

EAGLE POST 46

The newsletter of **ESWA - EAGLE SUMMIT WILDERNESS ALLIANCE** (formerly Friends of Eagles Nest Wilderness) apprises you of important activities in and around Eagles Nest, Holy Cross, and Ptarmigan Peak Wilderness Areas.



EagleSummitWilderness.org or fenw.org

[VIEW IN BROWSER](#)

BEFORE WE BEGIN... Applications are now being accepted for **Volunteer Wilderness Rangers** (VWRs). A required one-day training class will be held on Saturday, June 6 in Minturn. If you value Wilderness, consider giving back by becoming an official representative of the United States Forest Service - you'll wear the **same patch** (right) on your sleeve that they do - and you'll have a lot of fun as you meet, greet, and teach Wilderness visitors. Visit the application page [HERE](#).



MARK YOUR CALENDAR! OVERNIGHT WORK TRIP SCHEDULE - Each is Friday to Sunday. Help us perform campsite rehab and trail maintenance in the deep backcountry, with help from our 2 pack llamas.

July 17 - 19: Upper Cataract Lake (Eagles Nest Wilderness)

July 31 - Aug 2: Lake Constantine (Holy Cross Wilderness)

August 14 - 16: Missouri Lakes (Holy Cross Wilderness)

August 28 - 30: Slate Lakes (Eagles Nest Wilderness)

Questions? Send us an [email](#)



March 2020

Dear *|FNAME|*

Greetings! This month, we address a pressing issue:

DOGS IN THE WILDERNESS

By Frances Hartogh

INTRODUCTION:

Each year ESWA Volunteer Wilderness Rangers (VWRs) engage with more than 10,000 Wilderness visitors, and about one-third of the groups that we encounter are accompanied by a dog or two, and about one-third of those dogs are illegally off leash. Their owners are at risk of receiving a fine of more than \$100, but not from VWRs - we rely only on friendly persuasion. In fact, VWRs do not ordinarily even mention the reality of a possible fine, but rather follow what is called the *Authority of the Resource Technique*, explaining the key reasons behind the Forest Service's decision to require that dogs be leashed, all of them based on their first responsibility to protect the Wilderness.

There are numerous reasons for the leash rule, and this month **Frances Hartogh** dissects the issue, referencing key scientific studies that underpin the growing need for visitors to leash their dogs.

We should say that offenders whom VWRs encounter are almost without exception accommodating and cooperative, although as Frances describes, it doesn't take many scofflaws to create a frustrating, even scary scenario.

Dogs in Wilderness

By Frances Hartogh

Setting out on a recent summer Pitkin Trail hike in the Eagles Nest Wilderness near Vail, my husband and I encountered three people whose four unleashed dogs were excitedly running around the parking area, anticipating a romp up the trail. We hiked up the trail ahead of their group, but 20 minutes later their dogs came running *down* the trail in a pack, having looped their owners by running upstream through the environmentally sensitive drainage of Pitkin Creek. We waited for their owners to catch up on the trail behind us so we could gently remind them of the Wilderness leash

requirement - which was clearly signed - only to receive a torrent of verbal abuse that it was none of our business and that their dogs weren't hurting anything. Isolated incident? Unfortunately, all too common.



It's a wonderful privilege to bring our canine companions into Wilderness, but what is

the actual impact and how can we minimize the negative aspects?

What Is Wilderness?: A 2019 Town of Vail survey of hikers in the Eagles Nest Wilderness revealed that most folks didn't realize they were in Wilderness, or know what Wilderness is. The 1964 Wilderness Act defines Wilderness as "an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain." Wilderness lands provide "outstanding opportunities for solitude" and "shall be administered for the use and enjoyment of the American people in such manner as will leave them unimpaired for future use and enjoyment as wilderness." Both the Eagles Nest and Ptarmigan Peak Wilderness in Summit and Eagle counties allow dogs, but only if leashed: "Pets are required to be on a leash to protect wildlife, other visitor's experience and your privilege to have them with you."

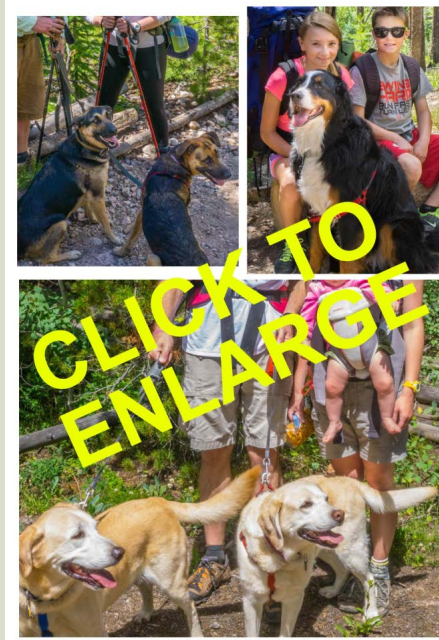
Backyard Wilderness: Home to Eagles Nest, Ptarmigan Peak, and Holy Cross Wilderness areas, the White River National Forest is the most visited national forest in the nation. Eagles Nest and Ptarmigan Peak (and Holy Cross in summer and fall), with their close proximity to human development, are heavily impacted by daily and overnight use. Towns, cabins, houses, hotels, and condos are within "convenient" distance of trailheads. This means that these Wilderness trails are regularly used by neighbors, many of whom "hit the trail" one or more times a day. When weekend and vacation traffic are added - 4.5 million people live in the Front Range, and Summit and Eagle Counties receive several million annual visits - the impact on our "local" Wilderness is huge.

And many people entering Wilderness bring their dogs.

Here are just a few reasons to leash your pup in Wilderness:

1. To protect wildlife and plants
2. To protect streams and lakes
3. To protect you and your dog
4. To protect your Wilderness experience, and that of other users including those with dogs
5. To ensure the continued benefit of bringing your dog into the Wilderness (and to avoid hefty fines)

Where's the Wildlife?: The evidence that dogs negatively impact wildlife is overwhelming. Studies have shown that people with dogs are much more detrimental to wildlife than people without dogs, and off-leash dogs are even more detrimental (off-leash, off-trail impacts being the most severe). Dogs (*Canis lupus familiaris*) are a subspecies of wolves (*Canis lupus*), and wild animals perceive dogs as predators. Even if you don't see your dog chase wildlife, your dog's impacts include:



1. Displacement – The presence of dogs causes wildlife to move away, reducing available habitat in which to feed, breed, and rest. To avoid dogs, wildlife becomes less active during the day, forcing them to be active in the darker and colder hours. And dog scent affects wildlife long after the dogs are gone.

2. Disturbance and stress response – Even if you don't see your dog chase wildlife, wildlife is aware of your dog. Dogs, especially if unleashed, cause animals to stop routine activities, increasing the amount of energy used and reducing opportunities to feed. Repeated stress suppresses animals' immune systems, increases their vulnerability to disease and parasites, and reduces reproduction and growth.

3. Wildlife mortality – Unleashed dogs can kill or injure wildlife. And dogs can transmit diseases to and from wildlife.

4. Spread of invasive plants – Off-leash dogs disperse seeds from invasive plants (seeds like to hitchhike on a dog's coat), and dogs who dig create fertile ground for invasive plants to grow, diminishing food for wildlife and causing destruction to delicate Wilderness ecology.

As examples, one study found that dogs increased the heart rates and flushing distances of bighorn sheep. A 2001 study found that deer, vesper sparrows, meadowlarks, and robins showed elevated sensitivity and flushing distances when dogs accompanied hikers, particularly when off-trail. Studies have determined that off-leash dogs reduce the number and types of wildlife in large areas of habitat. A Canadian study found that domestic dogs were one of the top three predators that killed white-tailed deer fawns. In winter feeding grounds in northern Idaho, a Fish and Game conservation officer witnessed or received reports of 39 incidents of dogs chasing deer, resulting in the deaths of at least 12 animals. Yet another report states that "Dogs cause wildlife to be more alert, which reduces feeding, sleeping, grooming and breeding activities and wastes vital energy stores that may mean life or death when resources are low, such as during winter or reproduction."

The Real Scoop: It's a common misconception that dog waste is the same as wildlife waste. In reality, dog poop presents a health hazard for people and wildlife. It is not natural to the environment, and takes longer to break down. Dog waste pollutes water and can transmit harmful parasites and diseases to people and wildlife. It contains excess nutrients, nitrogen, and phosphorous from dog food - and these substances create habitat for invasive weeds, and also encourage algae blooms that cloud lakes and streams.

What to Doo?: The average dog produces ½ to ¾ pound of fecal matter each day. On day trips, bag up your dog's waste and carry it with you - if you're worried about a breach, just double-bag, and then remove and reuse intact outer bags later. Don't leave poop bags on the trail to pick up on the way back - not only are "parked" bags

often missed or forgotten, but other Wilderness users shouldn't have to encounter your bags. Left bags are also a temptation to wildlife. On backpacking trips, humans and canines are subject to the same Leave No Trace rules: Bury poo in a 6- to 8-inch hole that's at least 100 feet from water sources. Better yet, use a wag bag for your own waste and add your dog's to it - wag bags are easy to use, and you'll feel better about not polluting the Wilderness. Wag bags on average cost less than \$3/bag, and can be used more than once - and as we who camp in Colorado's high country know, it's not always easy to dig 6-8 inches in our thin topsoil (and finding an unused spot in popular areas can be a challenge). Enforcing the 100-foot rule for pee breaks isn't always practical - still, if your dog begins to pee in or next to a water source, be prepared to interrupt things and move away.

On the Other Paw: Leashing your pup is in your interest and your dog's. A leash helps your dog from becoming lost. Leashing can also protect your dog from wilderness hazards such as moose, skunks, porcupines, mountain lions, bears, and rabid or injured animals - and protect you from attacks by wildlife your dog might disturb and bring back to you. A leash can keep your dog from drinking in streams and lakes, which are often contaminated with Giardia and other parasites. Better yet, you are much more likely to see wildlife if your dog is leashed - their keen sense will alert you to wildlife that you might not otherwise notice (and will keep them from scaring away wildlife before you get a view). And of course there's the "hammer:" Failure to leash your dog can result in a stiff fine (up to \$5,000 in the Eagles Nest Wilderness).

Good Neighbors: Leashing your dog will help ensure the enjoyment and Wilderness experience of other hikers, including those with dogs. After all, who really wants to deprive anyone of the peace Wilderness provides? A leash means you are sensitive to other trail users, who may not want a dog to approach them. Haven't taken the time to train your dog not to pull on the leash? Don't worry, there are lots of free online training tips. Lastly, think hard before bringing your dog on overnight trips - are you really willing to comply with the leash rules 24/7? Is your dog a barker, who will bother other campers, not to mention wildlife venturing down to alpine lakes for an evening drink?

Holy Cross Wilderness: It's worth noting that, since 2013, Holy Cross Wilderness has been trying off-leash access for dogs, using a rule that requires dogs to be leashed or "under control": "Dogs must be kept under control and may not harass wildlife or other visitors" and "Possessing a dog or other animal that is harassing wildlife, people, or damaging property" is prohibited, and can result in a fine of up to \$5,000 for individuals, and \$10,000 for organizations. The off-leash rule is based on a past interpretation (when user numbers were lower) of the Wilderness Act's language about providing "... outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and *unconfined* type of recreation" (emphasis added). Since the Holy Cross Wilderness is subject to numerous other restrictions, it's not clear why the rule requiring dogs to be leashed was dropped. Unfortunately, with today's elevated user numbers, and with relatively few rangers available to patrol this highly popular

Wilderness, incidents have been reported of dogs harassing and killing wildlife—including pikas, whose survival is already greatly threatened by climate change. In an area that used to provide opportunity for viewing wildlife, few animals can now be seen from the trails. It is hoped that, in light of increased visitor numbers, the forest supervisor and district ranger will revisit the off-leash rule for the Holy Cross Wilderness, especially for the popular summer and fall seasons.

Looking for an area where your pup does not have to be leashed? The White River National Forest has many non-Wilderness trails where dogs can be leash free, although they are always required to be “under voice control.” Visit this Forest Service [website](#) with links to where you can check out the restrictions on White River trails.

Interested in more ways you can lessen your impact on our Wilderness? The Wilderness Society’s 29 Critical “[Leave No Trace](#)” *Tips for Wilderness Visitors* has some great suggestions.

Let’s all do our part to help keep Wilderness wild.

For more information and sources, see:

Statutes & Forest Service Orders

1. [Federal law establishing Wilderness](#): see also [regulations](#):
2. [Use restrictions in Holy Cross Wilderness](#): see also [HERE](#)
3. [Use restrictions in Ptarmigan Peak Wilderness](#):
4. [Use restrictions in Eagles Nest Wilderness](#):

Sample Reports/Studies of Effects of Dogs on Wildlife and Plants:

The [Effects of Dogs on Wildlife Communities](#), a comprehensive [literature review](#), and [Wildlife Responses to Pedestrians and Dogs](#).

Two articles on the spread of invasive plants by pets [HERE](#) and [HERE](#).

Miscellaneous:

Colorado Parks & Wildlife: Watching Deer & Elk: “Viewing & Safety Tips – Leave pets at home. [Dogs and deer/elk don’t mix.](#)”

ABOUT FRANCES HARTOGH

As a new member of ESWA’s Board, Frances Hartogh brings to us a wealth of personal experience as a backpacker, hiker, climber, and Wilderness volunteer ranger, and a wealth of professional experience in environmental and public land law, communication, fundraising, and marketing.

A lawyer since 1982, Frances says that growing up in the hills and mountains of northern California, and in the Pecos Wilderness outside Santa Fe where she served on her college's mountain search & rescue team, inspired her to focus her career on environmental and natural resources law. She attended law school in Denver, which allowed her to begin an exploration of Colorado's Wilderness areas that continues today. She has been an in-house counsel and an attorney with the Colorado Attorney General's Natural Resources and Environmental section. She recently stepped down after a decade as Associate Director and Director of Outreach for a nonprofit that provides natural resource and environmental law-related educational conferences and publications, also serving several years as editor of the organization's publications. She's thankful that her varied career allowed her to view from myriad angles the complex issues surrounding our public lands and the environment.






Frances recently completed a five-year term (the last year as Chair) on the City of Boulder Open Space Board of Trustees, which makes recommendations to City Council and staff about the city's 46,000 acres of Open Space and 155 miles of trails. At their monthly public meetings, the five Trustees met with Open Space staff and members of the public on issues such as addressing impacts of dogs and other recreational uses, managing agricultural use of Open Space lands, and long-range management of land through Master Planning processes. She recommends getting involved with public land issues through service on citizen boards, as it provides a chance to hear from varied interests and to give back to the public lands that give so much to all of us.



A huge thanks to [ARAPAHOE BASIN SKI AREA](#). For more than two decades, A-Basin staff have donated generously to their **Employee Environmental Fund**, of which ESWA has been a steady beneficiary. Last year, more than 150 employees donated, led by A-Basin Director **Alan Henceroth**. Our enduring THANKS!

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The Fall-Winter hard copy newsletter is full of

information about our 2019 season. If you didn't receive a copy by mail, send us a request and we'll pop one in the mail. Please send it to us at info@eaglesummitwilderness.org. The newsletter contains about two dozen fun and informative articles about us - past, present, and future. Next up: the Spring-Summer issue, which will be chock-full of plans for 2020.

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