

Get Wild: September is National Wilderness Month!

Karn Stiegelmeier



Fall colors are pictured from Acorn Creek looking toward the Eagles Nest Wilderness.

Karn Stiegelmeier/Get Wild

The President Biden recently proclaimed September to be [National Wilderness Month](#). For many of us, there could not be a more beautiful month to celebrate wilderness! September comes with cool weather, vibrant fall colors and a dusting of snow on the high peaks. Here in Summit County, we deeply appreciate the expression of national support for our stunningly gorgeous Wilderness Areas. Eagles Nest Wilderness was established in 1976, and Ptarmigan Wilderness in 1993. We have been working alongside other Colorado communities for many years toward additions to these and other wilderness areas — for the many reasons stated in the [president’s proclamation](#)

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“America’s natural wonders are marvels of the world. People travel across seas and continents to behold the spirit of this great land embodied by our majestic mountains, breathtaking deserts, emerald valleys, and mighty rivers. During National Wilderness Month, we celebrate the power and promise of our country’s extraordinary natural gifts and renew our commitment to protecting them for generations to come.

“When we conserve our country’s landscapes and wilderness, we do more than preserve their beauty for our own enjoyment. We safeguard the future of people who depend on and sustain the land as a way of life — Indigenous peoples, farmers and ranchers, recreation businesses, and rural communities. We enshrine landmarks that identify the places where the history of our Nation was made. We protect sacred spaces that have been stewarded by Tribal Nations since time immemorial. And we mitigate the impacts of climate change to help make our country more resilient.

“... This National Wilderness Month, we renew our commitment to protecting our wilderness areas and ensuring that all their splendor is passed down from generation to generation of Americans, helping to bridge our past and our future.

“... I encourage all Americans to experience our Nation’s outdoor heritage, to recreate responsibly and leave no trace, to celebrate the value of

preserving an enduring wilderness, and to strengthen our commitment to protecting these vital lands and waters now and for future generations.”

Over 111 million acres of land have been protected under the 1964 Wilderness Act, including more than 800 wilderness areas. What makes a wilderness area unique from other public lands? In the words of the Wilderness Act “A wilderness, in contrast with those areas where man and his works dominate the landscape, is hereby recognized 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.”

With our growing population, keeping our local wilderness areas “untrammelled by man” can be challenging. When the Eagles Nest Wilderness Area was established, Summit County’s population was only about 8,000. But by 2022, it had increased almost fourfold to 31,000, and the projected 2030 population is upwards of 45,000 — which doesn’t take into account the 5 million tourists from Front Range cities and around the globe who visit annually.

Even though what used to be remote wilderness has now become backyard wilderness, it still deserves our protection. Familiarize yourself with

the [regulations](#) that apply in the Eagles Nest Wilderness, and help others to learn and follow them. For instance, dogs must be leashed at all times in order to protect you, your dog, wildlife, and the wilderness experience of other users. And remember to always practice Leave No Trace principles, and be aware of cumulative impacts on our fragile landscapes.

Let’s celebrate National Wilderness Month by getting out into our beautiful local Wilderness Areas, while at the same time leaving them “untrammelled”!

“Get Wild” publishes on Fridays in the Summit Daily News. Karn Stiegelmeier is the Chair of 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





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