

LANDSCAPES



Wild Connections

FROM THE MOUNTAINS TO THE PRAIRIES

DECEMBER 2023



Reconnecting Wild Nature

Looking up Badger Creek drainage towards rolling hills.
Photo: Kate Spinelli

Connections Across the Arkansas Canyonlands

BLM's proposed Eastern Colorado Resource Management Plan (ECRMP)

by John Sztukowi

I began working for Wild Connections in 2013 to help identify intact Bureau of Land Management lands in anticipation of BLM's Resource Management Plan (RMP) revision for their Royal Gorge Field Office (RGFO). BLM's RGFO manages 658,200 acres (and over 3.3 million subsurface acres) in central and eastern Colorado, however the majority of the lands, and wilderness quality lands, are in the Arkansas River region.

ECRMP How we got here

In 2012, the BLM developed Lands with Wilderness Characteristics (LWC) as a new management tool for their management plans. LWC appeared to provide the highest management protections that BLM offered at the local level, and so Wild Connections got to work from 2013-2015 identifying these lands in our region. We found nearly 250,000 acres of LWC and submitted our findings to the BLM in 2015. It turned out the BLM had only identified 77,000 acres as LWC, but through the planning process, and verifying Wild Connections reports, the BLM increased their LWC inventory to over 194,000 acres!

ECRMP planning

This planning process, known as the Eastern Colorado Resource Management Plan (ECRMP) revision, officially began in 2015. An RMP, much like a master plan, describes broad multiple-use guidance for managing lands and federal mineral estates (such as oil or coal) administered by the BLM for the foreseeable future. It will manage wildlife, water, cultural resources, recreation



Hikers explore the wilderness characteristics in McIntyre Wilderness Study Area.
Photo: Curt Nimz

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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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Going outdoors
President's Message

by Jim Lockhart

The theme of this issue of Landscapes is “Reconnecting Wild Nature.” We go to the outdoors in large part to make those connections: in relaxing, challenging, enlightening, and sometimes surprisingly unexpected ways. As the COVID epidemic wanes, we at Wild Connections have found and been able to share new opportunities to do this. In the past twelve months

- We led numerous hikes to various wild areas, including Wildcat Canyon, Kenosha Pass, Oil Well Flats, Pikes Peak/Raspberry Mountain, and Grape Creek/Ecology Park.
- We restored an abandoned road spur in the Farnum Roadless Area near Tarryall Reservoir and identified opportunities for further restoration work in the area.
- We visited several of our past restoration projects to determine how well closures and restoration work and have determined that, on the whole, they are holding up well.

• Our Conservation Director John Sztukowski continued to lead the ECRMP Conservation Coalition, a group of environmental organizations, and saw the culmination of nearly a decade of effort with the release of the Bureau of Land Management’s Eastern Colorado Resource Management Plan: a blueprint to manage the vast mosaic of canyonlands, grasslands and mountains in southern, central, and eastern Colorado.

All in all, it has been a very productive year.

We also brought our Keep It Wild Campaign to a successful conclusion. This campaign, aimed at raising \$60,000 in donations earmarked to hire additional staff, will enable us to continue as an effective organization well into the future. Perhaps nothing else shows the importance you attach to our work as the gratifying response to this campaign. Many thanks to all of you who have contributed toward Keep It Wild, as well as to those of you who have donated generously toward our general fund.

What will 2024 bring? We can see some major opportunities to support and influence agency actions aimed at protecting wildlands in our region. Pike-San Isabel National Forest is completing the process of identifying areas suitable for “dispersed” roadside camping, and for the closure of other areas; and likewise for the designation of appropriate target-shooting areas, and the closure of the rest of the Forest to this use. Both these actions are expected to reach a final decision in 2024. As noted above, the BLM will continue to implement its new Resource Management Plan. We will continue our restoration work – in Farnum and other areas. We will also continue to give you the opportunity to visit our wild areas, including some lesser-known but equally beautiful and important parts of our landscape. In short, we see many ways in which we can help you to reconnect with wild nature and in which you can help to maintain nature’s own wild connections.

As we complete our 28th year as an organization, we look forward to the challenges and opportunities that, with your help, 2024 will bring us. ☺



Jim Lockhart



*Oil Well Flats trails lead to views across these BLM lands.
 Photo: Wild Connections*

Ideal Habitat and Cool Refugia in Browns Canyon

Browns Canyon NM climate resiliency hike

By John Sztukowski

On Saturday, November 4, Wild Connections and [Friends of Browns Canyon \(FBOC\)](#) partnered on a climate resiliency educational hike along the historic Austin trail at Stafford and Railroad Gulches, the southern boundary of the 21,589-acres [Browns Canyon National Monument \(BCNM\)](#).

It was wonderful to partner with FOBC. They are the local stewards of BCNM working with the local management agencies and were deeply involved in achieving the monument status in 2015. Additionally, FOBC coordinated with Forest Service's (USFS) Salida Ranger District for this event, securing us approval and access past a USFS administrative gate, which provided for a very special outing for this lucky group.



*Snowy Collegiate Peaks over BCNM hoodoo rock spires.
Photo: David Beaulieu*

Wild Connections is working with [Rocky Mountain Wild](#) on a climate resiliency project to identify climate corridors and refugia in Central Colorado, with the goal of helping us prioritize areas for protection. We chose this hike location because BCNM and the Railroad Gulch area to the south were identified by Rocky Mountain Wild as being one of the “Best” areas for Climate Refugia in [Wild Connections Climate Corridor and Refugia Analysis](#). These are areas that have “cold air pools,” or locations that will remain cooler and wetter in the future. They are expected to harbor a climate environment that will support biodiversity, a healthy natural variety of animal and plant species that will persist as the climate changes and the landscape warms and dries.

We walked around five miles round trip with about 800 feet of elevation gain. We traversed in and out of BCNM, as well as USFS's Aspen Ridge Roadless Area and BLM's Railroad Gulch Area of Critical Environmental Concern, which is also proposed to be managed for its wilderness character in BLM's Eastern Colorado Management Plan revision.

For a route that was once the main way to get to Turret CO, and more recently for recreational use, including illegal motorized use, we did not see many signs of recent activity by people. Based on the scat and tracks we observed, it is still a thoroughfare for deer, elk, black bear and many other area wildlife that live or migrate through the area. BLM notes that Browns Canyon is also the home to bighorn sheep, mountain lion, bobcat, red and gray fox, and coyote, among others.

The incredible and rugged canyons, cliffs, rock spires and hoodoos above the gulches also provide outstanding habitat for birds of prey like American Peregrine Falcons and Golden Eagles. Our hike came within about a mile of the Arkansas River, which provides an excellent food source for a lot of raptors, solidifying this as ideal habitat for birds of prey. This section of the monument is actually closed to human activity every year from March 15 - June 1 for raptor nesting. Additionally, there is a seasonal wildlife closure just above Browns Canyon in the USFS roadless area December 1 - April 15.

The views within and from Browns Canyon are absolutely amazing. We had scenic views of the snowcapped Collegiate Peaks across the valley and local geological features, The Reef and Hecla Tower, within the Monument. At our overlook, we could see a couple hundred feet down into the narrowest parts of Railroad and Stafford Gulches. And we had the pleasure of looping around Hecla Tower and up the narrow, cool gulches, through mature cottonwood stands, and scrambling up sections where necessary. And I mean cool in the sense of temperature: this section of Railroad Gulch was noticeably colder than anywhere else on the hike, including the only places that we observed snow from the week's previous storm and sections that likely never see the winter sun.

On our hike, we also picked up three data loggers that we placed along the hiking route in Stafford and Railroad Gulches six weeks before the hike. The data loggers tracked temperature, relative humidity and other data points at ten-minute intervals at ground level. This data collection was more of an educational exercise, as RMW has already done the geospatial analysis, informed by verified and tested datasets, components and analyses.

Nevertheless, the data that we collected does help illustrate that some sections of this area remain much cooler than others. There is a high amount of variation in temperature and relative humidity, as well as an inverse relationship with temperature and relative humidity. When temps rise during the day, relative humidity decreases and at night when temps decrease, relative humidity rises, sometimes making moisture in the form of dew.

This event was a big success on the ground, and an excellent opportunity to engage with and inform local people. We look forward to planning on next climate resiliency outing in 2024. For more info on Wild Connections Climate Resiliency work, see wildconnections.org/conservation/climate-change. ☺

Connecting Across the Arkansas Canyonlands

Continued from the front page

areas, conservation areas, oil and gas development, road building, and livestock management.

Securing BLM public lands protections like LWC, Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs) and Backcountry Conservation Areas (BCAs), as well as water protections through Wild and Scenic designations, was our goal for this planning effort from the beginning. These conservation designations, with appropriate management, will help safeguard some of our last wild intact public lands and waters that are east of the Continental Divide.

Reconnect BLM wild lands: wild nature would thrive

There are some amazing wild BLM public lands in this region, and even more impressive is the connectivity that they provide to each other and adjacent Forest Service and state managed lands. Just southwest of Colorado Springs and Pikes Peak is BLM's Beaver Creek, then Phantom Canyon, Cooper Mountain, and Red Canyon as you head west through the Gold Belt region towards Cañon City. Continuing west are intact BLM public lands on both sides of the Arkansas River towards Salida and Buena Vista separated by Highway 9 and a handful of county and BLM roads.

The de facto connections across these areas have great potential for low elevation habitat with their at-risk plant and animal species to thrive. BLM lands are historically unprotected in Colorado and throughout the west; providing proper management for them through the ECRMP will go a long way in protecting these open spaces for wildlife, backcountry recreation, and future generations.

Partners submitted nominations

Wild Connections and partners submitted conservation nominations on all of the aforementioned designations, and coordinated with the BLM RGFO and the public throughout the planning process. BLM gave us a sneak peak in 2017 with the plan's preliminary alternatives, which had a wide range of planning alternatives, including a conservation alternative that encompassed a lot of the BLM land and water protections we were seeking,

Changes of administrations and leadership in this country really put this plan through the wringer, having conflicting guidance at times, and with a lot of delays. The draft plan did not come out until 2019, and reflected the Trump administration's energy first policies, which slashed much of our proposed protections in favor of oil and gas development.

Fortunately that plan never came to fruition. This was fortunate for the BLM as well since they are still rectifying similar management planning efforts that were finalized in western Colorado, but immediately challenged by the state and others. Not wanting to go down this same path, the RGFO kept revising and reanalyzing the ECRMP draft revision, until it was finally made public this summer as the proposed ECRMP. It had a 30-day public protest period, and a 60-day governor's review period.



*Looking down on the hoodoos below the Cooper Mountain overlook.
Photo: Kate Spinelli*



Big and small thrive in protected connected wild lands

**Bull Snake in Sand Gulch, Bighorn Sheep in Bighorn Sheep Canyon.
Photos Kate Spinelli**

The Good in the Proposed ECRMP

As expected, BLM selected Alternative D, the human ecoregion alternative, as the preferred alternative when the proposed ECRMP was released this past summer. This was BLM's balanced approach alternative, modified from the 2019 draft plan's Alternative D.

BLM's proposed ECRMP includes significantly more protected areas than earlier drafts, in line with what community members, sportspeople, and conservationists have advocated. Thousands of public comments highlighting the need for conservation and recreation designations were submitted throughout this planning process.

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Connecting Across the Arkansas Canyonlands

Continued from page 4

The proposed plan included nearly 300,000 acres of public lands conservation designations! Here's the breakdown:

- 114,700 acres as Lands with Wilderness Characteristics
- 101,400 acres as Areas of Critical Environmental Concern
- 87,400 acres as Backcountry Conservation Areas
- Five river and stream segments, totaling 60 BLM river miles, were found suitable for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System, consisting of four segments of the Arkansas River along with Eightmile Creek
- 10 areas totaling 71,400 acres of Special and Extensive Recreation Management Areas

The strong management prescriptions that BLM identified for managing the different designations are just as impressive as the conservation designations. While there is some overlap between designations, the overlapping acreage is pretty minimal. Although BLM is proposing to manage just 114,700 of the 194,000 acres that they identified as LWC (still a great amount!), we found that an additional 65,600 acres is proposed to be managed as ACEC, BCA or similar. In sum, these are very big wins for our local BLM public lands, waters and habitat connectivity!

The Not so Good in the Proposed ECRMP

Despite these gains for land protection, the plan missed the mark on reducing greenhouse gas emissions from public lands and improving air quality for communities impacted by oil and gas development.

The proposed plan left the vast majority of BLM public lands open to future oil and gas leasing at a time when the impacts of climate change, like hotter and more frequent heat waves and more severe storms, are dominating headlines on a daily basis, and while the state of Colorado and Front Range communities grapple with efforts to improve significantly out-of-compliance ozone pollution.

ECRMP today

Wild Connections has been providing feedback to the BLM for a long time with regard to climate impacts and air quality issues in this plan and thought they could have done more based on the range of alternatives. We also shared our concerns with the governor's office and Colorado state agencies, who are coordinating with the BLM on this, and anticipate that some of it will be addressed before the plan is finalized.

BLM Colorado has stated on a couple of occasions that they hope to see this plan have a Record of Decision by the end of 2023. We are expecting it soon and will share the final plan updates when they are available.

This has been a very long campaign to protect local BLM public lands and waters through the ECRMP planning process. Thanks to all of you that have made this possible, whether through comments, donations, joining our events, or spreading the message. This would not have been possible without your support! ☺



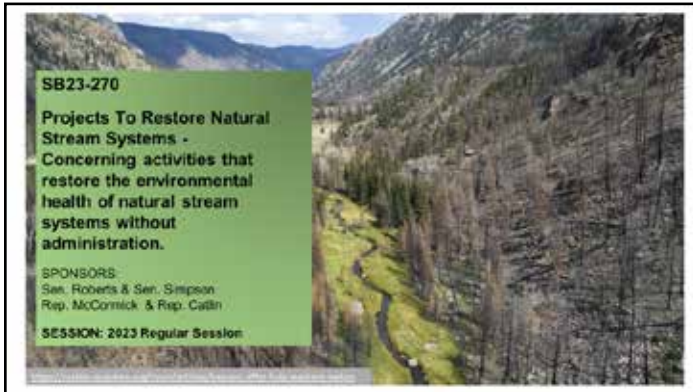
The rolling hills and canyons show the range of ecosystems found on BLM lands.

Photo: Joel Marx

A Watershed Accomplishment

2023 Colorado legislation SB270: Projects to restore natural stream systems

by John Stansfield and Doug Kreiger, Wild Connections members



After two years of House and Senate negotiation ending with a remarkable nonpartisan approval, Governor Jared Polis signed SB270, on June 23, 2023. The document's declaration says: Functioning natural streams are beneficial to all Coloradans because they provide clean water for farms and cities as well as broad-based public safety and ecological services including:

- (1) Forest and watershed health;
- (2) Wildfire mitigation and prevention;
- (3) Flood safety;
- (4) Water quality;
- (5) Recreation;
- (6) Riparian and aquatic habitat.

The bill defines a set of minor stream restoration activities that are not subject to water rights administration. These include stabilizing the banks or substrate of a natural stream with bioengineered or natural materials, installing porous structures in ephemeral or intermittent streams to stop degradation from erosional gullies and headcuts, and installing structures in stream systems to help recover from impacts to water supplies from wildfires and floods.

Challenging people across the state, the declaration presents clear directives to fulfill its tenets. Since June, many groups, businesses and individuals are taking up the charge to restore natural streams and educate others.

A training was held in Manitou Springs on October 27 by Fountain Creek Watershed District, Manitou Pollinators and WC.

The training was presented by the Co-Chairs of the Colorado Healthy Headwaters Working Group <https://rockies.audubon.org/rivers/colorado-healthy-headwaters-working-group>, who not only exhibited a solid background on the science and technical aspects of on-the-ground stream habitat work, but also provided insight into the interpretation and application of SB270 legislation to stream restoration projects.

Thirty attendees from a variety of governmental and environmental entities, including seven from Wild Connections, left the training with effective guidelines on how to plan and communicate successful restoration projects intended to protect and enhance Colorado's headwaters and reduce vulnerability to fire, flood, and drought. ☺

The Beaver Makes a Comeback in the Pike National Forest

Re-connecting critical riparian habitats

by Claude Neumann

Despite the historical disregard and annihilation of beaver populations across the U.S. to satisfy an international fur trade among other reasons, the beaver is making a comeback! Increasingly respected as an essential player, this "keystone species" brings streams and wetlands back into a healthy condition. At various sites on the Pike National Forest and across the country, what are known as Beaver Dam Analogs (BDA) are being constructed to bring beavers back to recover watersheds.

At locations that beavers historically occupied before being trapped or driven out, streamside debris is used to construct dams supported by wood posts driven into the streambed. These structures simulate a beaver dam and entice beavers to return and often continue the building process.

One such project near Kenosha Pass was explored this past summer by a Wild Connections team. A wide valley had become more barren along the stream banks due to substantial channeling. Devoid of beaver dams, water flow speeds likely increased significantly, progressively scouring a deeper and deeper gorge into the ground, leaving the surrounding stream banks high and dry. A series of BDA's constructed will "bumper" the flow to slow it down creating ponds and expanded wetlands. This dramatically increases "mini" habitats for fish, waterfowl, turtles, crayfish, and other aquatic species, especially critical as a warming climate dries the surrounding lands.

☺



One of many Beaver Dam Analogs constructed along this stream in the Pike National Forest expands wetlands and beaver habitat.

Photo: Claude Neumann

Wildcat Canyon Hike Reveals Ongoing Illegal Damage

by Jim Lockhart

An area which has long been of concern to Wild Connections is Wildcat Canyon, a 1,200-foot deep canyon on the South Platte River upstream of Cheesman Reservoir. Motorized routes in the area were closed in 2004 due to damage caused by the 2002 Hayman Fire and have remained closed in order to protect an area relatively spared by the fire and important to the Denver water supply as well as for a valued trout fishery and awe-inspiring scenic values, including unique, massive granite formations along the inner canyon.

Last year's Pike-San Isabel Travel Management Plan confirmed the decommissioning of these old routes on both the east and west sides of the river. This set the stage for future restoration across the area. In 2022 Wild Connections arranged removal of unneeded metal signs, posts, and cable with funding from the Park County Land and Water Trust Fund – an important first step toward implementing the travel management plan and restoring Wildcat Canyon to its outstanding natural state.



*Wheelies at the river's edge.
Photo: Jim Lockhart*

Despite the route closures, many jeep, ATV, and motorcycle users continue to visit the area. Closure signage has been frequently destroyed, vehicle barriers have been bypassed, and some online sources still inaccurately describe these routes as open for motorized use. In October, we made our second visit to the area in 2023, hiking in along Corral Creek, and we saw a continuation of this motorized trespass. We spoke to fishermen who said they hiked down to the river frequently, said that they have always seen vehicles down at the river.

The Forest Service is now completing engineering plans to design effective route closures. Until these closures can be put in place, they are faced with a difficult situation, since they have limited staff available for enforcement and often encounter hostile motorized users. When the time comes to put effective closures in place, Wild Connections plans to help with the restoration of the damage which motorized use has caused to the area. ☹️



*Trespassing
vehicles roil up
the river.
Photo: Claude
Neumann*

Reconnecting Wild Lands from Lost Creek Wilderness to South Park

Restoring healthy habitat to Farnum Peak is the link

By Jean Smith

Today Farnum Peak's intact 19,200-acre swath of forests, cliffs and meadows connect the higher elevation Lost Creek Wilderness to the lower elevations in South Park. But years ago, the Pike-San Isabel National Forest (PSI) said that only two small areas around Farnum Peak and Schoolmarm Mountain were roadless.

FINDING THE REAL ROADLESS

Beginning in 1995, Wild Connections volunteers were out following each motorized track toward the interior of their assigned area. By 2002 more than 100 volunteers and staff had completed boundary work on 100 PSI roadless areas.

Based on our field work, we participated in the 2001-2017 efforts that led to the Colorado Roadless Rule. WC promoted citizen involvement in public meetings and written comments. We submitted our area inventory data, and 107,400 acres was added to the PSI inventory based substantially on our research. The Colorado Roadless Rule was a significant step forward in protecting roadless areas from road construction and commercial activities.



Eroded user created trail.

Photo: Misi Ballard

Recognizing the need to enlarge and connect roadless lands, the Farnum Peak area became a priority for on the ground action. In 2004 and 2011, WC volunteers checked every track leading into the Farnum Peak and Schoolmarm Mountain areas. Some were maintained for motorized use; others were eroding user created tracks. Unhardened stream fords and denuded campsites on these illegal trails were damaging water quality and prime wildlife habitat.

With this new data, we viewed Farnum Peak, Schoolmarm Mountain, Martland Mountain, and Rishaberger Mountain as one single reconnected area. Wild Connections recommended Farnum Peak Roadless Area for future Congressional Wilderness designation in 2006.



Protecting large areas of intact land and connecting them in a network that provides avenues for wildlife movements and responses to climate change is our best chance to keep wild nature viable.

HABITAT RESTORATION

Concerned about the increase of user created motorized routes in the Farnum area, the South Park Ranger District of the PSI partnered with Wild Connections to restore habitat to more natural conditions

Reconnecting Farnum Peak and Schoolmarm Mountain, 2015

Schoolmarm Mountain was separated from Farnum Peak based on an old pack trail. We knew this horse trail was being used illegally for motorized travel. The Ranger District, after a walk-through inventory, agreed that it should be closed. The Forest Service and WC volunteers built berms, made turnarounds at both ends of the pack trail, and installed post and cable fences to block the route.

Monitoring visits have found that the closures are secure and a 2018 photo shows substantial vegetation.

A small trail closed: big lands reconnected.



Large berms and cable fences at the closure, placing logs and brush to reduce erosion, vegetation in 2018.

Photos: Misi Ballard and John Stansfield



Roping off Packer Gulch tracks, 2017

Packer Gulch on the northwest side had illegal tracks from FR 144 running miles into the roadless area. Volunteers and the Forest Service installed post and cable, planted native grasses and laid down brush and logs to block these trails. This reduced fragmentation of the habitat and disturbance to wildlife.



*Preparing Packer Gulch tracks for seeds.
Photo: Deb Overm*

Recovering North Farnum Peak, 2022-2003

In the north, near the Tarryall Reservoir, illegal dispersed camp sites were barren and household garbage widespread. ATVs fanned out on user created tracks into the surrounding forest and southwest to Packer Gulch. The South Park Ranger District mobilized to recover this site.

In 2022 Woodland Park's Focus on the Forest hauled out mountains of trash while the Forest Service completed archeological and historical surveys.

In June 2023, the Ranger District installed posts and cable to block access over the summer to the area from FR 233. They brought in heavy equipment to scarify the hardened roadbed up the hill into the camping area.

Planting native seeds

On a sunny day in October Wild Connections volunteers and Forest Service staff wielded mattocks, rakes, and buckets and lots of energy to plant forty pounds of native grasses designed for the high mountains. The main route was well scarified to scatter and rake in the seeds. Some of the higher tracks required vigorous scraping to loosen the surface. A few days later there was snow which will help the seeds sprout and thrive in the spring.



*Volunteers and staff and their tools, spreading seeds on the scarified roadbed, some areas required hand work with mattocks and rakes before seeding.
Photos: Kristin Skoog*

Reconnected Wild Lands from Lost Creek Wilderness to South Park

We come back, now, to the value of Farnum Peak as a connection between Lost Creek Wilderness and South Park.

- Wildlife, ranging from elk to forest birds and insect pollinators, are no longer disturbed or displaced by human activities.
- Wildlife connectivity and seasonal movements within Farnum Peak and between summer ranges in Lost Creek to winter range in South Park are improved.
- Ponderosa pine, Douglas fir, bristlecone/limber pine, some aspen and lodgepole pine, shrublands and grasslands provide a variety of habitats for mammals, fish, amphibians, birds, and insects.
- Lynx denning and winter habitat is found across the northern two-thirds of the area.
- Several tributaries of Tarryall Creek have their headwaters in the area and there are scattered wetlands.
- Recreation opportunities are redirected to established campgrounds and angling locations in the surrounding public lands.
- Between Highways 285 and 24, with high speed traffic, heavy motorized recreation, and small subdivisions, Farnum and Lost Creek Wilderness are islands of quiet in the larger landscape.
- Farnum Peak is one of several roadless areas surrounding Lost Creek Wilderness that together may be responsive to climate changes, serving as refugia and allowing for wildlife seasonal and permanent movements.

As recreation increases and climate changes affect the PSI, there will be more work. The South Park Ranger District is aware of even more illegal off-road use around Farnum Peak. Perhaps another habitat workday is in the offing. ☺

Harassed By A Hare

Connecting with wildlife

By Jim Lockhart

I have been backpacking in Colorado for almost forty years. When the weather is suitable, I prefer to sleep out in the open, with a tarp and bivy sack or only a tent fly and not the tent body. Sometimes that gets a person a little closer to nature than one might wish: mosquitoes most often, ants or other unidentified crawlies occasionally, but sometimes other animals as well. Once while sleeping out under the stars in the Red Canyon roadless area, I heard a catlike yowling a lot closer to my bedside than I would have liked. One night, while backpacking on the edge of our Collegiate Peaks Wilderness, I heard a rustling inside my sleeping bag cover. It turned out to be a mouse gnawing a hole in my brand-new down bag. A friend once got up in the night to pee and spooked off a wet and indignant porcupine.

Then there was the night when I was genuinely harassed – there is no other word for it – by the wildlife.

I was camped in Lost Creek Wilderness along the Brookside-McCurdy trail and had brought only a tent fly as shelter. Soon after dark, I heard animal noises outside. I could tell by the sound that it was something larger than a mouse. I looked out and saw that it was a hare, presumably a snowshoe hare in his brown summer coat. Nothing to worry about, I told myself. Then as I was trying to fall asleep, I felt the hare duck under the edge of the tent fly and begin rooting around near my head. He ducked back out and when I looked out, I saw that he had my neck gaiter in his mouth. I got out of my tent to chase him off and he dropped it, but no sooner had I gotten back in my sleeping bag than he was back hunting for something else to swipe.

I found my flashlight and tried shining it in his eyes to scare him off, and it didn't. After getting out and chasing him off again, I picked up a stick and used it to poke out under the edge of the tent fly whenever I heard him coming close. It didn't faze him. He kept coming back every few minutes. I was miles from any houses; otherwise, I might have thought that he was an escaped pet rabbit, he seemed so unafraid of humans. This pestering went on most of the night, until about three in the morning. Despite trying not to, I fell asleep.

I woke to find he was sitting on my chest. I chased him off and got my camera out of my backpack, thinking that the flash might scare him off. It didn't. He did finally leave, after I spit in his face, but he might have exited only because it was close to morning and getting light out.

I have no idea why he decided to pick on me. Our human sweat is salty, and that often draws animals to gnaw on our clothing or camping equipment, but they usually do that quietly. Why he should have made such a NYAA-can't-catch-me game of it is beyond me.

But there you have it. Bugs Bunny is not totally a myth. ☺



Hare.

Photo: Jim Lockhart



Connected, Protected, Together!

Wild Connections has a proven record of leadership in protecting and reconnecting wildlands. Right now, your donations are urgently needed to preserve sensitive habitats in the face of a changing climate. We are deeply grateful for our generous supporters and hardworking volunteers. Please do what you can to help Reconnect Wild Nature in Central Colorado! ☺

	<p>Join the team that works together to protect and connect our precious wildlands! Your donation will be used to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide supplies to remediate degraded habitat • Continue research on climate refugia • Forge strong partnerships for conservation • Support expanding staff <p>https://wildconnections.org/httpswildconnections-bloomkindfulcom-2/</p>
	<p>The Give! Campaign runs through December 31. Donate at Give! and get rewarded for your generosity!</p> <p>Give! is a year-end philanthropic initiative in the Pikes Peak Region that specializes in raising awareness of smaller organizations. Many local businesses support Give! by providing a selection of cool gifts for you! The more money you donate, the more rewards you get. Stronger together!</p> <p>https://givepikespeak.org/WILD</p>
	<p>Tuesday, December 5 is Colorado Gives Day Easily the best day to give!</p> <p>Each year, the people of Colorado unite with a shared common purpose: to elevate their community and neighbors by supporting the efforts of nonprofits that make a meaningful change. You can fuel that change by giving early to Wild Connections for December 5th and year-round at the Colorado Gives 365 site:</p> <p>https://www.coloradogives.org/organization/WildConnections/</p>



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*Kenosha Creek Beaver Pond Project.
Photo: Claude Neumann*