

Wild Connections *E-News*

March, 2008

In This Issue

Travel Management Rule

Economic Value of Public Lands

What Happened With?

Upcoming Hikes & Events

Quick Links

Get Involved

Support Our Work

Newsletter Archive

About Wild Connections

About CCWC

Join Our List!

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Dear Michael,

Spring is around the corner and so we updated our hikes schedule. We also feature two major issues in which Wild Connections is engaged; both have direct impacts on our local public lands.

I also want to personally welcome our fellow Central Colorado Wilderness Coalition supporters. This *E-News* is a collaborative effort between our organizations. Our goal is to send succinct and factual information spotlighting issues affecting our local public lands - the Pike-San Isabel National Forest and Bureau of Land Management Royal Gorge area.

The Travel Management Rule

The Pike-San Isabel Forest making progress

The Pike-San Isabel Forest is publishing, for the first time, Motor Vehicle Use Maps. By the end of 2008, all but one Ranger District will have these maps available to the public. What does this mean to you, the recreationist? What does this mean for wildlife, ecosystem protection and landscape connectivity?

The publication of these maps will yield in what might appear to be contradictory results: "no change" yet at the same time "significant habitat protection." Confused? Some brief background will allow us to understand what impact these new maps will, and will not, have.

The Four Threats

On Earth Day, 2003, the Chief of the Forest Service outlined the four threats facing the agency. One of the four threats was unmanaged recreation, with specific emphasis on unmanaged motorized recreation. To address this threat, the USFS published the Travel Management Rule (2005), with the goal to clearly define and designate the official motorized road and trail system on Forest Service lands. The official system is then to be published on Motor Vehicle Use Maps.



ATV riding across the South Platte River.

Motor Vehicle Use Maps versus Forest Visitor Maps

You might ask, doesn't the Forest Service have maps? Yes and no. The Forest Service has published general visitor maps for decades; however the new Motor Vehicle Use Maps are the next step in detail, accuracy and enforcement for the agency.

Motor Vehicle Use Maps will show:

- Only the current, legal motorized system,
- Only those routes that have been approved through a prior public

- comment process,
- Routes differentiated by mode of use,
- Greater detail, as there will be one map for each Pike-San Isabel Ranger District, rather than the visitor maps which are general and forest-wide in scale.

Defining the current system

These maps can only show the current, official system, meaning only those routes which have been approved through a prior agency environmental impact analysis and public comment process (NEPA). These maps are essentially a visual representation of past decisions. Therefore, routes cannot be added nor closed at this juncture. Therefore, this is an internal agency process to produce the baseline travel map. Full public comment will be invited once these maps are published and the agency enters into travel management planning.

The process sounds simple, but good things are never easy. The agency has been underfunded by Congress for at least a decade, and therefore they are working with outdated technology and database systems. The Pike-San Isabel staff are working hard to surmount this hurdle, but with 2.2 million acres and thousands of miles of routes in the Pike-San Isabel, this is clearly no easy job.

Wild Connections is involved in this process. We are utilizing our GIS route inventory database, the result of hundreds of citizen volunteers who mapped roadless areas, to assist the Forest Service. The Forest Service cannot directly use our primary data, but our data and field experience is a welcome and helpful resource when they come across routes which have incomplete records.

Why this is important

The publication of motor vehicle use maps is a mile-stone for land-protection. Until now, the forest motorized road and trail system had never fully and clearly been identified. This left recreational users to rely on a mish-mash of sometimes conflicting and erroneous maps and information such as gazetteers, unofficial private maps, outdated agency maps, and on-the-ground signs which are sometimes missing. This lack of clear and reliable information has led to the continual motorized use of illegal roads and trails.



A fork in the road, only one is legal. Can you tell which one?

These free maps will clearly define the official travel system. Any route not on this official travel map is closed to motorized travel. While the law of the land has been that only official routes are open to motorized use, these maps will give, for the first time, motorized users a clear answer to what routes are truly open.

Publication timeframe

The South Platte Ranger District has already published their map. The projected timeline for the other Ranger Districts are as follows (subject to change):

- March, 2008 – San Carlos Ranger District
- July, 2008 – Leadville Ranger District

- September, 2008 – Pikes Peak Ranger District
- November, 2008 – Salida Ranger District
- July, 2009 – South Park Ranger District

Once the maps are published, the Pike-San Isabel Forest will then start travel management planning, inviting full and open public comment and suggestions for the addition of new routes or for needed route closures to protect habitat and resources.

To learn about the Four Threats, go to www.fs.fed.us/projects/four-threats/

These maps are free. To view the South Platte map, go to: www.fs.fed.us/r2/psicc/recreation/mvum.shtml

The Economic Value of our Public Lands

A new Wild Connections report coming soon

Have you ever wondered why the Forest Service counts only commodity values such as board feet of timber or the direct fees paid for grazing permits when they analyze the economic impacts of a project?

Why don't they include the value of clean drinking water provided by the South Platte or Arkansas River watersheds which supply every mountain town and urban area from Denver to the New Mexico border and beyond? What about the value of biodiversity when lynx or Preble's meadow jumping mice habitat is protected? What about the benefits to local businesses, rural communities and ranchers gained from recreation, hunting, fishing, grazing, rafting or any other number of human uses of BLM and USFS lands?



11 Mile Reservoir. What is its value for fishing, recreation and drinking water?

When we saw the USFS' economic analysis methodology, we couldn't help but notice that these important benefits of our public lands were not fully being included. We want to fix that. Michael Rogers, our Executive Director, and Rebecca Schild, a current graduate student with particular expertise in this area, are working on a report that will analyze these ecological factors across the two watersheds. It will include both our findings and a description of the methodology utilized for ferreting out this sometimes elusive information. We will share it with the Pike-San Isabel Forest, BLM and others.

If you have or know of primary ecologically oriented economic data which could be useful, we invite you to email Michael@wildconnections.org.

What Happened With?

The Colorado Roadless Rulemaking first round of public comment closed on February 25th. Exact comment statistics are not yet available, but Colorado's citizens clearly spoke in favor of protecting these last, precious, undeveloped lands. The Forest Service is now writing a draft Colorado Roadless Rule. Stay tuned as Colorado citizens will again need to speak up for

preserving our backcountry lands.

The Cooperative Law Enforcement Bill (HB 1069) passed both the State House and Senate, and awaits the Governor's signature. This landmark bill grants state peace officers the authority to enforce federal travel management laws, effectively adding over 150 Law Enforcement Officers to protect our federal public lands. Our hat's off to the bill sponsors, Representative Kathleen Curry and Senator Lois Tochtrop, and to the Colorado Mountain Club, Colorado Division of Wildlife and the Colorado Off-Highway Vehicle Coalition.

For more details on either issue, please visit our issue archives at: www.wildconnections.org/getinvolved/newsalertsarchives.html.

Upcoming Hikes & Events

Come Join Us

Saturday, March 15

Table Mountain Proposed Wilderness Day hike

Second in a series of hikes to Wild Ten areas included in the Colorado Wilderness Act of 2007. Year-round hiking is just one wild benefit found in rough and rocky Table Mountain, on the north slope of the Arkansas River canyon west of Royal Gorge.



Hikers in Table Mountain proposed wilderness.

Sunday, April 20

McIntyre Hills Proposed Wilderness day hike

Third in a series of hikes to Wild Ten areas included in the Colorado Wilderness Act of 2007. Narrow, almost invisible slot canyons twist away from Hwy 50.

Colorado Wilderness Conference - April 4-6, 2008

The bi-annual statewide wilderness conference is intended to engage and educate both novice and experienced wilderness activists.

Sunday, May 18

Grape Creek Proposed Wilderness day hike

Fourth in a series of hikes to Wild Ten areas included in the Colorado Wilderness Act of 2007. Rising through an inviting valley between Grape Creek and Curley Peak is the little-visited West Bear Trail -



Lupines in West Bear Gulch of Grape Creek.

We are currently scheduling additional fun and interactive activities throughout the summer such as a map reading 101 field course, a beginner backpacking overnight trip, a hike exploring the proposed Ring the Peak trail, and other adventures. These will be featured in upcoming editions of *E-News*, so stay tuned and don't forget to check our website at www.wildconnections.org for details.

In Closing:

Thank you for your passion for Colorado's public lands! If you have comments or questions about our new *E-News* or the topics above, please email Michael Rogers, Executive Director at: Michael@WildConnections.org.

Please don't forget to add us to your address book or safe list so you will continue to get critical news about our local public lands. We value your interest, we do not share our email lists, and we will not send fundraising appeals by email - only monthly news features and occasional, time-sensitive alerts.

Sincerely,

Michael Rogers

Executive Director
Wild Connections

UASPP, d.b.a. Wild Connections, is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization. Our mission is to identify, protect and restore lands of the Upper Arkansas and South Platte watersheds to ensure the survival of native species and ecological richness.