This has been a remarkable summer and fall and not in a good way. We are dealing with a pandemic the likes of which have not been seen for a century. We are having a reckoning with centuries of racial injustice. And we are voting to determine the future of our country. All are serious matters for every American.

On a millennial scale, our forests and ecosystems are dealing with changes that may affect us for generations to come. It is a gradual, insidious change many Coloradans are beginning to notice and connect the dots. I am talking about wildfire, forest mortality, and climate change.

As of October 21, over 640,000 acres of Colorado forests have burned this year; by far the most in state history. With but one respite, all summer and fall we were besieged with smoke, oppressive heat, and murky skies. Most of the fires are still burning. It is the same throughout the West. As of this writing, the Cameron Peak, East Troublesome, and Pine Gulch fires have assumed first, second, and third places in largest mega-fires in state history (Hayman is now fourth). The 1960s through the 1990s saw less than 20,000 acres burned per year, while the 2000s and 2010s saw 85,000 and 100,000 acres burned per year, respectively (https://csfs.colostate.edu/media/sites/22/2019/03/FINAL-307714_ForestRpt-2018-www.pdf).
President’s Message
Holding on Through a Hard Year
from Jim Lockhart

The year 2020 has proven to be a difficult one. A deadly coronavirus epidemic, an unprecedented wildfire season, and a continuing onslaught of new threats to our remaining wild areas have combined to make this a year of enormous impacts for you, for us, for Colorado, and its environment. We do not expect these impacts to disappear in 2021, but we do see the coming year as a time of hope and opportunity.

We have continued to work to influence agency planning that will affect our wildlands, including the pending Bureau of Land Management Resource Management Plan for Eastern Colorado and the recently released Travel Management Plan for Pike San Isabel National Forest. We are participating in the state’s Outside 285 process to route trails along the US 285 corridor where they will limit impact to wildlife and avoid sensitive areas. We have fought agency decisions which would impair wild areas proposed for wilderness under the Colorado Wilderness Act by allowing intrusive activities in or near them. Perhaps the most shocking agency action in 2020 was a BLM decision to allow heavy equipment to operate within the Grape Creek Wilderness Study area in order to prospect for gold ore. See the photo below.

In this issue of Landscapes, you will learn more about our history and our recent activities to protect our part of Colorado. You will also learn about the threat of wildfire in a warming world and how climate mapping can identify and to some degree mitigate the impacts of global warming.

Last year at this time, we anticipated that 2020 would be a year to celebrate our 25 years of working to protect the environment through a series of special events and outings. That celebration has had to be much more muted, but as you can read in this newsletter, there is no shortage of things to celebrate.

COVID-19 Note:
We have made every effort to carry on despite the COVID-19 pandemic. We have resumed some outings and restoration work with limited attendance and mandatory safety precautions. We hope to expand these activities in 2021 as conditions warrant. We are working with our cooperating agencies and cosponsoring organizations to keep our outings and events safe, and we will continue to comply with their directives and restrictions.

Heavy equipment in the Grape Creek Wilderness Study area prospecting for gold ore.
Photo: Jim Lockhart
Keeping Wildcat Canyon Wild!
by John Sztukowski

Wildcat Canyon is defined by a 1,200 foot gorge dissected by a seven plus mile stretch of the South Platte River, located above Cheesman Reservoir and just east of Lost Creek Wilderness. As one of the few healthy habitats in the region that was largely spared from the devastating 2002 Hayman Fire, this wild and rugged section of US Forest Service (USFS) public lands is a haven for area wildlife, birds of prey, migrating songbirds, and wild trout.

Unfortunately, this wildlife refuge has seen an increase in illegal off-highway vehicle use on long-closed roads, particularly in 2020, including riding into and across the South Platte River and Tarryall Creek. This is also causing deep erosion to the closed roads, creating new illegal tracks, and damaging the delicate stream beds and fish habitats, not to mention the noise and air pollution that adversely impact the local wildlife and quiet recreation users.

Fortunately, Park County and other local stakeholders have been firm in their support for keeping Wildcat Canyon closed to motorized use, citing many of these values and impacts above.

Wild Connections goal is to work with local partners to keeping Wildcat Canyon wild! Through USFS projects, we hope to restore areas damaged by illegal motorized use. Permanent secure closures will be installed to block such access and signs will be installed to educate the public.

Earlier this year, Wild Connections secured significant funding from the Park County Land and Water Trust Fund to have large outdated signs and partially buried and precarious post and cable to be removed from Wildcat Canyon, with the posts planned for re-use.

Many of our plans for Wildcat, including the metal removal project, were dependent on the decisions made in the USFS Pike-San Isabel (PSI) final Travel Management Plan (TMP), which was just released in November 2020. As indicated, this plan will manage travel on over 2,000 miles of USFS roads and more than 500 miles of motorized trails on the 2.3 million acres of USFS managed public lands in the region, including the contentious closed routes at Wildcat Canyon.

To our relief, the USFS chose Alternative C for the PSI TMP, which will decommission the routes into Wildcat Canyon, keeping them closed to motorized use!

Our Wildcat Canyon Metal Removal Project should take place in 2021, and we look forward to working with our partners and stakeholders on other projects over the next several years that will help permanently protect the wildlands, wildlife, and water quality at Wildcat Canyon.

Illegal motorized use at and across the South Platte River at Wildcat Canyon in May 2020. Photo: John Sztukowski
The Colorado Wilderness Act in Light of the 2020 Election

by John Stansfield

As I write to you with this update on the Colorado Wilderness Act (CWA), election results flow across the TV screen. There is good news that the Joe Biden-Kamala Harris team are piling up overwhelming numbers of votes and enough electors to win the Electoral College. And there is hope that the new administration can reverse the environmental landslide of the past four years with help from newly-elected John Hickenlooper, Colorado’s incoming junior senator.

In the article “Moving Toward Approval” (Landscapes, June, 2020), I noted that the CWA had been included in the Protecting America’s Wilderness Act (PAWA), which was passed by the House, a substantial step. Thanks are due to all of you who expressed your support to Congress for CWA and PAWA.

In July, the House amended PAWA onto the multifaceted National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). The House version of the bill is set for a conference committee after the election with members of the Senate to align the two versions of the NDAA and hopefully keep PAWA attached.

Call to Action: Please call or email Senator Michael Bennet and outgoing Senator Cory Gardner

continued on page 5


Map: Alison Gallensky

Sewemup Mesa, a remote proposed Wilderness in extreme western Colorado.
Photo: Courtesy of Rep. Diana DeGette
All of our large fires have occurred in the 21st century. Remember Spring Creek - 2018, Black Forest - 2013, Waldo Canyon - 2012, Hayman - 2002? By the middle of the century, mega-fires are expected to triple in frequency (https://climate.gov/news-features/event-tracker/colorado-summer-drought-wildfires-and-smoke-2020). At 640,000 acres/year, this could mean 6.4 million acres/decade; 3.1 million acres have already burned since 2001. With 24 million acres in Colorado forests, this burn rate is not sustainable. Our children may well see a transformation of forests that evolved over ten thousand years.

Changing climate is a major factor in forest mortality. As of mid-October, 90% of the state is in severe or greater drought, and 59% in extreme or exceptional drought (see figure). This has been the driest year since 2012 and is on track to be the second driest in recorded history, according to the Colorado Climate Center. A related factor is the rise of bark beetle activity that has killed or impacted over 21% of our forests and contributed to dry fuels. In October, with red flag warnings, most of our state-wide fuels were down to less than 5% moisture. Only heavy snows saved us this year. On October 21, due to wildfire, the Arapaho-Roosevelt National Forest closed access to its lands in five front range counties.

As we celebrate our 25th anniversary, Wild Connections is greatly concerned with protecting our forests and the watersheds, wildlife and the quiet recreation they provide. As the landscape warms and dries, and wildfire and insect pests claim the forests, there are hidden places on the landscape that will stay cooler and wetter, in valleys, canyons, and riparian areas. We have developed a Climate Corridors and Refugia model and maps that identify these places in our geographic area that must be protected to enable our ecosystems to persist or migrate. These refugia may one day serve as seeds to restore ecosystems hanging in the balance. If you’d like to learn more about what Wild Connections is doing to protect our lands for years to come, please see “Wild Connections Climate Planning Indoor Outings” on page 10.

Another important piece of Colorado public lands legislation, Colorado Outdoor Recreation and Economy Act (CORE), was also amended to NDAA. We ask you to take the simple steps of calling or emailing Senator Michael Bennet and outgoing Senator Cory Gardner. Your support for Wilderness is essential and appreciated.

US Senator Michael Bennet
• (303) 455-7600; https://www.bennet.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/contact

US Senator Cory Gardner
• (202) 224-5941; https://www.gardner.senate.gov/
Because of Wild Connections, the Forest Service added over 5,500 acres to the Chipeta Roadless Area, west of Poncha Springs.

Because of Wild Connections, the Bureau of Land Management determined the 5,490-acre Stanley Creek area, northeast of Blanca Peak, has Wilderness Characteristics.

Wild Connections 25-Year Retrospective
In Maps and Photographs
By Alison Gallensky

Pike-San Isabel National Forest—Roadless Inventory 1995-2001
- Wild Connections’ 100+ volunteers mapped and documented Roadless Areas on the Pike-San Isabel National Forest from 1995 to 2001.
- The Forest Service reviewed Wild Connections’ inventory and added 107,400 acres as part of defining the Colorado Roadless Rule.
- Roadless lands protected in the Pike-San Isabel National Forest increased more than 16%.

Bureau of Land Management–Lands with Wilderness Characteristics Inventory 2013-2015
- Wild Connections’ staff and interns mapped and documented Lands with Wilderness Characteristics on the Bureau of Land Management’s Royal Gorge (Eastern Colorado) Field Office from 2013 to 2015.
- The Bureau of Land Management reviewed Wild Connections’ inventory and added 113,000 acres to their inventory as part of the Resource Management Plan revision.
- The Land with Wilderness Characteristics identified in the Royal Gorge Field Office increased by more than 145%.

Restoration Projects 2010-2020
Wild Connections’ restoration projects rehabilitate damaged areas to improve biodiversity in Central Colorado. Our dedicated volunteers have restored wet meadows, restored wildlife movement corridors, and improved the resiliency of our cherished landscapes.

continued on page 8
Wild Connections 25-Year Retrospective
continued from page 7

Restoration Projects 2010-2020

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Green Mountain</td>
<td>2011</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
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<td>Selkirk Basin</td>
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<td>Packer Gulch</td>
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<td>North Tarryall Creek</td>
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<td>9</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Salt Creek</td>
<td>2018</td>
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<tr>
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<td>2019 – 2020</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Sheep Creek</td>
<td>2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>La Salle Restoration</td>
<td>2020</td>
</tr>
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Because of Wild Connections, the Forest Service added the 6,900-acre Antelope Creek Roadless Area.

Photo: Naomi Yoder

Legend:
- Wild Connections Region
- USFS
- State
- City
- BLM
- Other Public
- NPS
- Private
- Wilderness
- Wilderness Study Area

Map showing various wilderness areas and project locations.
Overcoming Trump’s Disastrous Eastern Colorado Resource Management Plan

by John Sztukowski

The Bureau of Land Management’s (BLM’s) Eastern Colorado Resource Management Plan (ECRMP) has been stagnant thus far in 2020, despite the release of the proposed plan being anticipated more or less weekly since the beginning of 2020. The causes for delay have been numerous, including the removal of William Perry Pendley as Acting Director of BLM in September 2020.

The ECRMP officially began in 2015 and will determine how approximately 660,000 acres of BLM managed public land will be managed in south-central Colorado. The last action taken by BLM was in the summer of 2019, when BLM National released a disastrous draft plan, which ignored the local BLM office and public input, and gutted BLM’s balanced alternative of many designations to protect area wildlife and quiet recreation. The Trump administration and their Energy First policy mandated the majority of the planning area be opened to oil and gas and other extractive development, similar to changes in other BLM plans across the West.

Wild Connections is heavily invested in this plan and began preparation for it in 2013 in our efforts to identify and report on BLM Lands with Wilderness Characteristics (LWC) in the region. Our reports were well received by BLM in 2015, leading them to increase their own LWC inventory from 77,000 acres to over 190,000 acres. Additionally, we have been leading a regional coalition of organizations advocating for conservation and recreation protections in this plan.

Our coalition is eagerly awaiting the release of this plan, expecting that the contents of the final plan and timing of the release will be significant. The final plan will have a 30-day public protest period, as well as a 60-day governor’s review period, in which Governor Polis must sign off on the plan.

If we happen to see a similar version to the 2019 draft plan released soon, it should not be signed off on as it will not protect area wildlife, and is incongruent with Colorado’s climate goals. With a new incoming administration, it is incompatible with our incoming National climate goals as well.

This plan should be revisited and revised to better reflect the balanced plan the BLM Royal Gorge Field Office submitted to the BLM in the spring of 2018, before it was stripped of local and cooperator input.

Regardless of what happens, Wild Connections will be working with our partners and members to ensure the best possible outcome of this BLM plan for positive environmental management of our local public wildlands and wildlife. ☑
Cares Act and Donor Advised Funds: Opportunities to Give
by Claude Neumann

"Cares Act" Special Allowance for Charitable Contributions

Deducting charitable contributions on your tax return normally means you have to itemize deductions. However, under a provision from the covid “Cares Act” passed by Congress this year, you are allowed to make up to a $300 charitable contribution to a 501(c) (3) organization such as Wild Connections and still take the standard deduction. This allows you a tax break for that donation.

Charitable Contributions, Donor Advised Funds, and Tax Deductions

Are you one of those who makes substantial charitable donations and have substantial itemized deductions such as a large mortgage but are unable to benefit by deducting these from you taxes due to enactment of the “Tax Cuts & Jobs Act of 2017”? Some people are in this situation because the standard deduction was raised, which means there is much less likelihood you will itemize deductions. The result is you will miss the tax deduction for donations to charities because the total of your deductions is not enough to exceed the standard deduction. By using a Donor Advised Fund (DAF), you are able to “bunch up” charitable contributions you will make for multiple years ahead and deduct them off your taxes by itemizing your deductions in that initial year that you contribute, thus giving you a tax deduction for the full amount. It can be thought of as a charitable savings account - your own giving program.

The DAF contributions you put in are not retrievable once made since the fund is sponsored by the financial institution and set up for donating to charities. During the time the funds are being “held,” they can grow based on the type of investment or money market option you choose. Profits from the growth also are not taxed. The fund can also be used to receive before-tax contributions in other forms such as from stock and real estate. Basic Donor Advised Funds are sponsored by many institutions such as Fidelity and Schwab. Minimum starting contributions are as low as zero, as in Fidelity’s "Charitable Giving Fund." Donations to charities from the fund are executed by the fund manager per your recommendation. Record keeping is easier as the tax deduction you claim is on your contributions to the DAF. Opening a DAF can be done online and choices of various investment options for the funds last until distribution.

Wild Connections will receive funds from a DAF like any donation. If you are interested in contributing to our mission of habitat protection and restoration via a DAF as part of your charitable giving, you might want to look into a fund like this. You can check it out at an institution that you use or talk to a financial advisor.

Wild Connections Climate Planning Indoor Outings: Save the Dates

Thursday, December 17 at noon and Tuesday, January 26 at 6:00 PM

Wild Connections has been working for two years on an ambitious project to plan for the future. It is essential that we advocate for and restore a connected landscape that is resilient in the face of climate change. Our initial geospatial modeling is complete. Join us at either of these sessions to learn about our progress to date and find out how your knowledge of our region can influence our work for years to come. Help Wild Connections protect the rich biodiversity of our region now and for future generations.

For more information and to sign up, visit http://wildconnections.org/events.html
Your Crucial Financial Support in a Year of Pandemic and Wildfire

By Kristin Skoog

Wild Connections has an urgent message to our supporters: our ability to fund our projects and staff has been hampered by the pandemic during most of 2020. We do not normally share our financial concerns, but we are asking for your donation today to support the cause that you care deeply about: defending wildlands and wildlife in central Colorado.

In normal times, we would make in-person contacts with our friends through frequent wildlands hikes and restoration projects where dozens of volunteers work side-by-side. Special events that we planned for you to remember and celebrate our accomplishments over 25 years have turned into slide shows to be viewed online. Although our personal contacts with you have all but disappeared, the damage to our wildlands continues, and the need to protect special places remains.

We are asking for your special gift today to support our work. One important work area is Wildcat Canyon, where motorized interests continue to ignore closures, damage precious habitat, and degrade the water quality in the South Platte River. Your gift will perfectly address our needs:

- Fill a gas tank, so we can travel long distances to visit project areas
- Pay for an hour of staff time working with a coalition of conservation groups
- Fund a month of computer software that keeps our organization running.

Wildcat Canyon is not our only need, not the only place where action is needed to preserve special places in the face of climate change and wildfire. Each page of this Landscapes describes a facet of Wild Connections’ work in Central Colorado.

Wild Connections did not anticipate the extreme impacts of the pandemic when we planned our budget for the year. Nor did we know the Resource Management Plan for Eastern Colorado BLM lands would be delayed for so long. Wild Connections is ready to respond to forces that threaten wild nature, and to influence the government agencies that manage our public lands.

We are confident that we have many supporters just like you who are willing and able to help. Your gift really can make a difference, and we cannot fulfill our mission without you.

Wild Connections sends our sincere thanks and appreciation for your support over 25 years! On behalf of the Board and Staff, we hope you all stay safe and healthy until we can see you in person again.

Send your contributions by December 31.

Online through our secure web sites hosted by Pikes Peak region Give! https://indygive.com/nonprofit/wild-connections/ or Colorado Gives www.coloradogives.org/wildconnections

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<td>$250 - 4 hours of GIS modeling for climate change</td>
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<td>$500 - video production costs for virtual events</td>
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Download a mail form at www.wildconnections.org/makeagift.html
Hikers in Beaver Creek proposed Wilderness, easternmost area of the Colorado Wilderness Act.

Photo: John Stansfield