



Keep it wild...

COLORADO WILD!

Fall 2003/ Winter 2004

More Logs, More Wells, More Jobs... More Bush?
Jeff Berman, Executive Director

On Dec. 3, President Bush signed Congressman McInnis' (3rd-CO) mis-named "Healthy" Forests Restoration Act - implementing the Healthy Forest Initiative - into law.

Rather than again expound how this law will fail to direct resources toward protecting homes from wildfire, I want to tell you what happens between 3 and 4 PM EST each Friday. It is then that the Bush administration announces its latest environmental protection rollback, including many that not only undermine forest protection, but even the ability for the public to know what's happening on public lands. Why Friday you ask? The administration's spinsters know as we do that that's when you get the *least* media exposure.

Through newsroom staff reductions coupled with intense attention to Iraq, terrorism, and the economy, America by and large doesn't know what's happening. Faced with pressure from up high in the Bush administration demanding unsustainable increases in timber production for instance, many Forest Service managers will opt to approve old-fashioned get-the-cut-out logging and road building under cover of the fuels reduction mantra (see pg. 3). With the courts now also

The "Healthy Ski" Initiative Coming Soon
Ben Doon, Ski Area Citizens' Coalition Research Director

The Ski Area Environmental Scorecard continues to hold ski resorts throughout the western states accountable for their impacts to the environment. The Scorecard, found at

www.skiareacitizens.com and produced each year by the Ski Area Citizens' Coalition, a program of Colorado Wild, is the only way skiers and snowboarders can genuinely distinguish the environmental performance of their favorite resorts.

Over 6 million Americans ski at downhill resorts nationwide. Yet even with the growing popularity of snowboarding, ski resort visitation numbers have been flat nationally for twenty-five

years. Skier visits reached 50 million in 1978-79, but the increase in skier numbers annually, since that time, has averaged only one half of a percent and has not increased more than four years in a row since the mid-1980's.

During the same period however, ski resorts have rapidly expanded their terrain, often for marketing purposes to attract skiers from rival resorts. Some resorts continue to wear blinders in their approach to development, ignoring the harsh impacts of cutting old growth for ski runs or filling wetlands for real estate development. Meanwhile, the ski industry still refuses to acknowledge that some sensitive mountain areas



ANOTHER ANCIENT FOREST SAVED BY THE HEALTHY FOREST INITIATIVE...

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Colorado Wild's Forest Watch Campaign

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

Colorado Wild Sues Forest Service to Halt Risky Missionary Ridge Postfire Logging

"Thinning forests doesn't come cheap. But someone needs to tell President Bush... Underfunding only makes the forests more vulnerable to big timber companies who want to pay to cut down valuable, old-growth trees."

Denver Post Editorial
Dec. 9, 2003

Colorado Wild Meetups!

Join Colorado Wild board, staff, and members for a laid-back evening of food, new friends, and discussion about the issues facing Colorado's public lands. Colorado Wild Meetups coming to a location near you. For more information, call 970-385-9833.

On December 23rd, Colorado Wild sued the Forest Service to stop the *risky Missionary Ridge salvage timber sale near Durango*. Even though San Juan National Forest's July 9 approval includes reconstructing dozens of miles of roads and constructing three more miles from scratch, they failed to assess the erosion impacts of road construction – the single greatest factor contributing to increased erosion.

Despite Best Management

Practices requiring their avoidance, they also approved logging on up to 1,316 acres of known high erosion hazard areas. Without our intervention, revegetation from expensive taxpayer funded seeding efforts on hundreds of acres would be torn up, continuing erosion in these areas as well.

As the Forest Service conditioned most mitigation measures with disclaimers (i.e. "should", "if possible", etc.), even greater environmental impacts than predicted, taxpayers footing the bill to limit environmental impacts, or both, are likely should this timber sale proceed. Adding insult to injury, the Forest Service's response to concerns

raised by the Town of Bayfield, La Plata County (requesting logging truck traffic impacts be minimized), conservation groups, the vast majority of citizens commenting on the proposal, recreation groups, the EPA (recommending against steep slope and erosion hazard area logging), and even loggers were by and large written off or ignored altogether.



"Hazard" tree logging at Missionary Ridge well outside of any hazard zone, but within potential debris flow hazard areas. This area was approved for logging with the full scale postfire logging proposal, yet has already been logged - illegally.

In contrast, with the other two large postfire timber sales from the fires of summer 2002, Colorado Wild gained improvements and thus did not appeal. For the *Hayman Fire salvage timber sale*,

based at least in part on our comments on the draft proposal, the Forest Service reduced the size of the project considerably. The Forest Service also chose to stay off the steepest slopes and out of areas that had already received the most effective and expensive taxpayer funded emergency rehabilitation treatment. Similarly, Colorado Wild chose also not to appeal the *Burn Canyon postfire salvage sale near Telluride* due to its location on flatter slopes in a drier, already-roaded area lacking endangered or sensitive wildlife or plant species. Following participation in site tours and ongoing discussion with the Forest Service, local elected officials and others, Colorado Wild

gained a commitment from the Public Lands Partnership – a local diverse stakeholders group of county commissioners, timber industry, and local conservationists that increasingly influences the Forest Service in the area – for genuine monitoring above meager Forest Service protocols. Thanks to San Miguel County Commissioner Art Goodtimes' persistence, monitoring implementation continued throughout the summer and fall.

Partnering with Other Environmental Groups to Fight the Bush Administration

Colorado Wild continues to increase its role in challenging the Bush administration's anti-environmental agenda. This summer, Colorado Wild assisted The Wilderness Society (TWS) and other partner groups in identifying and recruiting local elected officials to vocally oppose Congressman McInnis' "**Healthy**" **Forests Restoration Act**, providing them with bill analysis fact sheets, letter templates, and advising of appropriate opportunities to speak out against legislation they recognize will not help them protect their communities. Colorado Wild continues to catalogue and provide national partner groups, such as the American Lands Alliance and the Natural Resources Defense Council, with descriptions of poorly located and designed fuels reduction projects.

Working with TWS and Center for Native Ecosystems, Colorado Wild published a list of eleven fuels reduction projects that we support on behalf of all of the Southern Rockies Conservation Alliance. The list was used in coordination with media efforts during Bush's visit to Colorado in early August. Colorado Wild Director Jeff Berman is heading to Washington DC in January 2004 to work with groups nationwide in coordinating responses and improved strategies to deal with implementation of projects under the so-called "Healthy" Forests Act.

A Growing Bevy of Fuels Reduction Projects

Colorado Wild will be addressing numerous proposed fuels reduction projects in the coming months, for instance, the **Sugarloaf and James Creek fuels reductions projects west of Boulder**. While both – generally within the wildland urban interface (WUI) – are good locations for forest thinning and fuel reduction, they illustrate common problems with such projects. Untreated slash (brush and limbs left over from logging) increases the short term risk of fire, yet the Forest Service has not determined how to treat it. Other prominent problems include introduction and spread of noxious weeds (logged or burned areas are ideal places for weed colonization); increased off-road vehicle abuse (thinned forests have fewer barriers to motor vehicle travel); windthrow (thinned stands are susceptible to high winds blowing down the remainder of each stand); snag, or standing dead tree retention (snags are very valuable for wildlife but tend to be felled during logging); and conserving large trees and potential old growth (large trees are targeted by loggers, as they are more valuable than the smaller ones most in need of removal). Colorado Wild is working extensively with residents around both project areas, conducting workshops advising how to participate in an increasingly limited public involvement process with maximum effectiveness. In response, the Forest Service has initially committed to addressing Sugarloaf and James Creek area residents' concerns. Meanwhile, Colorado Wild drafted its own detailed comments on these projects with several partner groups signing on. On the heels of continued discoveries of abuse, including logging of more fire resistant larger trees with the nearby **Winiger Ridge project** (Spring/Summer 2003 Newsletter, pg. 1), our concerns are very justified.

The Forest Service this summer proposed the **Vail Valley Project** encompassing a large area west of Vail Pass down to Avon on both

Community Wildfire Education Forums

Come learn what every Westerner should know about wildfire.

*Boulder: Wednesday
January 21st, 2004,
6:30-8:30 PM, Boulder
City Council Chambers,
1777 Broadway.*

*Ft. Collins: Wednesday
February 18th, 2004,
6:30-8:30 PM, Lincoln
Center, 417 West
Magnolia.*

*West Slope locations to
be announced. Event is
free and open to the
public. For more info,
call us at 970-385-9833,
or contact Lisa Smith at
The Wilderness Society:
303-534-7066, x208.*

...Forest Watch

sides of I-70. This too is a good location, yet burning proposed on steep slopes, along with thinning and control line construction needed for prescribed burn safety measures in up to four roadless areas, raise environmental concerns. The Forest Service has also proposed to thin stands of trees near outbreaks of Mountain Pine Beetle (MPB) to make the remaining trees more resistant to them, even though it makes far more sense to focus limited resources on some dead trees and thin live stands near residences.

Similarly, the Arapaho-Roosevelt National Forest seeks to address a MPB infestation in the Williams Fork drainage with the ***Crimson Vegetation Management Project***. Like Vail Valley, much of the proposal is impractical. By the time units could get thinned, MPB will likely have already attacked, while some thinning is also unwisely proposed on steep slopes.



Hazard tree logging at Missionary Ridge - a tiny precursor to the full postfire logging proposal - has brought erosion impacts through destroyed revegetation.

The White River National Forest has revived the ***Upper Blue Stewardship fuels reduction project near Frisco***. Following Colorado Wild and ski industry appeals in 2001, the Forest Supervisor pulled the project pending Forest Plan completion. While they improved the project somewhat, damaging components remain, such as “special cuts” to improve telemark skiing in what would

likely develop into quality lynx habitat without such logging. Following discussion with local county officials, Colorado Wild filed detailed comments this summer. In July, the Pike San-Isabel National Forest approved the ***Trout-West Project, a major fuel reduction project near Woodland Park***. Given local support for the project coupled with Forest

Service agreement to leave an average canopy closure of 25% (the most significant concern outlined in our January 2003 comments on the Draft EIS), we chose not to appeal this project.

Colorado Wild Challenges Logging Near Leadville, Gunnison, Steamboat Springs

This fall Colorado Wild partly won its appeal of the ***Millswitch timber sale near Gunnison*** (Spring/Summer 2003 Newsletter pg. 5), which includes constructing several miles of new roads impacting the Continental Divide trail and a lynx travel corridor. The Forest Service refuses (or more likely is simply unable) to determine how frequently and with what success past timber sales’ mitigation measures were actually funded and implemented – critical in ensuring Forest Service promises to limit impacts. Moreover, Colorado Wild research showed that the Gunnison National Forest has failed to monitor 5 projects per year as required to ensure that logging isn’t driving species towards extinction. Colorado Wild is considering whether to file a lawsuit to ensure this National Forest doesn’t continue to fail to ensure the survival of wildlife.

Colorado Wild prevailed in its appeal of the ***Box Creek Project southeast of Leadville***, as the Regional Forester’s office in Lakewood agreed that the Project was woefully based on inaccurate information. Meanwhile, Colorado Wild led a field trip again this summer for the Colorado Environmental Coalition to the ***Green Ridge Project area in north central Colorado’s Jackson County***. While we persuaded the Routt National Forest to eliminate logging in the Troublesome North roadless area and areas included in Rep. Diane DeGette’s wilderness bill, the project still includes a large increase in an already significant road system and futile thinning to protect against MPB. As the Forest Service rejected entry in the roadless areas however, we decided not to appeal it.

...From the Director

instructed by the “Healthy” Forests Act to essentially discount public concerns, Colorado Wild’s job description is changing. We will be spending much more time in the field with newly influential stakeholder groups (local elected officials and the timber industry), identifying sham fuels reduction projects, generating the evidence needed to re-establish reasonable environmental protections and public participation, and critically, demonstrating the fallacy of the current administration’s policies.

In the meantime though, resource extraction at public and environmental expense continues to swell. The Missionary Ridge fire salvage logging seeks to ramp up timber production in Southwest Colorado through introduction of steep slope logging equipment. In an extremely short time frame, the Biscuit fire salvage logging in Oregon seeks to log more in one timber sale than we have from all National Forests in the past year nationwide. The Bush administration is shuttling through quick development of vast new oil and gas wells simply to hold energy production at current levels, keeping the cost of energy cheap without care for the land or property owners, thus also propping up the economy through externalization of costs.

In the short term, we cannot neglect the economic *benefits* of these proposals. Yes, benefits. More logs and more gas wells do create more jobs. For now. We all need a strong economy, but when do the bills come due? Extensive mining developed Colorado’s economy in the 19th and 20th centuries, yet we now pay through polluted streams that don’t support recreation and wildlife or provide clean water. When the gas runs out and the economically valuable trees are cut, we’re left without clean water to grow food or drink, without wildlife and natural beauty for tourism, without opportunity for posterity.

Externalizing costs to water, air quality, human health and the land will be for another administration, or generation, to deal with.

The most insidious effect of such policies that foster unsustainable resource production is an economy propped up for the short term, then Bush administration claims of successful economic policies when they are really just mortgaging our future. Colorado Wild now needs to not only protect the forests, but to expose concomitant harm to future generations for immediate political benefit. And in this, we – Colorado Wild’s staff, volunteers, and every member – are increasingly recognized as a critical component of forest protection efforts nationwide. We now participate extensively in strategy meetings and provide Colorado based advice as part of the United Forest Defense Campaign – the conglomeration of national, regional, and local groups that spearheaded the campaign to challenge the McInnis bill and the Bush administration’s anti-environmental/anti-public process regulation changes.

With sincere elected officials who consider matters of policy and long-term public good over short-term gain, our long term prospects for environmental and social justice are promising. But we must overcome hollow Bush administration claims of successful economic policies based on unsustainable resource extraction that, in the end, cannot continue. This summer I ran for a seat on the board of our local electric cooperative in Durango, coming within a few dozen votes of defeating one of the most popular and respected incumbents on a clean energy platform. I have also volunteered extensively in other election campaigns, some with success, all with influence. Next year, I will again work actively in the elections outside of Colorado Wild. I urge you to also enthusiastically work to put into office those willing to honestly address the important issues we face.

Colorado Wild Staff

Jeff Berman
Executive Director
(Durango)

Ben Doon
Ski Area Citizens’
Coalition Research
Director
(San Luis)

Rocky Smith
Forest Watch
Campaign Program
Director (Denver)

Previous newsletters are available online at www.coloradowild.org/newsletter.html, or contact us for back issues at 970-385-9833.

Colorado Wild's Ski Area Citizens' Coalition

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

2003-2004 Ski Area Scorecards Available in Updated Print Version

Despite limited funding, Colorado Wild this year published printed versions of our annual Ski Area Environmental Scorecard grades for the first time since its unveiling in 2000. We distributed thousands throughout the western U.S., with major efforts ongoing especially in Colorado to distribute them at events and venues frequented by skiers. Increased marketing throughout the next year will also place Scorecards in dozens of ski shops and other stores statewide.

Colorado Wild communicates regularly and meaningfully with many of the ski resorts we grade. This July we mailed detailed letters inviting a dialogue with each resort along with a new Scorecard survey. Some resorts within the ski industry are undertaking positive initiatives, such as experimenting with or even ramping up use of carbon-neutral low emissions bio-diesel fuel, purchasing wind power, or supporting the McCain/Leiberman Climate Stewardship Act (a policy position spearheaded by Aspen Ski Company). Unfortunately, the ski industry trade group continues to advocate last-ditch greenwashing campaigns epitomized by the industry's reliance upon the Sustainable Slopes Environmental Charter (Spring/Summer 2003 Newsletter pg. 6).

Colorado Wild recently commented on the **proposed settlement of the Vail Associates (VA) wetland destruction case** between VA and the US Environmental Protection Agency. In 1998 and 1999, Vail Associates illegally bulldozed a road across a wetland to access the Category III ski area expansion area (Blue Sky Basin). Vail did not have a permit and was cited for this illegal and

destructive activity. While satisfied with the measures required to restore the disturbed wetland, Colorado Wild vehemently protested the EPA's abnormally low fine of \$80,100, when the maximum for such a knowing and flagrant violation is \$25,000 per day. VA has acknowledged to shareholders that the miniscule fine made no meaningful impact of its multimillion dollar revenues, unwittingly echoing our comments to the EPA.

In early August, the White River National Forest published an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for a **suite of expansion concepts at Copper Mountain**, including extensive new snowmaking, as well as a new lift and runs on Tucker Mountain south of the resort with potential for future private land development. No evidence of need for expansion other than the ski area's own claim has been presented. We are especially concerned about impacts to a major lynx and elk travel corridor, and the proposed use of polluted snowmaking water that will tarnish clean drainages capable of supporting trout. Colorado Wild again insisted, as it has for years, that the undeniable impact of any one expansion on the viability of other National Forest based ski resorts, and the local economies supported by those resorts, be fully considered. Our September comments aggressively opposed some aspects of the expansion while recognizing that if a genuine need for expansion is demonstrated, the less objectionable projects within the disturbed areas' boundary could be approved.

Through 2003, the **contractual agreement between Colorado Wild and Durango Mountain Resort (DMR)** is bearing fruit. This fall, DMR finalized the donation of 1,351 acre-feet of water rights to the Colorado Water Conservation Board to preserve instream flow

In a single minute, send emails individualized for every ski resort graded in the Scorecard! Go to www.skiareacitizens.com today to make your voice heard in seconds!

To help distribute Scorecards to friends, neighbors, co-workers, or at events identified throughout Colorado (or the nation), contact us! With just a two hour commitment, you can help us to make a great difference!

in the East Fork of Hermosa Creek (containing native Colorado cutthroat trout). Also in accordance with our agreement, DMR has requested an amendment to the Development Agreement with La Plata County benefiting affordable housing, and has incorporated agreed upon alternative transportation, water, and air quality requirements into future plans. Colorado Wild is continuing a meaningful dialogue with DMR, working on issues such as biodiesel, wind power, and incorporating greater energy efficiency into development.

Similar wind power and biodiesel promotional efforts are ongoing with *Wolf Creek ski area*. In addition, Colorado Wild has for years worked with the ski area owner to preserve the rustic nature of this corner of the San Juan Mountains, an area that serves as an important wildlife corridor between the largest and wildest wilderness lands in Colorado. In 1998, Colorado Wild signed an appeal settlement agreement with the Rio Grande National Forest after approval of a new lift, whereby construction access to the inholding at the back side of the ski area would require an EIS. Attempts by the Texas developer that manages the inholding to get a rider passed in Congress that would allow an end run around our now all important settlement agreement have been foiled. The EIS process is now beginning, through which we will raise both local and legal opposition to the sacrifice of this critical wildlife area in the name of ill-concieved development schemes.

...Doon

may be inappropriate for industrial ski resort development.

The ski industry trade group, the National Ski Areas Association, has continued its ill-conceived campaign to downplay the importance of protecting undisturbed mountain habitats. As the days of locally owned and family owned resorts continue to be a thing of the past, the corporate ski resorts have begun to resemble industries like logging and mining in

their approach to public lands. A recent article by Geraldine Link of the NSAA drove home this point when she wrote, "It seems like just yesterday that we were tested time and time again with new Clinton Administration initiatives on public land. First there was the road building suspension, and then the Roadless Rule, which would severely curtail our ability to expand."

The NSAA repeatedly denies that environmentally destructive actions like impairing water quality, destroying roadless areas and logging old growth are important measures of a ski resort's environmental performance. In fact the Ski Area Citizens' Coalition recently learned that the ski industry has proposed a series of Categorical Exclusions to exempt certain construction projects from the environmental review process under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Like the timber and mining industries before them, the ski industry is actively searching for ways to limit public involvement for industrial development on public land. The NSAA and hand-picked resorts will also be participating in the NEPA Reform Task Force Roundtable spearheaded by the Bush administration, likely seeking ways to disregard and circumvent the National Environmental Policy Act.

This type of proposal by the NSAA is hardly indicative of an industry concerned with true environmental stewardship. As the Ski Area Citizens' Coalition has exposed time and time again, the NSAA encourages resorts to be obsessed with their environmental image, rather than being concerned about the substance of their environmental record. Listening to the ski industry's standard excuses, you'd think that any resort which installs low flow faucets or upgrades to more efficient snowmaking guns is doing a wonderful job of protecting the environment. Until the ski industry recognizes that exploiting public lands with the, 'if we build it, they will come' mentality is unwise and unacceptable, then the Ski Area Citizens' Coalition will continue to hold the industry accountable for their environmentally destructive actions.

"[The] National Ski Areas Association is doing everything it can to level the playing field for the 134 resorts operating on public lands... We have proposed a series of Categorical Exclusions to exempt certain resort activities with limited impacts from an extensvie and costly environmental review process..."

*Geraldine Link, NSAA
Director of Public Policy*

As private lands resorts are governed by virtually no environmental regulations at all, much less public input, the NSAA appears to now be seeking equally minimal oversight for ski resort on public lands.



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

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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 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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