# Get Wild: Yes, we do love our wildlife

*MIke Browning*



**A mother elk and her calf are pictured in the Colorado mountains.**
*Richard Seeley/Richard Seeley Photography*

Local wildlife advocates regularly proclaim that our residents highly value wildlife. But is it true that residents want local governments to protect wildlife even at the cost of new development projects or our own outdoor recreational opportunities?

A recent scientific survey undertaken by Colorado Parks and Wildlife next door in Eagle County indicates residents overwhelmingly want to see wildlife protected. Eagle and Summit counties share many things in common — including our beautiful Eagles Nest Wilderness whose spine runs down the Summit/Eagle county line. Consequently, it is likely that the survey results reflect the views of many Summit County residents as well.

Parks and Wildlife released the results of the study of residents' attitudes towards wildlife in June 2022. Among other things, the survey evaluated the balance that residents desire between wildlife protection, land development and private recreation. Titled "Conservation at the Intersection: Examining residents' perceptions of and preferences for wildlife outdoor recreation, and development," the study was led by Mike Quartuch, a human dimensions specialist and researcher with Colorado Parks and Wildlife.

Almost 100% of survey respondents said that sustaining wildlife populations was somewhat, moderately or very important to them. It was "very important" to over 80% of survey respondents. No one selected "not important at all."

But what if protection of wildlife interferes with new land development projects or with the survey respondent's own recreational activities on public lands? Over 75% of respondents agreed with statements prioritizing the protection of wildlife — even if interfered with their own outdoor

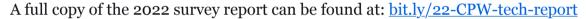recreation opportunities or restricted future land development projects.

A majority of residents were also very concerned about wildlife habitat. In fact, 84% of respondents agreed with the statement "I am concerned that important wildlife habitat in Eagle County may be converted for residential or commercial development in the near future." Moreover, 64% strongly agreed with this statement.
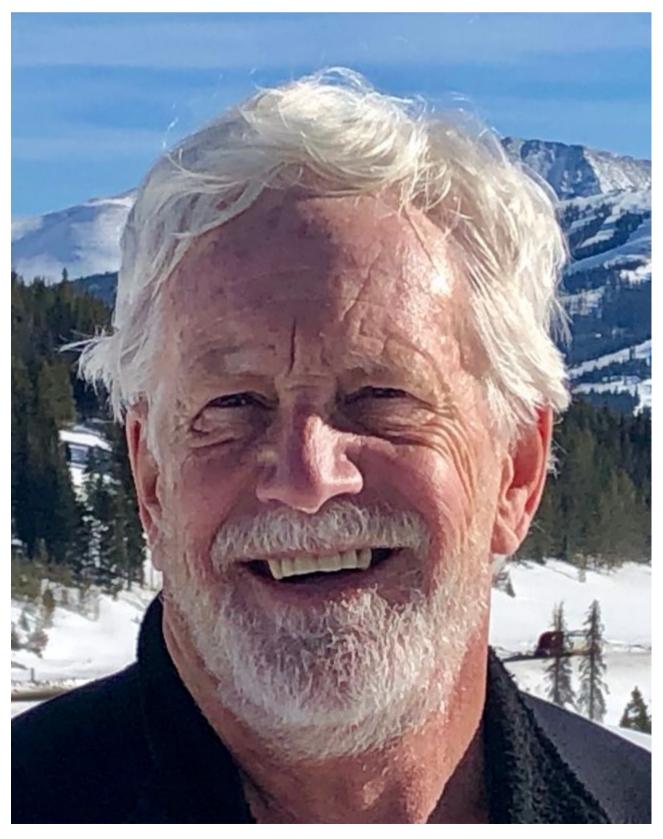
Interestingly, the survey found that Eagle County residents thought their local governments did not value the protection of wildlife as much as they did. This suggests that there is strong public support for local governments to do even more to maintain healthy wildlife populations.

In its summary, the survey report states that "results from our study clearly illustrated the importance of wildlife to Eagle County residents. Not only do residents hold overwhelmingly positive attitudes about wildlife, but these sentiments manifested in other ways including interests in sustaining wildlife populations, prioritization and protection of critical wildlife habitat, concerns about losing wildlife habitat due to residential and development, and preferences to protect wildlife/habitat even if doing so limited future recreation and development opportunities."

Given the commonalities between our two counties, support in Summit County for protecting wildlife is at least similarly robust. Indeed, Summit County residents have a rich history of fighting for protection of wildlife and habitat, as witnessed by the work of groups like Summit County Safe Passages and the Eagle-Summit Wilderness Alliance.

Summit County leaders should find the survey results useful when considering proposed new developments, adopting seasonal trail closures, funding safe wildlife passages and other projects that impact local wildlife. The survey suggests there is strong public support for efforts to protect critical wildlife habitat and maintain (or reestablish) healthy wildlife populations, even at the expense of additional development or personal recreational opportunities.

A full copy of the 2022 survey report can be found at: bit.ly/22-CPW-tech-report                                    .

**Mike Browning**
*Mike Browning/Courtesy photo*

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