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COLORADO WILD!

Fall 2001 / Winter 2002

Attacks Bring Focus Back to Local Issues *By Jeff Parsons, Board Member*

In the wake of the September 11th attacks, our leaders are urging all Americans to not let terrorism halt their important daily work. They advocate a return to strong local community involvement that made America the great nation it is today. Colorado Wild has always heeded this advice. Our staff and board are made up of devoted Coloradans, passionate about the environmental health of the state's public lands, but equally important we recognize the economic and cultural vitality of local communities dependent on healthy ecosystems.

Colorado Wild and all those concerned about our local public lands and the wildlife they sustain have important work to do. Unfortunately, in the first six months of the Bush administration, we've seen the signs of a serious menace to nearly all we hold dear. For example, the Bush administration has nominated scores of mining, timber, and grazing industry lobbyists and lawyers to cabinet and sub-cabinet level positions, rolled back significant protections for inventoried roadless areas, thrown out needed regulations for hardrock mining, and proposed an energy "plan" that puts the Rocky Mountain West squarely in the cross-hairs of extensive oil and gas development on public lands. Independently, each of these examples are serious threats. Together, they represent a well-organized campaign to undermine critical public land protections in Colorado and throughout the west.

Endangered Species Not to Blame *for Firefighter Deaths*

By Jeff Berman, Executive Director

Modified from op-ed printed in the Denver Post

In a tragic historical repeat, four firefighters on July 10 died fighting a forest fire in a remote section of Washington. Preliminary Forest Service (FS) reports suggested that water drops were delayed while



Forest "management" in the Gunnison NF.

bureaucrats sought approval to take water from a stream harboring endangered fish. Seeking to claim the Endangered Species Act contributed to these young firefighters' deaths, Colorado 3rd District Congressman Scott McInnis – Chairman of the Forests and Forest Health Subcommittee – quickly publicized the report. Regrettably, such claims mock candid consideration of sound public lands forest policy, and portend further calamity.

In 1994, Congress instructed the FS to assess the cause of 34 forest fire related deaths, including 14 firefighters similarly trapped by a remote Colorado fire. They concluded that "past land use practices," namely logging and fire suppression, have greatly exacerbated the severity and frequency of fires in many forests. The fire-resistant trees favored by the logging industry – older, larger, with thick bark and greater spacing between them – had been logged and replaced in large part by younger, more dense forests with intermingling treetops conducive to fire spread. Meanwhile, decades of fire suppression unwittingly nurtured undergrowth up to the lower tree branches, creating a ladder by which fire reaches the tops

...See Parsons, Page 7

...See From the Director, Page 7

Forest Watch Campaign (FWC)

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

Forest Service Continues its Unfounded Campaign to Rid the Forest of Bugs

Rigorous examination of public lands timber sales proposed to reduce populations of beetles and other insects that kill trees uncovers their likely futility. The bug threat merely serves as Forest Service (FS) rationale to get the cut out and/or demonstrates an arrogance that humans can manage forests better than nature. These projects may even cause additional forest blowdown in wind storms, foster more beetle breeding areas, and exacerbate the original "problem".

In the ***Routt Bark Beetle Project*** for instance, the FS has proposed up to 2,500 acres of thinning, and potentially unlimited acres of suppression treatment (removing beetle-infested trees) for up to five years. At least five miles of new road may be built, including within the Nipple Peak North Roadless Area north of Steamboat Lake. Numerous other roadless areas may also be "treated" if beetles spread. The FS has even proposed a small area of treatment north of Buffalo Pass in the Mt. Zirkel Wilderness. In addition to thinning and suppression treatments, thousands of trees would be sprayed with a moderately toxic chemical to prevent beetle attack. Colorado Wild filed extensive comments and published an action alert on this project in September.

After reviewing the final Environmental Impact Statement as well as hundred of pages of documents obtained through the Freedom of Information Act, Colorado Wild this October assisted the Aspen Wilderness Workshop (AWW) in preparing an appeal of the similar ***Baylor Blowdown Project*** near Carbondale (Spring 2001 Newsletter, pg. 2). The White River National Forest (NF) had

proposed over 1,000 acres of thinning with considerable new road construction. Our appeal focused on the futility of thinning (beetles will have probably attacked the stands before they can be treated), failure to disclose cumulative impacts, and failure to disclose how certain wildlife species would be affected.

Forest Fire Risk / Fuel Reduction Projects

The FS is also proposing many logging projects on the Front Range designed to reduce an unnaturally high level of fuel (dense forests, and in some cases, down dead wood) that could lead to catastrophic fires if ignited (see *End. Species Not to Blame*, pg. 1). While Colorado forest activists cautiously support the concept of fuel reduction projects, particularly when it entails returning carefully controlled prescribed fire to the forest, specific proposals leave much to be desired.

In the ***Columbine Project*** west of Central City, the FS in August proposed treating several units that are not at all fire prone and aren't near any residences. Just south of Idaho Springs, the Arapaho-Roosevelt NF's Clear Creek District proposed the ***Santa Fe Project***. While near some residences, the proposed treatments are on steep slopes where erosion or an escaped fire could result from burning, and the area does not have much fuel accumulation in most areas. A considerable acreage is in aspen, which does not burn readily anyway.

Colorado Wild also submitted detailed critique of the ***Dry Lake Fuel Reduction Project*** east of Steamboat Springs, where the FS seeks to burn an area of dense fire-suppressed oakbrush and aspen. Oakbrush can burn very hot if ignited when dry. A wind-accelerated fire in this type killed 14

In October, Piano Creek LLC announced the end of their bid to develop the E. Fork of the San Juan River valley near Pagosa Springs (Spring 2000 Newsletter, pg. 7)

Environmental opposition, including Colorado Wild and the San Juan Citizens Alliance's active roles in Friends of the E. Fork, played a significant role in this ill-advised development's demise, despite the developers' claims to the contrary. That's just fine by us.

Colorado Wild is honored to be listed with the radical right wing green-watch.com. According to their website, they monitor "the largest and most politically influential groups and activist groups in the news."

firefighters in the South Canyon fire near Glenwood Springs in 1994. The FS has yet to demonstrate how this project can be done safely, and should take advantage of an opportunity to create habitat in the Dry Lake area for a rare and declining species, Columbian sharp-tailed grouse.

In September, Colorado Wild teamed with other groups within the Southern Rockies Forest Network to appeal the **Upper South Platte Project** (Fall 2000 Newsletter, pg. 4) that approved clearcutting and thinning on approximately 17,000 acres. It would log over 5,000 acres in three roadless areas on the Pike-San Isabel NF about 35 miles southwest of Denver. This proposal would remove too many trees and have an adverse impact on roadless areas. From the start, it has been plagued with a lack of even basic information, such as the location and condition of proposed treatment areas.

After long and difficult negotiations focused on reducing the amount of openings (i.e. FS euphemism for clearcuts), leaving more trees standing in thinned areas, and reducing the impact on the roadless areas, we reached agreement to settle the appeal only to have the FS's lawyers scuttle it at the last minute. The Deputy Regional Forester then issued a decision agreeing with one of our appeal points, reversing the project's approval, and requiring the FS to perform additional analysis. If the FS fails to reach agreement with conservation groups, a lawsuit is possible.

Meanwhile, the FS continues to ignore Colorado Wild and local residents' recommendations on what to cut for fire protection in the **Winiger Ridge Project** west of Boulder. For instance, we opposed the logging of several large lodgepole pine trees on the edge of a unique aspen stand. The FS agreed to conduct a field trip with a PhD scientist who subsequently agreed there was no need to cut these trees. Yet the FS had already signed the contract, which

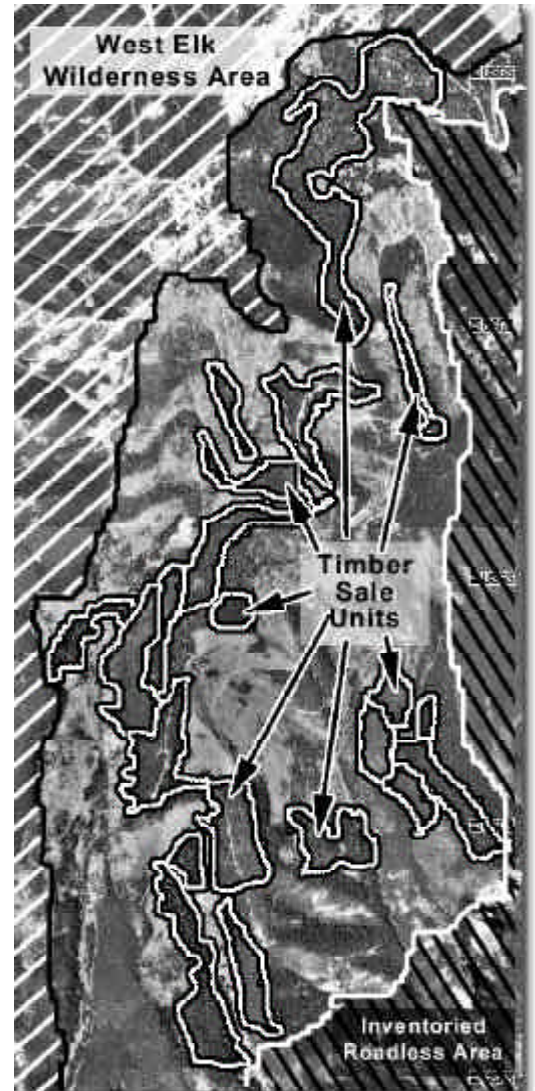
included cutting the large trees. We now seek to get the FS to amend the contract, and have scheduled a meeting with the Forest Supervisor to resolve this and other problems.

"Improving" Forest Health Through Logging

Eighteen miles NW of Gunnison, the Grand Mesa-Uncompahgre-Gunnison (GMUG) NF in August proposed 4.7 million board feet (MMBF) of spruce-fir logging in an area bounded by two roadless areas and the West Elk Wilderness with the **Red Creek timber sale**, of course citing forest health problems. Our site survey, however, showed that the FS merely seeks to log almost every acre that hasn't already been clearcut.

Colorado Wild filed detailed comments covering numerous legal and logical deficiencies with the proposal. For instance, the GMUG NF this summer published a forest wide assessment of Management Indicator Species (MIS) to skirt the requirement that they perform site specific species surveys at each timber sale. The lack of MIS surveys holds significant promise to halt this and many other sales on the GMUG NF given a recent court ruling in New Mexico that invalidates any analysis that doesn't include MIS population data.

This July, the San Juan NF refused Colorado



Aerial photo of the Red Creek timber sale reveals the FS rationale of preventing insect infestation a ruse - they simply identified the dark areas (i.e. not yet clearcut) for logging. It took us a mere 35 minutes to "design" this timber sale.

Ski Area Citizens' Coalition (SACC)

Working to Halt Environmentally Damaging Ski Area Expansions and Associated Real Estate Development

A Moratorium on Ski Area Expansions?

Even though skier numbers nationwide have not increased in two decades, the Forest Service (FS) has approved tremendous increases in skier acreage. In June, twenty four organizations joined Colorado Wild in petitioning the FS to implement a moratorium on such ski area expansions until they



Copper Mountain ski area scored poorly in the Ski Area Environmental Scorecard. Besides significant real estate development, they seek to expand into undisturbed forest, fill wetlands, and are likely harming endangered species.

perform a programmatic Environmental Impact Statement addressing the need (or lack thereof) for any further growth in skier acreage. Through October, the FS failed to return our phone calls or otherwise respond. It appeared that Plan B – using our fourteen page demand in legal challenges of upcoming expansions – would be put into effect with the next major ski area expansion proposed. In October

however, the FS advised us via email that they are indeed working on a response. Stay tuned...

Keystone Ski Resort Seeks to Develop Condos in Wildlife Corridor

After having their development plan for Jones Gulch (Spring 1999 Newsletter, pg. 3) recommended for denial following Colorado Wild's presentation to the Snake River Planning Commission in late 1999, Keystone Real Estate Development Corporation (KRED), a subsidiary of Vail Resorts, Inc., submitted their application this June to the Summit County Commissioners regardless. Colorado Wild authored a signon letter, then organized turnout at the Commissioners' hearing and a subsequently scheduled site

tour. The Commissioners denied KRED's application – according to at least one local source maybe the only time they ever outright denied an application. Unfortunately, KRED has once again come back to the Planning Commission with a revised proposal – Colorado Wild will be at the forefront advocating protection of the critical wildlife corridor adjacent to Keystone ski area.

Ski Area Environmental Scorecard Beginning to Show Concrete Results

Since its inception in 1998, Colorado Wild has cultivated the SACC into a genuine coalition of conservation groups throughout the west. By working together we are a much stronger and better recognized force in protecting forested mountain environments.

On November 29 2000, the SACC released its first annual Ski Area Environmental Scorecard online at www.skiareacitizens.com, grading over 50 resorts throughout the western U.S. on their environmental policies and management. The media response was astounding (Spring 2001 Newsletter, pg. 6). Since then, over 500 emails have been sent to ski areas through our website requesting resorts improve their environmental policies if lacking, or supporting their environmental ethic if evidenced by a strong grade from the SACC.

In gathering information on each ski area, the SACC submitted over 100 Freedom of Information Act requests to the FS and other governmental bodies. We also mailed three letters to each ski area, requesting they fill out a survey to improve their score. Irritated with Colorado Wild and other SACC groups' presence at the public unveiling of their million dollar Sustainable Slopes PR effort though, the ski industry trade group National

Ski Areas Association (NSAA) rashly chose a disingenuous strategy. In their bid to discredit the Scorecard through a vastly underestimated media response, the NSAA pressured their members to not respond to our survey. Their public complaints with the Scorecard, echoed by many a resort media relations staff, would then defame the Scorecard for a lack of ski resort responses to our survey.

With skiers nationwide beginning to book this year's ski vacations, we began to identify the most efficient and effective ways to influence skiing destination choices. In October, Colorado Wild became a member of Green Media Toolshed, gaining access to their vast online database of environmental and travel reporters. With volunteer assistance, we then mailed over 1,700 Scorecards with a press release and score update insert. Once again, the media blitz commenced. Only this time, it has the industry rethinking their strategy. As soon as newspapers, radio, and other outlets began their coverage of ski area environmental scores, resort managers began defecting from the NSAA's position, filling out our survey, and initiating a dialogue we hope to foster into concrete policy improvements. Stevens Pass ski area in Washington State, for instance, formally rescinded their plans to log old growth forest for ski runs following a mid-summer site visit with our SACC affiliate there who described how they can improve their score, attesting to the Scorecard campaign's objective of linking market behavior to environmental change. We hope to bring such concrete results to more surreptitious ski resorts in Colorado.

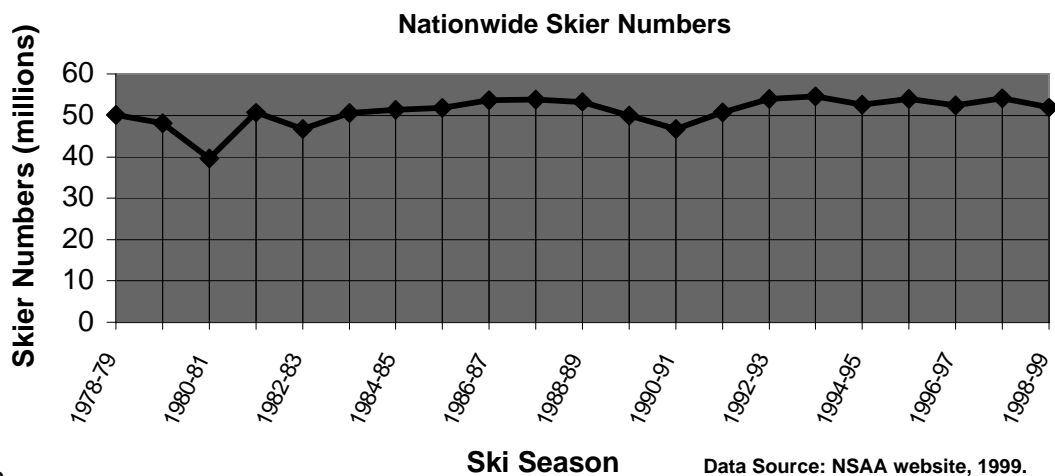
...Forest Watch

Wild and ten other groups' request to convene an independent team of geologists to assess the landslide risk with the proposed *Jackson Mountain timber sale* (Spring 2000 Newsletter, pg. 6). Since then we have worked with nearby landowners to raise funds to hire an independent geologist ourselves. In October, Colorado Wild hired Robert Blair, a PhD Geologist with a twenty year tenure at Fort Lewis College, to prepare an independent assessment of landslide risk.

In August the San Juan NF also proposed 4 MMBF of logging (about 800 logging trucks worth) with the *Dutton timber sale*, mostly in mixed conifer forest (ponderosa pine, white fir, and Douglas fir) about 8 miles north of Pagosa Springs. This is the same district that has been proposing the monstrous and very similar Jackson Mountain timber sale. While seven of the FS's objectives involve forest restoration, the eighth – to provide forest products – has once again perverted the project from away from legitimate forest restoration. Subsequently, Colorado Wild filed a detailed critique of this sale, covering every potential logical and/or administrative challenge we could identify.

Go paperless!

Support Colorado Wild without a single renewal notice. By joining our Monthly Sustainer Club, you can help us reduce our minimal overhead. See the remittance envelope included, call us at 970-385-9833, or log on the web at www.coloradowild.org/membership.html.



Skier numbers nationwide have not increased in two decades, yet the Forest Service continues to approve expansions unjustified by demand. With skier numbers arguing against more expansions (and Colorado Wild widely publishing that fact), the National Ski Areas Association has removed this data from their website.

Responsible Recreation Program (R&R)

Working to Reverse the Proliferation of Motorized "Trails" & Ecological Damage into the Backcountry

Documenting Environmental Damage from Off-Road Vehicles, Pressing for Policy Change

Colorado Wild has been in the field to document off-route abuse of public lands with the onset of the hunting season. For instance, 4-wheel drive and ATV/motorcycle activities have impacted Dorsey Creek north of Villa Grove for years. Last year, Colorado Wild documented stream diversions, rutted wetlands and displacement of beaver habitat due to irresponsible motorized use. After meeting with officials of the Rio Grande National Forest (NF), the Forest Service (FS) effectively closed the Dorsey Creek road to motorized use, protecting both the creek and the southern boundary of the Sangre De Cristo Wilderness from illegal trespass.

Motorized Special Use Events Damaging Public Lands

Each year the FS and BLM issue hundreds of Special Use permits for motorcycle races, trials events, stock car hill climb races, snowmobile rallies and a host of other motorized events on public lands. Unfortunately, all of us are often taxed for biological evaluations and other costs to permit each two to three day event, while we pay for monitoring and restoration of damaged natural resources afterward. Direct consequences of these events include compacted soils, sediment loading in streams and wetlands, and vegetative trampling, while we frequently find evidence of illegal campfires, littering, and creation of new trails. Often the impacts go beyond that plainly visible on the ground. The frightening and displacement of wildlife, for instance, is difficult to gauge.

The Pike San-Isabel NF has permitted one such event, the *Buffalo Peaks Hill Climb*, for years near Buena Vista. Based on our thorough documentation of natural resource impacts, we

filed a letter this summer with the FS demanding they not issue a permit for this year's event. Recognizing they were on shaky legal ground for failing to perform a biological evaluation or accepting public comment as required by federal law, the FS cancelled the event this year.

The Ute Cup Trials is another prime example of a Special Use Event permitted by the FS without adequate consideration of environmental impacts that nonetheless costs every taxpayer. This two day event attracts 150 motorcycle riders to the beautiful Sangre De Cristo Mountains each summer. Up to thirty stations are set up off trail where a rider must perform a stunt or task that tests his/her riding skills, awarding the most skilled (balanced) entrant for going through these stations without falling over or putting down a foot. Events like the Ute Cup Trials come with ramifications though. Colorado Wild has documented, for instance, motorcycle tracks straight into streams, even though this is not allowed under the permit, while some of the stations are within twenty feet of the Sangre De Cristo Wilderness!

As such, Colorado Wild submitted comments to the FS prior to this year's event. While we were not able to stop the event entirely, we did get the FS to require that riders stay out of streams and riparian areas, ensured that FS personnel monitored the entire event for three days, and forced the event sponsors to fund an environmental analysis. To their credit, the event sponsors did a good job of cleaning up the station areas after the event, but probably because they were being closely monitored. Regardless, off-route motorized vehicle use of any type is illegal and violates the Pike San-Isabel NF Plan. Colorado Wild is considering legal action to prevent additional natural resource damage.

Colorado Wild would like to extend appreciation for Lisa Philipps' dedicated service as our Responsible Recreation Program Director since our founding. This October, Lisa departed for climes closer to family in Montana. Current R&R projects continue with the rest of our staff and active volunteer board.

...From the Director

of the trees. Coupled with the tinder of economically worthless small branches left after logging operations, forest fires more frequently now climb into the crowns of the trees, becoming "catastrophic."

Following last summer's intense and well-publicized fire season, Congress created the National Fire Plan, appropriating \$1.8 billion to mostly buttress fire suppression capabilities, but also to reduce fire prone conditions. Fires near homes would be held at bay to protect life and property. Fires would also be suppressed on 70 million acres of federal land where improvident past management practices have fostered a tinder box prone to catastrophic fires. In these areas the Fire Plan calls for costly forest thinning, prescribed burns, and other vegetation management so that catastrophic fires remain naturally infrequent.

But if fire suppression and logging cause the problem in the first place, why are we spending billions of taxpayer dollars for even more? The answer becomes all too clear when you consider the timber industry's opposition to the roadless area protection policy. Roadless forests by and large have never been logged and are more difficult to access – forests that should be left to naturally burn to avoid cultivating more catastrophic fires. Yet these areas often harbor the last of the larger diameter, easily profitable timber. Spending billions of taxpayer dollars to quell fire in such forests already resilient to catastrophic fire is a clear-cut case of corporate welfare that only exacerbates the problem.

As Colorado Wild's analysis of such fuel reduction projects attests (see Fuel Reduction Projects, pg. 2), the Fire Plan contains no safeguards excluding projects from areas that need no fuels reduction treatments. Fire Plan funding must be directed towards protecting homes in the wildland-urban interface, rather than suppressing fires to preserve the forests' extractable economic value. With mounting

federal funds having created an industry determined to fight fires whenever and wherever they occur – including in forests never before touched by axe or fire retardant foam – the task is that much more daunting.

Policymakers and public lands managers must begin to acknowledge that we should not have been fighting that Washington fire, and most others, in the first place. While scapegoating endangered species skirts the real issue, risking firefighter and other lives by exacerbating the problem is simply unconscionable.

...Parsons

Colorado Wild serves as a superb example of how a local group, made up of local members, can achieve significant exposure and success while operating on an extremely tight budget. This is the benefit of supporting small, local organizations such as Colorado Wild. Members of Colorado Wild are guaranteed to get the most for their hard earned donations. Members are also assured that our efforts will not be wasted or left unnoticed. Since Colorado Wild's novel concept of an environmental ski area report card hit the public for instance, the information presented has received unceasing attention. Importantly, the ski industry is among those who recognize the powerful potential in such a tool – as more and more resorts initiate dialogue with our staff as to how to better their environmental scores.

Overall, recent events have rudely reminded us all of the extreme importance of getting involved and supporting local non-profit groups. For those concerned about the seemingly unending development in the high country, especially that conceived of for the benefit of the few and at the expense of the many who use and enjoy public lands, Colorado Wild offers an opportunity to make a real difference. Your support is essential to our continued efforts, and those efforts are essential to the protection of Colorado's spectacular once and future natural heritage.

"Congrats on getting the Summit County Commissioners to say no to Jones Gulch. I never believed I would see this group say no to Keystone on anything."

...Anonymous Summit County resident.

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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.

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