

# Get Wild: More fun with llamas

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**Mike Browning**  
**Get Wild**



Mike Browning leads llama Dom down from Lake Charles in the Holy Cross Wilderness.  
*Get Wild/Courtesy photo*

I could feel Dom's warm breath on my neck, and hear his gentle breathing. Some llamas like to stay close, and that was Dom's case as I led him along the trail to beautiful Lake Charles this August. When we last [wrote about our hard-working](#) llamas in early June, their work was just beginning. Since then, Dom and Monty have stacked up quite a few accomplishments.

Each summer the Eagle-Summit Wilderness Alliance organizes llama-supported multi-day work trips to some of the most beautiful wilderness lakes in Summit and Eagle counties. Llamas are perfect support animals for these trips. The sure-footed llamas walk at the same pace as humans, and carry 75-100 pounds. Since no mechanized or wheeled equipment is allowed in our wilderness areas, llamas are a huge help on work trips, carrying most of the heavy tools. Llamas also live gently off the land, although we also supplement their diet with food pellets.

Fun fact: Llamas enjoy being stroked on their necks, though not their faces.

The Eagle-Summit Wilderness Alliance hires two llamas each summer to help in our work trips and assist the U.S. Forest Service in their trail-maintenance work. These llamas are a joy to work with. On four trips this summer, alliance volunteers hiked with llamas Dom and Monty, and colleagues from the Forest Service. We conducted reclamation work at Slate Lake and Upper Cataract Lake in the Eagles Nest Wilderness and Nolan Lake and Lake Charles in the Holy Cross Wilderness.

Once Dom and Monty carry in the heavy equipment, the llamas get time off to rest and graze. That's when the human work starts, rehabilitating our well-loved trails and lakeshores.

Llamas Dom and Monty head down from Nolan Lake with their packs laden with tools and collected trash  
*Brandi Timm/Get Wild*

Camping and campfires are prohibited within 100 feet of these lakes (1/4 mile in Eagles Nest Wilderness) or above 11,000 feet, since the ecosystem is too fragile to recover.

Campfires were allowed in the “good-old-days,” when fewer people were camping around our high-country lakes and we didn’t fully understand the impact of camping and campfires near lakes. Old fire rings remain, and people add a few new ones each year, enticing others to continue to use them, thinking, “Someone else had a campfire here so it must be OK.” During the alliance’s llama trips, we dismantle these illegal fire rings to discourage their continued use. We also erect “No campfires above this point” signs to educate campers about the no-campfire rule and help protect these beautiful areas and pristine waters.

As part of our llama-supported trips this summer, we removed over 100 illegal fire rings around Slate Lake, Nolan Lake, Lake Charles and Upper Cataract Lake. We also picked up many pounds of trash, which the

Volunteers also help abate a real scourge for backcountry users — all those trees that fall across our wilderness trails every year. Fallen trees not only hinder passage, but also lead to the development of social trails that cause erosion and are an eyesore. Since chainsaws and other mechanized tools are not allowed in wilderness areas, we carry in crosscut and handsaws to cut and clear the fallen trees. During this summer's llama trips, we cut and cleared over 40 trees from trails. During the entire course of this summer, llama-less Eagle-Summit Wilderness Alliance sawyers cleared 1,300 more trees from our local Wilderness trails.

If you are interested in joining the Eagle-Summit Wilderness Alliance on a llama-supported volunteer work trip next summer, visit [EagleSummitWilderness.org](https://EagleSummitWilderness.org) or email [info@eaglesummitwilderness.org](mailto:info@eaglesummitwilderness.org). And remember to bring a lightweight camp stove on your next Wilderness backpack — an added benefit of not having a campfire is better stargazing!

*Mike Browning is a board member and Volunteer Wilderness Ranger for the [Eagle Summit Wilderness Alliance](https://EagleSummitWilderness.org), a local all-volunteer nonprofit that helps the Forest Service protect and maintain the Eagles Nest, Holy Cross, Ptarmigan Peak and Flattops Wilderness Areas.*

Mike Browning

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