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Get Wild: Preserving wilderness for future generations

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Stasia Stockwell

Get Wild



Stasia Stockwell sits at the edge of South American Lake near Silverthorne during a backpacking trip while she was pregnant last year.

Stasia Stockwell/Courtesy photo

Some of my favorite childhood memories include family camping trips in the summertime. We'd pack up the tent and griddle and drive into the mountains to sleep and play in Utah's High Uintas Wilderness. My brother and I would spend our days rolling in the dirt and running around camp, examining ants in the sand and looking for squirrels in the trees. At the end of each trip, while my parents finished packing up, I'd sit in the back of the car, quietly gazing out the window with tears in my eyes. I never wanted to leave.

I still feel that way whenever I'm stuffing my tent and sleeping bag into my pack after nights spent perched near an Alpine lake in the Eagles Nest or Holy Cross Wilderness, though I might not actually cry anymore. Few things have brought me more joy and peace in life than spending time deep in the wilderness. And this summer, I'll have the joy doing what my parents did for me — taking my own son into the backcountry to experience the glorious mountains of Colorado.

I've always been grateful to call Summit County home. But my gratitude swells even more now that I have the opportunity to raise kids here. There aren't many towns situated so closely to mountain wilderness as this. The contentment that comes from time spent in nature may not be as easy to find without the designated wilderness areas that surround us here in the High Country. These are the places where the real world is preserved — where rivers are left undammed and wildlife are free to roam.

This summer, I'll pack my backpack – the larger one – with diapers and bottles and baby clothes, alongside my usual camp gear. It'll be a heavier load, and we'll likely have to pitch our tent closer to the trailhead than we normally do. But I'll be out in our local wilderness areas, showing my son the real world – nature in all her glory.

I want for my son to see moose perched in the meadows and marshes of the Slate Creek drainage. I want him to be stalked by a marmot at Willow Lakes as he slurps down his baby food while sitting in the dirt. I want him to watch cutthroat trout spring from the turquoise waters of Brady Lake. I want to teach him to identify paintbrush and fireweed, and to spot boletes and hawk's wings sprouting up from the soil. He'll nap in the shade of spruce and aspens. I hope that he doesn't get bit by too many mosquitoes, but he'll eventually learn that it's just a part of being outside.

Perhaps one of the biggest ironies of preserving Wilderness is that we're trying to save nature from ourselves. But instead of othering ourselves from the natural world, when we spend time in these areas we're reminded that we are just as much a part of it as the moose and the marmots. Communing with nature in these spaces helps us check our hubris and questions our anthropocentric view of the world. If we fail to protect these spaces for future generations, we risk losing our connection to the natural world altogether.

I hope that my son is able to grow up understanding that there's more to this world than just the human parts. And if he does, it'll be thanks in large part to time spent outside. And while I never want to see him cry, I hope that if he does it's because he's sad to leave our campsite in the wilderness.

"Get Wild" publishes on Fridays in the Summit Daily News. Stasia Stockwell is a Breckenridge local, avid backcountry skier and supporter of Eagle Summit Wilderness Alliance, an all-volunteer nonprofit that helps the U.S. Forest Service protect and preserve the wilderness areas in Eagle and Summit counties. For more information, visit EagleSummitWilderness.org.



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