



Grand County Wilderness Group

Fall Issue 2020

www.gcwg.org

Dear Members

I hope you are all safe and well. I know that we all miss getting together. There is no denying that this past year has been a difficult time. Now, more than ever, our Friends and the Forest need our support.

For our Friends, Forest Service staff, GCWG members and ex-members, we may be able to help some of them who have suffered from the forest fires. We are thinking of reaching out and expressing our concern and, if needed, establishing a fund for members' donations to buy gift cards or specific articles to help replace losses. If you know of anyone who has losses that we can help alleviate, please inform me and the Board will organize support.

For our Forests, The Board has been active in planning future hikes and trail work. First, the Board responded to members requests for hikes without trail work. Joyce Clair will be organizing these informative hikes. Steve Hennings will be organizing the light trail work hikes. Last year, because of Covid, GCWG did not have a Volunteer Agreement with the Forest Service and was unable to do any trail work. Steve contacted Headwaters Trail Alliance (HTA) and GCWG was able to adopt the Vasquez Pass Wilderness Trail through HTA's Adopt a Trail Program. Work-days were planned, but had to be cancelled because of the Williams Fork fire.

Board members have scouted other trails to determine which trails would benefit from light trail work. We are working with the Forest Service on a Volunteer Agreement. We hope that in 2021, GCWG will be able to resume, perhaps in a modified form, its full slate of activities.

Also, we plan to have a ZOOM members meeting in January or February. It will not be as fun as the White Deer Party or the quizzes Bambi organized, but it should be a good summary of what has been going on and plans for the future.

Best Regards,
May the Forest be With You
Beth Collins, President GCWG

Upcoming Events

There are NO MEMBERSHIP DUES for 2021

Fall Membership Meeting – Cancelled for Covid

SMOKEY VOLUNTEERS CANCELLED

Winter Get-Together: Possibly a Sat or Sun in Jan or Feb

Spring Annual Meeting -- Tentative for first two weeks of May.

Spring Camping Trip - late May (See article below)

AA Barn Summer Picnic – Planning for August 2021

SMOKEY CANCELLED: - Letter from Miles Miller

It is with mixed emotions and some personal sadness that I am informing you the Forest Service will not be requesting assistance from the GCWG for staffing the Smokey Station for the Elk Creek Christmas tree cutting area for the holiday season this year.

As you are well aware, we have continuously operated the Christmas tree cutting area since the early nineteen eighties and it has become a proud and rich tradition of the Sulphur Ranger District to provide this unique opportunity to the public during the holidays. However, with much deliberation and assessment of the current Covid-19 situation statewide, the Forest Service does not feel encouraging large gatherings and mass movement of the public is consistent with the governor's current direction and the states need for managing containment of the Covid-19 virus.

Given historical participation in the program, the Forest Service does not feel staging the event at this time would be in the best interest of our either the local community or the greater community from a public health perspective.

Like us on Facebook!

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

Forest Service Volunteers - 2020 – There were no Forest Service volunteers this year because of the Covid-19 pandemic. Let's get started on planning what needs to be accomplished next year.

The Grand County Wilderness Group family extends their sympathy to the families who lost their homes.



Williams Fork: East of Bottle Pass
– Larry Aragon



Williams Fork smoke column – Lauren Demos



East Troublesome: Smoke visible from Holly's window.



East Troublesome Fire Mosaic - Credit: Todd Olson.

WIND, RAIN and FIRE --- OH MY: The multiple natural disasters in our area bring focus on the importance of the work by the members of the Wilderness Group. Fire, Wind and Erosion take their toll. Once we are able to get out of our homes and back into the forest, we have a LOT of work to do.

Our Mission: TO ASSIST THE US FOREST SERVICE IN THE PRESERVATION, PROTECTION, IMPROVEMENT AND PUBLIC UNDERSTANDING OF THE WILDERNESS AREAS IN GRAND COUNTY.

The Williams Fork fire impacted both the Byers Peak and Vasquez Wilderness Areas. East Troublesome raged through portions of Grand County extending from north of Parshall into Rocky Mountain National Park (RMNP). Pictures on the left show some of the beauty and devastation of the fires.

There is a short video showing RMNP on the East Troublesome Fire information page: <https://www.facebook.com/EastTroublesomeFire/posts/121604863069053>. At the end of this video, the Park explains: "For thousands of years, fire has been a natural and necessary part of the Rocky Mountain ecosystem. Most forests here depend on fire, burning down, growing, burning and growing again. Every time a fire comes through, the land is ready for new life to emerge. With more open space, nutrient-rich soil, and sunlight, plants quickly reappear after a fire. The rejuvenating effects of fire help keep Rocky's forests healthy and increase biodiversity, meaning a wide variety of plant and animal species can thrive."

Other Devastation -- Monica Sandstrom:

On October 6, 2020, a few of us hiked the Knight Ridge Trail for about 1.5 miles up and then turned around. Due to the extreme drought and perhaps increased use of popular trails this summer (most likely from Covid) the trails showed visible erosion and human use impact as seen in the photo on the right.

Also, on November 7, 2020, a few of us visited Monarch Lake. Our objective of investigating the steam donkey derailed when we encountered unexpected and packed snow and ice on that side of the loop. The week before Labor Day, the lake contained numerous plastic water bottles and dog poop bags. After Labor Day, the area was inaccessible due to the many blowdowns from the wind event. (see lower right photo)

Clayton Cornwell from the FS emphasized that the FS values our work and looked forward to working with us next year.

Over Labor Day Weekend Grand County experienced a strong wind storm. Maire Sullivan with the Headwaters Trail Alliance stated: "The Monarch Lake Trail, the Idlewild Trial System, Rollins Pass and Corona Pass all got hit hard with places where trees are on the ground and piled 15 feet deep.... Where chain saws are not allowed, it could be several summers before those trails are cleared out."

- 9 News.com (Remember TUTI?)



Erosion on Knight Ridge



Blowdown from the September wind storm at Monarch.

2019 Registration Box Report

The Grand County Wilderness Group monitors and maintains registration boxes for trailheads leading to Wilderness Areas for the US Forest Service since 2000. The GCWG now maintains a total of 12 registration boxes. A volunteer (box keeper) provides registration sheets, retrieves the completed sheets and tabulates the numbers for that trail. The volunteer then submits these numbers to a Coordinator, who puts them together and writes a report for the Forest Service. This report provides important information for Forest Service planning and funding. The Headwaters Trail Alliance also requested copies of our report. A tabular listing of all the data obtained for the total number of visitors at each trailhead registration box is available at <http://www.gcwg.org/> in the Registration Box Info & Forms link.

For the second year in a row, external conditions affected these numbers. In 2018, the persistent summer wildfires in the western part of the county closed most the trailheads in those areas. In 2019, the late start of summer with snow in most of the area until June 23 kept some of the trails inaccessible. Due to a steady increase in previous years, Monarch Lake projections anticipated 30,000 visitors by 2019. Instead, most trailhead counts in 2019 remained lower or unchanged compared to the previous year. Monarch Lake, for example, showed 26,245 for 2019 compared to 27,373 for 2018. St. Louis Lake, on the other hand, more than doubled the number of visitors for 2019 compared to 2018. Byers showed an increase as well. Perhaps a "pent-up" demand for the St. Louis Lake hike explains the spike; that area, along with Vasquez, spent most of the summer closed due to the fires of 2018.

A couple of other notes about trailhead data. Part of the information from the Bowen registration box went missing when the box keeper picked it up during the Summer; therefore, the number for 2019 is almost certainly low compared to previous years. Also, the Coordinator (and his wife) retrieved 2018 as well as 2019 data from both Kinney Creek and Lake Evelyn registration boxes. The 2018 data may be incomplete, but at least they retrieved partial information for that year.

The report, available on <http://www.gcwg.org/> includes a Table showing the number of overnight visitors passing through each trailhead multiplied by the number of nights spent in the Wilderness. These numbers provide a better sense of how many people are actually recreating in the various Wilderness areas.

Once again, most backcountry numbers decreased except for those for St. Louis Lake and Byers Peak. The Byers numbers increased minutely, but St. Louis overnights almost tripled. And as stated earlier, we included overnight data for both Kinney Creek and Lake Evelyn, even though these smaller numbers may not be significant.

Visitor sheets also provide the number of through-hikers traveling the Continental Divide Trail. Bowen Trailhead recorded 217 hikers on the CDT, while Monarch recorded 186. The registration sheets for Bowen and Monarch Lake now have a slot where CDT hikers can sign in. This data shows higher numbers for CDT hikers, whether they are hiking from the Mexican to Canadian border or just some of the segments. Obviously, there is overlap in the numbers recorded at Bowen and Monarch. According to the Continental Divide Coalition, 150 hikers completed the entire CDT in 2019. Only 87 hikers completed the entire Divide system in 2018.

For the last two years, numbers decreased across our Wilderness system due to wildfires and inclement early summer weather. Monarch Lake registered the highest registration box numbers by far, but the increase leveled off recently. This takes some of the pressure off the facilities at Monarch which have been over-used for the last several years. All of our other wilderness areas generally show little change or a slight decrease in visitor numbers.

Additional Note:

Due to the shutdown of the program by the Forest Service, no report will be produced for 2020. However, some of the box holders picked up their sheets and we will see how we can use this data. With twenty years of data from 2000 to 2019, it is important to continue this practice as this useful information assists in planning future outdoor recreation in Grand County. We appreciate our registration box keepers and their excellent contribution of checking their boxes and recording accurate information over the last five years.

2021 Wilderness Group Spring Campout

When Covid cancelled last spring's camping trip, we packed up all our plans and put them away. Well, we've now pulled them back out, and dusted them off. They still look pretty good, with a few changes. Of course, at this time, everything is tentative as no one knows what restrictions may be in place next spring. We would like to start making plans but recognize we should prepare to make adjustments later if necessary.

We continue with the plan to camp at James M Robb State Park, Fruita Section. This is just off I-70 in Fruita, and allows us to explore several beautiful areas nearby, including the Colorado National Monument. We chose the dates of May 17 through May 20, 2021. This is slightly later than usual, but wanted to wait as long as possible to get past any restrictions. We **do not** plan to reserve the group campsite, so each camper will need to reserve her/his own campsite. Tent sites are \$22 per night. Electric sites are \$36 per night. Full hookups are \$41 per night. If it turns out that we need to cancel you will only be charged a \$6.00 cancellation fee up until 14 days prior to arrival. These reservations are made through [Reserveamerica.com](https://www.reserveamerica.com). Reservations can be made six months in advance, so we are already within the booking window. If you are interested in attending, you should make a campsite reservation **soon**, before they fill up.

If you have any questions please contact;

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Chuck Chladek: cchldek@gmail.com

NOTE: This article was held over from the Fall 2019 issue of GCWG Newsletter. Who could have anticipated the dramatic changes our lives have seen since then?! As restrictions are eased in the months to come, I hope the information finds new relevance regarding the value of outdoor play for children of all ages.

WILD CHILD

For the purpose of this article, a “**wild child**” is one who has opportunities to be out in nature and experience the wilderness.

GCWG is a group of likeminded individuals who value being in the great outdoors and are dedicated to preserving and promoting recreational use of public lands. It is easy for us to name benefits of being in the wild for ourselves and, by extension, for children. However, maybe we can better advocate, educate and articulate the pluses of raising “wild children” with the help of some additional information.

In 2005, Richard Louv, author and journalist, coined the term “nature deficit disorder” to describe the fact that children are spending less and less time outdoors. Louv’s award winning book, [Last Child in the Woods](#), describes the individual and societal prices paid when our youth are disconnected from nature. (Statistics from the EPA show adults and children spend 90% of their lives indoors. A University of Michigan study found that on average children get less than 7 minutes of outdoor play each day.) There are many reasons why children are spending less and less time outside, including real and perceived safety risks, busy working parents, kids joined at the hip (more likely at the **thumbs**) to their electronic devices (screen time vs green time), schools having fewer resources for field trips and parents getting the societal message that developing their child’s every skill and aptitude (music, sports, academics) is the hallmark of being a ‘best parent’...that outdoor leisure and recreation may be a waste of precious time.

In his testimony on behalf of the American Academy of Pediatrics, Kenneth Ginsburg, MD, MS Ed, FAAP, presented an overview of the issue he titled, “No Child Left Inside: Reconnecting Kids with the Outdoors”. He stated, “Nature places virtually no bounds on the imagination and engages all the senses. For all children, this setting allows for the full blossoming of creativity, curiosity, and associated developmental growth...The outdoors also presents marvelous opportunities for parents to interact with their children in a way that fosters both the development of the relationship and the child. Play in nature provides children with opportunities for self-directed activity that promotes physical wellbeing. Unlike team sports, individual play in nature allows the child (and parent) to tailor exercise to the child’s interests and ability.” This is not to say team sports do not have value, but that physical activity in the wild has different qualities and unique advantages.

Activities in the great outdoors empower kids and teach them self-reliance. Children, under the watchful eye of parents or other adults, face challenges and take risks (like fording streams by rock stepping) that build confidence through mastery. Being in the wilderness is unlike having the creature comforts of being in indoor, climate-controlled environments with amenities. Children face demands posed by weather, challenging trails/terrain, needing a bathroom, feeling hungry, etc. They develop strength, balance, endurance, planning and problem-solving skills, and resilience from their experiences.

As it does for adults, being in the wild helps rid a child’s mind and body of stress and allows him/her to decompress, in part because a natural environment is less demanding than the frenetic pace of a typical school day. Both educational and psychological research provides strong evidence that outdoor activity enhances a child’s ability to focus attention and retain information, which is why some schools are experimenting with conducting some academic lessons outdoors and giving children time to play before test taking.

There are numerous programs and strategies for encouraging/enabling families to engage in outdoor activities in hopes of reversing the trend toward inactivity and “inside-ness”.

- ❖ Sharing the concern that children are missing out on the benefits of time in the wild, Great Outdoor Colorado (aka GOCO) has created a new mascot “Wilder” for their Generation Wild campaign. Wilder is an 8-foot tall yetti-sheepdog Chimera who wants children to love the outdoors. Wilder visits fairs, festivals, and events throughout Colorado, inspiring families and sparking children’s curiosity about outdoor adventure. Parents can go to www.goco.org to find “100 Things to Do Before You’re 12” (a list of activities in nature) and to youtube.com to see the video: “Wilder: A Tale of Love for the Outdoor.”
- ❖ You may recall reading about a federal program, 4th Grade Annual Pass (GCWG Newsletter Fall 2017) which is ongoing. The purpose of the Every Kid in a Park program through which the pass is obtained is to promote youth and family use of federally managed lands and waters to experience the outdoors. To earn the free pass, starting September 1st of their school year, any fourth grader can go to www.everykidinapark.gov, answer a few questions about outdoor adventures, and print out their pass. The pass gives the student and their family free access to national parks, monuments, forests, recreation areas, wildlife refuges and marine sanctuaries for the entire year of their 4th grade school year.
- ❖ The National Wildlife Federation’s Green Hour program is designed to encourage the major influencers of children’s time (parents, schools, childcare centers, park agencies, camps, grandparents and others) to adopt a goal of an hour per day of time for children to play and learn outdoors. Parents can find tips and resources at www.nwf.org.
- ❖ www.childmind.org offers “Ideas for Getting Your Kids into Nature: How to make being outdoors fun and rewarding for kids inclined to stick to their screens”.
- ❖ www.theguardian.com has “32 tips to get your kids back outdoors,” an article about the launch of Wild Network, a nationwide (UK) campaign to “rewild” children and some fun ideas to get started.
- ❖ www.naeyc.org offers “10 Ideas to Get You and Your [Young] Child Exploring Outdoors”.
- ❖ At www.ahaparenting.com parents can find “How Nature Makes Kids Calmer, Healthier, Smarter”
- ❖ At www.cpw.state.co.us parents can subscribe to Colorado Parks and Wildlife’s monthly State Parks e-news for a list of events, festivals and classes for outdoor recreation enthusiasts throughout the state.
- ❖ www.childrenandnature.org has a variety of free materials for parents (and educators) including “Together in Nature: Pathways to a Stronger, Closer Family”.

While the focus of this article has been to look at ways in which a “wild child” enjoys distinct advantages and how to encourage this healthy lifestyle; there is another reason we want the younger generation to be engaged with nature. If they love the outdoors, they are far more likely to become the stewards of the environment as adults. As Kim Dinan, author and adventurer, states, “If we want to protect the land for future generations, we need to get our current generations outside.”

Although the volunteer opportunities were suspended for 2020, we hope to get started again next summer. Here is a summary of opportunities that will hopefully be available in 2021:

1. Pay your \$20 dues to GCWG – - suspended for 2021
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 an informative trail hike - Joyce Clair,
7. Light trail work Steve Hennings: swhennings@hotmail.com
8. Adopt a registration box and retrieve the reports – Stephen Lee (stephenchris@rkytmtnhi.com, [708-990-5967](tel:708-990-5967))
9. Spreadsheet analysis of trail usage from registration boxes
10. Take digital photos and contribute articles and photos for the newsletter - Holly Whitten (news1@GCWG.org)
11. Help construct signage and update trailhead bulletin boards, including photos for the boards – Jack Reichert
12. Work on trail maintenance and other projects - Jack Reichert
13. Wear your wilderness tee shirt or sweatshirt every time you hike in the forest and report your hours
14. Staff the booths at the Art Affair or Fourth of July – Ingrid Anderson
15. Staff Grand Lake Regatta in August - Bob Saint
16. Uproot noxious weeds– Beth Collins ([970-726-5423](tel:970-726-5423))
17. Record and report volunteer hours – Toni Wujek
18. Distribute our “business” cards
19. Help Smokey Bear- Chis Lee (, [708-990-5967](tel:708-990-5967))
20. Work on National Public Lands Day or Colorado Public Lands Day
21. Purchase shirts, sweatshirts and hats (Bambi Statz or Sue Perkins)
22. Adopt an Osprey nest or monitor a bluebird box–USFS
23. Empty monofilament bins, cleaning line, and getting it to FS for recycling
24. Volunteer at the Forest Service Office

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

S.1695 - Human-Powered Travel in Wilderness Areas Act (ie Mountain Bikes in the Wilderness):

Senator Mike Lee (R-Utah) will introduce S. 1695 in Senate Subcommittee on November 18th. This bill requires the Department of Agriculture and the Department of the Interior to authorize their respective local offices to determine all permissible forms of nonmotorized travel over routes within wilderness areas. Local offices must seek to accommodate all forms of nonmotorized travel to the maximum extent practicable. If a local office fails to make such a determination about a route within two years after this bill's enactment, then any form of nonmotorized travel shall be allowable on that route.

Also, research S. 4215, the Bonneville Shoreline Trail Advancement Act. **Urge your senators to oppose all attempts to amend and weaken the Wilderness Act.**

Devil's Thumb Land Swap – by Gary Piper

Bob Fanch is developing a proposal to exchange between 1,536 and 2,261 acres of Devils Thumb Ranch for 534 acres of USFS land. The exchange would follow the Forest Service multi-phased land exchange program. This is a very extensive program requiring environmental studies, public notices and hearings as well as a land value assessment. The land must be of equal value. This is why the proposal has a range from 1,536 to 2,261 acres for 534 acres. A part of this land would be east of Idlewild Campground and the Fraser River Trail.

The Devil's Thumb Land to be swapped is between Waterboard Road and the south part of Indian Peaks Wilderness area. They share a common boundary. The land that Grand County Ranches would exchange is 534 acres located between private property owned by Rendezvous Development, Lakota Development and ROAM Development. It appears they propose to maintain a buffer zone between the river/campground and the development to ensure both are maintained as is.

There are different perspectives of land swaps. Having this land transferred to public land would have a positive impact on the wilderness area by providing a buffer zone of public land between private and wilderness lands. However, developers are constantly looking for opportunities to build. When urban areas bump up against public lands there is a desire to acquire public land for development. The USFS land swap program appears to be set up to facilitate this.

I ask that all members of the wilderness group follow this as it goes through the process and offer comments during the request for public comments period. Our board members have different views on this and chosen not to comment as an organization.

I want to thank Bob Fanch for providing info on the proposal to the GCWG as it is being developed. I appreciate his interest in our and other groups opinion as he plans for this project and its potential impact on our community.

Additional info on land exchanges:

https://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/fs_bdev3_034082.pdf

This is a short Powerpoint on the process from USFS <https://www.sierraclub.org/policy/public-land->

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

Grand County Wilderness Group 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

GCWG Contact Info:

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2020-21 Membership. Yearly membership renewals are normally due in October. Dues are normally \$20 per household, due at the Fall Meeting. There are no dues due for 2021. New members, please complete the following form and mail to Grand County Wilderness, PO Box 4116, Granby, CO 80446. You can also join on-line at www.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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