



Grand County Wilderness Group

Spring/Summer Issue 2021

Dear GCWG Members:

Avid supporters of Public Forest Service Lands and the WILDERNESS:

Summer is finally here. It has been an interesting year. The Pandemic closed many of our opportunities to be active stewards of our lands in Grand County. Last summer we were not able to do any of our volunteer projects. This summer, we are able to resume our activities.

However, this summer there is a big change in our volunteer structure, but no change in our volunteer ethic and mission. In the past years, we have worked pursuant to a Volunteer Service Agreement directly with the Forest Service. This year because the Sulphur Ranger District lost valuable staff, (including experienced, dedicated Wilderness Ranger, Andy Borek) and the increased workload the Forest Service is now facing to mitigate the damages caused by the horrendous fires, the Sulphur Ranger District does not have the staffing to directly supervise our activities. Instead, Grand County Wilderness Group will be volunteering under the umbrella of the Headwaters Trail Alliance (HTA). Collaboration between GCWG and HTA will be mutually beneficial. HTA staff have been very complimentary about the great job that Grand County Wilderness Group does for the Forest Service and our special work in the Wilderness. Members who have been working with HTA or have seen the results of their labors in clearing trails have been very complimentary about the good work that HTA is doing.

Last Fall, strong winds caused major tree blow-downs that made many hiking trails, including Wilderness trails, impassable. HTA staff and volunteers helped clear hundreds and hundreds of trees that were blocking Monarch Loop, Cascade Creek, Columbine, Strawberry Bench, Jim Creek, Knights Ridge, Vasquez and the High Lonesome trails. They have also almost finished clearing Devil's Thumb Trail. Our hiking trail system has benefited by the "muscle" HTA has applied to these trails.

GCWG members can help by hiking trails and providing trail assessments to HTA and working on our adopted trails: Columbine Lake and Vasquez Pass. When we staff the Junco and Monarch cabins, we can talk to people about their hike/camping experiences and forward trail condition information to HTA. The link for reporting trail maintenance or problems is <https://headwaterstrails.org/trail-volunteer-forms>.

Upcoming Events

Spring Annual Meeting – Saturday June 5th, 2021

Spring Camping Trip - late May (See article below)

AA Barn Summer Picnic – August 15, 2021

Fall Members Meeting – October? Keep an eye on the GCWG.org page

SMOKEY VOLUNTEERS

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

Although our volunteer structure has changed, our mission to aid the Forest Service and our special dedication to the Wilderness remains unchanged. Many dedicated volunteers have already signed up for staffing Monarch and Junco cabins on the weekends. Many more volunteers are still needed! Cabin hosting will be even more rewarding this summer because we will not be handling ANRA parking passes or back country camping permits. Instead, we can concentrate on meeting, greeting visitors and on imparting useful information about our trails and the Leave No Trace practices and Recreating Responsibly. If anyone wants to host at Monarch or Junco, but would like to volunteer with another member, please call Monica Sandstrom 330-671-7541 (not 303, but 330 is the correct area code) and she will try to make arrangements.

Volunteers are also needed to be Hike Leaders. On Thursday, July 22nd, Joyce Clair will lead a hike to Columbine Lake which is one of her favorite places. If you would like to lead a hike, call Joyce Clair at 970-531-7083.

Whenever you are hiking in the National Forest you can be a Trail Ambassador by wearing your Grand County Wilderness gear and sharing your forest knowledge to help other hikers and our forests. What a great way to help!

Wishing you a happy, healthy summer!
Beth Collins

Hiking Western Colorado's Best Kept Secret

Colorado National Monument, a majestic landscape of deep red-rock canyons on the Western Slope, offered an ambitious bunch of GCWG hikers the chance to stretch our legs and rekindle friendships during the May trip to Fruita.

Sixteen sure-footed hikers trekked up the trails of Wedding Canyon and returned down Monument Canyon. This breath-taking 5-mile loop weaves in and out of shadows beneath 500-foot-high walls of sandstone. We gazed upon more than one billion years of Earth's geological history.

Often called "Colorado's best kept secret," this National Monument elicited "wows" from awestruck hikers in between gulps from water bottles. We photographed blooming flowers: watermelon-shaded prickly pear cactus, fiery red Indian paintbrush, golden prince's plume, and desert 4-o'clocks with magenta-pink petals.

We lunched at the foot of a towering pinnacle called Independence Monument, viewed petroglyphs created six centuries ago by Ute artists.

Golden eagles, bighorn sheep, a few elk, rattlesnakes and an occasional brown bear call CNM home. None were evident to us on this late spring day, however. The most abundant wildlife are lizards which scurried about in search of insects.

Nine lizard species inhabit the park. The most photogenic -- the collared lizard -- has an aquamarine torso, black rings around its neck and a yellow head resembling that of a tyrannosaurus rex. Just before the trail's end, one of these iconic critters appeared on a nearby boulder, a dashing memory of our morning adventure.

The hike was led by Eric Sandstrom, a former National Park ranger and GCWG member.



Hikers took a lunch break at the foot of Independence Monument.



Eric Sandstrom led the hike



Ute artists depicted themselves and wildlife in petroglyphs from the 17th Century;



Collared lizard posed for photos along the trail in Colorado National Monument;

Trail Work Update by Steve Hennings

A GCWG trail work sub-committee was formed last year. Their first step was to gain board approval for adopting the 4.4 mile Vasquez Pass Trail. This is a scenic, lightly-traveled trail running through the Vasquez Peak Wilderness area to the top of Jones Pass. It is just west of the ski resort. It is located 3 miles past a locked gate on a forest service road, but we can gain access on work days to drive directly to the trailhead.

This is the second trail adopted by GCWG, joining the Columbine Lake Trail. Both adoptions are through Headwaters Trail Alliance and we now work through them, rather than the Forest Service, to coordinate formal trail work activities. This was advocated by the Forest Service to minimize their time devoted to volunteer organizations while they focus on other issues. So far, we have found HTA staff to be extremely helpful and accessible. In fact, they provided a 3-man crew to help complete our first work day on the Vasquez Pass Trail on June 25th.

Anyone completing trail work or a trail assessment hike is encouraged to complete the online HTA Trail Maintenance Form. This form is not simply intended to report hours, but is designed to collect information that helps GCWG and the HTA crew identify and prioritize trail work projects. Be sure to select the option that indicates you are completing the form on behalf of GCWG.

The decision to adopt Vasquez Pass trail followed several scouting trips by GCWG members who found a variety of light-duty projects needed to be completed. There is no adoption fee as long as the group completes a total of 8 hours of trail or trail assessment work each year. The first half-mile of the trail is outside of wilderness and required a major tree-clearing effort, completed by HTA in mid-June. That same crew helped 4 of us from GCWG clear half the trail of over forty mid-sized trees and dozens of saplings and branches. The plan is to return in late August to clear the switchbacks leading to the Continental Divide Trail.

Some informal work days were also completed on the Columbine Lake Trail to clear the first 2.3 miles of trail past Junco Cabin. There are several sections of trail beyond that point that need attention from a much larger work crew, and the Forest Service has plans to provide that workforce in the coming weeks. In the meanwhile, GCWG members helped flag a temporary trail in mid-June to help guide hikers to the lake.

In July, we will also clear the last few remaining trees from the Monarch Lake loop.

Please contact Steve Hennings, at swhennings@hotmail.com, if you would like to help with light trail work projects or if you have suggestions for where such work or trail assessment hikes should be completed.

Downed Vasquez Pass
Trailhead sign on CR7



Scouting the Trail



Clearing the Vasquez Pass Trail
June 25



2021 volunteering is starting a bit slow, but opportunities are available throughout the summer and fall. Depending on what your interests are, contact correct person listed below:

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 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.

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

ANRA Passes:

We will no longer be selling ANRA passes or backcountry permits when we are cabin hosting. The ANRA passes will only be available at the office or the Kiosks. The backcountry permits will have to be purchased through recreation.gov.

Land Swap Update:

Grand County Ranches, LLC withdrew the land exchange proposal, therefore the Forest Service terminated the Feasibility Analysis process and discontinued processing the

June 6th Meeting Minutes:

The Spring Meeting/Picnic was held at the Pavilion near the Lions Fishing Ponds in Fraser.

Treasurer’s Report: Balance: \$5435.31

Current membership is 68 households and 120 individuals.

At the members meeting, the following members were voted unanimously to positions on the GCWG Board:

Toni Wujek (2nd term), Ingrid Anderson (2nd term) and Richard Sprague (1st term).

- Monica will continue to do the Cabin hosting sign ups.
- Dick agreed to manage Monarch Cabin.
- We still do not have anyone to manage Junco Cabin.
- Joyce Clair will organize hikes.
- Roxanne, along with Carolyn Sunderlund will organize the Double A barn picnic.
- Steve Hennings will organize the wilderness trail maintenance projects.
- Ingrid Anderson will be in charge of GCWG booth at the Art Affair.
- Stephen Lee has agreed to manage the registration box volunteers.
- Beth will supervise monofilament pickup.
- Monica Sandstrom agreed to be Vice President.
- Jack Reichert reported that he is having lots of trouble getting Snow Mountain ranch to host our Membership meetings as they have done in the past.

Like us on Facebook:

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

How to report your volunteer hours:

For individual activities, please maintain a log of your hours. You can download the Individual Volunteer Hours Reporting form from the GCWG.org web page.

At the end of each Quarter email the completed form to Toni Wujek atvolhourscoor@gcwg.org.

WE MISS YOU ANDY:



Andrew Borek
Wilderness Program Coordinator
Volunteer Coordinator



Dear GCWG:

Over the past six years I have enjoyed working with all of you each season. Attending your member meetings, keeping you informed on issues and trends and working with you at the cabins has always been fun for me.

However, I have been offered and have accepted a promotion opportunity on the Stanislaus National Forest in Pinecrest California just north of Yosemite National Park. This is a big career move for me, and although I won't be rambling to Crater Lake as much, I'll always keep Grand County in my heart. I do not know what the Sulphur Ranger District has in store for the Wilderness Program here, as funding has been already curtailed for the 2021 season, leaving the program unfunded for the third year in a row. This is a bleak situation for the district and the wilderness that we all love so much. Only time will tell if Clayton (who will now be your main contact) will be able to get a few interns or rangers together for next season. Historically it may take as long as 3 years for the district to be able to hire for another permanent position to replace me, if they choose to backfill at all.

I will still be available via email at Andrew.Borek@usda.gov in my new position, and I will always have time to answer questions or serve as a sounding board for anything you need. Thank you for all the memories, and happy trails!

-Andy

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:

President: Beth Collins
president@gcwg.org

Vice-President: Monica Sandstrom
vpres@gcwg.org

Treasurer: Toni Wujek
treas@gcwg.org

Secretary: Joyce Clare
sec@gcwg.org

Newsletter Content: Holly Whitten
news1@gcwg.org

2021-22 Membership. Yearly membership renewals of \$20 per household are due at the Fall Meeting. 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
Granby, CO 80446