



# Keep it wild...

## ***COLORADO WILD!***

**Fall 2000 /  
Winter 2001**

### *Awakening and Appreciating the Wilds...*

*By John Watson, Board President*

I recently had the pleasure of a week of traveling along the metropolis of the East coast. I spent the first eighteen years of my life in that area, and I enjoy returning occasionally, seeing the assortment of trees in the glory of fall color, and sampling the variety of foods made possible by urban ethnic populations. A trip back East has another benefit as well: it re-awakens me to the splendor of Colorado. Landing at DIA with a view of the Rockies, and driving up I-70 to my home in Evergreen, gives me the refreshing sense of being back close to a place with space, an area of beauty, and most importantly a land that is large, wild, and alive.

Not long ago, the area I visited between Philadelphia and Washington was a fully functioning ecosystem, diverse and alive. Parts of it are still pretty, but it has few wide-open spaces, few large predators. Its bucolic beauty, for the most part, does not include fully functioning ecosystems. Even those that do function seem somehow artificial, places where nature is hemmed in and controlled.

From an evolutionary standpoint, the Eastern population growth and development of the past several hundred years occurred in the blink of an eye. A similar transformation of the Colorado landscape is now occurring. We have two things, however, that protect us from a fate resembling that which has befallen the East. The first is the public land with

### *A Forest's View of the Election*

*Jeff Berman, Executive Director*

The forests of Colorado and the nation, in concord with the critters that make it their home, must have a very different opinion than the electoral college poised to position George W. Bush in the White House.

During the campaign, Mr. Bush rebuked candidate Gore's pledge to protect National Forest roadless areas from logging and roadbuilding, promising to reverse any protections

instituted during the waning days of the Clinton administration. The election of a pro-extractive President, coupled with the continuance of thin Republican majorities in the Senate and House of Representatives, may halt the last decade's slow gains toward sustainable use of the forest's bounty.

The coming years will prove challenging. We may find ourselves battling to retain strategies taken for granted for thirty years, such as our right to appeal timber sales which gives

us the ability to negotiate them down. More than ever before we may all have to pressure the President and Congress to turn away from timber corporation bids to undermine laws and regulations that protect both the forest and the people who enjoy its bounty in a sustainable way.

Yet the most insidious ramification for Colorado's forests may come through Presidential appointments. Likely no longer will a pro-conservation biologist run the Forest Service. Likely no



**Will a Bush administration find more of Colorado's forests ready for the saw?**

...See Watson Page 3

...See Berman Page 5

# Ski Area Citizen's Coalition (SACC)

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

### *Ski Cooper Land Exchange Dropped*

Lake County, owners of Ski Cooper near Leadville, withdrew their proposed Corske Creek Land Exchange designed to privatize and develop 600-acres of public land at the base of Ski Cooper. Lake County cited the following:

*The Forest Service indicated...a regional lynx corridor assessment would be required... Following the corridor study, the exchange would have to be re-scoped under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the Environmental Assessment (EA) would have to be elevated to a full Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)... The delay... placed the land exchange out of the...grasp of Lake County.*

Since the land exchange was first presented to the public in Sept. 1998, Colorado Wild has stood by its call for an EIS when only an EA was being contemplated.

Ski Cooper sits atop Tennessee Pass, a unique forested corridor along the Continental Divide and widely recognized as an important area for lynx in the Southern Rockies. The proposed development resulting from the land exchange threatened to destroy Tennessee Pass' unspoiled character. Yet just as disturbing, this land exchange would have perpetuated the

trend of transforming ski areas from local public lands based recreational facilities to exclusive, four-season destination resorts.

### *Maryvale Village Development*

The Fraser River Valley retains a partially undeveloped and rustic character. However, the "Maryvale" development proposal threatens to irreversibly change this valley. Maryvale Village

LLC is proposing 750 residential units west of Highway 40 between Fraser and Winter Park along with 50,000 square feet of offices, shops, and restaurants, a 110-room hotel, and soon much more development east of Highway 40.

While Maryvale LLC has agreed to some open space areas to allow continued elk migration, it is unknown whether this will be sufficient to avoid degradation of an elk movement corridor and winter habitat. Colorado

Wild has additional concerns regarding water quality, wetlands destruction, and adverse impacts to declining species. Colorado Wild worked with local opponents of the development this fall, convincing the Army Corps of Engineers to hold a public hearing that demonstrated and coalesced vast opposition. We will continue to support local opposition to ensure that this area is not compromised by out of control development.

### *The Village at Wolf Creek*

Below the base of Wolf Creek Ski Area lies a 300-acre private inholding of lush meadows, alpine creeks and spruce/fir forests. Known as



Wetlands by the Fraser River threatened by the Maryvale development.

"...this so-called charter is being used as a public relations ploy rather than a genuine attempt to improve their environmental performance"

Jeff Berman, responding to the National Ski Areas Association "Environmental Charter", New York Times, Sept. 10, 2000.

Alberta Park, this parcel was traded out of public hands to the Leavel/McCombs Joint Venture in the mid-1980's. A Texas developer is currently managing the property with his sights set on creating "The Village at Wolf Creek" - 2,172 units on 162 lots, 5,176 bedrooms, 4,267 parking spaces, and 222,100 square feet of commercial space including 12 restaurants, hotels, a convention center, and shopping.

Mineral County gave preliminary approval for the Village at Wolf Creek to proceed with a Planned Unit Development process in August. While the proposed development is on private land, construction and other vehicles can only access it by a public Forest Service road. An appeal agreement between Colorado Wild and the Forest Service in 1999 regarding the Alberta Lift expansion requires a thorough analysis should the developers seek approval to upgrade the road for construction access. Issues including threatened and endangered species, water quality and quantity, and the creation of yet another exclusive destination resort promise to be at the forefront of Colorado wild's opposition to this massive new development.

### ***Ski Area Environmental Scorecard***

The ski industry keeps telling us how environmentally inclined skiers are. Yet until now, there has been no means for skiers or snowboarders to make recreation choices based on their concern for the environment. Beginning this holiday season, Colorado Wild will release a "Ski Area Environmental Scorecard" granting Western U.S. ski resorts grades of A through F on their environmental behavior. Colorado Wild's partners include the Crystal Conservation Coalition of Washington, Friends of the Inyo of California, Greater Yellowstone Coalition, and Save Our Canyons of Utah.

Criteria being used to rate ski resort's environmental record include terrain expansion, disturbance in environmentally sensitive areas, real estate development in conjunction with terrain expansion, commercial or residential development on undisturbed lands, water quantity

and quality degradation from snowmaking, recycling and energy conservation among others.

To gather the extensive information needed, Colorado Wild in August sent 53 Freedom of Information Act requests to Forest Service offices throughout the West. Colorado Wild also mailed 84 surveys to ski areas asking for information about their various environmental programs. The ski industry trade group, National Ski Areas Association, is leaning heavily on its member resorts to ignore our survey in a bid to discredit the entire scorecard initiative. However, a number of resorts have broken rank feeling that they may have something to gain - free positive publicity - by responding to our survey.

### **...Watson**

which we are blessed. Millions of acres of federal land in Colorado, primarily Forest Service and BLM holdings, comprise a haven from some types of development. As many people know, though, the presence of public land isn't enough. The second element of protection is comprised of the people and groups working to protect public lands, to ensure that pristine areas remain a refuge, and that degraded lands can be restored.

Colorado Wild is at the forefront of the organizations protecting Colorado's public lands. I first learned of the group two years ago, soon after it had been founded by a collection of experienced, dedicated activists seeking a formal organization as an umbrella for their efforts. I had recently moved back to Colorado after three years in the Midwest, and was working in the private sector after years in environmental non-profits. While attending a hearing on the lynx reintroduction I met Jeff Berman, then and still running Colorado Wild. I had not heard of the organization, but he quickly convinced me to get involved in a small way.

...See Watson, Page 7

***Along with the SACC's partner organizations, Colorado Wild will release its much anticipated Ski Area Environmental Scorecard Nov. 27.***

***Check out***

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com***

***to find out where you  
can ski with an  
environmental  
conscience.***

### **Colorado Wild Staff**

Jeff Berman  
Executive Director  
(Durango)

Ben Doon  
Ski Area Citizen's  
Coalition Staff  
(San Luis)

Lisa Philipps  
Responsible Recreation  
Program Director  
(Salida)

Rocky Smith  
Forest Watch Campaign  
Program Director  
(Denver)

John Whitney  
Forest Watch Campaign  
Timber Monitor  
(Durango)

# Forest Watch Campaign (FWC)

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

### ***Poorly Designed Forest “Restoration” Projects Threaten Wildlife and Other Resources***

The fires in the western United States this year created great pressure on the Forest Service to treat forested areas to reduce the risk of future fires. Indeed, Congress recently appropriated over \$1 billion for such efforts. Some areas in Colorado could benefit from treatments, such as thinning of fire-suppressed trees and reintroduction of low-intensity fire. But based on what we have seen so far from the Forest Service, there is cause for great concern about these projects.

### ***The Winiger Ridge Project in Boulder County***

The Forest Service approved the Winiger Ridge project east of Nederland in early September, under which 1,800 acres of forest would be mechanically treated, and 2,400 acres would be burned when conditions allowed. Much of the cutting would thin unnaturally dense ponderosa pine stands - a consequence of a century of human fire suppression. These small trees have little or no commercial value, thus the Forest Service will be tempted to allow the logging of larger trees to make the project's timber sales more desirable to the timber industry. However, the larger trees, which are rare on the Winiger landscape because of historic logging, are more fire resistant (because they have thicker bark), and are also important for wildlife, as they make good nests and perches. Removal of large trees in particular will hurt wildlife species needing solid forest for habitat.

While no new road construction is planned, several miles of existing road would be reconstructed to provide access to treatment units. This would worsen already severe

motorized and non-motorized travel management problems, such as renegade mountain bikers illegally creating new trails almost daily. However, the Forest Service chose not to analyze travel management in preparing the vegetation treatment proposal, even though upgrading roads for vegetation treatment will almost certainly increase already out of control recreational abuse.

Colorado Wild and several local residents appealed the decision to approve the Winiger project to the Regional Forester. Our appeal was denied in late October. We have surveyed all of the units proposed for treatment in the first contract, which will probably be marked by the end of 2000 for logging, with treatments scheduled to begin in April. We have discovered numerous areas with large trees in planned treatment units, some of which are clearcuts. Colorado Wild is still working to convince the Forest Service to drop or modify the proposed treatment units containing the larger trees.

### ***The Upper South Platte Project Southwest of Denver***

An even larger project is proposed for the Pike-San Isabel National Forest in Jefferson and Douglas Counties. The Upper South Platte Project would thin 13,000 acres and clearcut 4,400 more. As with Winiger, the older, larger trees would be removed, especially in clearcuts. Three roadless areas would be partially logged, yet the project's draft environmental assessment (EA) does not even analyze the impact on these areas. The EA admits that the project would violate the Pike-San Isabel Forest Plan, yet the Forest Service has not proposed any Plan amendments.

The treatments could adversely affect a threatened species, the Mexican spotted owl, while Goshawk, a large bird which likes more

**“the Forest Service will be tempted to allow the cutting of larger trees to make the project's timber sales more desirable to the timber industry”**

dense forests, is likely to also suffer. The EA does a poor job of describing these possible impacts. Also, soils in the area are extremely erosive.

As with Winiger, no new road construction is planned, but the use of heavy mechanized equipment like skidders and log forwarders would create paths through forest stands that could easily invite illegal motorized use, potentially devastating soils and wildlife habitat security.

The project does have some components favorable to conservationists:

- 1) reintroduction of fire, which was a regular process that kept fuel levels low before humans intervened;
- 2) obliteration of 25 miles of unneeded roads (though the EA does not show where these roads are located);
- 3) repair of eroding trails; and
- 4) planting trees in some of the areas severely burned in the 1996 Buffalo Creek fire.

However, the overall project needs a much better design (e. g., to retain all trees over nine inches or so in diameter and to avoid cutting in roadless areas), and the Forest Service must fully disclose the likely impacts of the treatments, as required by law.

The Forest Service has stated that the Upper South Platte Project may serve as a model for other projects that seek to reduce catastrophic fire risk. ***The poor design and extremely poor analysis of this project are thus cause for great concern.*** Colorado Wild helped prepare a 50+ page letter signed by several local and national environmental organizations detailing the problems with the proposal and how to make it a project we could support. We favor some restoration of forest conditions that existed prior to human manipulation of forests, which began in earnest about 120 years ago, including reintroduction of low-intensity fire every 30 years or so. However, removal of one of the most important forest elements - larger, older trees - cannot be considered "restoration"; in fact, it is quite the opposite. Colorado Wild's Forest

Watch Program will devote a considerable amount of time and effort toward reviewing all project proposals addressing fire risk and/or forest restoration.

... **Berman**

longer will Fish and Wildlife Service higher-ups permit their biologists to consider adequately enforcing the Endangered Species Act in the face of well-connected opposition. No longer will lower level administrators, such as National Forest Supervisors, be free to object to ecologically damaging timber sales when higher level bureaucrats beholden to timber industry campaign contributions call the shots.

Despite the depressing outlook, there is reason to hope. While George W. Bush is poised to win the electoral vote, it appears he did **not** win the popular vote. The Republicans also barely held on to majorities in both houses of Congress. While they will continue to dictate what legislation is (and isn't) voted upon, their thin majority will make it much more difficult to undermine laws that lay the foundation of environmental protections. Further, a few moderate Republicans regularly side with conservationists, granting us a thin **majority** for legislation considered under the light of day (as opposed to riders attached to unrelated bills, which will continue to be a major democracy problem).

It is unlikely that conservationists will make any gains during this next Congressional session. Yet ***an outspoken public that increasingly demands more than symbolic environmental protection can pressure a President continually reminded that the majority didn't vote him in.*** An outspoken public that continually reminds a Congress fearful of losing its majority that rash anti-environmental exploit may fully swing the balance of legislative power in 2002. Ignoring the overwhelming majority of Americans who demand strong environmental protections may prove untenable to a party that knows full well its tenuous standing.

***"Rocky's superb work on Winiger Ridge... really impressed the local nature group... They couldn't believe how well prepared and versed he was... During the settlement session, one of the Forest Service timber people boasted he had marked one of the units and not marked anything over 8" diameter. Rocky said "just a minute", leafed through the voluminous document and pointed to the page with the unit prescription that said "clear cut". The FS staff was completely aced out."***

***Rosalind McClellan,  
Preserve Unique  
Magnolia Association***

# Responsible Recreation Program (R&R)

## Working to Reverse the Proliferation of Motorized "Trails" Into the Backcountry

The pressure of urban lifestyles and new "toys" are making recreation on public lands the number one weekend activity for many Americans. Recreationists of all types are jumping on the bandwagon to ensure the continuation of their particular form of public lands recreation. Amidst the scramble among users to claim a chunk of the land, Colorado Wild has remained steadfast in its mission to protect wildlands from irresponsible recreation use and to stop illegal proliferation of roads and trails on public lands.

### White River National Forest (NF) ORV Land Damage Inventory

The White River NF experiences more recreational visitation than any other in Colorado, including tremendous motorized use (snowmobiles in the winter, off-road vehicles (ORVs) in the summer). Their proliferation throughout the backcountry is bringing significant ecological impacts to the forest. As a result, the White River NF has proposed to close many duplicative, user created, and/or ecologically damaging roads and trails. Unfortunately, the Forest Service may have less than adequately inventoried and documented the damage to withstand anticipated ORV group legal challenges.

This fall, Colorado Wild spearheaded a comprehensive mapping/inventory project on the White River NF to document user created and/or ecologically problematic roads.

Colorado Wild and volunteers from the Southern Rockies Forest Network (SRFN) have gone out in the forest and located, described, photographed, and mapped these roads. Colorado Wild will compile the data in a report to be distributed to the Forest Service, the general public, and other Colorado conservation organizations.

### Fourmile Area Travel Management Plan Seeks Improvements

Colorado Wild staff approached the Forest Service in September, 1999, requesting immediate action be taken to protect soil and water resources in the Fourmile area north of Buena Vista from illegal and inappropriate ORV use. Colorado Wild found massive amounts of sediment being deposited into wetlands, Fourmile

creek, and the Arkansas River as a result of miles of unauthorized user-created roads and trails. This April, more than 200 citizens, mostly from Chaffee County, met in Buena Vista to listen to the BLM and Forest Service describe how they plan to manage recreation travel on 103,000 acres of public lands north and east of Buena Vista. Three citizen working groups were formed as a result to develop a citizens management alternative for the Fourmile Travel Management Plan. Subsequently, Colorado Wild staff Lisa Philipps and Ben Doon, volunteers, and members of the Quiet Use Coalition participated in monitoring, mapping and inventorying the Fourmile area this past summer. The collected data will go to a citizens planning group tasked with developing a resource-friendly travel plan



Landscape damage documented on the White River NF. Note the sticker - Mile Hi Jeep Club "adopted" this road.

**On Sept. 13, Colorado Wild joined with the Southern Plains Land Trust to hold a tremendously successful art auction. Not only did we together raise over \$20,000, but over 200 current supporters and newcomers had a fabulous time. Look forward to this being an annual event. See you next year!**

for the area. The project promises to be challenging as many members of ORV organizations are intent on leaving all routes, legal or not, open to motorized use.

### ***Chaffee County Commandeers National Forest Roads***

On September 12, the Chaffee County commissioners in Salida voted to adopt a law enacted in 1866 entitled RS2477. This archaic law puts control and management of federal public land roads and trails in the hands of County Commissioners. The County then has the final say on the management of these roads and trails, and can change their use from non-motorized to motorized at their personal discretion. They can also choose to open roads that no longer exist on the ground or that are in designated Wilderness, Wilderness study, and roadless areas. Colorado Wild will be researching all Chaffee County RS2477 claims to make sure they are valid and encourage the citizens of Chaffee County to not open more roads into sensitive areas on BLM and Forest Service lands.

### ***Motorized / Non-motorized User Conflicts***

The Forest Service and BLM can no longer ignore that ORV's are the number one threat to many forest habitats. Motorized "toys" cause more conflicts in the forest than any other activity. User conflict report forms are now available in most Forest Service District offices; Colorado Wild urges the public to report problems encountered when you enjoy public lands. We are also gathering photos and data from outfitters, hikers, anglers, hunters, and others as not only a means of documenting problems to the agencies but to further educate the public.

### ***ORV Damage Presentation***

Colorado Wild has compiled hundreds of pictures and slides from all over the state showing ORV damage to wetlands, user conflicts, wildlife impacts, soil erosion, and illegal ORV use. In conjunction with SRFN, these slides are being

organized into an informative presentation that can be used for environmental groups, schools, and the general public. Please contact us if you want to have a slide show for your group or community.



Duplicative route impacting the South Fork of the Swan River - a consequence of inadequate road maintenance budgets and irresponsible motorized use.

### ***...Watson***

Two years later I find myself increasingly involved with, and dedicated to, Colorado Wild. I consistently find staff and volunteers to be intelligent, experienced, and above all devoted to protecting and restoring the land we love. The commitment of others, and the successes that Colorado Wild has enjoyed, feed my desire to be involved. When I fly over the state, I see ski areas in an expansion arms race with little regard for their environmental impact, and I am glad that Colorado Wild stands as a voice of reason. I see clear cuts, knowing that although few people realize that logging even exists in our state, Colorado Wild leads the fight to make sure that every timber sale is reviewed and, when necessary, challenged. I think of the motorized vehicles illegally tearing up land and streams, and remember that Colorado Wild volunteers are in the field documenting such damage, and working to close inappropriate trails.

If you are a current supporter, thank you. It is only with the backing of people throughout the state that we can continue to be successful. If you are learning about Colorado Wild for the first time, please consider taking the time to learn more and contemplate how you might join our efforts. The only thing more satisfying than being able to see, and experience, the lands we have saved is playing an active role in preventing them from becoming something less than Wild.

***Alongside recreation groups such as the Colorado Mountain Club, Colorado Wild is criticizing the Clinton administration's "Recreation Agenda". It threatens to insidiously divest public lands through "private investment in government facilities", promote recreation disregarding the lands's ability to accommodate more of it, and expand fees charged for public lands access.***



Colorado Wild  
P.O. Box 2434  
Durango, CO 81302  
www.coloradowild.org

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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 970-385-9833.

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