

Sheep Mountain Alliance reorganizes

by Eric Krell

The Sheep Mountain Alliance, a Telluride environmental organization, is seeking community input on environmental issues following a six-month reorganization period.

SMA has scheduled a meeting Friday at the Ah Haa School at 5 p.m. One of the main focuses of the meeting will be whether SMA should get involved in environmental protection of private lands.

SMA was founded in 1988 after Jack Pera gathered signatures on a petition opposing the U.S. Forest Service's proposed timber cut on Sheep Mountain.

"I was amazed at the community's response," says Pera. "I gathered about 300 to 350 signatures — for the U.S. Forest Service that's a lot of names. They had to listen."

And they did. The USFS reversed its decision to cut timber

on Sheep Mountain, and soon thereafter the Sheep Mountain Alliance was born.

The alliance is one of approximately 10 groups that fall under the umbrella of the Western Colorado Congress, "an over all environmental/consumer group for the Western Slope," according to SMA member Nancy Kurtz.

Other WCC organizations include High Country Citizens' Alliance of Crested Butte and the San Juan Citizens' Alliance of Durango.

At their meeting in June 1992, SMA decided to form a steering committee to address some of the difficulties that had arisen from the alliance's volunteer character.

"We had to deal with the inevitable burnout of the volunteer staff," explains Kurtz.

"Not that they were less committed to the idea of environmental protection, but several members said, 'I've put in my time, it's time for someone else to take

over."

Kurtz asserts that such growing pains are normal, however, adding that other organizations in the WCC have experienced similar periods.

"We weren't willing to give up our environmental vision," she says. "We decided to reorganize to consider the issues we were struggling with."

Pera points out that the organization had been inundated with environmental issues, which had been "thrust upon us — it was a question of how much we could handle, especially with a volunteer membership."

The steering committee, which has had several meetings in the past couple of months, consists of Kurtz, Pera, Jeanne Stewart, Steve Johnson, Dave Wolff, Mark Lange, Eric Heil, Rob Schulteis, Nancy Kraft, Phil Hayden and Pat Willits.

"Jack and I have been involved since the beginning and we really want to see this get

started up again on a good path," Kurtz says.

The main purpose of the meeting, says Kurtz is to find out "what the community's environmental concerns are." She adds that the SMA is a "very pivotal" organization in that it is the only environmental group in the area.

SMA will consider the possibility of a paid staff at the meeting. Telluride Town Council member Bryan Miller will also make a presentation regarding the Telluride Ski Company's planned expansion.

"We've introduced environmental protection to this area and now we want to know where the community stands," says Pera.

"Environmental protection seems to be an at-home, grass roots process that has to happen in our own backyard. Environmental protection at this point has to be a community effort, not solely an organizational effort. We want to represent the community's wishes."