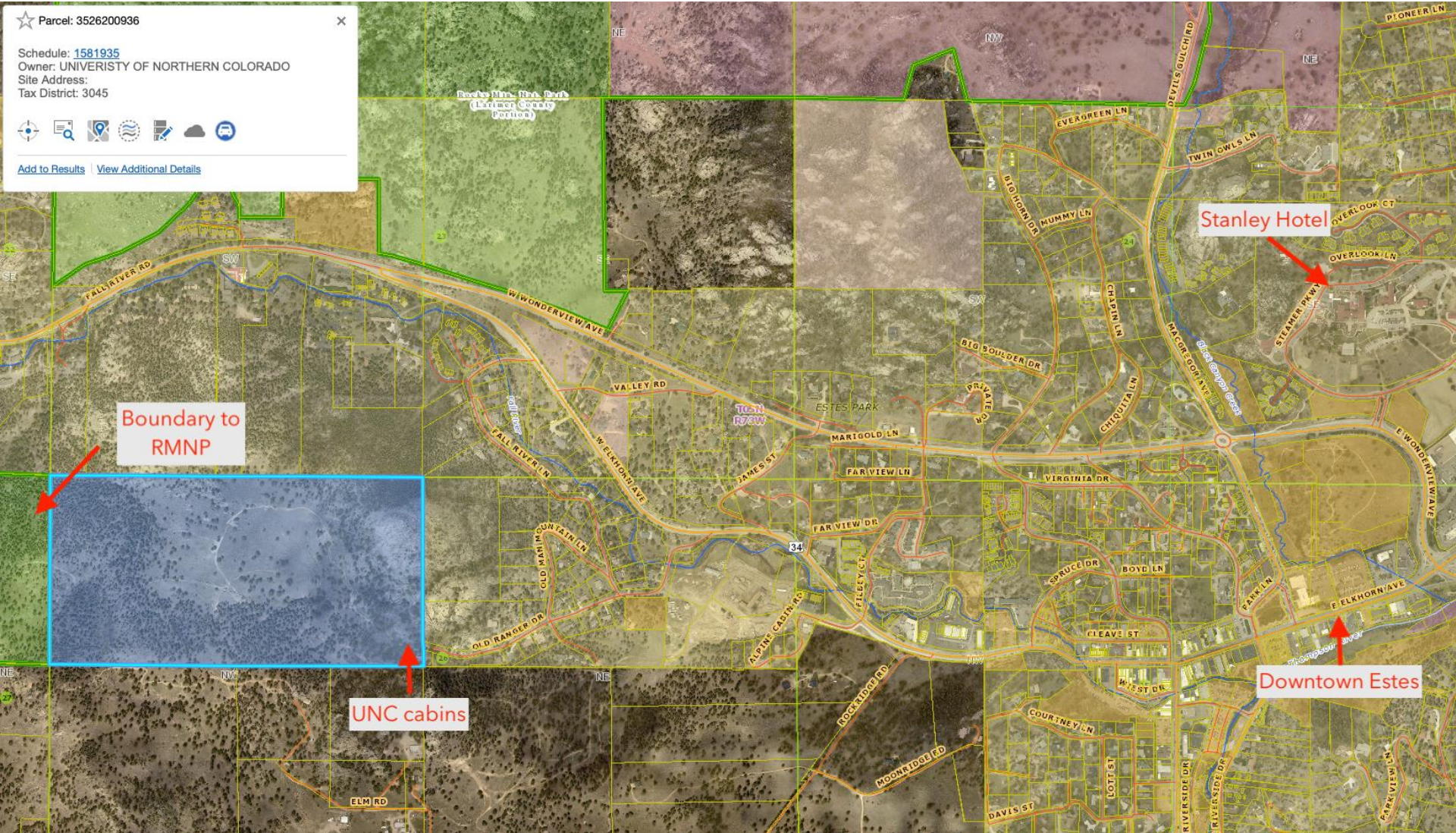


**UNC**



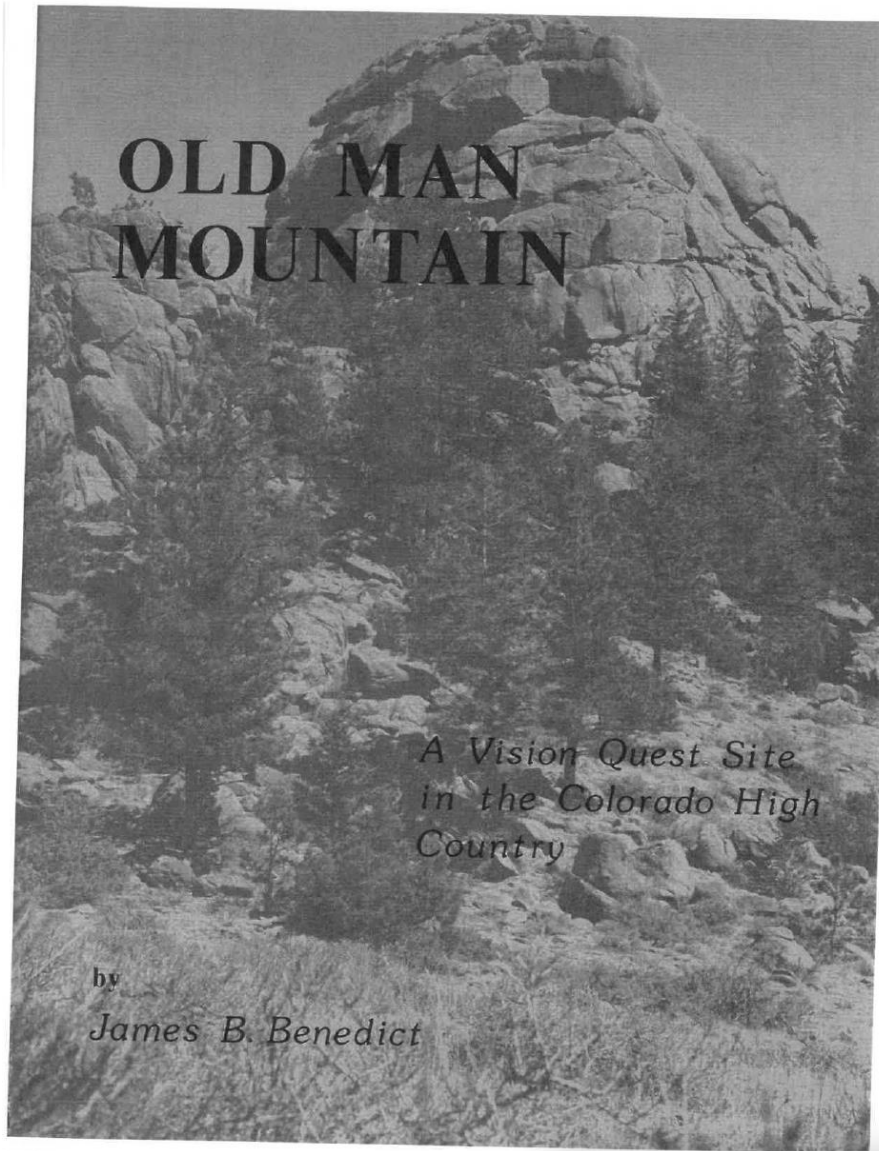
# Overview

- 80-acre parcel
- Received for free from U.S. in 1956
- *Vision Quest* site





# Vision Quest Site



- Old Man Mountain is sacred to indigenous peoples and was used for fasting for visions to come, often from the top of the mountain
- One of three Vision Quest sites in north-central Colorado
- Strong desire to conserve this site due to its importance to indigenous peoples and shared border with Rocky Mountain National Park

# Proposal from EVLT

UNC was approached by the Estes Valley Land Trust (EVLT), a nationally accredited non-profit which has put over 10,000 acres into conservation easements in Larimer and Boulder counties. A conservation easement would protect the property from development in perpetuity.

- **EVLT is offering to pay UNC \$1.25M to place the property under a Conservation Easement**
  - UNC would still own the property
  - UNC could still sell the property in the future, albeit with the conservation easement attached
  - UNC retreat footprint would be excluded from conservation easement, allowing for continued use and future upgrades

# Options for UNC

## 1. Sell conservation easement to EVLT for \$1.25M; UNC maintains ownership and usage

- No change to current usage
- Multiple wins: PR and community support for conservation and preserving sacred site

## 2. Sell the site

- Appraised in 2024 for \$2.56M
- Would be controversial
- Development is challenging
- **Two title defects would impact/impede sale**

### 1. Deed restriction by feds

Provides for the “full unrestricted possession, control, and use by the U.S. during any period of emergency declared by the President or the Congress...in the event of any declared national emergency”

### 2. “Public Highway” court ruling

UNC was party to a lawsuit in the 1990s related to the horse stables down the hill leading tours through the property. Court ruled that federal law established a “public highway” on the property prior to ownership being transferred to UNC. Public cannot be barred from property.

## 3. Do nothing – maintain status quo



## A Mark of Distinction

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November 17, 2025

Dr. Andrew Feinstein  
President  
University of Northern Colorado  
Carter Hall  
Campus Box 143  
Greeley, CO 80639

RE: Offer Letter

Dear Dr. Feinstein,

Please permit this letter to convey that the Estes Valley Land Trust is interested in pursuing the purchase of a permanent conservation easement on the property encompassing approximately 79 acres near Estes Park, Colorado owned by the University of Northern Colorado.

The University of Northern Colorado would retain ownership of the property, can continue to use the property, improve the Old Man Mountain Retreat Center and can transfer the property. The permanent conservation easement would prevent subdivision and additional development that would harm wildlife habitat, open space and cultural values.

If the seller wishes to pursue the sale of a permanent conservation easement, the Estes Valley Land Trust is offering a total of **ONE-MILLION-TWO-HUNDRED-FIFTY-THOUSAND dollars (\$1,250,000)**. The land trust would also coordinate all project due diligence and cover associated transaction costs.

Old Man Mountain is a prehistoric Native American Vision Quest site that should be preserved forever. Our mission is to conserve land for current and future generations and your property has been a conservation priority for more than 30 years.

Thank you for considering this offer and please let me know if you would like to discuss this further.

Sincerely,

Robin Harding  
President, Board of Directors  
Estes Valley Land Trust

Jeffrey Boring  
Executive Director  
Estes Valley Land Trust

Cc: Blaine Nickeson, Associate Vice President of Administration  
Jediah Cummins, Director of Strategy & Operations