



Keep it wild...

COLORADO WILD!

**Spring / Summer
2000 Update**

Giving More Than We've Gained

By Jonathan Staufer, Chairman of Colorado Wild's Ski Area Citizen's Coalition

There is a spur off the Lost Lake Road near Vail. I have camped there longer than I can remember. It is especially good for those days when I have to get out there after a long day at the office, and another one coming tomorrow.

At the edge of a creek in an open meadow surrounded by the peaks of the Eagles Nest Wilderness, I have seen amazing things and found much amazement in unremarkable things. I have remembered my detractors' humanity and regained my own humility. Regardless of religion or lack of it, belief, disbelief or apathy, out there you are connected to something, and out there you are reminded of your own smallness and your own unending possibility. There is freedom to imagine and space to imagine it. Once, I came across an enormous bull elk grazing as evening fell. Perhaps it was the elk that solidified my feeling that I have always taken more from the place than I've given. The Forest Service closed that spur last summer.

Environmentalists often get accused of trying to curtail that sense of freedom, of trying to "lock up the forest" and turn it into a "drive-by tree museum": ridiculous accusations from ridiculous people with obvious agendas. The epithets

From the Director

In our ongoing endeavor to best utilize limited resources toward concrete ecological protection, Colorado Wild staff and volunteers have been spending much of their combined energy this year on the momentous White River National Forest (NF) plan revision, keeping us from publishing this overdue newsletter until now. The comment period ended May 9, closing a nine month campaign to analyze the Draft

Environmental Impact Statement, continually counter deception and public relations spin by the ski, logging, and off-road vehicle industries, and generate support for ecologically sound management of the most heavily visited NF in Colorado.

In April for instance, I literally chased Congressman Scott McInnis and his staff around the high country from town council to town council meeting, countering their effort to gain blank check endorsements for a deceitful "compromise" alternative plan

that in reality was designed to promote the ski, off-road vehicle, and timber industries. We were successful. Few towns, counties, or other legislative entities endorsed the "McIndustry" plan, and by the time his staff reached their fifth or so meeting in Carbondale, they quit asking for endorsements.

Even during the White River campaign, Colorado Wild undertook a dozen other efforts, some described in this newsletter, others that simply couldn't fit, such as formal



Proposed Jackson Mountain timber sale near Pagosa Springs on hold... see page 6. Photo courtesy John Whitney.

...See Staufer, Page 3

...See From the Director, Page 5

Responsible Recreation Program (R&R)

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

Off-road vehicles (ORV's), including all-terrain vehicles (ATV's), snowmobiles, and motor bikes, pose possibly the fastest



Motorized vehicle sedimentation impacts to Fourmile Creek near Buena Vista. Photo courtesy Lisa Philipps.

growing, pervasive, and longest-lasting threat to the ecology of Colorado's public lands. These machines compact soil, damage vegetation and riparian areas, spawn erosion, and generate a tremendous number of user conflicts. Unauthorized and often un-inventoried

roads and trails (otherwise known as non-system or "social" trails) are adding to an already alarming number of agency approved, "designated" roads and trails on public lands. ORV's carve roads and trails without the scrutiny of National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analysis or any other kind of ecological scrutiny or public input, and cause fragmentation of wildlife habitat. Even many designated routes are being splintered and branched into an expanding network of backcountry roads and trails by ORV users. User created roads and trails are not designed considering protection of soils, water quality, visual quality, vegetation, non-motorized recreation, or wildlife habitat; rather, they are often created to take shortcuts through the Forest, reach inaccessible places (e.g., roadless areas), and test ORV skills (e.g., stream and bog crossings, steep hill climbs, etc.).

Colorado Wild believes that there can be a balance among recreation users of all types, but that ecosystem protection comes first and foremost. We have been busy

influencing land management plans, invoking legal actions when necessary, and increasing public awareness of the growing threat of irresponsible recreation impacts on Colorado's public lands.

Fourmile Creek near Buena Vista

Finding substantial sedimentation deposited into wetlands, Fourmile Creek and the Arkansas River as a result of numerous miles of unauthorized, user-created roads and trails, Colorado Wild requested in September of 1999 that the Forest Service take immediate action to protect soil and water resources. We buttressed our case with pictures, water samples taken from Fourmile Creek, and documents obtained under the Freedom of Information Act demonstrating the Forest Service's failure to conduct water or soil monitoring as required by the Pike San-Isabel National Forest (NF) Plan. Colorado Wild was advised by the Earth Justice Legal Defense Fund that the Forest Service may be in violation of Clean Water Act and its implementing regulations. In March, 2000, the Salida Ranger District and the Front Range BLM subsequently began developing a Travel Management Plan (TMP) for the Fourmile area and surrounding lands, totaling approximately 103,000 acres. Colorado Wild staff and volunteers serve on the planning and monitoring committees that will be developing citizens alternatives over the next 6 months. We will also be mapping the area as part of our "Road Rip" program to ensure that user created routes are closed.

Troublesome Roadless Area

North of Kremmling, the Forest Service has proposed to close a trail that cuts through the Troublesome North Roadless Area in violation of the Routt NF Plan. Almost nonexistent 3

R&R Committee

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(Nederland)

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(Boulder)

years ago, motorized use on this trail has increased greatly. In cooperation with other environmental groups statewide, Colorado Wild sent out an alert to the public and generated letters in favor of closing this trail to motorized use permanently. This area is part of the Colorado Citizens Proposal for wilderness that would be designated Wilderness under Congresswoman Diana DeGette's bill, H.R. 829. Given significant public comment on both sides of the issue, the Forest Service is undertaking further research before issuing a decision later this summer.

Uncompahgre NF Travel Management Plan

In January of 1999, Colorado Wild submitted extensive technical comments on the Uncompahgre NF TMP Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). Fully 84% of the Forest is open to motorized use, and there are no large unfragmented blocks of habitat left. Partly in response to Colorado Wild's input, unrestricted summertime motorized use will now be restricted to designated routes on 650,000 acres, while snowmobiles will be restricted to designated routes on 200,000 acres to protect wildlife. The Forest Service further decided to close 490 miles of ATV routes, 500 miles of 4WD routes, 250 miles of motorcycle routes, and protect 165 stream crossings. However, several roadless areas will now be formally roaded, and Colorado Wild participated in an administrative appeal just before we went to press.

Pagosa Motorized Hut & Trail System

In June of 1998, the Pagosa Ranger District in the San Juan NF approved the Pagosa Hut and Trail System – a year-round, partly motorized hut and trail system entailing the construction of three new huts and five miles of trails in the partly roadless Piedra and Devil Creek drainages. In conjunction with other proposed ORV projects, the approval would impact Mexican Spotted Owl, Peregrine Falcon, SW Willow Flycatcher, Bald Eagle and

other species. In April, Colorado Wild and the San Juan Citizens Alliance filed a complaint with the courts charging that the Forest Service failed to consider the project's cumulative environmental impacts to inventoried roadless areas. Colorado Wild is waiting for a decision at this time.

...Staufer

were hurled again over the past several months by politicians and industry execs looking for convenient sound bites and snazzy headlines as Colorado Wild, working with a coalition of several environmental, user and community groups, grappled with the awesome task of ensuring that the White River National Forest Management Plan revision will be good for the Forest.

The politicians' efforts garnered them little but ill will as forest users from all walks of life sided with the Forest Service's choice of Alternative D to guide the Forest's management for the next ten to fifteen years, or worked with Colorado Wild to push the even more progressive, conservation biology based Alternative I. In all, over 15,000 comments were submitted to the Forest Service, the majority of them favoring Alternatives D or I. Among all the people I conversed with during the campaign, there was a definite sense that in order for the Forest to remain a special place for all of us, we would all have to make some small sacrifices.

I'll admit I was a little miffed at first at "them" for closing "my" road to "my" spot. But then I thought of the elk. The Forest Service didn't close the road **against me**, but **for** the elk. In the final analysis, it is the freedom we experience in the Forest that makes it so important to all of us.

How freedom? The freedom stems from the sense that somehow the Forest is not for us. It is for the bears and the elk and the lynx and all the multiple and little understood

Join us at
Colorado Wild's
Annual "Meeting"
in the heart of
the beautiful San
Juan Mountains!

August 25 - 27.
Hiking,
campfire
cameraderie,
music,
livations,
cookouts.

*We'll be camping at the
Last Chance Ranch off
Highway 160, nearby
the stalled Jackson
Mountain timber sale
and proposed Piano
Creek Ranch develop-
ment (see page 6).*

*RSVP by August 18:
jeff@coloradowild.org,
or call 970-385-9577.*

Ski Area Citizen's Coalition (SACC)

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

"The Minturn to Vail ski connection [zoning] isn't in our plan because Vail Resorts didn't request it."

Richard Woodrow, former White River NF Supervisor hired by Congressman McInnis to write their "blended, compromise" plan, Vail Town Council chambers, April 18, 2000.

SACC Committee

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Tom Dickinson
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Ben Doon
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Jennifer Kemp
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(Winter Park)

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(Boulder)

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(Aspen)

Colorado Wild Sues Forest Service over A-Basin Snowmaking Approval

On April 5, Colorado Wild sued to stop the Forest Service from sacrificing a mountain river for Arapahoe Basin ski area's snowmaking proposal in Summit County. A-Basin wants to eventually make enough snow to stay open year-round. Before filing suit, Colorado Wild tried at length to reach agreement with the Forest Service and A-Basin. We entered this lawsuit reluctantly, and would much rather the Forest Service spent its money on cleanup instead of legal bills. Yet A-Basin and the Forest Service wouldn't commit to guaranteed protection of the Snake River's water quality.

A-Basin seeks to make artificial snow by diverting large volumes of water from an unpolluted tributary of the Snake River – the North Fork. Clean water from this tributary currently flows into the Snake River and helps dilute acid mine pollution. By reducing the North Fork's water flow, A-Basin would cause pollution levels in the main stem of the Snake River to rise substantially, increasing an existing violation of the Clean Water Act.

White River National Forest (NF) Plan Revision

The White River NF that encompasses over 60% of Colorado's skier visits through 12 ski areas (such as Aspen, Vail, and Copper Mountain), is now in the process of revising its forest plan – basically zoning sections of forest for ski area expansions, logging, backcountry recreation, wildlife habitat, or other uses. Additional ski area expansion in the I-70 corridor – driven by the lure of real estate development profits – would further isolate the fauna of northern and southern Colorado, reduce the viability of rare species

such as lynx, wolverine, and goshawk, and reduce habitat connectivity necessary for re-establishment of other species such as the gray wolf. Despite tremendous lobbying pressure by most of the ski industry, the Forest Service has proposed to limit ski area expansions to current permit boundaries. Even though several ski areas could still propose to expand, this represents the beginning of a long overdue shift in management of public lands away from unbridled, whimsical ski area expansions.

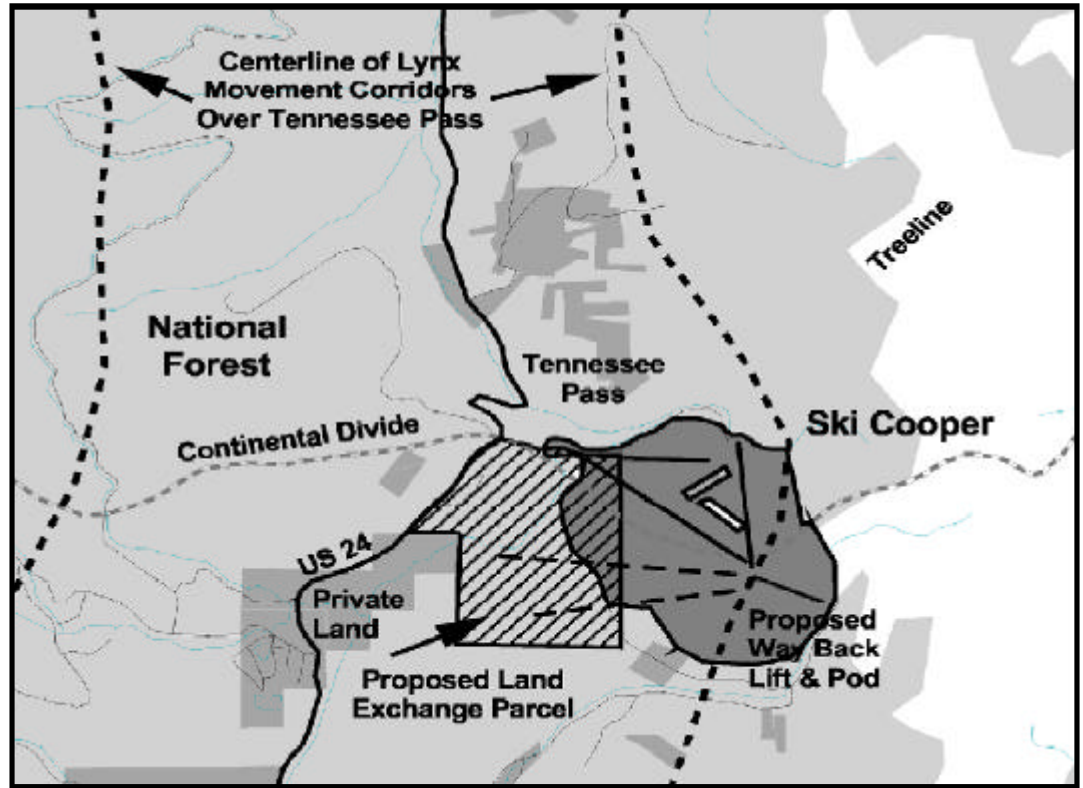
Working with the American Lands Alliance, Aspen Wilderness Workshop, Land and Water Fund of the Rockies, Wilderness Society, and Western Colorado Congress, Colorado Wild helped generate an outpouring of public sentiment in favor of wildlife preservation and a halt to environmentally damaging and / or real estate driven ski area expansions. We seek to ensure that the Forest Service chooses an ecologically sound management alternative for the White River NF, including limiting ski areas to their current permit boundaries. In an attempt to delay implementation of the plan's proposed limitations in ski area zoning until after either a Republican administration could be installed, or a revised forest plan renewal process scraps the draft plan altogether, Colorado Senator Ben Nighthorse-Campbell placed a rider in the Interior Appropriations bill last fall that delayed the comment deadline until May 9.

The White River NF is still under tremendous political pressure to backtrack on its modest improvements and choose a less ecologically protective alternative. Notably, western slope Congressman Scott McInnis convened an exclusive "work group" comprised of off-road vehicle, ski, and logging industry representatives to fashion a new alternative amenable to their desires. In April, McInnis released and

sought to politically pressure the Forest Service into adopting his “compromise blended alternative plan”. Yet careful scrutiny shows his plan as little more than a wish list for the timber, ski, and motorized off-road vehicle industries that, for instance, grants the ski industry *every* single ski area expansion zoning request they seek, including at least one new area for which there is no interest.

Ski Cooper Expansion and Land Exchange

Ski Cooper near Leadville recently gained Forest Service approval for a 45 acre, mostly environmentally benign expansion into second growth forest. However, Lake County, which owns the ski area, has proposed a land exchange for eventual real estate development next to Ski Cooper, bringing with it the potential for significant impacts to Tennessee Pass – a critical and rare forested wildlife corridor over the continental divide. Following our intensive review of documents obtained under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) that revealed great detail about the exchange, its impacts, and its connection with the expansion proposal, Colorado Wild made the difficult decision to not appeal the expansion itself. Our extensive comments, however, provided the Forest Service with numerous ecological and legal arguments against the exchange. Subsequently, the Forest Service has gone back to the drawing board for the exchange; Colorado Wild will continue its scrutiny of this proposal and keep you informed through action alerts, our website, newsletter updates and the media.



...From the Director

comments to the Forest Service on ski area expansions at Copper Mountain and Wolf Creek, the Gunnison Travel Management Plan, the listing of the lynx, the Finley Springs timber sale proposal near Rifle, an effort to “eradicate” naturally occurring pine beetles from our forests as an excuse for more logging in the Routt NF, and a Rio Grande NF timber sale suitability appeal filed in April. We’re now doing all this with 5 staff , over 15 active volunteers, and 5 offices statewide.

By the time you read this, I will have relocated the Colorado Wild administrative office and myself to Durango. But with our Denver, San Luis, Vail, and Salida offices, along with volunteers in Aspen, Boulder, Summit County, Winter Park and other locales, our presence will remain in all corners of the high country.

Jeffrey A. Berman, Executive Director

Ski Cooper Expansion and Land Exchange (above).

Map includes hypothetical lift connections to a land exchanged parcel and subsequent development.

Forest Watch Campaign (FWC)

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

Jackson Mountain Timber Sale Proposal on Hold!

Last December, the Pagosa Springs Ranger District of the San Juan National Forest (NF) proposed to log up to 15 million board feet (MMBF) of trees on 3,044 acres of forests with the Jackson Mountain timber sale. Since one log truck carries about 5,000 board feet, this sale could entail about 3,000 fully loaded log trucks.

Colorado Wild sprung into action, preparing an action alert that generated over 225 comments opposed to the sale, and writing our own lengthy technical comments highly critical of the sale. We pointed out how the proposal calls for the

logging of rare forest ecosystems including old growth ponderosa pine, massive aspen clearcutting, the creation of up to 4.9 miles of new roads and 11.3 miles of road reconstruction, and would likely result in increasing the risks of landslides. In calling this a “salvage sale” for “ecological restoration”, the Forest Service glossed over the fact that there is not a problem with disease or insects in this area in a bid to log where they are normally prohibited from doing so.

Subsequently, the San Juan NF in their Spring 2000 newsletter indicated that “it is unclear when the Jackson Mountain Timber Sale analysis will be completed.” Written by

the most outspoken Forest Service proponent of the sale, the newsletter pointed Clinton’s roadless area protection initiative, the listing of the lynx as a threatened species under the ESA, concerns about potential landslides, and other issues in halting this sale – hopefully for good!

Upper Blue Stewardship Project Entails a Huge Timber Sale



Old clearcuts within the Upper Blue Project area that aren't growing back well, approved by former White River NF Supervisor Richard Woodrow in the 1980's (see sidebar, page 4). Photo courtesy Doug Malkin.

The Forest Service is planning one of Colorado’s largest timber sales in the area bounded by Breckenridge ski area to the south, Frisco to the north, the peaks of the Ten Mile Range to the west, and Colorado Highway 9 to the east. Extensively clearcut between 1860 and 1920, this portion of the White

River NF has grown back with a key ecological process suppressed – fire. Some portions of the forest are now “dog-hair lodgepole” – very dense, small-diameter trees that are biologically deficient of habitat elements needed by rare and declining species such as the golden crowned kinglet, American marten, three-toed woodpecker, and lynx.

The Forest Service is proposing to “Improve forest health, visual quality, wildlife habitat, and fire resilience... through greater species and structural diversity” in the area. While some components of this Stewardship Project should be applauded by conservationists, including prescribed burns, tree planting, and obliterating some illegally-created roads and trails, the Forest

FWC Committee

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Lisa Philipps
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John Whitney
(Durango)

Service seeks to log way beyond what is necessary for improving forest health. This includes one of the largest timber sales in the state – at least 12.8 MMBF on more than 2,800 acres, and possibly up to 18 MMBF.

In April, Colorado Wild staff and volunteers toured the area, researched the Environmental Assessment, distributed an action alert widely in Summit County and elsewhere, and extensively critiqued the logging portion of the project in formal comments to the Dillon Ranger District. We placed photographs of historic logging in the area that has not grown back on our website, and educated the public about the negative impacts of such a large stewardship project. For more information, check out our web page: <http://www.coloradowild.org/alerts/upperblue.html>.

Piano Creek Ranch Development Proposal

The San Juan River's East Fork Valley is the last large undeveloped valley in the entire San Juan Mountains. Located east of Pagosa Springs, a single-lane dirt road, open only during a few summer and fall months, meanders along a dozen miles of the East Fork. Surrounded on three sides by the Continental Divide, home to elusive lynx and potentially even grizzly bears, the East Fork Valley is the ecological linch-pin to the entire southern San Juans. Yet developers hope to reap millions turning this quiet valley into an exclusive, private country club.

They want year-round road access to develop one of the West's last untrammled mountain valleys. While the Forest Service does not have jurisdiction over impacts confined solely to private land, the scope of impacts from the development made possible by year-round road access, road improvements, and utilities significantly impact public lands and resources surrounding the proposed resort. By law, the Forest Service must analyze the impacts to federal resources associated with development made possible by its permit approval. The impacts to land, wildlife, air, water, wetlands, wilderness, recreation, and society are

significant and extend far beyond the confines of the private property.

Working as a partner of Friends of the East Fork, Colorado Wild forwarded an alert prepared by Mark Pearson of the Sierra Club, helping to generate public comment to the Forest Service on the road easement. Colorado Wild also helped prepare extensive legal comments on the need for the Forest Service to perform a comprehensive analysis of the impacts of providing improved road access to the East Fork inholding. A draft environmental document is expected this summer, at which time Colorado Wild will again spring into action.

White River NF Plan Revision

Colorado Wild wrote extensive comments on the logging, grazing, and ski area sections of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement, as well as Congressman McInnis' "blended plan". For more information, see "From the Director" on page 1 and the Ski Area Citizen's Coalition section on page 4. To view Colorado Wild's full comments on the plan revision, download them from our website at www.coloradowild.org/wrnf, or give us a call for a hardcopy. Be forewarned though, they total over 120 pages of technical critique!

...Staufer

dramas and interactions that comprise a healthy, wild forest. That the forest is wild, that it is not for us, is what makes it special. That "my" spot should always be there for that elk, awesome in his powerful grace, and for me should I choose to commit to it, is more important than personal convenience. And one day, I will be very old and unable to hike there any more and I will not begrudge that, as there will be others to enjoy it, and call it "theirs" and hopefully, protect it. In accepting that it is not "mine", I'll have given as much as I've gained.

**Peaks to Prairie
Silent Auction Gala
Benefit Party for
Colorado Wild and
the Southern
Plains Land Trust!**

**Mark Your
Calendar!**

**Downtown Denver
Location TBD,
Thursday,
September 14.**

*If you have items to donate, would like to purchase tickets, or volunteer, contact
Brenda Fraser:
303-635-1096,
galaforce530@cs.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, 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. For more information, call us at 970-385-9577.

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