



**Keep it wild...**

# ***COLORADO WILD!***

**Spring / Summer 2001**

## ***One Hundred Thirty Years of Colorado Change?***

by Board Member Jonathan Staufer

Spring and the first hint of Aspen leaves blanket the hills with a celebratory luminescence in honor of a cycle which has gone on with us and without us for a thousand thousand years. The elk are on the move again, seeking out higher, quieter pastures in which to bear and rear their young. I find evidence of them in the beds they have made for themselves during the night, and in the scat they have left on the trail.

Driving from Minturn, south to Pagosa Springs and over Monarch Pass is like traveling some boulevard of broken dreams: Here, an abandoned mine, tapped out or left idle when it did not yield fortune; across the valley, the stagecoach route, abandoned when the railway made it uneconomical; the railway itself abandoned just a few years ago, a victim of what some economics PhD might explain away as "progress" and "development" and "improvement".

Viewing the special presentation John Fielder did for Colorado Wild of his and William Henry Jackson's photographs, it was easy to be alarmed at how much of Colorado has changed in the past 130 years. Equally striking, though, is how much of Colorado has remained the same. Whether through inaccessibility, lack of economic viability, conscious conservation or just plain luck, much of Colorado offers safe harbor for nature. It is these safe havens that it is Colorado Wild's job to protect.

## ***Environmental Catch-22***

From the Director, Jeff Berman

I am certain you expect to hear of the Bush administration's environmental transgressions in this column. The new Forest Service Chief's call for increased logging of our National Forests; Bush's push for Congress to weaken the public involvement requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the consultation requirements of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) as it applies to timber sales; the Administration's refusal to adequately defend the roadless protection policy in court leaving roadless areas vulnerable to logging and other impacts for the time being. But I have a corollary tale to tell.



**Old growth forest NW of Pagosa Springs protected by the roadless rule effectively rescinded by Pres. Bush.**

Ralph Nader and others are apparently pleased with these brazen Bush administration efforts that ignore popular support for environmental preservation. They proffer a common misperception: Bush will unwittingly rally the public against such transgressions thereby increasing support for environmental groups. Indeed, a recent Los Angeles

Times poll found that 13% of Americans consider environmental protection their number one concern, up from a mere 2% in 1998. Environmental cause coffers would overflow, empowering them to fend off policies such as Bush's proposed energy plan designed more for corporate profiteering than to genuinely address America's energy needs (and in spite of clear support for environmental preservation).

...See Staufer, Page 7

...See From the Director, Page 5

# Forest Watch Campaign (FWC)

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

### ***Forest Service Proposes Logging in Futile Effort to Stop Spruce Beetles***

In what most likely will prove a futile attempt to prevent tree mortality from spruce bark beetles, the White River National Forest this winter proposed two projects to “treat” blown down and live spruce trees. In blown down forest stands, spruce bark beetles can breed to populations large enough to attack live trees. They are a natural part of forested ecosystems, but their actions can be destructive in human terms. An epidemic on the Flattops north of Glenwood Springs killed millions of spruce trees over many hundreds of thousands of acres from 1939-1952. Despite massive control efforts, beetles raged until a week of bitter cold in 1952 killed enough of them to stop their spread.

### ***Baylor Park Blowdown Project Near Glenwood Springs***

With the proposed Baylor Park Blowdown project southwest of Glenwood Springs, the Forest Service has proposed to thin numerous live forest stands. This will expose the forest to even more blowdown, and may ironically *increase* beetle populations. Some spruce would be left in the thinned stands and remain susceptible to bark beetles even if they did not blow down.

The best way to prevent or reduce a beetle outbreak entails aggressively treating the blowdown itself where the beetles are breeding. Yet this several hundred acre blowdown occurred in August 1999, so the beetles are almost through with their two-year breeding cycle. They will likely fly and attack live trees this summer. Sadly, the Forest Service did not seriously consider treating only blowdown in the project’s draft

Environmental Impact Statement.

### ***Buford-Newcastle Project Near Rifle***

Similarly, the Forest Service proposes to log live stands in an effort to slow down spruce bark beetles with the Buford-Newcastle project northeast of Rifle. In June 2000, this blowdown occurred in approximately 1,550 acres of aspen, subalpine fir, and spruce. It is part of a larger project that includes a poorly-justified widening of Forest Road 245 and the rather absurd idea of cutting trees to “enhance” scenery in an area that already includes many beautiful views of the west side of the Flattops.

In both areas, young spruce trees (too small to interest the beetle) and fir trees (which do not host the beetle) growing underneath the main canopy would be released (i.e. would grow faster) if the tall, large spruce trees died from a beetle attack. Many of the spruce stands in the Buford-Newcastle area also contain aspen trees. Thus if the beetles should kill all the large spruce, aspen might regenerate; in no case will either area become deforested.

### ***Colorado Wild Appeals Upper Blue Stewardship Project in Summit County***

Colorado Wild continues to track projects designed to reduce flammable fuels and fire risk to homes (Fall 2000 Newsletter, pg. 4). In March, the Forest Service approved the Upper Blue Stewardship Project north of Breckenridge. As they essentially disregarded Colorado Wild’s (and local governments’) concerns, we filed an administrative appeal on April 30. While this project has some positive features, the Forest Service has not reliably addressed phosphorus sedimentation into Dillon Reservoir, which is already teetering on the edge of the legal limit. The project also

Back issues of Colorado Wild’s newsletter can be found online at:

[www.coloradowild.org/newsletters.html](http://www.coloradowild.org/newsletters.html)

Or for printed copies, please call 970-385-9833.

This winter, Colorado Wild revised its articles of incorporation to formally recognize every supporter as an official member.

If the mailing label indicates that your membership has expired, please renew promptly so we may continue to spend as much of our limited resources and funding on preserving wildlife habitat.

Thanks in advance for your continued support.

approved a new ski hut right on the edge of good lynx habitat, and is not necessary to reduce fire risk as the area isn't very fire prone.

In an unexpected turn of events, the Breckenridge ski area also appealed the Stewardship project. To keep their options open for yet further expansion onto Peaks 5 and 6 (see SACC, pg. 6), they were opposed to the Forest Service's decision to restrict backcountry skiing access northwest of the hut designed

to protect good lynx habitat. It seems that their only just begun Peak 7 expansion isn't nearly enough to satiate their expansion appetite.

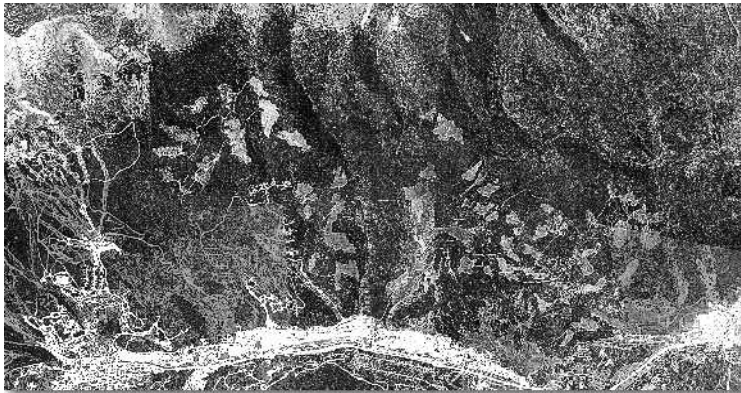
The Upper South Platte Project, which would clearcut, thin, and/or burn 17,000 acres of fire-suppressed timber southwest of Denver, concerns us even more. While the Forest Service recently agreed to consider our concerns before issuing a decision, they have thus far refused to supplement a woefully inadequate impacts analysis despite Colorado Wild's and a coalition of conservation groups' carefully considered critique. A decision is expected very soon.

Meanwhile, after persistent prodding by Colorado Wild and local residents, the Forest Service agreed to avoid logging of larger more fire resistant trees with the Winiger Ridge Project east of Nederland. However, at the insistence of a business that bid on the contract, the Forest Service set aside Colorado Wild's and local residents' concerns, allowing the use of log processing and a type of equipment that will result in very large piles of

slash (leftover wood) in places easily visible to the many recreational users of the area.

### ***Colorado Wild Puts the Skids on Three More Timber Sales***

In the Pike-San Isabel National Forest, the Forest Service proposed to log 320 acres of old growth ponderosa pine 8 miles southwest of La Veta. Since 1998, Colorado Wild staff have visited the area, identified goshawks (a candidate for the endangered species list),



Aerial photo of the Upper Blue Stewardship Project area shows past clearcuts that have not grown back. Breckenridge ski area at left, Frisco at right, Upper Blue River / CO Hwy. 9 at bottom.

submitted these findings to the Forest Service, and called for them to protect the northern goshawk nest and surrounding habitat. In March, we convinced

the Forest Service to drastically reduce the size of this timber sale. There will be a 420 acre buffer around the goshawk nests March 1 through Sept. 30 and no logging permitted at all March 1 through June 15. There will be a 30 acre buffer Oct. 1 through Feb. 28. While the Forest Service will still prescribe burn outside the buffer, biologists will be present to ensure there is no goshawk activity during this time.

Colorado Wild this winter appealed the Buffalo Forks timber sale proposal near Gunnison, and the Handkerchief Mesa sale near Wolf Creek Pass. Rather than face losing these appeals, the Forest Service "withdrew" both of them. However, the Bush administration overturned the basis for winning the latter appeal, and the Forest Service will likely try to press ahead with this sale. Colorado Wild will continue to challenge this ill advised logging.

**Join us at  
Colorado Wild's  
Annual Gathering.  
Exact location to be  
announced in July.**

**August 24 - 26.**

**Hiking,  
campfire  
cameraderie, music,  
livations,  
cookouts.**

*RSVP by August 22:  
jeff@coloradowild.org,  
or call 970-385-9833.*

# **Responsible Recreation Program (R&R)**

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

Colorado Wild coordinates its conservation efforts with over two dozen other forest protection groups in the Southern Rocky Mountains as an active participant in the Southern Rockies Forest Network.

Instituting policy delays and setbacks, the Bush administration is making it more difficult to limit off-road vehicle (ORV) resource damage through national policy. To ensure responsible recreation policies and halt ecologically damaging off-route motor vehicle use in the Southern Rockies, Colorado Wild is increasingly involved in setting local policies, monitoring impacts on the ground, and engaging ORV users, landowners, and others in novel collaborative efforts.

### ***Fourmile Citizens Proposal***

As part of a diverse citizens group, Colorado Wild this April finalized recommendations for over 200 motorized routes on 103,000 acres of public land in Chaffee County (Fall 2000 Newsletter, pg. 6; Spring 2000, pg. 6). Over half of these routes were "user created". We worked with ORV user groups to identify numerous routes causing adverse environmental impacts (massive erosion, soil trampling, etc.) and/or routes without significant recreational value. Together we drafted a lengthy Citizen's Proposal to be included as an Alternative in the forthcoming Travel Management Plan for the area. Collaboratively, we recommended closure on 160 of the 200 routes identified.

With the ORV groups and the agencies, we were also awarded a \$15,000 grant from the State Trails OHV (off highway vehicle) fund to set up road closures, signage, restoration, and a data base for collected inventory information. This is the first time diverse interests of conservationists and

ORV users have come together cooperatively to develop a Travel Management Plan with an emphasis on both resource preservation and responsible recreation.

### ***White River National Forest Travelway Inventory Report***

Colorado Wild and other conservation groups of the White River Conservation Coalition this winter completed inventory and documentation of 25 motorized routes on the White River National Forest (Fall 2000 Newsletter, pg. 6). We analyzed and quantified the data by resource impacts, recreation values, and Forest Service concerns to create the most scientific, data based method available to support the closure of roads causing ecological damage. We are now finalizing this Travelway Inventory Report for presentation to Forest Service decision makers in concert with the upcoming Travel Management Plan revision there. Additional routes will be added as we collect more field data this summer.

### ***Bureau of Land Management ORV Strategy***

This winter, Colorado Wild submitted lengthy comments on the BLM's "National ORV Strategy" put forward to address ORV ecosystem damage and conflicts with non-motorized users. We urged the BLM to restrict motorized travel to designated routes, prohibit ORV use in Wilderness Study Areas (WSA's), and accelerate the route inventory process. While the BLM incorporated some of the conservation community's recommendations, the Final Strategy is inadequate to protect WSA's, and with new user-created routes formed daily, the Strategy allows too much time to identify (i.e. inventory) an ever growing number of routes.

Currently, 91% of BLM land in Colorado is



Illegal motorcycle routes Colorado Wild inventoried off of I-70 near Avon.

open to ORV use on *existing* routes, while 47% is fully open (i.e. ORV's may travel cross-country wherever they wish). The State BLM office is leaning towards adopting a policy of limiting travel to existing routes, yet this policy cannot provide adequate resource protection as existing routes are created every day. On May 10, Colorado Wild's Responsible Recreation program director Lisa Philipps introduced a resolution before the Front Range Resource Advisory Committee (RAC) asking for an expedited route inventory process and for the BLM to adopt a policy limiting travel only to *designated* routes in Colorado.

Following Lisa's presentation demonstrating how rapidly motorized routes proliferate on the ground (in some areas as fast as 2 miles per week), the resolution passed unanimously. It will be forwarded and recommended for approval by the other two Colorado RACs, a significant milestone towards Colorado Wild's mission to halt off-route landscape damage.

### ***Scrutiny of National Forest Motor Vehicle Events***

Hundreds of Special Use Permits (SUP's) are issued each year for snowmobile rallies, motorcycle enduro races, and race car hill climbs on public lands. Each year District Rangers rubber stamp these events without any environmental impacts analysis or public input as required by the National Environmental Policy Act. Documentation Colorado Wild acquired through the Freedom of Information Act pressured the Pike-San Isabel National Forest to perform NEPA analysis and request public input on all of the 2001 permit applications. Further, the Forest Service will also perform crucial biological evaluations for each permit application (at the expense of the permittee). This victory may set a precedent for other forests in Colorado; Colorado Wild is initiating the same investigative process for the White River National Forest. We plan to investigate all SUP's in Colorado this year, and are pressing the Forest Service to monitor every event approved after full environmental impact analysis and public input.

### **...From the Director**

Hopeful hypotheses in dire times for humanity to live sustainably within the Earth's limits.

Many a conservationist has pondered an economic downturn to stem the frenzied construction of trophy home sprawl and the sale of motorized recreational toys that progressively push the natural world toward extinction. Ironically, at the time of the Bush Administration's inauguration, the stock market turned bear and the economy began going sour. While many second homes are bought on the foundation of stock market profits, so are the meager budgets of conservation groups built on a thriving economy bolstering the donations of each individual member.

Meanwhile, Bush's numerous regressive policy proposals are simultaneously increasing competition for limited foundation funding.

Unfortunately, the hit to the environmental cause is arriving well before any apparent decline in the sale of second homes, ORV's, or gas guzzling sport utility vehicles that permit ever greater access to what remains of America's undisturbed wildlands. And unfazed by the morally bankrupt proposition of promoting sprawl into wildlife habitat, the real estate development industry continues on with sales of energy inefficient second homes filled but a few weeks each year.

As the stock market falls, ecologically damaging second home sprawl will too, but only well after the support base of environmental groups that work to keep such sprawl in check has eroded. Were energy prices to rise sufficiently, the free market would promote efficiency, and motorized access to wildlands might also diminish. With an ulterior motive administration calling the shots though, coupled with a sagging economy draining environmental cause funding, wildlands may bear the brunt of unchecked sprawl, further motorized recreational access, and Bush's energy development ruse more than we all might like to acknowledge.

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

**Mark Your  
Calendars!**

**Downtown Denver  
Location TBD,  
Thursday,  
September 20.**

*If you have items to donate, would like to purchase tickets, or volunteer, contact  
Brenda Fraser:  
303-635-1096,  
galaforce530@cs.com*

# **Ski Area Citizens' Coalition (SACC)**

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

### ***Ski Area Environmental Scorecard a Gigantic Success***

In Colorado Wild's continuing campaign to bring consumer pressure to bear on ski resort expansion decisions, the SACC published the first Ski Area Environmental Scorecard in November. We gave 57 ski resorts throughout the western U.S. grades of A through F on their environmental policies and management, providing bomb proof documentation of our conclusions online at [www.skiareacitizens.com](http://www.skiareacitizens.com). The response was enormous. We earned media coverage in the New York Times, Christian Science Monitor, USA Today, AP wire stories, National Geographic, most major papers in every western state and international media. The public continues to visit our website at almost 1,000 hits per day. We also mailed over 10,000 printed Scorecards to skiers in targeted metropolitan areas. Hundreds of email responses, dozens of additional radio and TV interviews, and over 200,000 hits on our website thus far have made clear our ability to reach millions of skiers worldwide.

The SACC is now well recognized as the authority on the ski industry's environmental impacts. As envisioned at our founding, Colorado Wild spearheaded the development of this program into a genuine national coalition critically needed to counter the increased real estate development and expansion aspirations of publicly traded ski conglomerates.

In May, the SACC mailed detailed follow-up letters to each ski resort outlining how they could improve their environmental practices. Several resorts quickly responded, such as the Summit at Snoqualmie in Washington state which has been proposing to log old

growth forest. We are working with our partner group the Crystal Conservation Coalition to persuade them to drop these environmentally ill-advised plans. They were impressed with the Scorecard, noting they would work with us to improve their grade. We endeavor to bring this positive trend to Colorado.

### ***Durango Mountain Resort Real Estate Development Proposal***

Last June, developers purchased Purgatory ski area north of Durango. They promptly renamed it Durango Mountain Resort and proposed to develop real estate on over 500 acres of private land at the ski area base. DMR now seeks county approvals to upwards of 2,500 dwellings, mainly million dollar trophy homes.

In February, Colorado Wild held a well attended public presentation at Fort Lewis College on this development and two ski area proposals just north of Silverton. The San Juan Citizen's Alliance also led discussion of the proposed Piano Creek Ranch development outside of Pagosa Springs (Spring 2000 Newsletter, pg. 7). We continue to assemble a local activist list, using action alerts and other means to encourage citizens to oppose the water and air quality, traffic, and affordable housing impacts the developers thus far refuse to adequately address.

### ***Breckenridge Expansion & Development***

In 1998, Breckenridge ski resort applied to the Forest Service for an expansion on Peak 7 (Spring 1999 Newsletter, pg. 3). Our main concern was not the expansion itself into previously logged forest, but for fail-safe protection of the Cucumber Gulch wetlands complex downstream - an aquatic resource of

**"Some environmental groups want the Forest Service to do a comprehensive review of how Uncle Sam manages the 137 [public lands] ski areas... the proposal has merit because the Forest Service should not continue to ignore the cumulative effects of its policies."**

*April 8, 2001 Denver Post editorial supporting Colorado Wild's forthcoming call for a Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement. The study would assess the need (or lack thereof) for ski area expansions when skier numbers nationally have not grown in two decades.*

national importance according to the EPA and home to the state endangered boreal toad.

Since 1999, the ski area has paid for hydrological tests to determine what impacts the proposed development may have on the wetlands complex. They hired a consultant to model water flows, reduced direct wetlands impacts, and agreed to transfer a portion of the development density from the base of Peak 7 to lands already partially developed at the base of Peak 8. This March, they received their wetlands fill permit from federal regulators. However, EPA hydrologists found that the model upon which the wetlands fill permit was granted was flawed and could not be used to make a no impact determination. The EPA concluded that "Weighed against the potentially significant impacts to montane wetlands, the base area development and ski area represent an unwarranted risk to a critical wetland resource."

In April, the expansion began, yet Vail Resorts' 300 acre real estate development at the base of Peaks 7 and 8 still requires Town of Breckenridge permits. Colorado Wild researched the development application and EPA objections through the Freedom of Information Act. We published action alerts encouraging local homeowners and others to pressure the town to guarantee that any development approved will not adversely impact the wetlands. A decision from the Town is expected soon; Colorado Wild is keeping its options open to challenge the wetlands permit through the courts.

Through this whole process, the Forest Service required additional analysis that revealed the expansion is unnecessary to service Breckenridge skiers' needs. Rather, all Breckenridge needs to do is get skiers away from the crowded Peak 9 base area up to the underutilized Peak 8 base area. Regardless, the Forest Service approved the Peak 7 expansion in September 2000, building our case for a programmatic EIS (see sidebar, page 6).

### ...Staufer

In Jackson's day, mankind was able to do much damage with pick axes, hand saws and early industrial machinery. The Native Americans remarked upon the destructiveness which is the curse of our civilization. The evidence of our predecessors' handiwork is evident in the battered forests around Breckenridge, and in the mine tailings around Leadville. Today, in a few days we can level with a bulldozer and a forward feller an ancient forest that took millennia to grow to such balance, and that, 130 years ago, would have taken months or even years to destroy.

The threats to Colorado's last wild places increase daily. We can access anywhere we like with helicopters and ORV's. The throwbacks to Jackson's day, who view everything in terms of an abstract sum they place on it and call it progress, have taken over Washington and are pushing for access to roadless areas and to wilderness. Some of their ideas will succeed. Others, as have so many other dreams in Colorado's boom and bust history, will fail. Our successors will be able to look upon our fortune, or our folly, in what we leave behind: It is only by choice now that Colorado's last wild places will be saved.

Conservation, a novel idea in William Henry Jackson's day and an idea yet to become universally accepted in John Fielder's, calls upon us to resist what has become accepted as a basic tenet of our civilization. Nature does not need our progress, our development or our improvement, she simply needs to be left alone. It takes much effort to leave nature alone, to see that she has an intrinsic value beyond our comprehension of it, but slowly, we are learning to.

John Fielder's book Colorado 1870-2000, comprised of his and William Henry Jackson's photographs, is available at better independent booksellers throughout Colorado. We thank him for his efforts to help keep Colorado Wild.

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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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### Colorado Wild extends a special thanks to:

Mike Bond

John Fielder

Kate Inskeep

Mike Lewinski

Bob & Janis Moomaw

New Land Foundation

Don & Mickie Parsons

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Josef & Annie Staufer

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