

LANDSCAPES



Wild Connections

FROM THE MOUNTAINS TO THE PRAIRIES

DECEMBER 2022



VITAL LANDS UNDER NEW MANAGEMENT

New agency plans bring changes

View across the forested lands of the Boreas roadless area toward South Park.

Photo: Bernie Gay/Tod Bacigalupi

The Forest Service Finalizes Travel Management Planning for the Pike and San Isabel National Forests

by John Sztukowski

In late September, the United States Forest Service (USFS) signed off on the long-awaited Pike and San Isabel National Forests (PSI) Travel Management Plan (TMP). The TMP outlines how and where motorized and non-motorized travel should occur on the PSI National Forests.

This TMP revision began in 2019, precipitated by a lawsuit and settlement by some of our conservation partners in efforts to protect area wildlife and ensure analysis of environmental impacts of unauthorized motorized routes.

This plan has not had much public interface since the USFS reviewed objections in early 2021. The USFS stated that the delay was due to “working with the Colorado State Historic Preservation Officer and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation to finalize a Programmatic Agreement which will cover the implementation of this project.”

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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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President's Message

What's new with our public lands

from Jim Lockhart

As we approach 2023, we can foresee a number of significant changes in the management of public lands in our part of Colorado. These changes are the focus of this issue of Landscapes. The lengthy process of identifying and classifying authorized motorized roads and trails in Pike-San Isabel National Forest, through its Travel Management Plan, has been completed. This has already enabled closure of one problem spot and actions to protect Wildcat Canyon, long the scene of illegal motorized use. A new National Monument, Camp Hale-Continental Divide National Monument, has come to the borders of our region. In addition, the Outside 285 process, which identifies protected areas and suitable nonmotorized trail corridors in the vicinity of the North Fork of the South Platte River, has completed its first phase and is entering a second, expanded phase. We expect that in the coming year, the Bureau of Land Management will finalize its long-delayed Eastern Colorado Resource Management Plan, defining how BLM lands east of the Continental Divide, including those in our Arkansas/South Platte region, are to be managed and protected.

These new land designations, plans, and initiatives will open up exciting new opportunities to protect our wild areas. By assisting strategic closures of obsolete or damaging roads and motorized routes, we will help to restore the connecting links between natural areas – the “wild connections” for which our organization is named. We will continue to identify areas of special concern in light of the impacts of climate change, and work to protect them. And, as always, we will bring you information, through our outings and publications such as Landscapes, regarding the state of public lands in our region and how you can help to protect them. 🌿



Exciting new restoration projects are on the horizon. Volunteers will get their hands dirty and help recover the naturalness of degraded areas.

Photo: Deb Overn

BLM's Final Eastern Colorado Resource Management Plan Revision is Expected this Winter

by John Sztukowski

The final component of BLM's Eastern Colorado Resource Management Plan (ECRMP) revision is scheduled to be released to the public later this winter! BLM resource management plans guide land use decision-making for all BLM resources for the foreseeable future. This plan covers over 660,000 acres of BLM managed public lands, with the majority of them in the Upper Arkansas River watershed, from Leadville to Cañon City.

This will be the fourth engagement that the BLM has had with the public regarding the ECRMP. When the final ECRMP is released, there will be a 30-day public protest period, reserved for members of the public who have previously commented during the planning process. There will also be a 60-day governor's consistency review process to make sure that the plan aligns with state goals.

The ECRMP began in 2015 with a scoping process and public comment period. In 2017, the BLM unveiled their preliminary alternatives for the plan, also with a public comment period. The last version we saw of this plan was the draft phase that came out in 2019, under the Trump administration's Energy First policy, which looked drastically different than previous iterations of the plan, gutting a lot of wildlife and conservation protections in favor of oil and gas development.

Fortunately, the final plan never came out under the previous administration. It has taken some time for the BLM offices to get restaffed and allocate resources over the last couple of years, but they are now moving forward on priority plans, which includes the ECRMP revision. We have high hopes that under the Biden administration, and his initiative to protect 30 percent of US lands and waters by 2030 (30x30), many of the proposed wildlife and land conservation designations will be utilized in this plan.

Wild Connections has been working towards conservation designations like Lands with Wilderness Characteristics and Areas of Critical Environmental Concern for this plan since 2013 to protect the large, vastly unloaded, network of BLM managed public lands. These conservation designations and others have had overwhelming public support throughout this planning process, and we look forward to seeing them implemented in the final plan's preferred alternative to protect deserving BLM managed areas, like Echo Canyon and Badger Creek in the Arkansas River Canyonlands and Reinecker Ridge in South Park.

We will let you know when the BLM announces the final ECRMP to the public, currently scheduled for early 2023, and what you can do to help conserve BLM wildlands and wildlife in our region! ☞



Hiking down BLM's Table Mountain overlooking the Sangre de Cristo Mountains and Arkansas River Canyonlands.
Photo: Kristin Skoog

Locally Recorded Cool Air Pools Help Map Climate Refugia

by Karl Ford, PhD

Recently, Wild Connections led a large group on a climate and wildfire education hike along the North Fork Trail. One of our objectives was to measure daily differences in temperature and humidity in lower gullies versus hillsides along the North Fork valley. We do this with the intention of finding places on the landscape that will remain cooler and wetter in the midst of a warming and drying climate. These places may serve as climate refugia and even landscape level corridors allowing native plants and wildlife to persist or migrate during climate change. Some of our temperature dataloggers failed on our first try and we intend to try again.

Recent work from New Hampshire's Mount Washington Observatory in the Hubbard Brook Experimental Forest (HBEF) performed the same experiment with more rigor (and resources). The following is taken from their website: <https://www.mountwashington.org/research-and-product-testing/past-projects/cold-air-pools-in-mountain-valleys.aspx>:

"On clear nights with calm winds, the ground cools rapidly. Air in contact with the colder ground cools by conducting heat to the ground. This process can continue until sunrise.

When this cooling process occurs along mountain slopes, the cooling air becomes colder and denser than the air away from the slopes, which causes the cold air to sink downslope. The dense cold air flows downslope in streams (called katabatic winds) following the steepest slopes. When the cold air flows into a relatively flat area (a mountain or river valley, for example), the streams of cold air slow down. This causes the valley to fill with cold air, much like streams filling a lake.

Mountain valleys around the world often fill with cold air a few hundred to thousands of feet deep, depending on the depth of the valley and the shape of the valley allowing cold air to flow out of the valley. Above this "cold air pool," the air remains warmer because is not in contact with the ground. This means that low elevations in mountain valleys are regularly exposed to cold temperatures at night and higher elevations above the cold air pool remain in warmer air when weather conditions are clear and calm.

Meteorological observations of cold air pool formation and evolution were taken in the mountain valley of Hubbard Brook Experimental Forest, New Hampshire in November 2015. We deployed a tethered weather balloon to 150 meters (~500 feet) with temperature sensors tied to the nylon string every 5 meters..."

These results from HBEF show more than a 10° C change over 125 meters (~400') and the cold air pool persists for about 14 hours, enough to keep the soil cooler and wetter and support native (often riparian) vegetation.

Wild Connections hopes to show this effect on future climate hikes! ☺

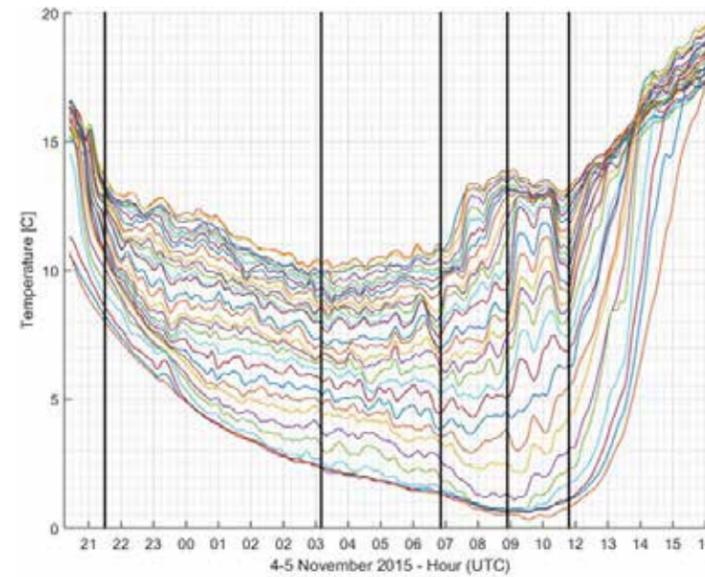
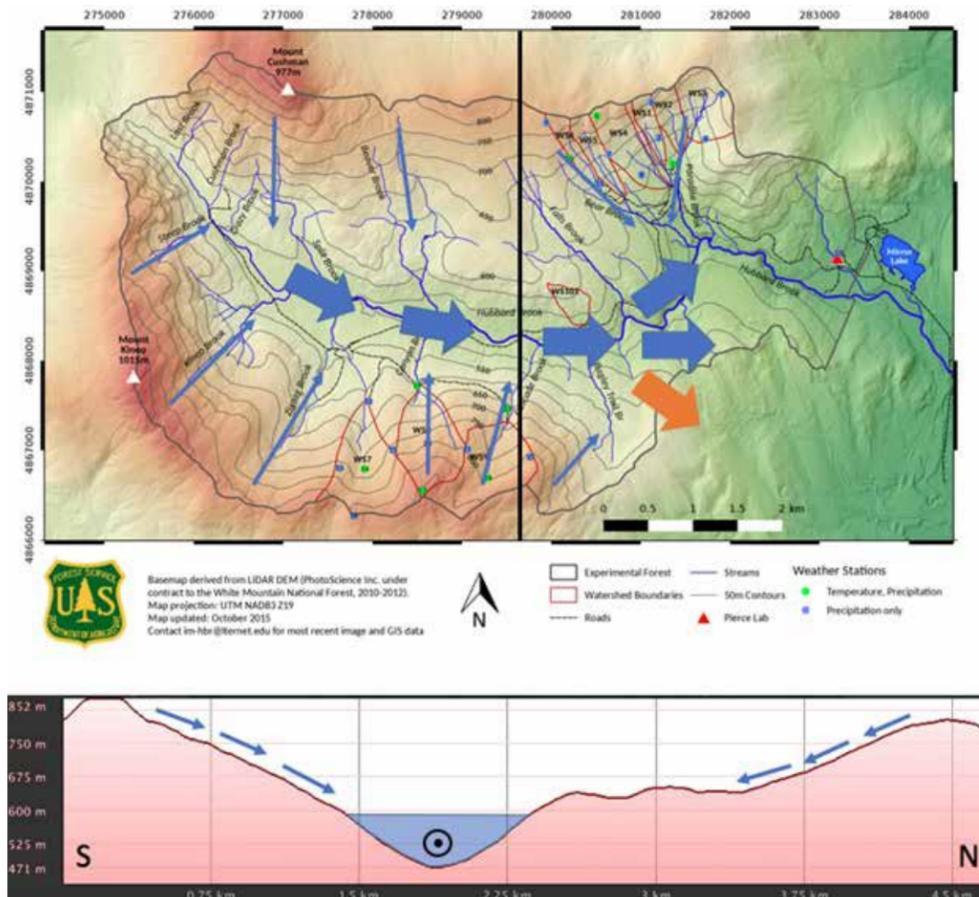


Figure 2: Time series of temperatures at all tethered data loggers. Temperatures are filtered using a 10 minute moving average. Graph courtesy of Mt. Washington Observatory.

Figure 1: Schematic diagram of drainage flows during maximum observed cold air pool height in HBEF. Small blue arrows (lower panel) represent katabatic wind flow. Large blue arrows (upper panel) represent mountain wind (drainage flow) of the cold air pool; the large orange arrow represents the increased drainage that would occur to the southeast if cold air pool height were to increase above the ridge height. Vertical black line shows location of vertical cross-section. Vertical transect elevation generated from Google Earth (2017). HBEF base map courtesy of Mary Martin. Mt. Washington Observatory.



Grape Creek could qualify for Outstanding Water designation. Photo: John Fielder

Make It Useful

Climate Refugia and Completing Model Refinement
by Alison Gallensky

As discussed in earlier editions of *Landscapes*, I've been supporting Wild Connection's conservation planning by modeling climate refugia and corridors. Climate refugia, when protected from human development and overuse, are places where native plants and wildlife will continue to thrive as the climate changes. Cold Air Pools, presented in Karl's article, are one example of climate refugia.

Conservation biologists have demonstrated that the value of protected lands is greatly increased when unobstructed corridors between them are also protected. These corridors support seasonal migration, dispersal of new generations, and movement to new habitats as the climate changes.

In the last decade or so, geospatial modeling techniques to identify climate refugia and corridors have become widely available. I've been combining well respected nationwide models with high quality local data to identify climate refugia and corridors in Central Colorado. I've researched techniques, identified data sources, created a model, and refined it based on expert advice. I'm tempted to keep refining the model as new models and techniques become available. The natural world is messy and complex. Creating a completely accurate model of current conditions is impossible. Creating a model of future conditions is even more difficult. However, as British Statistician George Box famously said, "all models are wrong, but some are useful." It is time for me to stop refining the climate refugia and corridor model and time for us to make it useful.

How do we make the model useful? First of all, we need to present our model results to the agencies that manage lands in our region. Public Land Management Agencies are increasingly recognizing the importance of Climate Resilience. Protecting lands identified as climate refugia and corridors in our model is a practical way to promote Climate Resilience in the natural world. In addition, Wild Connections needs to include the model results as we prioritize our restoration and advocacy work going forward.

Wild Connections is entering its 28th year of identifying, protecting, and restoring wildlands, native species, and biological diversity in central Colorado. One of our major activities in 2023 will be to document our model results, share them with our agency partners, and incorporate them into our restoration and advocacy work. With these science-based tools, with the efforts of our dedicated volunteers and staff, and with the support of our community, we can ensure that the natural world continues to thrive in central Colorado for ourselves and future generations. ☺

Across the Divide

Camp Hale Joins Colorado's Newest National Monument

By Neil Gallensky

Many Coloradoans are aware of Camp Hale, once located in Colorado's central mountains, where the elite mountain soldiers of the 10th Mountain Division who played a pivotal role in World War II earned their skis. On October 12, 2022, President Biden declared the site part of our newest National Monument, the Camp Hale-Continental Divide National Monument. The Monument's dedication was held in a high alpine valley at 9,200 feet, just north of Tennessee Pass on US Highway 24 between Leadville and Red Cliff.

The Camp Hale site is just north of the Ski Cooper ski area, on the west side of the continental divide. Framed by the majestic Sawatch and Tenmile-Mosquito Mountain Ranges, the site includes the headwaters of the Eagle River near the Continental Divide and Colorado Trail.



Camp Hale, Colorado.
Photo: Creative Commons

Camp Hale came into being during the early days of America's entry into World War II in 1942. U.S. military commanders anticipated the need for a force of elite mountain soldiers. The site provided ideal conditions to sharpen the skills of mountain troops who would need superior skiing and snowshoeing skills, ability to scale rough terrain quickly and quietly, and the determination and training to survive in snow and extreme cold. Constructed with great urgency, the camp quickly turned into one of the largest alpine cities in Colorado, with barracks for 15,000 soldiers, mess halls, movie theatres and other recreational facilities, a hospital, stables, and a veterinary hospital for the sure-footed mules. A sophisticated system of mountaineering training

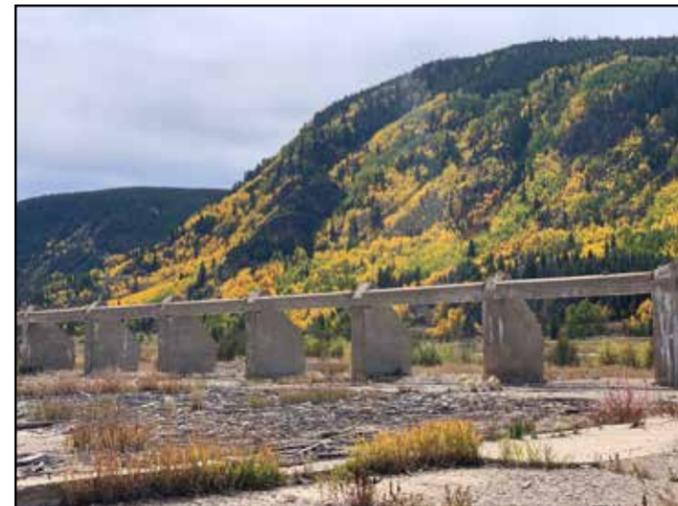
facilities was created, including terrain for climbing and a broad landscape for backcountry traverses. A system of far-flung backcountry huts was also built, 34 of which exist today. Five of these huts are inside the boundaries of the new National Monument.

To create the large footprint needed for Camp Hale, the character of the upper Eagle River Valley required significant modification. Seasonal marshes were drained, and brush and trees were removed. The meandering river was then channelized into a straight ditch that ran through the valley, providing space and flood resistance for a huge army post.

The hardened and determined soldiers of the 10th Mountain Division went on to achieve major military victories against Japanese forces in the Aleutian Island chain of Alaska and against German forces in the Apennine Mountains of Italy. Camp Hale also trained soldiers of the Norwegian Operational Group of the 99th Infantry who jumped into operations in France and Norway.

Once the US mountain soldiers had departed Camp Hale, it gained a second life as a prisoner of war camp for German soldiers captured from the Afrika Korps. Later, the camp also served yet another intriguing purpose, as the CIA secretly trained Tibetan guerilla warriors there during the late 1950s through the early 1960s, with armed security present around the camp. The CIA circulated false stories that Camp Hale had been turned into a nuclear test to keep curious visitors away.

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Camp Hale Ruins.
Photo: Neil Gallensky

Defending Roadless Areas, Chicago Ridge, and the WCCP

By John Stansfield

In this Landscape, with careful detail, Neil Gallensky introduces us to the nation's newest conservation victory, the Camp Hale—Continental Divide National Monument. Monument fans from Colorado and afar celebrated the dedication of the lands in October. And others, backcountry skiers, climbers, backpackers, Wild Connections (WC) members also cheered the monuments' adjoining territory to the south on Chicago Ridge.

The popular ridge, with wildlife, rugged peaks, rolling tundra, and plentiful snow, contains long stretches of roadless country. The Pike-San Isabel National Forest (P-SI NF) has studied the ridge, along with at least 100 other eligible public lands, to identify its wilderness characteristics. Roadlessness is one of the most important measures determining areas worthy of conservation under the federal Wilderness Preservation Act of 1964.

Over the years, not all conservationists have agreed with the NF decisions about wildland characteristics and roadless area boundaries. With that in mind, in 1995 Jean Smith gathered interested citizens into a group later known as Wild Connections.

The all-volunteer organization went to work on a citizen's land management plan for the region, the Wild Connections Conservation Plan (WCCP). As Smith described the burgeoning efforts in 2006:

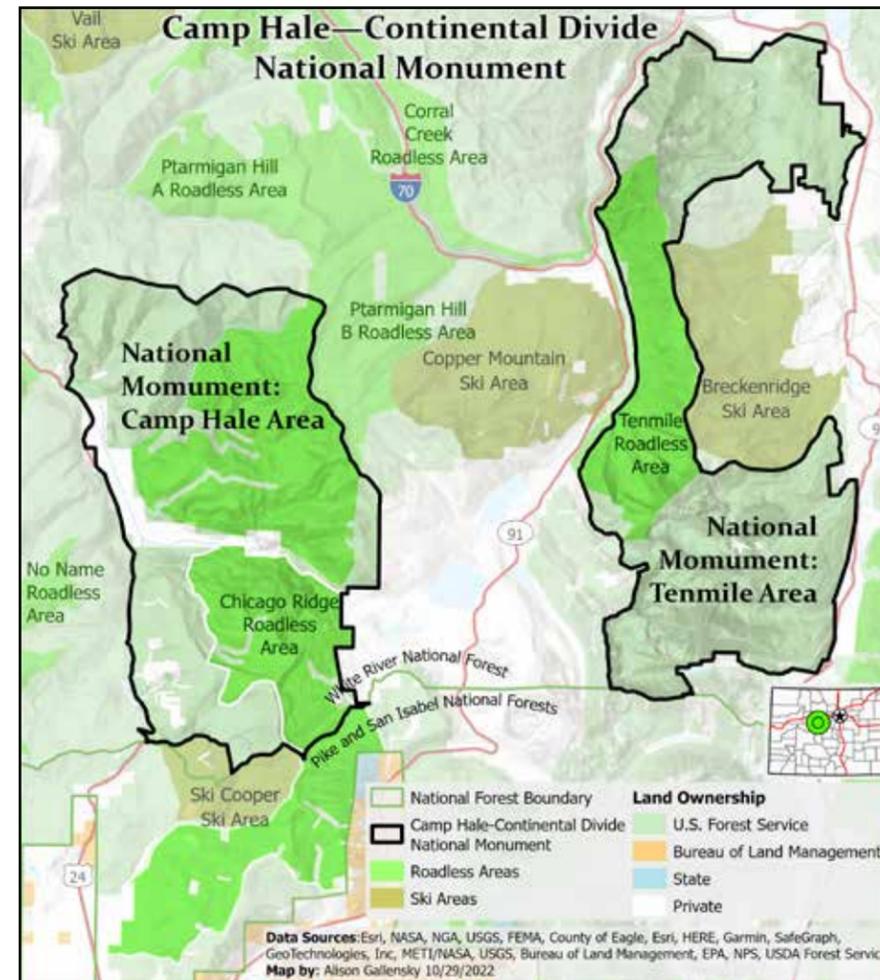
"The Wild Connections Conservation Plan was created by the efforts of people who share a deep concern for the well-being of public lands. . . From hunters and hikers to biologists to volunteer mappers, they worked together to map the boundaries of 100 roadless areas, explore some of central Colorado's wildest lands, and apply the science

of conservation biology. Over the past decade, they developed and defined a vision of a network of protected cores and wildlife linkages. The Wild Connections Conservation Plan describes how this vision can be a reality where it counts—in the everyday policies and management of the Pike-San Isabel National Forest."

Eventually, Wild Connections' efforts also extended into concerns with the lands of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Royal Gorge Field Office, in charge of hundreds of thousands of public land acres in the Arkansas River watershed. BLM manages six roadless Wilderness candidates, contained in the Colorado Wilderness Act currently before Congress. The long-awaited Royal Gorge Resource Management Plan, a particular involvement of WC and WC's Conservation Director John Sztukowski, could soon go public.

The WCCP, a veritable public land atlas, is a remarkable volume, 332 pages of data and tables, foldout maps and photos intended to inform the public and the management agencies of WC's vision. The document is published in text and CD formats.

WCCP's land base is divided into eleven complexes centered on geographical features encompassing sections of the P-SI, adjacent BLM, State, and private lands. Fitting together like a mosaic, they cover the headwaters of the South Platte and Arkansas Rivers. The Mosquito Range Complex lies in the northern end of the mosaic and contains seven roadless areas, including Chicago Ridge.



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The Forest Service Finalizes Travel Management Planning for the Pike and San Isabel National Forest

Continued from the front page

The USFS made the decision to select Alternative C, their balanced approach, with modifications based on feedback from the State Historic Preservation Office. The USFS states that “the modified Alternative C will balance public motorized access with the need to protect resources from negative effects that result from motorized activity.”

It is great to see that this document is finally finalized. The USFS made the decision to decommission or seasonally close some much deserving routes into wildlife corridors and Forest Service Roadless Areas that Wild Connections has been working to protect, like at Farnum and Wildcat Canyon. Additionally, the local USFS ranger districts were just recently able to move forward with planned projects that were held up until this document was completed. This was particularly exciting for Wild Connections as we have been waiting as well to enact planned projects partnering with the USFS.

Farnum Roadless Area Restoration Work

Wild Connections once again partnered with the USFS South Park Ranger District (SPRD) for a restoration project to protect local Forest Service roadless areas. We partnered up to protect an area that we are very familiar with, the Farnum Roadless Area, where we have worked with the USFS on projects in 2015 and 2017.

This 2022 restoration project secures the northern end of the Farnum Roadless Area, just southwest of the Tarryall Reservoir. On October 4, 2022, Wild Connections provided post and cable for the decommissioned USFS route 233, a short cherrystem route into the northern portion of the roadless area. This route was decommissioned due to issues of illegal public dumping and camping, as well as illegal motorized routes that cut across the roadless area and wildlife corridor to Packer Gulch. Kudos to Focus on the Forest, which has already done a thorough cleanup of the trashed campsites.

Continued on the next page



Almost a mile of steel cable, 250 posts, and dozens of metal signs were removed from the riverbank in Wildcat Canyon in October 2022.
Photo: S Platte Ranger District

The Forest Service Finalizes Travel Management Planning...

Continued from page 8

Next year we plan to revisit this project area, assess it with the USFS, and plan restoration work, including seeding, on the decommissioned route. We plan to host volunteer workday(s) here next year to complete our restoration efforts.

Wildcat Canyon Metal Removal Project

The final PSI TMP kept the routes that descend into Wildcat Canyon closed to motorized use. This was expected, but still a sigh of relief as motorized groups have become more vocal about opening the routes back up to motorized use, particularly because illegal motorized use has been rampant on these routes in recent years. Wild Connections members have witnessed multiple motorized parties of vehicles illegally traversing these routes, including in and across the South Platte River at Wildcat Canyon, impairing the watershed and area wildlife, particularly riparian wildlife species.

This section of the South Platte River at Wildcat Canyon, upstream from Cheesman Reservoir, has been identified as eligible for Scenic River designation in previous Wild and Scenic River studies. The studies showed that the Wildcat Canyon section of the South Platte River has characteristics of scenic, geological, fisheries, and wildlife Outstandingly Remarkable Values (ORVs) that need to be protected. A South Platte Protection Plan (SPPP) was developed by a collaboration of public and private organizations, including the USFS, and adopted to benefit similar Wild and Scenic River protections. In fact, the USFS took these factors into consideration for the recent TMP decision, and protecting these resources from motorized use was the primary reason they chose to keep the routes into Wildcat closed.

A few years ago, Wild Connections secured South Park Land and Water Trust Fund funding to help the USFS SPRD remove post and cable and metal signs along the South Platte River in Wildcat Canyon that have been there since before the 2002 Hayman Fire and the following USFS decision to close the routes to motorized use. Since the fire, the metal poles and cables have become buried in places by sediment near and in the South Platte River. They were much needed for the safety of local wildlife and recreationists alike, regardless if the routes remained closed or not; however the project was put on hold until the PSI TMP was finalized.

The final TMP decision in late September came just in time for Wildcat Canyon. This metal removal project required heavy machinery, which can only get into Wildcat Canyon and the South Platte River when the river is low in September and October and early enough before the snows come. In late October the Forest Service's contractor pulled out 250 posts and spooled over 5,000 feet of cable that are now stockpiled for later reuse. He also removed several dozen metal signs in the riparian area.

This is just the first step in protecting the Wildcat Canyon watershed and wildlife. We will be forming a coalition specific to protecting Wildcat Canyon and we look forward to a continued partnership with the SPRD in 2023 and beyond. ☺

USFS Decommissioned Route 233 post and cable closure at Farnum Roadless area.
Photo: USFS Jeremy Schoonover



Camp Hale Joins Colorado's Newest National Monument

Continued from page 6

In 1965, Camp Hale was decommissioned, and the site was ceded by the US Army to the US Forest Service. A monument to Camp Hale's soldiers is present at the site; however none of the central camp's WWII era buildings exist today, with only foundations and ruins remaining. It has not yet been determined what actions will be taken on the National Monument site to preserve the remains of Camp Hale, as well as to restore, protect and conserve the fragile alpine environment there.

An amazing legacy of Camp Hale, in addition to the heroic battles fought by its soldiers, is that returning veterans of the 10th Mountain Division went on to found much of the snow sports industry and many of the most famous ski areas in the United States. Their love of Colorado's backcountry and skiing extended well beyond their military careers and led many Americans to seek out opportunities for winter outdoor recreation.

For anyone wishing to learn more about the Colorado's mountain soldiers and Camp Hale, the Colorado Snowsports museum in Vail is an excellent resource, with displays and historic artifacts from Camp Hale. The Denver Public Library and Metro State University also house significant 10th Mountain Division and Camp Hale collections. ☞

Defending Roadless Areas

Continued from page 7

The Mosquito Range Complex and its Chicago Ridge segment present views of the WCCP's contents, to some are shared here:

Complex overall: Detailed descriptions of the landscapes, wildlife, ecological values, one designated Wilderness and seven roadless areas, historical and cultural features.

There are individual applications of WC's nine land management recommendations (themes), such as: Natural Processes Dominate—Wilderness; Natural Landscapes with Limited Management—Quiet Use Areas and Biological Connectivity Areas; Active Management—Wildlife Habitat.

"Chicago Ridge, at about 12,600 feet elevation, spans the Continental Divide along the boundary of the P-SI and White River NFs... including 12,867 foot Buckeye Peak and 12,126 Mount Zion."

"The Inventoried Roadless Area... encompasses 11,600 acres."

"Chicago Ridge is a popular area for snowcat skiing; however, most of the skiing occurs in the White River NF portion."

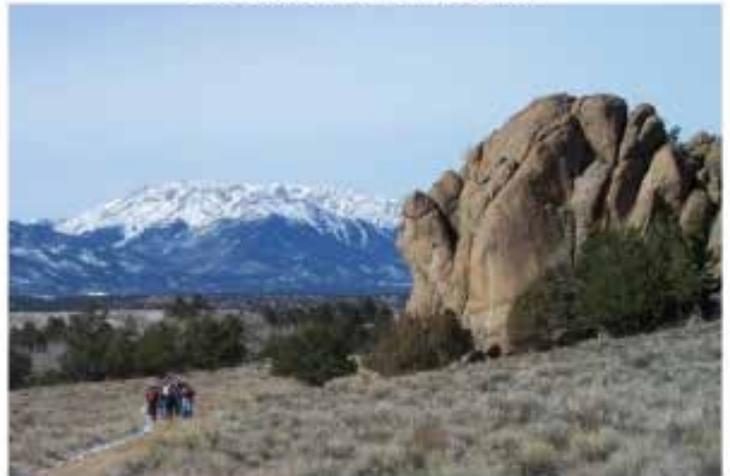
"The entire area is summer range for elk and deer. Elk calve in the western half of the roadless area..."

"a high priority lynx linkage Connecting Chicago Ridge to Holy Cross Wilderness and to the north..."

In 2006 the FS prepared to revise its periodic land and resource management plan. Now it's 2022. The FS Plan Revision might begin in 2023. Maybe. So WC, the WCCP and sister environmental groups are still guarding the wildlands of central Colorado with no intent to quit. ☞

Wild Connections: Conservation Plan for the Pike & San Isabel National Forests

WILD CONNECTIONS CONSERVATION PLAN



*For Protecting Biological Diversity and Ecosystem Health
in the Pike and San Isabel National Forests*



Submitted as an option for the
Pike and San Isabel National Forests Plan Revision
June 2006

Authored by
The Upper Arkansas and South Platte Project

June, 2006



Your Generosity Fuels the Restoration Ramp-up

As you read this issue of Landscapes, you will notice that the time is ripe to ramp up restoration efforts in central Colorado. We are deeply grateful to the donors and volunteers who are helping to connect wild areas for the benefit of biodiversity, wildlife, and future generations of Colorado citizens. How do **you** want to make your dollars count?

- Are you passionate about effectively fighting climate change locally?
- Your gift of \$100 provides a data logger to gather information on climate refugia.
- Support GIS professionals who create maps of refugia on our favorite wild spaces.
- Promote research and science-based tactics to understand our changing climate.

Are you taking the long-term view for protecting wildlands in Central Colorado?

- Set the stage for hiring additional staff in 2023 by becoming a Keep it Wild Partner!
- When there is \$60,000 in the bank, we can hire a new employee.
- Join the ranks of extraordinary donors who support expanded staffing.
- We are over halfway to the goal – your gift makes a long-term impact.

Do you want hands-on action to protect wildlife habitat and restore degraded wildlands?

- Help defray costs for the recent closure at Farnum Peak route 233.
- Build the coffers for restorations which are now possible under the new Pike-San Isabel Travel Management Plan.
- Support long-term projects to protect Wildcat Canyon and the South Platte watershed.
- Wild Connections celebrates this season of giving with thanksgiving for our donors and volunteers!

Convenient ways that YOU can make a difference with Wild Connections

Do you want to provide general support or join the Keep It Wild Partners?	Do you want to participate in philanthropy for the Pikes Peak region and get rewarded?	Do you want to join the largest statewide giving campaign?
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Wildcat hike.
Photo: Curt Nimz