

LANDSCAPES

NEWSLETTER



Wild Connections

FROM THE MOUNTAINS TO THE PRAIRIES

... for 20 years

Wild Connections concludes our celebration of twenty years of conservation work by sharing highlights of 2015 programs and anticipations for 2016.

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BLM Wildlands - Year in Review

by John Sztukowski

It's been a busy and exciting year for our BLM Wildlands project. We wrapped up the Lands with Wilderness Characteristics (LWC) inventories and reports at the beginning of 2015, totaling about 246,000 acres over twenty-four proposed areas in central Colorado.

This LWC citizens' inventory took Wild Connections staff and volunteers almost two years to complete. In May, we presented our LWC findings to the BLM Royal Gorge Field Office and submitted our reports, totaling over seven hundred pages of narrative description, maps, photopoint documentation, and supplemental data, providing a robust and up-to-date scientific inventory of the BLM landscape. (See www.wildconnections.org/conservation/blmwildernessinventory.html)



Grill Hill and Table Mountain Lands With Wilderness Characteristics. Photo EcoFlight

BLM management planning

We began the wilderness inventory project in 2013, anticipating a BLM Resource Management Plan (RMP) Revision for the Field Office region, which covers BLM surface and

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Healing the Habitat in Farnum Peak and Badger Flats

by Misi Ballard

Wild Connections' members got their boots on the ground and hands dirty while partnering with the South Park Ranger District, Great Old Broads for Wilderness, Pikes Peak Sierra Club, Colorado Mountain Club (CMC), Mosquito Range Heritage Area (MRHI) and the Coalition for the Upper South Platte (CUSP) on several restoration projects in South Park.

Farnum Project reconnects 19,000 acres

After months of planning, fundraising, site visits, and coordinating with the Forest Service, an enthusiastic group of volunteers showed up the first weekend in August to tackle Wild Connections' main 2015 stewardship project, the Farnum Peak



Volunteers place berms, logs, and native seeds to prevent motorized travel in Farnum Peak roadless area. Photo John Stansfield.

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From Mapping to a New Career

Interview with Alison Gallensky

by John Stansfield

Alison Gallensky gives liberally of her time and talent as a volunteer activist and board member with Wild Connections. She is our perceptive and fluid-fingered secretary and technical advisor. We asked Alison to reflect on her long involvement with Wild Connections and its mission.

Why are you passionate about wild places?

When I was growing up, my family would go on camping vacations and I grew to love the outdoors, camping and hiking. We visited places ranging from the isolated highland bogs of far eastern Nova Scotia, Canada to the peaceful forests of Virginia and the magnificent Canadian Rockies. These experiences made me love and respect natural places.

How did you become involved with Wild Connections?

I was actively involved with the Sierra Club before I moved to Denver in 1992. So it was natural for me to get involved in the Sierra Club in Colorado. I attended a Sierra Club retreat where Wild Connections founder Jean Smith gave a presentation about mapping roadless areas in the Pike and San-Isabel National Forests. Soon after that, I signed up to map roadless areas near the current location of Browns Canyon National Monument. I've continued to be involved with Wild Connections ever since.

But I had no idea when I first got involved that mapping with Wild Connections would lead me to a new career.

A new career?

I had a nice job doing computer programming and analysis. Unfortunately in the economic troubles of the early 2000s, I found myself out of work. By that time, I had become fascinated with computerized mapping and analysis programs being used by Wild Connections. So I got a Geographic Information Systems (GIS) certificate from the University of Denver, did some freelance GIS work for conservation groups, and eventually got hired by Rocky Mountain Wild, a regional conservation organization.

Where has your career change taken you?

Working for Rocky Mountain Wild has allowed me to support many aspects

of conservation in Colorado. I really enjoy learning about a variety of different conservation issues and applying different aspects of GIS. Some examples:

- an artistic map of Wilderness areas in Colorado to support the 50th Anniversary of the Wilderness Act
- supported Wild Connections and other organizations mapping Lands with Wilderness Characteristics
- a website combining maps and aerial photographs exploring the legacy of uranium mining in Western Colorado

These examples are at

<http://rockymountainwild.org/gis/wilderness50th>;

<http://rockymountainwild.org/blog/lwc>;

<http://tinyurl.com/UraniumFlyover>

What else do you like about Wild Connections?

One of the best things about Wild Connections is that everyone is very passionate about protecting wild areas in central Colorado but without becoming strident or confrontational. I really appreciate that we take a science-driven approach and that we work collaboratively with the Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management, with other conservation organizations, and with local communities.

What do you see as the future of Wild Connections?

Wild Connections works to protect places like the iconic purple mountain majesties of Pikes Peak, the highest peak in Colorado, Mount Elbert, and the headwaters both the Arkansas and the South Platte Rivers. I believe that Wild Connections will continue to play a critical role in ensuring that these places continue to allow wildlife to thrive while providing inspiration to generations to come.



Alison and Neil Gallensky at Yosemite Falls. Alison still enjoys traveling around North America just like she did when she was a child.



2168 Pheasant Pl.,
Colorado Springs CO 80909
info@wildconnections.org
719-686-5905
www.wildconnections.org

Mission: Wild Connections, a science-based conservation organization, works to identify, protect and restore lands of the Upper Arkansas and South Platte watersheds to ensure the survival of native species and ecological richness.

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Boots on the Ground

Field Trips Play a Critical Role for Wild Connections

by Claude Neumann

Over the twenty years since the founding of Wild Connections, getting out into the field has played an increasingly important role in fulfilling our objectives. Field mapping and inventory teams, restoration work projects with subsequent field monitoring, and general hikes for educational purposes all have become essential in our mission to protect wildlife habitat and migration corridors.

We started our first major volunteer effort back in the nineties by field surveying over one hundred roadless areas, mostly on the Pike-San Isabel National Forest. The need was to document and map roads and trails, legal and illegal motorized use and abuse, boundaries, and natural features such as vegetation types. This first-step survey and documentation provided important information, some of which was not even known to the public lands agencies or was not correct in their documents. It formed the basis for our 2006 publication *Wild Connections Conservation Plan*. In recent years, our major *BLM Lands With Wilderness Characteristics* inventory project, detailed in this issue of Landscapes, challenged and honed our field skills further.

From inventory and mapping, our field activities expanded in recent years to restoration work and road closures of both illegal and unnecessary legal roads. We partner with the Forest Service and other conservation groups on these projects. Areas abused primarily by motorized vehicles are restored and closures installed on illegal routes or routes deemed inappropriate by the agencies on Forest Service and BLM lands. Our major project this summer helped the South Park Ranger District at Farnum Peak east of Fairplay to close an illegal route through the roadless area, restoring continuity for wildlife travel.

An essential part of enhancing the success rate of these projects is field monitoring of the results. After four years since closing two miles of an illegal route on Green Mountain and restoring native grasses, we returned this summer to observe the progress of the new vegetation and survey for any recent illegal motorized incursions into the area. The results were encouraging, with even more revegetation than we saw on the previous monitoring trip. In the future, we hope to utilize other observation methods possibly including monitoring cameras and the use of EcoFlight aerial observations.

Lastly, realizing the importance of getting the public out to see these lands and understand the importance of habitat protection and what we are trying to achieve, we have increasingly sponsored hiking trips. Our supporters, funders, and the interested public have the chance to observe first-hand the areas on these guided hikes. This year we conducted ten hikes to showcase lands that are part of the BLM wilderness inventory project. We are hopeful that those participants will in turn encourage the BLM to seriously consider substantial protection.

After plunking fallen tree trunks over illegal roadways on the Green Mountain restoration project my friend George Ware developed a taste for repairing motorized damage in wildlands. Up until then, George had never visited an existing or proposed wilderness. A season later he urged me to return to the site to help monitor trespass and revegetation. I just followed his lead as we rebounded the steep but re-greening slopes, celebrating tufts of native grasses thriving in the ruts of the closed roads. Now he's an unstoppable wilderness advocate who's joined other conservation groups. Lee Patton



The meadow in the Green Mountain roadless area was restored in 2011 (left). The darker revegetated swath in the after photo (right) is just out of the frame on the left in the before view. The illegal ATV tracks that once circled the meadow are gone and elk and other animals are no longer disturbed by motorized traffic. Photos Jean Smith and Claude Neumann.

Not So Virginal: Pike and San-Isabel National Forests Plan Gets First Revision Since 1984

by Alison Gallensky

In 1984, Ghostbusters was the number one grossing film, *Like a Virgin* was Madonna's song at the MTV Video Music Awards, and the first Apple Macintosh computer was introduced. In 1980 the population of the Denver and Colorado Springs metropolitan areas was less than 1.8 million people. The first mass production mountain bike was introduced in 1981 and the first high-performance four-wheel ATV was introduced in 1985.



The Pike-San Isabel administers several million acres in south central Colorado in two great river basins. The South Platte headwaters begin in the mountains surrounding South Park and flow through the mountains (left) to the plains east of Denver. The headwaters of the Arkansas are on the east side of Mt. Arkansas (right) above Leadville and exit the mountains at Pueblo, continuing across the prairie where the Forest office also oversees the Comanche and Cimarron National Grasslands. BLM lands and state lands are found across the same area. Photos by Hoggs550 and Rob Koran.

1984 is also the most recent time that the Forest Service's plan for managing the Pike and San-Isabel National Forests was updated! The population of the Denver and Colorado Springs metropolitan areas has almost doubled since 1980 to over 3.4 million people. New forms of recreation such as mountain bikes and off-highway vehicles are now common sights across the forests.

The Management Plan for a National Forest is required by law to be updated every 15 years. However, a combination of political, regulatory, legal, and funding/staffing issues have led to a plan for the Pike and San-Isabel National Forests (and for the Cimarron and Comanche National Grasslands that are managed with them) that is over thirty years old. One of the major reasons that Wild Connections was formed 20 years ago was to provide conservation-oriented input into that planning process.

Issues resolved, planning can proceed

The regulatory and legal issues holding up the planning process were resolved when the USDA Forest Service put out a new rule for planning in 2012, and on January 30, 2015 released planning rule final directives that "improve and support consistent approaches to achieving the broad goals of the 2012 Planning Rule." (The U. S. Forest Service Planning Rule Revision web page)

In order to ensure that there is enough Forest Service staff available at the regional and national level, the Forest Service is staggering out their work on forest plans. Currently the Rio Grande National Forest in southern Colorado is the only forest in Colorado where the forest plan is being updated. The Forest Service has said that the Pike and San Isabel National Forests planning will start after the planning for the Rio Grande National Forest is well

under way. Wild Connections best guess is that the Forest Service will start the planning process for the Pike and San Isabel National Forests in late 2016 or in 2017.

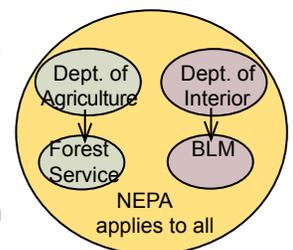
Wild Connections will be involved

Wild Connections is starting to plan how we will be involved in the planning process for the Pike and

San Isabel National Forests once it's re-launched. We will absolutely be engaging our supporters in the process and will also be collaborating with other local, regional and national organizations who share our commitment to conservation and environmentally friendly recreation on the forests.

For those of you who have been involved with the Eastern Colorado Resource Management Plan (RMP) process, there will be similarities and differences between the two processes. The Eastern Colorado Resource Management Plan is managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) which is part of the Department of the Interior. The Forest Service is managed by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).

The Department of the Interior and the USDA are different federal executive departments. Therefore, the BLM and Forest Service planning process are managed under different guidelines, explaining the differences especially in terminology. However, both planning processes are regulated by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) explaining the similarities especially in process steps.



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Pike-San Isabel Forest Plan Revision continued from page 4

For example, both the BLM and the Forest Service set aside some time before the portion of the planning process regulated by NEPA begins. The BLM calls the initial phase of the Eastern Colorado RMP process the Envisioning Phase. The Forest Service calls this initial phase, the Assessment Phase. The BLM in the Eastern Colorado RMP focused on creating a vision and identifying priorities for planning. The Forest Service Assessment phase focuses on what needs to be changed in the existing plan.

After the Envisioning/Assessment Phase, the formal planning process that is regulated by NEPA begins. The steps for creating a management plan are as follows:

1. **Scoping:** During Scoping, the agencies gather input from the public including individuals, organizations (such as Wild Connections), and businesses, about what they think should be included in the planning rule.
2. **Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and Draft Plan:** After Scoping, the agency uses information they have prepared and scoping comments received from the public to develop a series of alternative ways the BLM or forest service lands could be managed. The alternatives are presented in an EIS and draft management plan.
3. **Final EIS:** After the Draft EIS and Draft Management Plan are published, the public has an opportunity to comment. The agency then reviews and incorporates comments and creates a final EIS.
4. **Record of Decision and Final Management Plan:** After additional public review and input, the agency produces a final Management Plan.

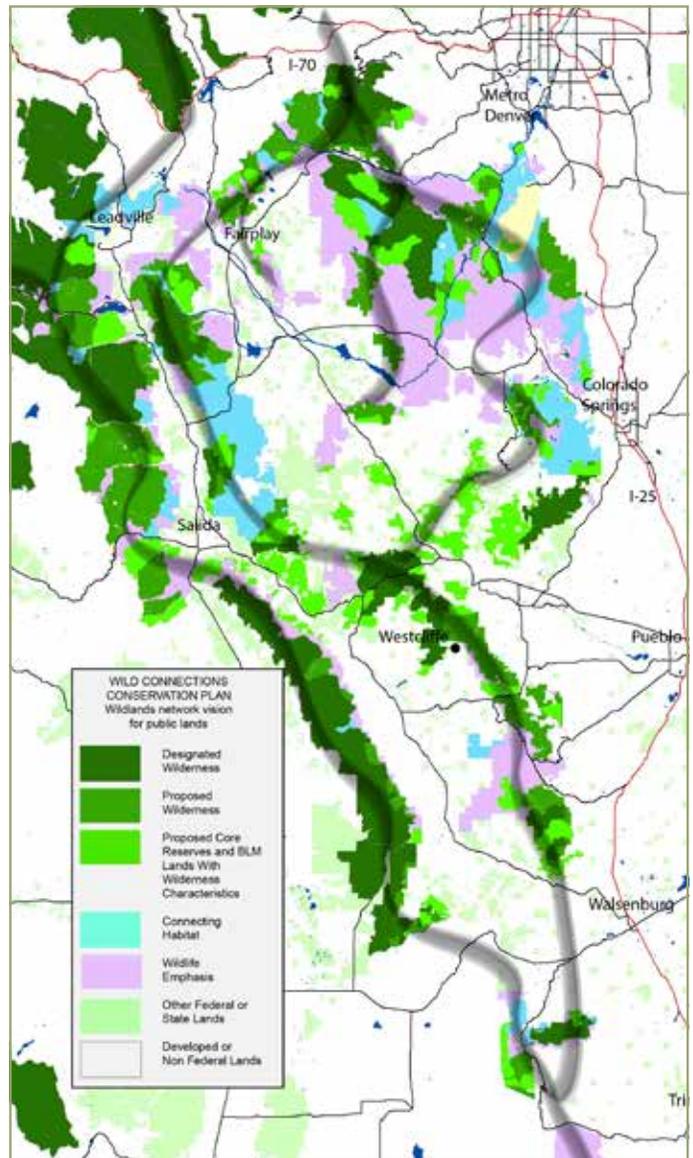
The Eastern Colorado RMP process that started in spring 2015 is expected to complete three and a half years later in Winter 2018/2019. The Rio Grande National Forest Plan Revision process started in Winter 2014/2015 and is expected to complete three years later in Winter 2017/2018. The Pike and San Isabel National Forest Plan Revision process will follow a similar timeline.

Wild Connections is dedicated to ensuring that conservation concerns are addressed in the management of public lands in our region: the lands along the upper portions of the Arkansas and South Platte Rivers. We will continue to work closely with the agencies managing these lands and will keep our supporters up-to-date on how they can influence the agencies to conserve these lands that we love for the next fifteen years, the next thirty years, the next one hundred years, and beyond.



Resources

If you want to dig into land management planning go to Wild Connections web site at www.wildconnections.org/conservation.html. The Conservation menu will take you to current activities in our region and links to federal management planning web pages. You may also subscribe to Wild Connections E-News which is sent monthly - just fill out the form on the Publications page.



Mapping a Conservation Plan for the Future

In 2006 Wild Connections used information from the roadless area inventories, regional citizen's workshops, and biological data to create the Wild Connections Conservation Plan (WCCP). This management scenario is based on a network of protected wildlands and wildlife linkages in the upper Arkansas and South Platte river basins.

At that time it incorporated primarily US Forest Service lands and some of the larger BLM lands

The map shows some of the major land-use designations and landscape-scale linkages that Wild Connections recommends. As the Pike-San Isabel forest plan revision ramps up, we will be evaluating our earlier work, adding new research and updating the WCCP to fit into the new forest planning framework.

Alison Gallensky, Wild Connections founding and current board member, is providing geographic analysis and mapping support for conservation community participation in both the Eastern Colorado Resource Management Plan and the Rio Grande National Forest Management Plan Revisions.

Our New National Monument, Brown's Canyon, Celebrated by Officials, Longtime Activists, Kids and Young Adults

by John Stansfield

Spirited people of all ages and backgrounds celebrated the designation of Browns Canyon National Monument on July 18 in Buena Vista. Folks enjoyed hiking trails and rafting the Arkansas River through the monument. A crowd of more than 500 squeezed into a gymnasium to applaud speakers who played notable roles in the monument's creation. Among those were Senator Michael Bennet, Representative Diana DeGette, Interior Secretary Sally Jewell, USFS Chief Tom Tidwell, BLM Director Neal Kornze, Governor John Hickenlooper, youth activist Loretta Pineda, Sierra Club President Aaron Mair, river outfitter Bill Dvorak and Friends of Browns Canyon Director and a veteran Keith Baker.

Here are some of my photos and words I gathered from some attending the Monument designation.



Friends of Browns Canyon representatives present commemorative paddles to Secretary of Interior Sally Jewell, Chief of the Forest Service Tom Tidwell, Representative Diana DeGette, Governor John Hickenlooper and Senator Michael Bennet.



Browns Canyon is one of the most popular rafting runs in Colorado.

John Stansfield: Given the decades of effort by so many to save this natural gem, the monument's creation seemed to inspire a great collective exhalation from the audience, a warm eminence in the chest, and upturned corners of every mouth. Yee-haw!



Sierra Club President Aaron Mair and Secretary of Interior Sally Jewell against the backdrop of Mt. Princeton.



Young Sierra Club activists in front of the new Browns Canyon sign.

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Sally Jewell, Secretary of Interior, surrounded by young Latinos.

Carol Stansfield: The highlight for me was the post-dedication party. I joined young Latino conservationists as they politely, but unreservedly, asked questions of Interior Secretary Sally Jewell. Questions ranged from the Mexican border fence, to gun control, to the Secretary's traveling security staff, and beyond. She happily responded to each questioner forthrightly.



Hiking into the Monument was one of many activities during the day-long celebration

Jim Lockhart: Most impressive to me about the ceremony was the diversity of speakers, including activists who worked long to protect Browns Canyon, Hispanic teenagers visiting wildlands for the first time, and veterans who found healing in the wilderness. It was proof to me that the national monument really is an asset to all of the residents of Colorado and the nation.



Pikes Peak Sierra Club members Carol Stansfield, Jane Ard-Smith and Jim Lockhart joined the crowd at the dedication ceremonies. Jim is also President of Wild Connections Board.

BLM Wildlands, continued from page 1

all sub-surface acres in central and eastern Colorado (see map on page 9). The LWC inventory reports would become part of Wild Connections' input into future management planning. This plan revision, which BLM dubbed the Eastern Colorado Resource Management Plan (ECO RMP) kicked off this summer on June 1st.

With BLM's official announcement of the RMP revision came a sixty day public comment period to help formulate the ECO RMP. It was a very important time in the process as BLM's draft plan has yet to be formed. Moreover, the BLM is initiating a stronger emphasis on the public input process, involvement, and incorporation on a national scale as part of BLM's "Planning 2.0" initiative. The ECO RMP can be seen as a hybrid plan, incorporating new elements of the yet to be released Planning 2.0 initiative.



BLM conducted Envisioning meetings early in the process. Photo John Sztukowski

Wild Connections co-hosted LWC hikes, workshops, and presentations during this time period to educate the public and other organizations and encourage participation in BLM's planning process.

Thanks to the many that came to BLM's envisioning and scoping meetings, and even more so for those that wrote public comments during the scoping period.

BLM wildlands hikes reveal variety and connectivity

Our LWC hiking series was quite successful and robust, consisting of ten trips that began in the spring, with an uptick during the summer's public comment period, and continued on through the fall.

We hosted hikes in a wide array of BLM Lands with Wilderness Characteristics, from the high elevation mixed



Hiking on the Hogback above Grape Creek in the Arkansas Canyonlands. Photo Tom Mowle

forests of Stanley Creek near Blanca Peak in the Sangre de Cristo Range to our lowest elevation and most eastward unit Cucharas Canyon east of Walsenburg, We led many hikes in the heart of

Bighorn Sheep Canyon and the greater Arkansas River Canyonlands since this region consists of many of the proposed LWCs and current Wilderness Study Areas, as well as provides an incredible connectivity corridor to many of the mountain regions of central Colorado.



A view from the Arkansas Canyonlands to Buffalo Peaks Wilderness in South Park. Photo EcoFlight

Coalition partners

Wild Connections is also working with a coalition of conservation partners on the ECO RMP campaign, including The Wilderness Society, Conservation Colorado, The Pew Charitable Trusts, and others. In addition to the twenty-four proposed LWCs that we submitted, our coalition also proposed other designations to protect the natural landscape, including ten Areas of Critical Environmental Concern and three Recreation Management Areas.

Keeping the drumbeat going

Since the BLM scoping period ended on August 31st, Wild Connections has still been very active in the Eastern Colorado Resource Management Plan revision. We have been following up on Environmental Assessment comment periods on Wild and Scenic River eligibility, bark beetle mitigation projects, and proposed trails. We've been out to the field with BLM staff to discuss some of these issues and Wild Connections' LWC inventory and boundaries. We plan to have more field trips with the BLM in the coming months to study Lands with Wilderness Characteristics in the region.

We've also been keeping the drumbeat going on the public front. In addition to our public hiking series, we recently co-hosted several EcoFlight flights over the Arkansas Canyonlands, primarily for local business owners and media. We also were able to put together a stellar aerial photography inventory of the region. *Elevations Outdoors Magazine* recently produced an online article about the ECO RMP and Wild Connections' and Conservation Colorado's role.

There is still much to do for this campaign! Please read *BLM Eastern Colorado RMP – A Look Ahead* on the facing page to see what the remainder of this plan entails!



BLM Eastern Colorado Resource Management Plan

A Look Ahead

by John Sztukowski

BLM's Eastern Colorado Resource Management Plan (ECO RMP) officially began June 1st of this year, followed by a sixty day public comment period, known as the scoping period. However this marked just the beginning of a multi-stage, multi-year agency plan revision.

These plan revisions typically take at least four to five years to complete. The ECO RMP is on a somewhat more structured time frame, shaped by BLM's new national planning effort, Planning 2.0. BLM is aiming to have the RMP approved with a Record of Decision in early 2019. However there is much to do before then!

Of note, BLM's Planning 2.0 initiative adds a pivotal new step to the planning process: producing draft alternatives for public review. This adds an extra comment review period in the process and at a critical time, giving the public an opportunity to support or voice concerns before the draft plan comes out, making it easier for citizens to shape the RMP. These draft alternatives, with public comment period, are scheduled to come out in the spring or summer of 2016. Wild Connections plans to host another series of hikes and other outreach events to educate the public on the planning process and plan alternatives that support biodiversity, wildlife, and the natural landscape.

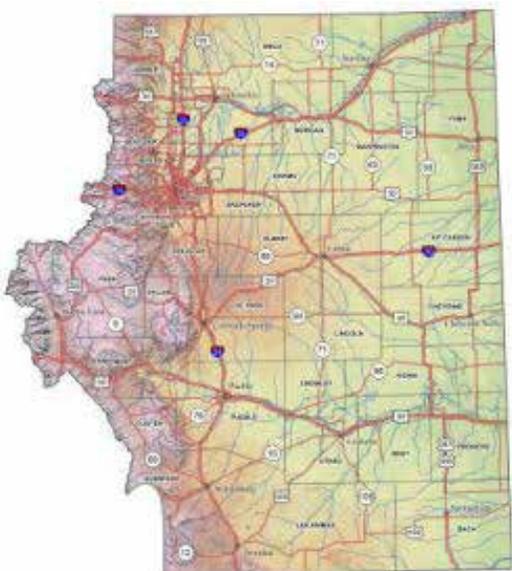
The next step after the draft alternatives will be BLM's draft ECO RMP, which is scheduled to come out in 2017, followed by another public comment period. BLM's proposed and final RMP will likely come out in 2018, followed by a short public review period, with the Record of Decision and approved RMP scheduled to come out in early 2019.

This is a somewhat long and tenuous process, however we are excited to be part of a formative conservation collation on this campaign, an open and communicative BLM office, and an engaged and diverse public, that can help form the Eastern Colorado Resource Management Plan. These next few years will shape the BLM landscape in central and eastern Colorado for at least several decades. Will you give your voice to help protect these lands for the next generation?



Planning Process Overview (Dates are Tentative)

Envisioning	May–September 2015
Public scoping	June–September 2015
Draft alternatives and impact analysis strategy	October 2015–June 2016
Public review of draft alternatives and impact analysis strategy	For 60 days after release of draft alternatives and impact analysis strategy
Draft RMP/EIS development	2017
Public comment period for the draft RMP/EIS	For 90 days after release of the draft RMP/EIS
Proposed RMP/final EIS development	2017–2018
Public review and protest period for proposed RMP/final EIS	For 30 days after release of proposed RMP/final EIS
Approved RMP and record of decision	2019



BLM's Eastern Colorado Resource Management Plan encompasses the territory east of the Continental Divide. Much of this is not under direct BLM management, but BLM is responsible for most subsurface rights such as oil and gas development across the state. Wild Connections focuses its attention primarily on the lands managed by BLM in the upper Arkansas and Platte basins, which include South Park and the Arkansas Canyonlands, among other important areas.

Healing the Habitat in Farnum Peak and Badger Flats, continued from page 1

Project. This project closed both east and west access points to an illegal off-highway vehicle (OHV) track in the Farnum Peak area of the Puma Hills. In addition to a full contingent of Forest Service and CUSP trail workers, twenty volunteers from the various groups pitched in for two full days of digging post holes, dragging tree trunks and branches, raking disturbed soil and spreading native grass seed at both ends of the illegal track. The Forest Service previously bulldozed high dirt berms to help ensure a successful closure.

With so many volunteers, work moved quickly both days and the group enjoyed leisurely plentiful lunches provided by Wild Connections. Jim Lockhart, Wild Connections' President, and John Stansfield, Vice-President, gave an



Lunch is served. Photo John Stansfield

interesting talk about Wild Connections' history of identifying and preserving roadless areas for critical wildlife habitat and winter range.

Several volunteers enjoyed camping out Saturday night at the Round Mountain campground. Wild Connections reserved campsites for the group and served a delicious pasta dinner, with wine, beer and dessert under the stars. The next morning, a breakfast of coffee, fruit and breakfast burritos prepared the campers for day's work ahead.

Over the two days, the volunteers and trail crews installed approximately forty posts in cement, strung more than seven hundred and fifty feet of cable, and spread about sixty pounds of native grass seed. These closures have restored connectivity to the Farnum and Schoolmarm Colorado Roadless Areas and protected 19,000+ acres of important wildlife habitat for the area's elk and bighorn sheep herds. Hunters have long complained to Colorado Parks and Wildlife about the scarcity of game in the area due to the encroaching illegal OHV activity, but Wild Connections' work will help protect the area wildlife herds' historic habitat.

Badger Flats project helps manage multi-use recreation

In addition to the Farnum Peak Project, Wild Connections members partnered with CMC and South Park Ranger District to continue work on the Badger Flats Habitat Restoration Project. This Project is a multi-year effort by South Park Ranger District and area conservation groups to manage illegal motorized activity and to provide appropriate and safe riding opportunities for multi-use visitors. Volunteers came out on four separate work weekends to close illegal OHV tracks, protect area wetlands and restore badly disturbed native vegetation.



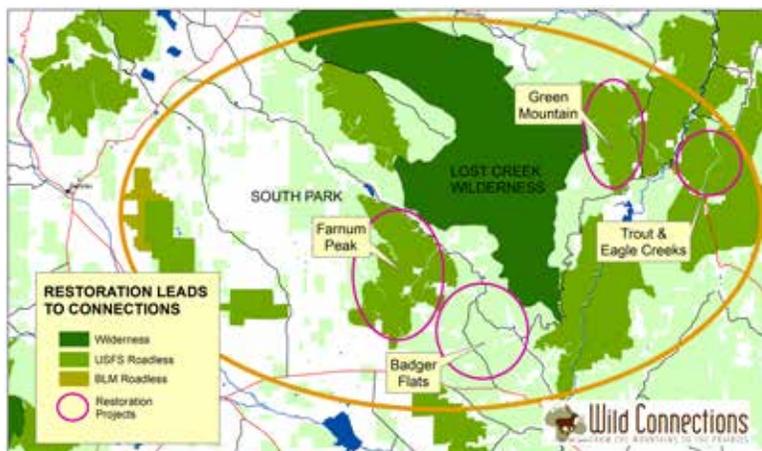
Installing post and cable in Badger Flats. Photo Misi Ballard

The Forest Service numbers for the Badger Flats 2015 restoration work are impressive: 2,500+ feet of post and cable fencing was installed in the area that resulted in closure

of seven plus miles of illegal track. Also important are the partnerships that were strengthened among area conservation groups and friendships created as members of these groups and other concerned citizens worked together to protect the public lands we love.

2016 stewardship projects

Wild Connections is currently planning next year's stewardship projects (see page 11) and will be partnering again with others to support the Forest Service on the challenge of managing South Park's public lands. While details on projects are still being worked out, you can rest assured there will be plenty of opportunity for you to join Wild Connections in meaningful stewardship work in 2016.



Restoration projects recover areas important for wildlife and biodiversity and foster connections across the larger landscape. Farnum project united the Forest Service's Schoolmarm and Farnum roadless areas into one 19,000 acre area adjacent to unprotected Badger Flats and the highly protected Lost Creek Wilderness.

Outreach in the Outdoors: Four Actions for 2016

by Kristin Skoog

Wild Connections is planning our portfolio of activities for 2016, covering our key missions of Public Lands Management, Habitat Restoration, Biodiversity Protection, Results Monitoring, and Education and Outreach. Here is a brief summary of our most important plans for 2016.

Public Lands Management

Our top priority for Lands Management will be to continue our work on the BLM Resource Management plan for Eastern Colorado (ECO RMP). In 2016, the BLM will draft several alternative plans for the ECO RMP, including a Master Leasing Plan for oil and gas in South Park. Wild Connections will review those plans and submit our recommendations, as well as solicit public involvement, organize input from citizens and partner organizations, and take field trips to key areas with the BLM. We will pursue special management designations for some areas, such as Recreation Areas and Areas of Critical Environmental Concern. In addition, we will monitor and respond to any new BLM announcements of specific proposed actions, such as fuels and insect management or helicopter training permits for the military.

Wild Connections will also begin planning for the upcoming revision of the US Forest Service Management Plan for Pike-San Isabel National Forests and Comanche-Cimarron National Grasslands.

Habitat Restoration and Biodiversity Protection

Wild Connections will sponsor Habitat Restoration or Biodiversity Protection projects in 2016. Our restoration projects seek to protect wildlife habitat, sensitive ecological locations and riparian areas by closing illegal motorized routes and curbing dispersed camping in sensitive areas. As part of the restoration process, we check existing closures for effectiveness, and document the location and extent of damaged areas.

A typical restoration project involves creating barriers, breaking up compacted soil, preventing erosion, and reseeded with native plants. Wild Connections will cooperate with the managing agencies to plan, fund, staff, and execute the restoration projects.

We hope to continue our partnership with the South Platte Ranger District and their High Country Travel Management Plan north of Highway 285 between Bailey and Kenosha Pass. One of our top candidates is the Geneva Basin, where we worked in 2013, home to the Geneva Basin Iron Fens, which are registered as a Colorado State Natural Area. Iron fens are found nowhere in the world except

Colorado, and the Geneva Fens are being damaged more each year by illegal off-highway vehicles.

Work will continue in the Badger Flats and Packer Gulch areas in the South Park Ranger District. (See report on page 1.) We will explore projects related to our Lands with Wilderness Characteristics monitoring in the Arkansas River Canyonlands in partnership with BLM.

Results Monitoring

As a citizen-science-based organization, Wild Connections believes that it is important to monitor the results of our previous projects. We use the results of previous projects to improve our future outcomes. In 2016, we will monitor the 2015 closure at Farnum Peak. We will determine if the old route is revegetating, and to see if we have effectively stopped vehicle traffic in the area. We will also visit the closure at Green Mountain, and determine if a new repeater site in the area has exposed that roadless area to vehicle traffic.

We may also participate in surveys to monitor threatened species in the Arkansas River corridor, such as the Arkansas Stickleaf and the Mexican Spotted Owl. Monitoring agency projects - for example logging that intrudes on lynx habitat or migration corridors - will continue.

Education and Outreach

Our regular public monthly hikes to BLM and Forest Service wild areas will be ongoing in 2016. The 100th anniversary of the National

Park Service falls in 2016, which we will celebrate with outings to Browns Canyon National Monument and the Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument. An overnight backpacking trip in Badger Creek is also in the works. We would also like to try some special interest hikes, with a focus on plant species or archaeological features.

Through all these projects, Wild Connections will continue to expand the techniques we use to publicize our work, by expanding our profile in traditional and social media outlets.

As you can see, Wild Connections has big plans for 2016 and beyond. Our ability to accomplish our goals is dependent on support from our volunteers and partner organizations. We will be seeking grants from foundations, and we ask for your generous contributions of time and treasure to support these goals. We look forward to your involvement in 2016!





2168 Pheasant Pl
Colorado Springs CO 80909

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Go online to the secure web site to make your donation
www.coloradogives.org/WildConnections/overview

Treasured heritage

As Wild Connections completes twenty years of conservation work this December, we invite you to help save the treasured natural heritage of central Colorado. Mountain parklands, peaks that top 14,000 feet, forests ranging from ancient bristlecone pines to pinyon-juniper woodlands and deep canyons along the two great rivers are knit together in a mosaic that supports thousands of animal and plant species and human enterprises that began millennial in the past. Today we have the opportunity and power to protect these treasures for now and for future generations.

Our end-of-year giving goal is \$10,000. We want to ensure that our 2016 programs will have the resources needed to make a difference - to protect our wildlands, to engage people in caring for our public lands, and to challenge agencies to do what is best for the land.

Please donate to Wild Connections on Colorado Gives Day, December 8th. Community First Foundation sponsors this state-wide campaign and provides a web site for online donations. Your gift is channeled back to Wild Connections, and in addition it increases our proportionate share of the million dollar incentive fund.

If you prefer, you can mail a check to Wild Connections, 2168 Pheasant Place, Colorado Springs, CO 80909.

We thank you for your dedication to the well-being of this heritage – it will continue if we act on its behalf.

Photo Hoggs 550