

# Get Wild: The wilderness needs you

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**Dave Brewster**  
**Get Wild**



A volunteer works to clear a tree from the Mesa Cortina Trail on Aug. 4, 2020, in Eagles Nest Wilderness Area.

*Photo by David Brewster / Eagle Summit Wilderness Alliance*

Our wilderness areas in Summit County are wonderful places to visit, and every year thousands of people hike, camp, fish, admire the wildlife and wildflowers, and enjoy the solitude.

Unfortunately, every year, nature and people cause trails to be eroded and bridges to break, trees to fall and brush to grow over trails. In addition, illegal campfire rings and camps are built in overused and delicate areas, sensitive vegetation is trampled, non-native noxious weeds are introduced and trash is left behind.

Thank goodness for the work of hundreds of volunteers, who work with the few professional U.S. Forest Service wilderness rangers to restore and nurture the forest and educate the public to enjoy and respect the wilderness.

There are numerous opportunities to volunteer in Summit County and many groups participate. For example, the Summit County Senior Center works with Friends of the Dillon Ranger District to restore illegal campsites, the Summit Mountain Biking Club works with Friends of the Dillon Ranger District to build new biking trails, and Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado and Wildlands Restoration Volunteers have projects to restore and improve trails in the county.

The Eagle Summit Wilderness Alliance works with the U.S. Forest Service and offers a wide variety of volunteer opportunities from weekend backpacking trips to trailhead hosting at the more popular trailheads.

Do you like to hike? While you are out hiking in the wilderness, you might see the wilderness alliance's volunteer rangers in their Forest Service shirts and hats. They are happy to stop and talk about the importance of "Leave No Trace," the benefits of having dogs on leash (required in wilderness areas), and wildflowers and wildlife. They also collect valuable information for the Forest Service. Friends of the Dillon Ranger District also has a volunteer ranger program for all the forests.

Perhaps you would prefer to sit outdoors with fellow volunteers, enjoying the sunshine and talking with hikers and backpackers? Then trailhead hosting is for you. Volunteers will be at some of the more popular trailheads to talk with recreationists about appreciating and respecting the wildlife and wilderness before they begin their trips.

Would you like to learn how to safely clear trees from trails? You might see certified sawyers clearing fallen trees, using two-person, crosscut saws on the big trees (chain saws are not allowed in wilderness). The sawyers enjoy this so much that they often go out on skis in the winter to help keep the trails open year-round.



Dave Brewster

Do you love wildflowers? Weed spotters locate noxious weeds and pull them when appropriate. Pulling some weeds can cause them to spread even more, so the alliance funds controlled spraying for those. This work ensures wildflowers can prosper and that wildlife has edible forage.

If you like to work with tools and move rocks and dirt, volunteers are needed for day projects building, restoring and rerouting trails. Reaching deeper into the wilder parts of the wilderness, the alliance has llama-supported weekend backpacking trips with Forest Service wilderness rangers. These are fun work trips, and the hikes to the campsites are fairly short at about 3 to 5 miles.

Volunteering is easy; just check the websites of the nonprofits listed for more information. We would love to see you, and the wilderness areas you love so much could use your help.



“Get Wild” publishes on Fridays in the Summit Daily News. Dave Brewster is a 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](https://EagleSummitWilderness.org) .



A llama stands near an Eagles Nest Wilderness Area sign July 27, 2018, at Slate Lakes.

*Photo from U.S. Forest Service*

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