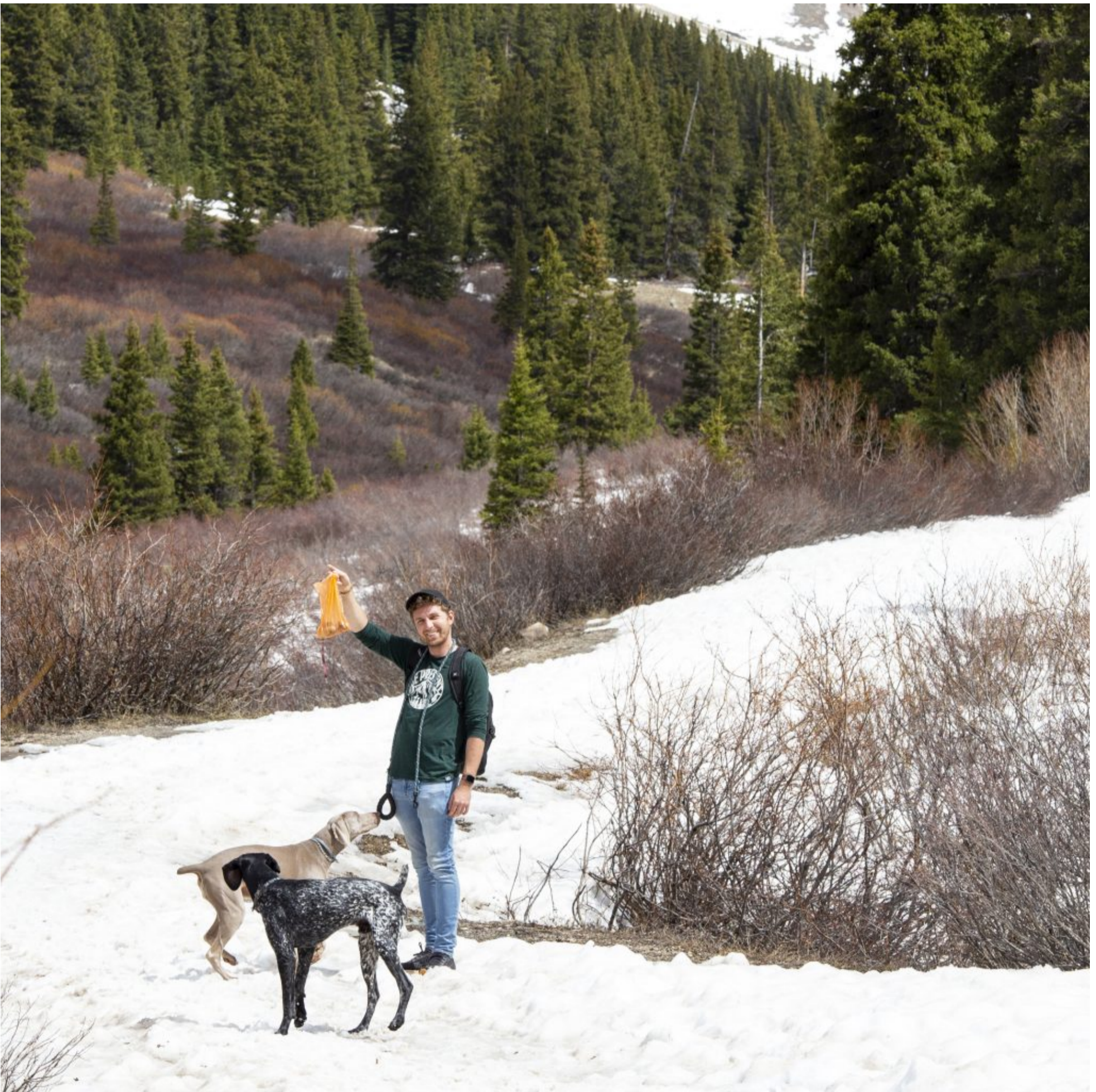


Get Wild: Self-interest — another reason to “doo” the right thing

Frances Hartogh



A hiker holds up a doggie bag after picking up his dogs' poop while hiking near Mayflower Gulch in Summit County in 2022.

Andrew Maciejewski/Summit Daily News

We've had some crazy temperature swings the last few weeks. While most of us prefer a continual supply of fluffy powder, those warm bluebird days were a nice break — except for an unpleasant little secret they revealed. As the snow melted, piles of dog poop were revealed, a predictor of what spring will hold.

While dog feces may be a nuisance — try cleaning it off ski skins — what's the big deal? After all, it's stinky, but natural, just like wildlife poop, right?

It's a common misconception that dog waste is no different than wildlife waste. Reality check: Dog poop presents a health hazard for wildlife, native plants and humans.

Whether on your favorite Wilderness trail, at the dog park, or in your neighborhood, dog poop [can spread life-threatening](#)

[parasites](#) not just to wildlife and other dogs, but also to [people of all ages](#). Young children, being close to the ground and interested in touching everything they see, can be particularly vulnerable.

Poop may be contaminated with canine viruses that can create life-threatening disease in other dogs.

Many species of our local wildlife are susceptible to the same parasites and viruses as dogs, but they lack the benefit of vaccinations to protect them.

Our dogs’ diet of manufactured food is chock-full of added nutrients. These can cause destructive algae blooms in our lakes, killing fish and other aquatic life, and making the water undrinkable for wildlife, dogs, and humans.

Added nutrients encourage growth of invasive plants, crowding out native species on which wildlife depends.

So, what’s the solution? First, don’t be the person who “forgot” the poop bags (or only brought one), “didn’t see” where their dog deposited, or parked the filled bag along the trail “intending” to pick it up later.

And if you see that person, perhaps gently point out that they may have missed something. One positive interaction is to say “Do you need a bag? You can have this one.” It’s yet another reason to bring extras.

Where off-leashing is allowed, leash your dog at least until she or he is done with their business — after all, it’s harder to ignore what’s happening at leash length. Clean up after your pet (perhaps with a compostable bag), stow that bag in a reusable ziplock and carry it with you in a belt bag.

Here in Summit and next door in Eagle County, we’re privileged to have these spectacular congressionally protected Wilderness Areas at our doorstep: Eagles Nest, Holy Cross, and Ptarmigan Peak.

Many of our favorite trails head directly into these Wilderness Areas. There, it’s required by federal law to have your dog on a physical hand-held leash no longer than six feet year-round and at all times: “Pets are required to be on a leash to protect wildlife, other visitor’s experience, and your privilege to have them with you.” E-leashes don’t count in. So, if you’re unable or unwilling to leash your dog, take your pup elsewhere. Don’t spoil the wilderness experience for other users and wildlife.

Always keep your dog close enough that you can see what they’re doing — and where. In areas of Summit County where off-leash is allowed, the law requires that your dog be under control and within 10 feet of you.

Certain areas of the county require leashes, including Arapahoe Basin Ski Area, Copper Mountain, Willow Creek Open Space, paved portions of the Summit County recreational pathway, and the towns of Silverthorne, Frisco, Breckenridge and Dillon.

Our wondrous lands in Summit County deserve our care. Reducing our dogs’ impacts is an important part of caring for our planet and for ourselves.

“Get Wild” publishes on Fridays in the Summit Daily News. Frances Hartogh is a volunteer wilderness ranger for 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.