

# EAGLE POST 15

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**EAGLE POST** - The newsletter of **Friends of Eagles Nest Wilderness**, apprising you of important activities in and around Eagles Nest, Holy Cross, and Ptarmigan Wilderness Areas.



## Greetings!

Our **topic this month:**

### The American Beaver: An Icon of the West

**Introduction:** The US Supreme Court has repeatedly observed that the US Congress controls public land "without limitations," which is one reason why the Sagebrush Rebellion has failed. What has this to do with beavers? Well, Congress has to a large extent left *management of wildlife* on most federal lands to the *states* ([link](#)). Thus, Colorado Parks & Wildlife (CPW, a Division of the Department of Natural Resources) manages beaver and other wildlife on federal lands.



What is so important about beavers? Well, by way of example, a year ago President Obama made what probably wasn't the the biggest



mistake of his presidency, but some consider it unfortunate nonetheless: he chose the *bison* as our national mammal. For several reasons, the beaver was the better choice:

- \* the beaver was ubiquitous in North America, and not restricted mainly to the plains,
- \* the beaver, as trappers sought their fur, catalyzed the largest human land migration in the history of the world - the westward movement of the

pioneers, and

- \* the beaver alters its habitat with dams and ponds to the benefit of countless species of fish, insects, insectivorous and shore birds, mammals, amphibians, reptiles, and plants.

Alas, from the get-go the poor beaver had two strikes against it as a candidate for national status. It is a *rodent*, and it is already the national animal of *Canada*.

Elissa Slezak is a District Wildlife Manager (Summit County East) in CPW, with headquarters in Hot Sulfur Springs. We



## DUST OFF THEM BOOTS!

Volunteer for our **2017 Trail projects:**

[Details](#)

**Saturday June 3:** Day project: National Trails Day: Salt Lick Trail in Silverthorne.

**Saturday June 17:** Day project: "Gateways" day project. Location TBD.

**Thursday July 20:** Day project: Colorado Outward Bound School Joint Project. Piney River Trail.

**Thu-Sat, July 27-29:** Pack-in project: Wilderness Society Joint Project. Location TBD. Reservations necessary (Bill Reed: 970-513-9741).

**Friday August 11:** Day project: Conservation Colorado Joint Project.

are fortunate that she has taken time from her extraordinarily busy schedule to contribute the essay below about beavers. Read on, to learn more about this fascinating animal.

## The American Beaver: an Icon of the West

By Elissa Slezak, District Wildlife Manager, Colorado Parks & Wildlife

Have you ever been enjoying a quiet creekside hike, a sunset river float, or an evening of fly fishing when all of a sudden, SLAP! The silence is broken by a sound of warning that reverberates from the mountainsides. You have interrupted the work of nature's foremost engineer, *Castor canadensis*, the American beaver. One of the few mammals capable of altering its environment to suit its needs, it is a keystone species of the Rocky Mountains.

How busy is a beaver? They are mostly nocturnal, working diligently through the night, repairing and maintaining dams and their lodge, munching their favorite food: aspen leaves and bark (no, they do not eat fish). Nor do fish eat them, although coyotes, bears, mountain lions, bobcats, lynx, and even river otters do. Fortunately, beavers can hold their breath for up to five minutes, swimming far away under water to reach safety when they feel threatened.



While the beaver may work solely to serve its own security, the labors of this industrious mammal have far reaching collateral benefits for the ecosystem. By managing a watershed with dams, ponds, and channels to slow moving water, beavers regulate spring runoff, reduce flooding, raise the water table, improve riparian vegetation, and increase forage both for other wildlife and for livestock. In winter, the ponds freeze over and beavers swim out under the ice to access their food cache (created in the autumn by sinking piles of limbs and branches in the pond).

While lovers of nature praise the work of the beaver, others fight to protect their landscape plantings, keep open their irrigation culverts, and safeguard driveways, roads and bridges. Increasingly, groups work to protect human structures without killing the beavers



Elissa Slezak

Silverthorne area of Eagles Nest. Reservations necessary (Bill Reed: 970-513-9741).

**Thu-Sun, Sept 14-17:** Pack-in project: Missouri Lakes Project. Two work days Holy Cross Wilderness. Reservations necessary (Tim Drescher: timdcy@gmail.com). In 2016, we spent two weekends at alpine lakes and obliterated **54** illegal campfire rings. Join our crews in 2017!

Become a **Volunteer Wilderness Ranger** in 2018

**Details.**

In 2016, more than 50 VWRs contacted more than 12,000 hikers. *Greet & teach!*

We also need volunteers **outside the Wilderness**

If you're a **writer, social media advisor, website manager, marketer, event planner, meeter/greeter**, we need you! **Email us** (info@fenw.org)

Make a donation to FENW



Make a difference!

Recent Newsletters

- May: "**Meet Wilderness Manager Mike Beach**" by Mike Beach

([link](#)). Beavers were driven nearly to extinction in the early 19th century by European explorers who sought their dense, luxurious pelts for stylish gentleman's hats.

A highly social animal, beavers live in large colonies with a dominant breeding pair, their yearling offspring, and a young-of-the-year litter.



A beaver family "home" may comprise several dams, ponds, channels, runways, and a lodge or earthen bank den. Two-year-old beavers are often the culprits of human conflict as they depart the colony to

establish their own territories.

To observe a beaver, look for signs of freshly cut wood chips, gnawed stumps and willows, or fallen aspen or cottonwood trees near slow-moving waterways or ponds - all signs of an active colony. Find a natural blind to disguise your presence, sit quietly in the mornings or evenings, and look for disturbance on the water surface as the beaver goes about its work. Whether you love beavers or not, most of us can admit to the amazing capability of these fascinating creatures, and we are lucky to catch a glimpse of them going about their work.

At the present time in Summit County, beaver populations are not *officially* monitored (but see [link](#)), and the total population is unknown. Typically, CPW receives several requests each spring for removal of nuisance beavers. As for relocating beavers, CPW does not allow them to be moved between different drainages due to risk of disease transmission (Tularemia).



**About Elissa Slezak:** Growing up in Evergreen, CO with a father as a biologist, Elissa always has had a passion for wildlife. After earning an undergraduate degree in Biology, followed by a Master's degree, Elissa was hired by Parks and Wildlife (formerly Division of Wildlife) as a Wildlife Health Technician in Fort Collins. Elissa's experience doing research on **chronic wasting disease** in

northwestern Colorado gave her a glimpse into the job of a District Wildlife Manager. She applied for the position soon after and was hired in 2004, working in Mesa and Garfield Counties until 2013, when she transferred to Summit County.

- April: "Future of Eagles Nest" by April Phule
- March: "Managing High Use Areas in Wilderness" by Kay Hopkins
- February: "A Cry From The Wilderness" by Bill Reed
- January: "Public Lands at Risk" by David Lien
- December: "My life as a Wilderness Manager" by Cindy Ebbert
- November: "Saving Native Cutthroat Trout" by Matt Grove
- October: "Loved to Death" by Jackie Fortier
- September: "Toward a Natural Forest" by Jim Furnish

**Join us!** for our next **Planning Meeting**

Thursday, June 22, 5:30 PM, Silverthorne >>

**MAP**

Details at [www.fenw.org/](http://www.fenw.org/)

CITY MARKET  
COMMUNITY REWARDS  
PROGRAM

Please **register** your City Market Value Card, linking it to FENW, which will send rebates to FENW without compromising your earned fuel points. Please note that each card holder may only sign up for one tax exempt organization. **THANKS!**



**Friends, Friends, Friends!**

Check out our sister 'FRIENDS'

- Friends of Dillon Ranger District (**FDRD**)
- Friends of the Lower Blue River (**FOLBR**)