

Get Wild: Hunting and the wilderness

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Mike Browning
Get Wild



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Evan Moore Photography/Courtesy photo

A sharp crack shattered the silence of the woods, bringing me to a halt. It was a crisp fall day and I was enjoying a quiet hike in the Eagles Nest wilderness. Had I heard a gunshot?

Hunting is allowed in our local wilderness areas such as Eagles Nest, Ptarmigan Peak and Holy Cross, subject to the regulations of Colorado Parks and Wildlife and the White River National Forest. Hunters must have the appropriate hunting license and tag, and follow Parks and Wildlife rules. Parks and Wildlife issues tags for specific game management units, types of animals and seasons.



Generally, September is archery and muzzleloader season, followed by four different rifle seasons in October and November. Tags are available under a lottery system for deer, elk, moose, bighorn sheep and mountain goats. Details are on the Parks and Wildlife

Hunting in wilderness areas is also subject to constraints imposed by the 1964 Wilderness Act. No use of motor vehicles, motorized equipment, game cameras, drones, game carts or any form of mechanical or wheeled transport are allowed. Given these limitations and the rugged terrain that is often involved, hunting in wilderness areas is a more challenging, primitive and, some say, rewarding experience.

While some may bridle at the thought of killing wildlife in our wilderness areas, Parks and Wildlife uses revenue raised by hunting licenses and tag sales to support its many nonhunting programs, such as environmental and wildlife education, habitat management and research, and species conservation. Species conservation includes the management of Colorado's "nongame" species like declining, threatened and endangered species, regardless of their importance for hunting or fishing.

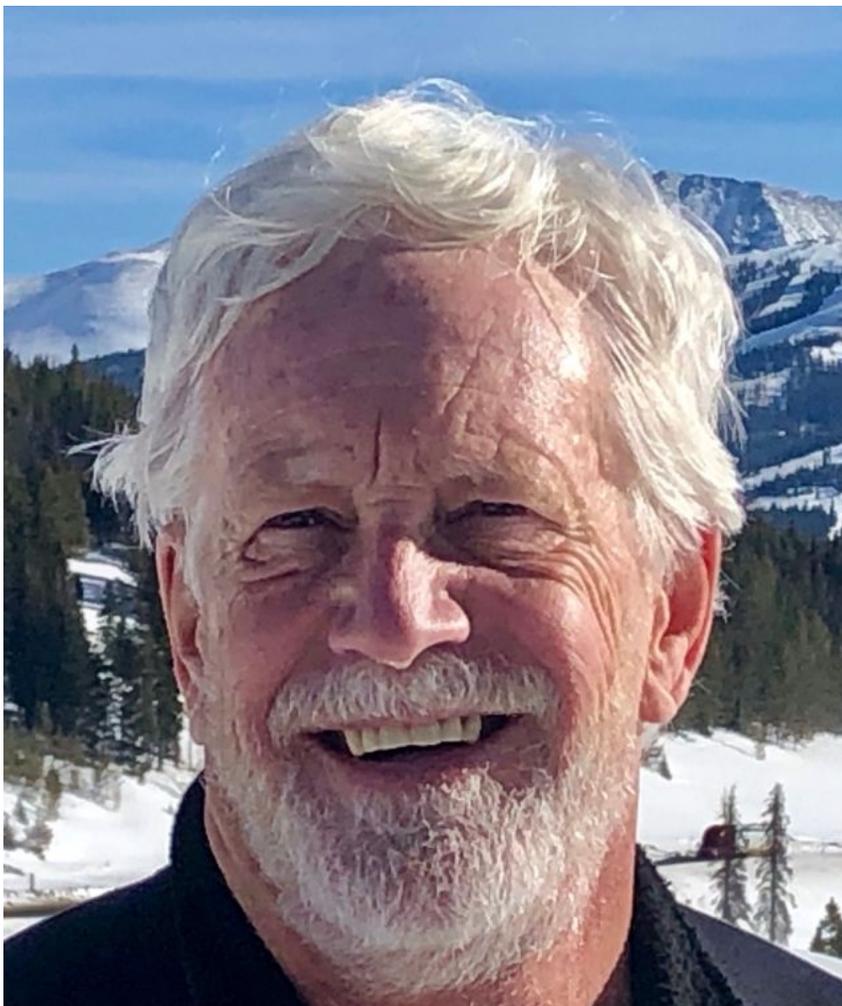
Although Parks and Wildlife were combined into one agency in 2011, the Parks and Wildlife sections are required to maintain separate budgets. The vast majority of Parks and Wildlife's wildlife revenues comes from hunting and fishing related fees. Less than 2% comes from the general fund. Parks and Wildlife also uses hunting to help manage wildlife populations to levels that the land can support, and to assist with disease management efforts. Overpopulation in herds can lead to starvation and disease breakouts.

Like all wilderness users, hunters must respect local wilderness regulations. In our Eagles Nest Wilderness, this includes camping at least 100 feet from lakes, streams and trails, and complying with fire restrictions: no campfires above 11,000 feet, within a quarter-mile of lakes or within other areas closed to campfires. Hunters should pick their targets carefully and ensure a clean, safe and humane shot. Hunters should also respect the wilderness areas we all love by following Leave No Trace principles and packing out all waste and everything packed in. Great tips for hunters on following LNT practices are available [online](#) at LNT.org.

Sadly, Forest Service rangers regularly report hunter camps left in messy condition. In response, the Eagle Summit Wilderness Alliance has provided funds for the Forest Service to extend the ranger season further into hunting season.

Hikers should be aware of the various hunting seasons and take extra care to be visible. Stay on trail, wear bright colors and, as always, keep your dog on a handheld leash. Off-leash dogs can look or sound like game animals and draw fire not only in their direction but in yours, as well.

The 1964 Wilderness Act was passed "to secure for the American people of present and future generations the benefits of an enduring resource of wilderness." Hunting is a historic use of wilderness and can offer a unique and primitive recreational experience. But hunters, just like other users, must honor and protect wilderness ethics and values so that future generations can enjoy this enduring resource.





Mike Browning

Mike Browning/Courtesy photo

Mike Browning is a board member and past chair of the Eagle Summit Wilderness Alliance, a local volunteer nonprofit that works with the U.S. Forest Service to protect, preserve and maintain the wilderness areas in Summit and Eagle counties. More information is at EagleSummitWilderness.org.

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