

Grand County Wilderness Group



Fall Issue 2019

www.gcwg.org

Letter from the President Jack Reichert

Earlier this week we heard some Elk bugling in valley behind our house.... a sure sign summer is coming to an end!

Overall, we had a very successful summer. Nearly all cabin hosting days were filled. The new signup system developed by Al worked very well and was used by the majority of those who hosted. Thank you to all those that hosted this year, and a big thank you to Monica for coordinating and getting the open dates filled. There were 112 spots filled and 56 members volunteered more than once. If you had a bad experience last year with the outfitter that operated out of Monarch Lake trail head, you will be happy to know the Forest Service (FS) did not renew his permit.

The weekend after the permit season ended (Sept 15) the Forest Service found about 75 overnight backpackers illegally camping the Crater Lake area. Some people thought since permits were no longer needed, they could camp anywhere, not just in the designated camping sites. Others were clueless and others did not care. As a result, the FS gave a lot of lectures and a lot of tickets. As we all know this is a very sensitive area and has been getting overused & abused and needs to be protected. The FS contacted the GCWG and asked if we could have members host the Monarch cabin the following weekend and explain the situation.... fortunately, we were able to support their request. Note, the Indian Peaks Wilderness is the second most visited wilderness in the United States!

The FS is looking into lengthening the permit season to the first of October next year and may ask us to host the Monarch cabin longer. Details will be available at the Spring Membership Meeting.

Other possible changes for next year include: moving one of the parking kiosks closer to the Monarch cabin and having an online overnight permit reservation system. There are other options being considered and I hope to have a FS representative at the fall meeting to give us some insight into the FS planning that may impact us.

Our group supported the USFS Region 2 and 3 Wilderness Ranger Academy June 2-6. This academy was hosted by Ralph Swain the USFS Region Manager. GCWG provided dinner and lunch at the St Louis Creek Campground for about 100 FS attendees. On June 6, Graham Powers represented our group with an outstanding presentation and discussion during a wilderness panel discussion held at the Winter Part Resort (West Portal).

Upcoming Events

Fall Membership Meeting – October 19th

5:30 PM – Snow Mountain Ranch

Christmas Bird Count – December 14

Winter Social – January 25th, 2020

5:30 – Snow Mountain Ranch

Spring Membership Meeting – May 16, 2020

Signup sheets for most activities

AA Barn Picnic - August 9, 2020

Fall Membership Meeting – October 24, 2020

Letter from the President continued

Membership status: We have 75 households (2018 season) with a 133 people. New members since 1/1/2019: Richard Lionberger, Betsy & Gary DeVries, Edd & Kathy Kubik, Cynthia Eberhard, Joe Conway & Dana Kober, Kim Gustafson and Mike & Diane Hawkins. Please introduce yourself and welcome them to the group.

Training videos: We have received a lot of good comments regarding the new videos and we currently do not see a need for any updates. There will be a new video for next year on "Radio Operations" starring Toni Wujek.

Volunteer hours: Our volunteer hours are down significantly from last year! We believe this is due to members not turning in their hours. Please turn in your hours to Toni, this is very important. Our volunteer hours are a major factor in the USFS – Sulphur Ranger District's ability to get grants for summer interns and other projects here in Grand County. Start counting hours when you leave the door till you get back home (i.e. door-to-door). If you do any prep work before leaving the door, as well as cleanup hours after returning home, count those hours. Group activity leaders – it is your responsibility to turn in the hours for your group.

Like us on Facebook!

<https://www.facebook.com/grandcountwilderness>

WEED WARRIOR ASSAULT 2019 – by Beth Collins

A special thanks to the few and the mighty Grand County Wilderness members who volunteered their time to combat the invasive weeds at Monarch. Thanks to Jerry and Edna Anderson, Ann and Richard Klingner, Bambi Statz, Doreen Sumerlin (who joined us as a volunteer), Bob Saint, Jim Magill, Paisley, Judy Smith and Ingrid Anderson. Special thanks to the Forest Service employees who provided supervision, education, and lots of digging and pulling: Greg Hardstock (Supervisor) Isabella Valdez, Chris Sheeran and Pedro Lopez. The bad news is that we did not have enough volunteers to rid invasive weeds from all the areas that we used to cover. There were lots of Ox-eye Daisy rosettes that were difficult to find and dig up. Please consider joining us next year to make Daisy Demolition a greater success.

Mayweed chamomile(Ox-eye Daisy) is a bushy annual that can adapt to various conditions and is native to Europe. The white ray flowers are in bloom from June through September. Mature plants grow from 0.5 to 2 feet tall.



Our President (not that one) at work! *By Doug Smith*

For "my" light trail work day Jack and I improved upon the log corduroy in a large mudhole on the High Lonesome trail not far south of Junco Cabin. The original corduroy was done by Pat and me last summer using smaller log sections that had been squished down into the mud by hikers by this summer. Jack and I used thicker logs on top of the old ones. Chatting with CDT through hikers over the years I have learned that one of the things they most appreciate is not having to take their footwear through mud. Maybe next year we can tackle some of the mudholes on the CDT north of Junco Cabin.



Jack placing a log in the mudhole



Jack testing the mudhole Corduroy

2018 Registration Box Report

Excerpts from report By Stephen Lee

The Grand County Wilderness Group has been monitoring and maintaining registration boxes for trailheads leading to Wilderness Areas for the US Forest Service since the year 2000. There are now a total of 12 registration boxes that are maintained by the GCWG. A volunteer provides registration sheets, retrieves them and tabulates the numbers for that trail. These numbers are given to a Coordinator who puts them together and writes a report for the Forest Service. This report has been identified as being very important in Forest Service planning and funding.

This year there was no data for the Kinney Creek and Lake Evelyn boxes due to persistent wildfires in the area. However, there was a new trailhead box added this year, the North Supply Trail near Grand Lake. Also numbers from St. Louis Creek, Byers Peak, and Vasquez were much reduced because of trailhead closures and smoke in those areas over the summer season. A big THANK YOU to all our registration box volunteers, especially this year under difficult conditions!

Monarch Lake continues its increase of the last several years. And again, not a small increase, but more than 2,000 individual guests for 2018. However, as mentioned above, several trailheads had significantly reduced visitation for 2018 because of two significant wildfires in the County. St. Louis Creek, Vasquez Creek, and Byers have much reduced numbers for 2018 that can be attributed to the wildfires, smoke, and trail closures for part of the summer.

For 2018 the Bowen & Baker sites both showed an increase. Baker shows a fairly substantial increase of 400 people. Both trails have shown fairly steady increases over the last few years.

Junco numbers leveled off this year, after a strong increase in 2017. The Junco registration box is one of the few where we have data for all of the past 19 years. Numbers are definitely up compared to in 2000, but overall numbers have been fairly consistent. Trailhead numbers for the other sites seem to be holding steady as well, with the exception of the decreases at St. Louis Lake and Vasquez probably due to the wildfires. The exception was Devils Thumb which did show an increase of almost 400 hikers for 2018.

Both Monarch Lake & Junco showed a strong increase in overnight visits compared to 2017. Devils Thumb showed a strong increase as well, while Roaring Fork leveled off in comparison to the previous year. Baker also showed a big jump, while Bowen remained about the same. Our new registration box at North Supply surprisingly showed a higher number for backcountry visits compared to day hikes. And as mentioned earlier, the wildfires in the County with their trail closures & smoke resulted in miniscule backcountry numbers for St. Louis Lake, Byers, and Vasquez. And no backcountry reports at all for Lake Evelyn and Kinney Creek.

More information that is easy to pull from the visitor sheets is the number of through-hikers traveling the Continental Divide Trail. Bowen Trailhead recorded 226 hikers on the CDT, while Monarch recorded 92. The registration sheets for Bowen and Monarch Lake now have a slot where CDT hikers can sign in. What is probably most important is that we are picking up higher numbers for CDT hikers, whether they are hiking from the Mexican to Canadian border or just some of the segments. According to the Continental Divide Coalition 87 hikers completed the entire CDT in 2018. The Coalition indicates that at least 150 hikers do some part of the CDT each year (probably a low number according to our statistics).

So what conclusions can we draw from the Registration Box data for 2018? We talked about increased visitation into the Never Summer Wilderness in 2015. In the last 3 years, the numbers have been a bit more up and down. Baker actually showed an increase in overnight visits in 2018, while Bowen was just about the same.

Monarch Lake still has the highest attendance, both day use and overnight. The numbers have been highest at Monarch since 2000 when the first trailhead data was recorded. Over the last 5 years I have been talking about Monarch's easy accessibility and lower elevation, but one of the main factors is the presence of a relatively large lake right at the trailhead. Visitors are always surprised that the lake is "right there". Perfect for fishing from the shores, as well as use of all kinds of watercraft including canoes, kayaks, jon boats, paddleboards, inflatables, etc.

Once again the other trailhead sites seem to be "holding their own". Numbers are relatively steady with no major decreases in attendance numbers. Junco's overall visitation seems to have changed very little over the last 19 years, but note that overnight numbers went down a bit in 2017, but are up again sharply in 2018. Probably the most popular overnight destination out of Junco continues to be Columbine Lake. And for Monarch, the backcountry lakes such as Crater & Gourd, as well as Cascade Falls, require reservations months (or longer) in advance.

Stay tuned.

The complete report is published on the Wilderness Group website (GCWG.ORG). The report includes Tabular representations of the numbers. The numbers give a better sense of how many people are actually recreating in the various Wilderness areas.

Cascade Creek Bridge Project – by Andrew Borek

Cascade Creek is a famous trail. A quick Google search of “Cascade Creek to Crater Lake” turns up literally pages of 5 star website reviews. It’s the #10 most researched trail in the state, and is in the “top 5 most scenic hikes in Colorado.” It’s iconic pinnacle, Lone Eagle Peak, commands attention on popular social media platforms, and only serves to perpetuate its popularity, visitation and ultimately difficulties in protecting this special place. On the other hand, I don’t need to tell the Grand County Wilderness Group about how popular Cascade Creek Trail is; I’m aware you know all too well.

So in 2017 when one of the three spans of the Cascade Creek Bridge at the waterfall failed due to spring snow load; I knew that the time had come for some major structure improvements. Luckily, in 2017, I was able to scrape together a crew of interns and set aside a workweek for some bridge building. However, with the natural lifespan of the original structure showing age, it was only a matter of time until the critical center span would fail. To have a failure of this center span, the one that crosses the roaring waters of Cascade Creek, would be catastrophic for this trail and the access to Crater Lake. Hikers would be forced to ford Cascade at high water levels, there would almost certainly be injuries; the creek is simply too rough to cross for much of June and July.

The planning for this project began in 2018. By campaigning for the project to be ranked as a high priority for the districts’ recreation program, and submitting project proposals to national volunteer organizations; I began the process of securing labor and help for this major accomplishment. So, as the winter snows finally melted, and Cascade Creek began to recede from flood stage, I found myself in July loading up backpacks with tape measures, rock bars and long carriers at the Monarch Lake Trailhead. The week previous, I had used the district’s llamas to deliver over 150 pounds of tools, rebar, spikes, screws, crosscut saws and many more items to the project site. This still left each Forest Service staff and intern with packs individually weighing between 40 – 60 pounds. If you’ve ever encountered a fully burdened trail crew on the way to a project site; you probably wouldn’t forget it. A platoon of young backs burdened with the basics of wilderness living, coupled with tools and crew equipment bristling out of backpacks is a sight to behold. The llamas at the tail of the crew don’t detract from the spectacle either. It’s one becoming rarer and rarer on public lands in the current age.

The rebuild of Cascade Creek would take two weeks. The first was to be an in-house trail crew, a combination of Wilderness, Non-Motorized Trails and Interns from Rocky Mountain Conservation Corps. It’s a rare opportunity to work together. The second would be filled with a volunteer crew from Wilderness Volunteers. A nationwide volunteer program based in Flagstaff, AZ; Wilderness Volunteers recruits volunteers and crew leaders who take part in all manner of projects on public lands. If you’re looking for a stewardship opportunity with varied difficulty levels, I’d highly recommend you look them up at www.wildernessvolunteers.org.



Bridge construction in Wilderness is not easy. But the first step in any project is a clean workplace. Thus right off the bat workers were clearing the old bridge out. First, the rotten and cracked railing was removed. Next, in a concerted team effort, the mostly rotten stringers (the two logs you walk across) needed to be cut out and off of the elevated pylons. Crosscutting rotten logs that are suspended 7’ above rushing water is challenging to say the least. However this too was accomplished in due time; and crews were ready to start assembly. All old material that was being removed contained old rebar, screws and spikes, and volunteers labored constantly in the background to free these stubborn bits of metal, to be brought back to civilization and a metal recycling dumpster.

Soon enough the project area was filled with sounds of construction better identified with a century ago. Crosscut saws sang in large standing spruce and lodgepole trees just waiting to be felled and used as new stringers. Draw knives scraped and peeled stubborn bark to show gleaming new wood. 24” steel rebar was driven in to new pylon members. New railing pieces were painstakingly measured, joints lapped and married to form a new, solid and safe handrail. Finally, getting 16 people arranged around a 22’ flattened spruce log and (slowly) transporting it across Cascade Creek, or through the woods to the site, we were able to assemble a beautiful bridge that will stand for decades. (continued Page 5– Bridge)



There are plenty of ways to be of service. We hope that you became part of GCWG because you care about wild places with wild creatures in Grand County and intend to help preserve them. NOW is the time to make choices for your involvement. All you need to do is set aside the time and sign up. NO ONE WILL CALL, it is up to you to get out there and make a difference. Here is a summary opportunities for your reference:

1. Pay your \$20 dues to GCWG
2. Host one day at Junco Cabin – Monica Sandstrom
3. Host one day at Monarch Cabin – Monica Sandstrom
4. Open up and clean either cabin to start the season
5. Hike a wilderness trail ANY DAY. REPORT your hours via website form.
6. Lead a Light Trail Work hike - Joyce Clair
7. Adopt a registration box and retrieve the reports – Stephen Lee (stephenchris@rkymtnhi.com, [708-990-5967](tel:708-990-5967))
8. Spreadsheet analysis of trail usage from registration boxes.
9. Take digital photos and contribute articles and photos for the newsletter - Holly Whitten (news1@GCWG.org)
10. Help construct signage and update trailhead bulletin boards, including photos for the boards.– Jack Reichert
11. Work on trail maintenance and other projects - Jack Reichert
12. Wear your wilderness tee shirt or sweatshirt every time you hike in the forest and report your hours.
13. Staff the booths at the Art Affair or Fourth of July - Sue Perkins
14. Staff Grand Lake Regatta in August - Bob Saint
15. Uproot noxious weeds wherever we can find them – Beth Collins ([970-726-5423](tel:970-726-5423))
16. Record and report volunteer hours – Toni Wujek
17. Distribute our “business” cards
18. Help Smokey Bear- Chis Lee (, [708-990-5967](tel:708-990-5967))
19. Work on National Public Lands Day or Colorado Public Lands Day
20. Purchase shirts, sweatshirts and hats. (Bambi Statz or Sue Perkins)
21. Adopt an Osprey nest or monitor a bluebird box–USFS ([970-887-4100](tel:970-887-4100)) .
22. Empty monofilament bins, cleaning line, and getting it to FS for recycling.
23. Volunteer at the Forest Service Office.

Contact the Forest Service anytime - USFS ([970-887-4100](tel:970-887-4100)) to check other activities.

Christmas Tree Cutting:

Elk Creek Cutting Area (behind Murdocks) will be open for Christmas tree cutting Dec 1-8. Permits will be available at the Sulphur Ranger District office in Granby starting November 1. As in the past, other “vendors” will sell permits by mid November. For a list of those vendors or to purchase a tree cutting permit online, go to <https://fs.usda.gov/arp> (click on Passes and Permits and then the Forest Products Permits pulldown). The fee is \$20 per tree with a household limit of 5 trees. – Don’t forget to see Chris Lee for Smokey signup!

Special Thanks to Chas McConnell at [McConnell Printing](#) for his help with printing this newsletter.

(Bridge – continued):

To be able to leave a legacy and impact on such an iconic trail in this state is a truly a privilege. This September, while heading back to Monarch from a weekend solo patrolling at Crater Lake, I happened to be taking my lunch in a shaded spot with a view of the Cascade Creek Bridge. As I sat and ate the last of my salami and sharp cheddar a lone hiker came up the trail, she was bent over with exertion and had headphones in her ears. I watched as she arrived at the edge of the crossing, still new with fresh, clean wood; the railing of green spruce gleaming in the sunlight of early fall. She stopped, took out her phone, snapped a photo of the build and as she crossed ran her hand along the rail as one would along the curve of a fancy car; as if to appreciate and take in the experience.

There are many projects that stand out in any backcountry workers’ lifetime, but this is one that will always hold a place in my heart and as a standout in my career. The next time you’re looking for somewhere to go hiking, remember that there’s a beautiful bridge out near a spectacular waterfall, don’t be afraid to go say hello.



Thank You - 2019 Crew

Remember to use the on-line signup for Monarch or Junco cabin hosting. Our participation and coverage was better this year. Let’s work to get this to 100%.

=====One last reminder. Our volunteer hours are a major factor in the USFS – Sulphur Ranger District’s ability to get grants for summer interns and other projects. Therefore, it is extremely important to **turn in your hours to Toni Wujek**. Start counting hours when you leave the door till you get back home (i.e. door-to-door). If you do any prep work before leaving the door, count those hours. The same applies to returning home. Group activity leaders – it is your responsibility to turn in the hours for your group.

Note: Country Ace Hardware in Granby now sells 1,3 & 7 day ANRA passes.

Grand County Wilderness Mission Statement: To Assist the US Forest Service in the preservation, protection, improvement and public understanding of the wilderness areas in Grand County.

Preservation

- Patrol shores for fish line filament and recycling
- Work on a National Public Lands day project
- Adopt an Osprey nest
- Monitor a blue bird box

Improvement

- Adopt a registration box
- Build a bluebird nest
- Eradicate noxious weeds
- Work on a maintenance project

Public Understanding

- Cabin Hosting (Junco and Monarch)
- Hike wilderness trails
- Lead a group hike
- Take digital photos to share
- Staff the booth at the Art Affair
- Wear your tee shirt or hat to bring awareness

Protection

- Update trail bulletin boards
- Construct signage

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2019-20 Membership. Yearly membership renewals are due in October. You can bring your dues, \$20 per household, to the Fall Meeting or send them to the below address. New members, please complete the following form and bring to the meeting or mail to Grand County Wilderness, PO Box 4116, Granby, CO 80446. You can also join on-line at GCWG.org.

Name:

Address:

Email:

Phone:

Interests (Please refer to the activity mentioned in this newsletter and make contact accordingly):

Grand County Wilderness Group
PO Box 4116
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