



Keep it wild...

COLORADO WILD!

Fall '99 Update

Colorado Wild Critical of Vail Inc.'s Role in the Lynx Reintroduction

Colorado Wild this summer played a critical role in protecting Colorado's lynx population and the habitat it needs to survive in the Southern Rocky Mountains.

Connection with the controversial Vail ski area expansion pushed Colorado's lynx further into the headlines. Both Colorado Wild and biologists with the Fish and Wildlife Service raised concerns that the ski area was destroying the last, best habitat for lynx in Colorado just as the species was being proposed for listing under the Endangered Species Act. At the same time, the Colorado Division of Wildlife (CDOW) was undertaking a hasty lynx reintroduction financially spearheaded by Vail Resorts, Inc. (VRI). In a true media spectacle, the CDOW released 41 lynx captured from Canada and Alaska at a location based deep in Southern Colorado. The reintroduction and choice of release sites – well away from Vail – may not only relieve VRI from preserving critical lynx habitat in and around their much maligned Category III ski area expansion, but could jeopardize the lynx's continued existence in Colorado altogether.

Beginning in May, Colorado Wild assembled a lynx team to look through a vast library of information on Colorado's lynx (many obtained through the Freedom of Information Act). In March of this year we wrote a detailed letter to John Mumma, Director of the CDOW, raising questions about the nature of their reintroduction and the motivation behind it. Not only were preliminary studies concerning prey availability incomplete, but their scientific validity was also in question.

Good News for Colorado's Roadless Forests?

As we go to press, President Clinton announced his intention to protect between 40 and 60 million acres of roadless forests on public lands, including significant wildlife habitat in Colorado, declaring that "We will live up to the challenge Theodore Roosevelt laid down a century ago to leave this land even a better land for our descendants than it is for us." By protecting undisturbed wildlands that the lynx, cutthroat trout, wolverine, goshawk and others need to survive, this initiative may have tremendous benefits for the continued survival of rare and endangered species throughout Colorado's high country. Since March, many of these roadless areas have been protected by a temporary moratorium.

The White River National Forest (NF) late this summer released their revised draft Management Plan; Colorado Wild's Forest Watch and Ski Area Committees are responding in depth. Find out more about the plan for Colorado's most heavily visited NF on pgs. 2 and 4.

The proposal isn't without flaws however; roadless areas in forests with recently revised forest plans, such as the Routt in northern Colorado, may not receive protection. And key considerations remain in limbo, such as whether areas from 1,000 to 5,000

acres and officially uninventoried roadless areas will receive needed protection. With Colorado's forests acutely fragmented by ski areas, timber cuts, and backcountry roads, protection of roadless areas less than 5,000 acres will prove fundamental in our quest for the well being of rare and endangered species. Moreover, the administration has not determined whether such areas will be protected from damaging logging, mining and off-road vehicles beyond prohibiting road construction.

Despite these flaws, the roadless area protection initiative holds great promise for genuine wildlife benefits by not only halting ill-advised logging, ski area expansions, and off-road

Forest Watch Campaign (FWC)

*Working to Halt Logging Operations That Invade Roadless Areas,
Sensitive Wildlife Habitat, or Old Growth Forests*

Draft Management Plan For the White River National Forest Released

The White River National Forest Plan revision would extend some level of protection to an additional 160,000 acres, but leave 200,000 pristine acres unprotected.



Lake below the Holy Cross Wilderness, White River National Forest.

The draft management plan for the White River National Forest (NF) is the fourth (of seven) revised NF management plans in Colorado to be released for public comment. The White River NF covers approximately 2.25 million acres, ranging from Meeker in the northwest, to Aspen, Eagle, and Glenwood Springs in the central portion, to the Continental Divide in Summit County on the east. It is also the most heavily visited NF in the southern Rockies. The management plan zones the forest for the next 10 - 15 years, and makes

important decisions that will guide management of the forest, including which roads will be open or closed to motor vehicles and how much timber can be cut.

At press time, Colorado Wild was still reviewing the plan, which consists of over 1300 pages, including a draft

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). Here is preliminary list of good and bad points about the Forest Service's (FS's) preferred alternative – Alternative "D".

The Good

◆ The White River NF recommends five areas for wilderness designation, totaling 47,200 acres. This includes Dome Peak, an area on the east side of the Flattops Wilderness, and the site of a proposed timber sale now halted by the FS's roadless area roadbuilding moratorium (see Good News for Colorado's Forests?, pg. 1).

◆ Numerous areas are proposed as research natural areas (94,100 acres); wild,

scenic and recreational rivers (35,200 acres); and special interest areas (30,600 acres). These areas all provide some level of protection.

◆ The amount of timber likely to be cut under expected budgets (subject to Congressional appropriations) is about nine million board feet per year – a moderate level (one million board feet is about 200 logging trucks).

◆ Motor vehicles would be restricted to designated routes, including snowmobiles. This is a major improvement, as there are currently no restrictions on snowmobile use outside wilderness. This has caused increasing conflicts with cross-country skiers and snowshoers.

◆ Mountain bicycles are regulated for the first time – they would be required to stay on designated routes.

◆ Numerous vacant livestock grazing allotments are proposed for closure, meaning they would not be grazed again. This would allow overgrazed areas to continue recovering, and would also provide good opportunities for scientific research in restoration of lands affected by overgrazing.

The Bad

◆ Approximately 200,000 acres of roadless lands could lose their pristine character. At press time, it was unknown how Clinton's roadless area protection initiative would impact these lands.

◆ The majority of the White River's roadless areas are left unprotected; some of them are assigned to management prescriptions allowing, or even encouraging, future timber harvest.

◆ If more money than expected is appropriated by Congress, up to 36 million board feet of timber could be cut annually, a very high level.

◆ Mature and old growth stands are

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mixed together for analysis, possibly masking the impact of logging in old growth, a forest type needed by some species of wildlife.

- ◆ No old growth in lodgepole pine or aspen is protected.
- ◆ No non-wilderness areas are closed to summer motorized use.
- ◆ The Draft EIS speciously concluded that the preferred alternative would not threaten declining species by just looking to the total amount of habitat theoretically available. They will fail to protect these species from logging and other activities that destroy habitat where at risk species reside while ‘saving’ habitat where they only *could* live. Rather, the FS should determine where rare species actually live.

In concert with the Aspen Wilderness Workshop and others, we published and distributed an alert encouraging people to write letters asking for improvements in the draft Plan while retaining the good features. Colorado Wild will continue analyzing the plan revision, and collectively present detailed technical comments to the FS.

Routt National Forest Continues its Assault on Roadless Areas

Despite Tremendous Opposition, Proposed Morrison Timber Sale Proceeds

Last January, the FS proposed a timber sale for two roadless areas 20 miles south of Steamboat Springs on the Routt NF. One of the roadless areas, Bushy Creek, is popular with hunters, hikers, mountain bicyclists, and horseback riders. It contains a spectacular natural landslide, known as the Muddy Slide, and is a very productive area with a lush ground cover of grasses, sedges, and forbs unusual for tree stands dominated by lodgepole pine. Much of the surrounding areas have been roaded and cut; the intact forests there constitute important habitat for some wildlife species, including elk. The pristine nature of the area also attracts recreational use. Aided by many local residents opposed to the

proposed sale, Colorado Wild led the opposition by distributing both electronic and snail mail alerts, urging the FS to cancel the proposed sale. The results went beyond our expectations: over 100 people wrote and opposed the sale, a majority of them vehemently. Only two writers supported the sale, both on the condition that certain mitigation measures be applied. Yet the FS ignored immense opposition and is continuing the analysis that will lead to a draft EIS this fall. Colorado Wild will once again lead the opposition by analyzing the EIS, publishing our findings, and sending out alerts.

Forest Service Approves Blowdown Area Timber Sales; Modifications Reflect Pressure from Forest Activists

The Routt NF also recently pressed forward with two more timber sales, 20 miles north of Steamboat Springs, affected by the large blowdown of October, 1997. In mid-July, they approved the South Fork timber sale, much of which would take place in the South Fork Roadless area adjacent to the Mt. Zirkel Wilderness. Colorado Wild widely distributed an alert on this proposal, urging people to insist in letters to the FS that any cutting and road construction be kept out of the roadless area. In response, they removed the two most objectionable portions of this sale: using dynamite to construct a road up a very steep slope to the “Island in the Sky” area, and aggressively logging all spruce trees even if they were in riparian (streamside) areas. We commend the agency for responding to public opinion here and dropping these two features. Most of the approved sale, however, is still in the roadless area, and Colorado Wild has filed an appeal.

Approved in late May, the second timber sale involves logging in the North Fork area. This was a revision of a July, 1998 decision approving access along the North Fork of the Elk River, a proposed scenic river

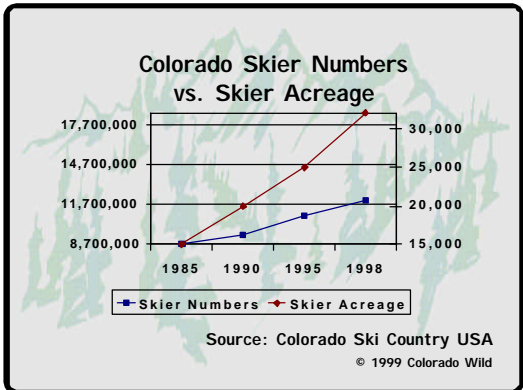
... See FWC, Page 7

The Routt National Forest is pushing ahead with two timber sales in the area affected by the blowdown of 1997, but modifications to one of the sales reflect pressure from Colorado Wild, local residents, and other conservationists.

Ski Area Citizen's Coalition (SACC)

Working to Halt Environmentally Damaging Ski Area Expansions and Those Driven by the Lure of Real Estate Profits

SACC Committee Spreads the Word...



While Colorado skier numbers since 1985 have increased 28%, skier acreage has more than doubled! Further ski area expansions aren't needed for skiing quality, but are rationalized as such for the the ski companies desire for real estate development profits on adjacent private land.

White River National Forest Plan to set policy for Colorado's most visited forest

The mood in Palmo's coffee house in the Vail Village could best be described as dominated by curiosity. The SACC's slide show: "The Ski Area Expansion Frenzy – It Doesn't Have to Make Sense, It Just Has to Make Money" ended an hour earlier. We discussed the alternatives to the

White River National Forest (NF) plan revision that will determine the fate of forest stewardship for the next fifteen years throughout the most heavily traveled section of NF in the Rockies.

More than half of Colorado's ski areas lie within the White River NF. Almost all are applying for snowmaking or terrain expansions. Thanks in part to the SACC's research and public education efforts, it is well known that these expansions are often driven by the lure of associated real estate development profits. This summer the SACC outreach program has informed communities about the impacts of environmentally and socially damaging expansions throughout the high country.

Of the Forest Plan's six alternatives, three (Alternatives C, E, and F) would allow for aerial transportation corridors – zoning for gondola connections between ski resorts and / or private land. This would be a dream come true for Wall Street controlled ski corporations. Gondolas coupled with vast expanses of forest

zoned for future lift served skiing would allow practically every resort that lines I-70 to connect, from Loveland ski area all the way to Beaver Creek. Aerial zoning would further allow Vail to connect their destructive Category III ski area expansions to private land holdings on the South side of Battle Mountain, suspiciously increasing land values for 6,000 acres of private land (i.e. the Gilman tract) that Vail Resorts is working to acquire through bankruptcy court.

Alternatives D and I, on the other hand, both wouldn't allow aerial corridor zoning, and eliminate superfluous ski area zoning in areas such as Georgia Pass in Summit County. Alternatives D and I retain the current ski area permit boundaries, helping reduce the expansion arms race that has done little for the skiing public. Even so, room for expansion would still be zoned at practically every ski area in the White River NF, such as Keystone's Jones Gulch, Breckenridge's Peak 7, and five lifts to the west of Copper Mountain's current boundary.

Hopeful our message would be heard far and wide, the Palmo's crowd encouraged us to seek many avenues for public education on ski area expansion issues – a challenge Colorado Wild's SACC committee is enthusiastically working for.

Basics of the Six Alternatives

- ◆ B – The current management plan, written in 1984, encourages tremendous ski area development and natural resource harvest. It was unable to consider or mitigate today's impact by off-road vehicles or mountain bikes.
- ◆ C – Promoting dispersed recreation, this plan adds unneeded ski terrain and aerial transportation corridors, but also adds wilderness while creating no new roads.
- ◆ D – This is the Forest Service's (FS's) preferred alternative. It marks important changes in principles of maintaining ecosystem diversity.

SACC Committee

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The FS deserves credit for proposing to keep ski areas to their current permit boundaries. In the name of active management for wildlife habitat, however, this alternative allows for timber harvest in areas that meet wilderness designation requirements.

◆ E – This alternative would allow increases in ski area territory, and adds miles of aerial transportation corridors such that every ski area along the I-70 corridor could be connected, effectively fragmenting Colorado’s wildlife habitat in two.

◆ F – This is the plan requested by the timber industry; it allows for the most commercial timber harvest of any of the alternatives.

◆ I – Based on conservation biology, this alternative was authored in large part by the Aspen Wilderness Workshop. Like Alternative D, it limits ski areas to their current permit boundaries, but also adds more than 200,000 acres of Wilderness and Resource Natural Areas.

Telluride Ski Area Expansion Approved

In late June, Grand Mesa-Uncompahgre-Gunnison NF Supervisor Bob Storch approved the second version of the Telluride ski area expansion. He withdrew the first approval in 1996 after two individuals and an environmental organization sued. In some ways, the second version is worse than the first, as it includes a ski area boundary change that may allow a skiing connection to the ghost town of Alta. The Telluride Ski and Golf Company (Telski), which operates the ski area, may be attempting to acquire land there for real estate development profits.

The expansion would bring alpine skiing to Prospect Basin, an area with a very steep, but short, upper part, and then a very flat section that is nearly a mile long. To allow skiers of less than super-expert ability to safely ski the top part, runs would have to be cut across a very steep slope that contains one of the only old growth stands in the area. The impacts could be devastating: the old growth stand would be destroyed, the cuts would create tremendous erosion, and two rare

fens (wetlands) could be adversely affected. Many wetlands in the region have already been destroyed by Telski’s illegal filling of dozens of acres of wetlands in the 1980s and early 1990s. As the expansion would require an additional 150 or more workers to operate, the Telluride region’s air quality, already poor enough for non-attainment status under the federal Clean Air Act, would worsen. The expansion would exacerbate an already severe shortage of affordable housing in the area, forcing workers to drive considerable distances to get to work and adding additional particulate air pollution in the process.



After years of intense opposition including appeals, public hearings, protests, and litigation, Vail Resorts proceeded with their much maligned Category III ski area expansion into what was the Two Elk Roadless area - a critical wildlife corridor and likely the last, best home of Colorado’s native lynx.

Colorado Wild, the Sheep Mountain Alliance (San Miguel County’s environmental organization) and Telluride residents Phil and Linda Miller filed an administrative appeal of the expansion. Unfortunately, it was sent to the wrong address, and the FS has so far refused to consider it; with the other appellants, Colorado Wild has filed suit in federal court.

... Roadless Area Protection

vehicle proliferation in roadless areas, but by influencing Forest Plans such as the White River National Forest’s now undergoing revision. While this Colorado Wild update – and much of Colorado Wild’s efforts – focuses great attention on the White River Forest Plan revision, developments continually change the factors that may influence both the revision and the roadless area protection initiative outcome. As these details emerge, we will keep you updated via action alerts, press, and our new and improved website, and of course ask that you make your voice heard for wildlands and wildlife.

For the wilds,
Jeff Berman, President Colorado Wild

Responsible Recreation Program (R&R)

Working to Reverse the Proliferation of Motorized "Trails"

Into the Backcountry

Benedicto from Edward Abbey : " May your trails be crooked, winding, lonesome, dangerous, leading to the most amazing view. May your mountains rise into and above the clouds. May your rivers flow without end, meandering through pastoral valleys tinkling with bells, past temples and castles and poets towers into a dark primeval forest where tigers belch and monkeys howl, through miasmal and mysterious swamps and down into a desert of red rock, blue mesas, domes and pinnacles and grottos of endless stone, and down again into a deep vast ancient unknown chasm where bars of sunlight blaze on profiled cliffs, where deer walk across the white sand beaches, where storms come and go as lightning clangs upon the high crags, where something strange and more beautiful and more full of wonder than your deepest dreams waits for you —beyond that next turning of the canyon walls."

Excerpt from "Terra Incognita: Into the Maze" from Ed Abbey's *Desert Solitaire*

To Ed's musings lets add a little modern day reality; imagine a distant buzzing. It grows louder as it gets closer. You leap off the trail for safety. The monster roars by – but its impact is not gone. The gritty blue cloud of smoke and dust lingers long after its passing; zippered tracks lead through the now cloudy stream below.

The Growing Threat of Motorized Recreation

The use of public lands for recreational activities has increased

dramatically in recent years, resulting in negative impacts to the health of our public lands. The last 20 years has seen the introduction and spread of a new menace – the off-road vehicle (ORV). ORV's include all terrain vehicles (ATV's), motorized dirt bikes, snowmobiles and jet skis that displace and disturb wildlife. The proliferation of ORV trails causes soil erosion and sedimentation into streams. Broad trails used by motorized vehicles fragment habitats, which are extremely vulnerable to edge effects such as changes in microclimate (e.g. increased wind and temperature extremes), declines in native species that require interior forest habitat, and relentless invasions of exotic plants that thrive in edge habitat. ORV's also destroy the chance for humans to experience so much of our public lands in more traditional ways, such as hiking, wildlife viewing, horseback riding, and traditional hunting – just to name a few

popular activities that require a semblance of peace for full enjoyment.

ORV trails are proliferating on public lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and Forest Service (FS) at a tremendous pace. The National Forest (NF) road system, for instance, now includes over 380,000 miles of road, enough to circle the globe 15 times over. In addition to these "official" roads, there are probably of thousands of miles of user created roads and trails maintained by repeated ORV use that the FS has no official knowledge of. These roads can slice through important habitats such as wetlands or lands with sensitive soils, causing massive erosion and sediment build-up in streams.

Colorado Wild's Responsible Recreation Program Meeting the Challenge

These are a few of the issues Colorado Wild's Responsible Recreation (R&R) Program addresses. This summer, we created a Road Removal Inventory Project (Road RIP) with dedicated, experienced "Road Rippers" on the Rio Grande, Gunnison, and San Isabel NF's to document ORV damage for use in possible future legal actions.

Also this summer, the Parks and Yampa Ranger districts on the Routt NF decided to close all non-designated roads and trails to motorized use (except snowmobiles). This affected 217,184 acres which were previously open, with limitations, to motorized travel off of designated routes. User created routes were disturbing riparian areas and wildlife habitat, as well as displacing elk from the NF to private lands, creating conflicts with livestock, and harming hunting opportunities. Along with the Wilderness Society, the Colorado Mtn. Club, and Wildlands CPR, Colorado Wild intervened in a Colorado Off-Highway Vehicle Coalition (COHVC) lawsuit

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...Colorado's Lynx

Evidence indicated that their portrayal of native lynx persistence, particularly in historically preferred habitat (the Vail area) was being downplayed. Surveys weren't as thorough as reported, suitable techniques to locate lynx were not used, and sightings were more frequent and credible than acknowledged.

As we uncovered information, it became evident that the reintroduction was not well grounded in sound scientific principles. This led Colorado Wild's lynx team to question the influence of corporate interests in wildlife management. We learned, for instance, that VRI requested a quid-pro-quo absolving them of all lynx habitat preservation considerations if they agreed to fund the reintroduction. That VRI colluded with our government agencies behind closed doors also led us to demand public input into these decisions.

Before long, the reintroduction ironically presented an ominous threat to Colorado's wildlife. In May, the CDOW declared that if more than 50% of the reintroduced lynx die, they would conclude the reintroduction a failure, halt future augmentations, and declare Colorado unsuitable habitat for lynx and possibly even other carnivores such as the wolverine and wolf. The reintroduction itself was so flawed, however, that such a conclusion would be utterly unfounded in scientific principle. Through Colorado Wild's efforts, including media publication of our research and contentions, the CDOW later retracted its faulty premise threatening a species eulogy for Colorado lynx.

Colorado Wild continues to review newly uncovered information (of which there is plenty); we recently participated in the CDOW's re-evaluation of the reintroduction. We will continue our critical efforts in ensuring that Colorado remains home to the lynx, our goal being to hold government agencies to the highest scientific standard – both for the benefit of wildlife and those who wish to see our wildlands preserved.



...FWC

corridor. The FS partially rescinded their original decision when they realized that the existing road was not suitable for timber haul; their latest decision approved the construction of a new bridge across the river to allow it. The FS also re-approved removal

of blown down timber from the scenic river corridor and from the Dome Peak Roadless area (a different area than its namesake in the White River NF). Colorado Wild, Sinapu, The Wilderness Society,

a local business, and one individual appealed this sale, partly because the removal of logs from the scenic river corridor violates the Routt NF Plan's standards and guidelines for protecting scenic river corridors. The regional forester upheld the decision to approve the sale, but prohibited it from proceeding until he gets a satisfactory explanation from the forest supervisor on how the recreational objectives for the area will be met. This will at least slow down the implementation of this sale.

...R&R

against the FS, supporting the FS's decision to close damaging and illegally created motorized trails.

Along with local ranchers, the R&R also helped stop for now the creation of a planned motorcycle 'playground' in the Chinaman's Gulch area near Buena Vista on the San Isabel NF and BLM lands. Chinaman's Gulch is currently a designated roadless area that mule deer use to migrate from the forest to the Arkansas River. Finally, the R&R program is working collaboratively with other concerned groups to raise the issue of Clean Water Act violations associated with ORV abuse.

The Forest Service is the largest road-building bureaucracy in the world, "managing" over 400,000 miles of roads – not including tens of thousands of miles of user-created roads.



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Colorado Wild works to protect, preserve, and restore the native plants & animals of the Southern Rocky Mountains, focusing its efforts on habitat protection of the forested high country.

Colorado Wild, Inc. is a non-profit, 501(c)(3) registered organization. Tax-deductible donations that make our work possible can be sent to the above address. Or for more information, call us at 303-546-9911.

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