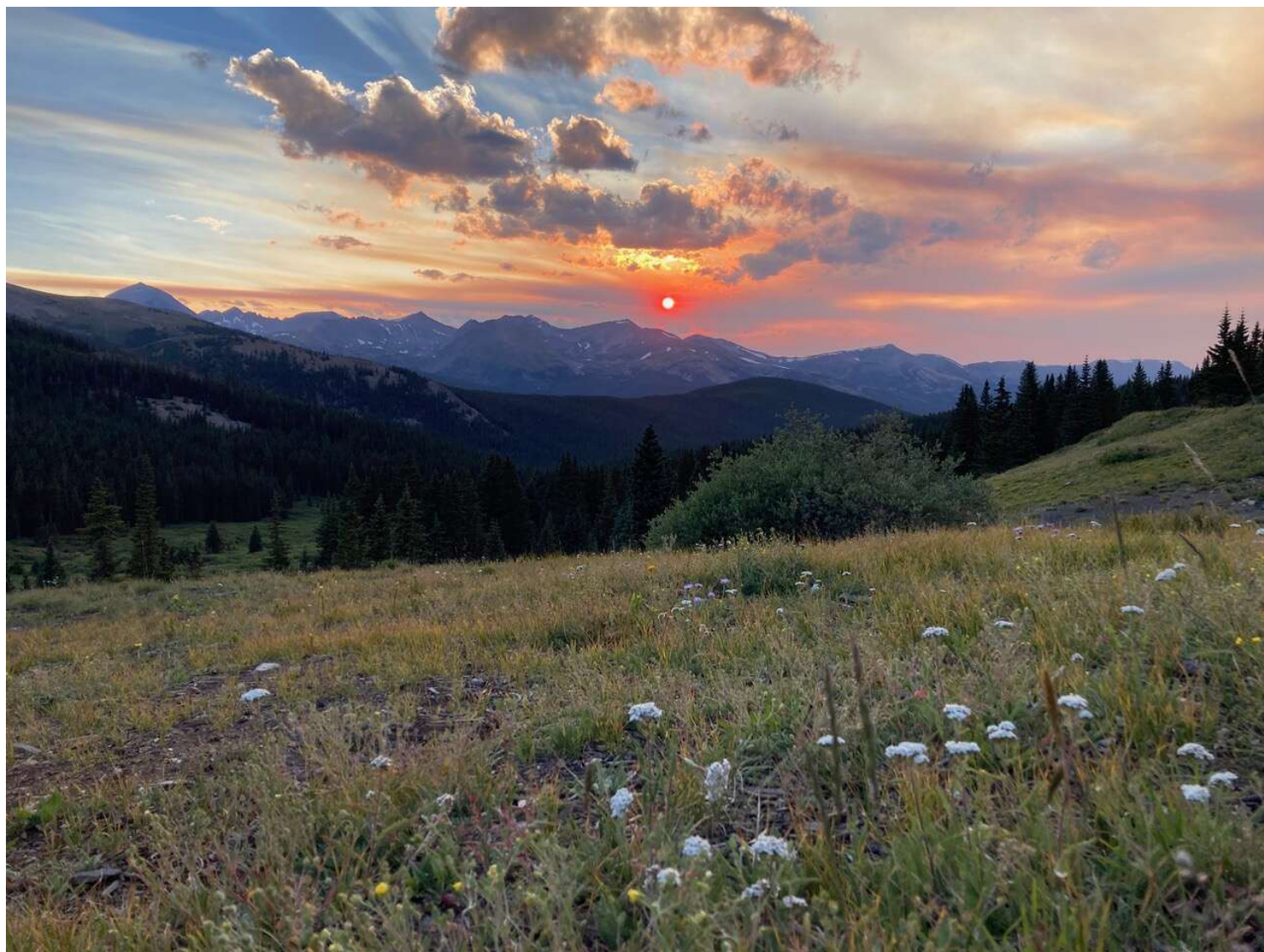


Get Wild: How to show our appreciation for the natural world on Earth Day

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Stasia Stockwell
Get Wild



A sunset is seen from Boreas Pass in August 2020.

Stasia Stockwell/Courtesy photo

Step outside. Just for a moment, instead of rushing to work or up the ski hill, pause. Take a look around. If you're in Silverthorne, perhaps you're catching a glance of the Gore Range that pricks the skyline with its rugged peaks and ridgelines. Or maybe, from Dillon, you're watching the sunset sky burst with pink and orange over the unmistakable crags of Buffalo Mountain. From Frisco, Mount Royal and Peaks One and Two jut straight up from the town with impressive prominence. In Breckenridge, we watch the sun kiss the summits of the Tenmile Range with the pale pink light of morning.

Step outside on a spring afternoon and watch the snow on the south faces of the peaks glisten — snowmelt that provides water for so many living creatures across the West. That spring snowmelt seeps into the ground where Indian paintbrush, columbines, larkspur, lupines, and Alpine forget-me-nots will drink in the height of summer. The late summer rains sprout hawk's wing and king bolete mushrooms underneath the needles of evergreens. Fall brings with it a display of shimmering gold in the aspens and hues of maroon and mustard that paint the high Alpine.

Step outside with the elk that traverse the hillsides near tree line. Moose linger near the willows and marshes; mountain goats tiptoe across the rocky Alpine terrain. ermines and foxes scurry through the forest; mountain bluebirds and northern flickers dart through the air; and the occasional bald eagle can be spotted on a high branch.

Gratitude begins with awareness. We must first notice what we have in order to be grateful for it. As residents and visitors to Summit County, we have much to be grateful for with abundant access to the wild, natural world and the many gifts it gives us, and with gratitude comes a sense of responsibility. Robin Wall Kimmer writes about this in her book “Braiding Sweetgrass.”

“Cultures of gratitude must also be cultures of reciprocity,” writes Kimmer. “Each person, human or no, is bound to every other in a reciprocal relationship. Just as all beings have a duty to me, I have a duty to them. If an animal gives its life to feed me, I am in turn bound to support its life. If I receive a stream’s gift of pure water, then I am responsible for returning a gift in kind.”

Perhaps the best way to celebrate Earth Day is first with gratitude. Whether we have the whole day to spend immersed in nature or just a moment here and there, take the time to recognize all the gifts of the natural world we have here in our corner of the mountains. And then, reciprocity: What do we have to give in return? How can we give back to the streams that offer us water, the wild plants and animals that offer us food, the mountains that offer the gift of beauty?

There are a number of resources available for us to care for and give back to nature here in Summit County. High Country Conservation has resources for more sustainable living as well as opportunities to volunteer. Consider volunteering with an organization like Eagle Summit Wilderness Alliance, in order to give back to nature. Even the simple things like practicing Leave No Trace ethics each time we venture out shows our respect for the earth.

Step outside and soak in the natural world. Something as simple as gratitude will lead us to reciprocity, and to a relationship with the land that will help us protect and preserve it for generations to come.



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Stasia Stockwell is a Breckenridge local and avid backcountry explorer, A true mountain dweller, she feels most at home in the Alpine. Stasia writes primarily for the outdoor adventure realm, with the desire to connect readers from all backgrounds with nature in a meaningful way.

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