

Get Wild: My gift to Colorado — preserving Colorado’s treasures one photo at a time

John Fielder Get Wild



For 40 years I have worked as a nature photographer and publisher to promote the protection of Colorado’s ranches, open space and wild lands in Colorado and beyond. I believe that humanity will not survive without the preservation of biodiversity on Earth and have been honored to use my photography to influence people and legislation to protect our natural and rural environments. I am humbled that these photos have spurred the passage of the 1992 Great Outdoors Colorado Trust Fund Initiative and Congress’s Colorado Wilderness Act of 1993 among other land protection projects across this state that I love.

I have decided to donate my life’s work of photography to you, the people of Colorado. As our state’s historical preservation arm, History Colorado will be the repository of this collection of more than 7,500 photos distilled from 200,000 made since 1973. Its photography collection of over one million images documents the history of the Centennial State and the American West from the 1840s to the present day. Key collections include the largest archive of the 19th century work of landscape photographer William Henry Jackson. You may recall my project “Colorado 1870-2000” that produced three books comparing Jackson’s images with my repeat photos of the same places.

This spring History Colorado will make all my photographs available for free digital searches and for personal and commercial use by the public for a small fee. The Telluray Foundation has made this possible. Via these photographic journeys, you will have the opportunity to explore 28 mountain ranges, float down each of our major rivers, visit remote desert canyons, and drive across our vast Great Plains. In between these public lands I have photographed over 100 of Colorado’s most beautiful ranches ranging in size from 600 to 150,000 acres!

Included in the collection are extraordinary scenes of the wildest parts of Summit and Eagle counties. You will see every remote alpine lake in the Gore Range/Eagles Nest Wilderness. Traverse from Black Lakes to Willow Lakes on one side of the range, then from Booth Lake to Gore Lake on the other. Never had the chance to climb high into the Tenmile Range? Enter vast glacial cirques of McCullough Gulch and Mohawk Lakes in the new Camp Hale-Continental Divide National Monument. Want to explore off trail at 12,000 feet in the Holy Cross Wilderness? You can do that, too!

My images represent the sublimeness of the place that I think is the most beautiful on Earth ... Colorado. They are both documentary and artistic. However, they represent something else, perhaps even more important than their sense of place: they are

a record of Nature as of 2022. As Earth has rapidly warmed, perspective is more critical than ever. In Colorado, trees have died and glaciers have melted, and this change in the ecological landscape will only accelerate. Perhaps my imagery can be a baseline to judge the impact of current change and allow us to predict what Colorado will look like in 2050 and beyond. Such a perspective could influence how we live to slow global warming and ensure a better future for my grandchildren and yours.

I have never felt that I “owned” my photographs, only that I was borrowing these places to visit and record, and that I would give them back someday. That day has arrived. Thank you, Colorado, for the gifts you’ve given me, the adventures, the joy and the inspiration. I am excited to preserve these treasures and make them readily available through History Colorado for generations to come.

- **Slate Creek, Eagles Nest Wilderness.**

John Fielder/Courtesy photo



- **Mohawk Lakes, Spruce Creek, Tenmile Range.**

John Fielder/Courtesy photo



- **Seven Sisters Lakes, Holy Cross Wilderness.**
John Fielder/Courtesy photo



- **Slate Creek, Eagles Nest Wilderness.**
John Fielder/Courtesy photo



- **Mohawk Lakes, Spruce Creek, Tenmile Range.**
John Fielder/Courtesy photo



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“Get Wild” publishes on Fridays in the Summit Daily News. Professional photographer John Fielder is a 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.