

## EAGLE POST 42

We are in the process of CHANGING OUR NAME from **Friends of Eagles Nest Wilderness to EAGLE SUMMIT WILDERNESS ALLIANCE - ESWA**, but we will still be apprising you of important activities in and around Eagles Nest, Holy Cross, and Ptarmigan Peak Wilderness Areas.

[VIEW IN BROWSER](#)



November 2019

Dear \*|FNAME|\*

Greetings! Our topic this month is  
**GOLD MEDAL STATUS FOR THE BLUE RIVER**  
By Lane Wyatt

NW Colorado Regional Council of Governments (NWCCOG)

### BEFORE WE BEGIN:

**1.** Our NEW NAME & LOGO are ready to go, but we will wait until after December 10, so that you can find us for [COLORADO GIVES DAY](#) - same link as last year.

Below is our new logo. It was created by [Kind Design](#), who discounted a significant fraction of their services for us, for which we are deeply thankful. By the way, the jagged line across ESWA tracks the actual horizon of Eagles Nest Wilderness as seen from the west side.

**2.** Colorado Gives Day is December 10. This single portal allows you to donate to Colorado non-profits in a convenient and friendly way. Please include FENW in your giving plans - visit our site [HERE](#). You can donate today and delay its payment until COGives Day.



## INTRODUCTION:

**Gold Medal** fishing designation is a cherished award for any stream. In Colorado, about 300 miles of streams - *less than one percent of the total* - are so honored. **Eagle County** hosts about 25 miles of Gold Medal streams (4 miles of Gore Creek near Minturn, plus the Frying Pan and a short stretch of the Roaring Fork in the far SW corner of the county). In **Summit County**, the Blue River in 2015 was Gold Medal from Dillon Dam all the 34 miles to the confluence with the Colorado River near Kremmling (excepting Green Mountain Reservoir).



Then, in 2016, *more than half* of the Gold Medal reach on the Blue River failed to meet minimum standards, and was delisted, all the way from Hamilton Creek in Silverthorne to Green Mountain Reservoir. Since then, a broad coalition of stakeholders has been investigating the reasons for the stream degradation as a preliminary step to repairing the damage and restoring its Gold Medal status.

In his article below, LANE WYATT of the Northwest Colorado Regional Council of Governments (NWCCOG) reviews the issues. He describes the criteria for achieving Gold Medal status, shows the data that reveal the sorry Blue River status, and describes the plans of a group (BREW) to restore the river. They will monitor a variety of variables, comparing the delisted reach of river with the Gold Medal reach farther downstream (below Green Mountain Reservoir). They will also conduct active experiments, for example by monitoring the effects of adding phosphorus in carefully measured amounts.

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## GOLD MEDAL FISHING AND THE BLUE RIVER STORY

Lane Wyatt

Director, Watershed Services & Summit Water  
Quality Quantity Committee  
NW Colorado Council of Governments (NWCCOG)

Hiking and outdoor enthusiasts often seek out designated Wilderness areas as locations for pristine hiking experiences. They know Wilderness areas will be free from motorized and non-motorized vehicles and will have limited forest management so are a prime place to spend time in a natural forest setting. Similarly, anglers will seek Gold Medal designated streams as locations where they will find a high-quality fishing experience. These are reaches of rivers and streams where they can also find trophy size trout.



## CRITERIA FOR GOLD MEDAL STATUS

Gold Medal designation requires attaining certain standards to qualify. They may be **nominated** for designation by individuals, organizations or Colorado Parks



and Wildlife (CPW), but at a minimum these stream reaches **must produce at least 60 pounds of biomass per acre of which at least 12 fish are 14 inches or larger.**

Interestingly the biomass measure includes all living organisms, so not only all species of fish found but also the macroinvertebrates that support the fish and algae and other plant life that support the macroinvertebrates. So the Gold Medal standard reflects not only good fishing but also a healthy aquatic ecosystem as well. In addition Gold Medal fisheries must be **accessible to the public.**

Of the 9,000 miles of streams in Colorado there are about 300 stream miles of Gold Medal fisheries. These are found on 11 different rivers and three lakes (see map above). In 2014 a 102 mile stretch of the Arkansas River downstream from the heavily impacted historic mining areas in the headwaters was added to the Gold Medal list. This is a remarkable tribute to effectiveness of 20 years of mine remediation efforts upstream.

Gold Medal status is given by the Colorado Parks and Wildlife Commission. This is an 11 member citizen board appointed by the Governor. The makeup of the Commission is mandated to include multiple interests, such as outfitters, recreation, agriculture, etc., and encompass different geographic areas of Colorado. The CPW Commission is the policy setting board for the state parks and wildlife division of Colorado's Department of Natural Resources. [Trout Unlimited](#) posted a summary in 2015 of our Gold Medal streams - read it [HERE](#).

### THE BLUE RIVER HAS LOST GOLD MEDAL STATUS

The Blue River from the outlet of Dillon Reservoir to its confluence with the Colorado River near Kremmling contains Gold Medal reaches. In a very unusual move in 2016 the CPW Commission removed the Gold Medal status from a 19 mile segment of the Blue River - more than half of its Gold Medal reach. This is largely due to the fact that this segment could not naturally sustain the required Gold Medal requirements. The large rainbows that were found in this reach were largely hatchery brood trout stocked by CPW. For example, in 2016 CPW stocked 692 rainbow trout ranging in size from an average of 14 inches to 19 inches in length and 1,768 in 2015. According to CPW, *unnatural stream flows, sparse aquatic invertebrate populations, low nutrient content, cold water, and degraded habitat* all contribute to the decline of the previously exceptional fishery. CPW indicated that the reach has not naturally met the Gold Medal standard for over 15 years.

<b>Blue River Electrofishing Surveys</b>					
<b>DATE</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2004</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2015</b>
<b>Biomass (pounds/acre)</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Number of fish &gt;14" /acre</b>	<b>--</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>

### RESTORING GOLD MEDAL STATUS FOR THE BLUE RIVER

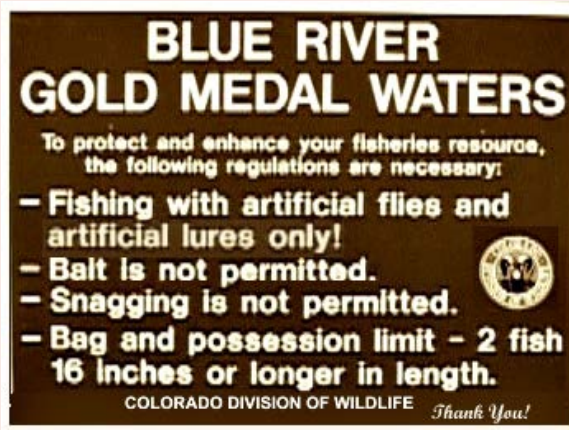
In response to this delisting of the Blue River the then



director of CPW organized a task force to look into the causes and hopefully remedy the depressed aquatic life situation in the Blue River between Dillon and Green Mountain Reservoirs.

That task force is comprised of CPW representatives, Denver Water, local fishing outfitters, Trout Unlimited, academics, the Town of Silverthorne, citizens and others. The group called itself the Blue River Enhancement Workgroup (BREW). They have met on multiple occasions and outlined a wide variety of potential causes and remedies for the problem. But ultimately

most of this was well intended speculation and professional judgement. To bring more definitive science to these theories, University of Colorado professor [William Lewis](#) proposed a **series of experiments** to either confirm or eliminate many of the ideas. In general, Dr. Lewis and other BREW members were trying to verify why the fish were essentially starving. Some individuals thought that very long periods of low stream temperatures (less than 8 degrees centigrade) were the primary culprit. BREW agreed that the temperature conditions did limit the growth rate of fish but did not explain the limited numbers and poor condition of the fish.



So participants in the group designed a very organized **monitoring network for nutrients, temperature, macroinvertebrates, and fish to establish a baseline condition** in order to be able to statistically verify any effect of the experiments. This monitoring included **sampling both upstream and downstream of Green Mountain Reservoir to compare portions of the same river that**

**have significantly different fisheries.** With this system in place one of the next experiments was intended to evaluate whether the stream bed provides adequate habitat for macroinvertebrates. Loss of habitat may be a result of reduced flooding to move and scour the stream bed. This scouring helps provide the spaces between the rocks and cobble that are necessary for various life stages of aquatic macroinvertebrates.

**Another experiment in the works is the enrichment of a short portion of the river with phosphorus.** The theory is that the primary source of flow for the Blue River is Dillon Reservoir. The Reservoir has a regulatory limit on phosphorus to prevent eutrophication (excessive algae growth) of the reservoir. Rivers can absorb higher concentrations of nutrients without negative consequences. For example,



Colorado's stream standard for total phosphorus for lakes and streams are 25 ug/L and 110 ug/L, respectively. Nutrients, like phosphorus are necessary for algae called *periphyton* to grow in streams. Periphyton are a critical food source for aquatic invertebrates, which of course are a primary food for fish. So this experiment is designed to help understand whether the fish's food web is disrupted.

In 2018 Trout Unlimited (TU) and the Blue River Watershed Group (BRWG) **acquired grants to fund an Integrated Water Management Plan (IWMP)** for the Blue River Watershed. There are several sources of these funds including the Colorado Water Conservation Board and the Bureau of Reclamation. An IWMP aims to balance social, economic, and environmental benefits of a watershed. After meeting with stakeholders in the Blue River watershed TU and BRWG identified the issues that BREW was grappling with as the first phase for funding. The hope is that these experiments will be initiated in 2020.

So after almost 20 years of degraded fishing conditions, the loss of Gold Medal status, and lots of speculation and blame, the outlook for the Blue River is improving. It is the goal of everyone involved to achieve Gold Medal status for the Blue River again.

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#### ABOUT LANE WYATT






Lane Wyatt

Lane is just retiring from the Northwest Colorado Council of Governments QQ Committee, an organization comprised of counties, municipalities, and special districts that utilize land use authority and local regulations to address water issues in the headwaters region of the Colorado River basin. In addition, Lane has administered the Summit Water Quality Committee since 1987. SWQC is one of the nation's first watershed based organizations actively involved in pollution trading. Lane's education background is in biology and engineering. He is a Registered Professional Engineer in Colorado.



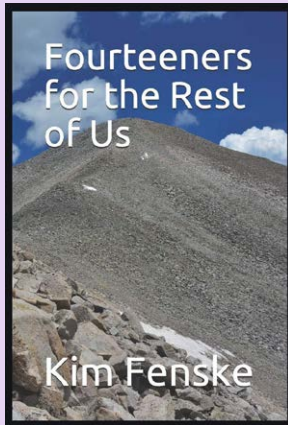
A huge thanks to [ARAPAHOE BASIN SKI AREA](#). For more than two decades, A-Basin staff have donated generously to their **Employee Environmental Fund**, of which FENW has been a steady beneficiary. Last year, more than 150 employees donated, led by A-Basin Director **Alan Henceroth**. Our enduring THANKS!

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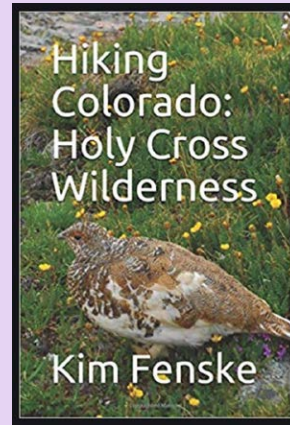
So many to **THANK**, so little space... Our deep thanks to:

[Restop](#), the leader in personal sanitation and hygiene in the backcountry (as well as many other venues), for donations of wag bags, which we offer to backpackers headed to the deep backcountry.



**KIM FENSKE**, for donations of FIFTEEN copies of his excellent hiking guides.

OUR SINCERE THANKS TO YOU ALL FOR HELPING TO PRESERVE AND PROTECT THE CROWN JEWEL OF PUBLIC LANDS - WILDERNESS!



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The Fall 2019 hard copy newsletter will be mailed later this month. If you haven't been receiving issues - which contain about two dozen fun

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**THURSDAY DECEMBER 12, 5:30 PM,**

Venue TBD

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

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# GOLD MEDAL STREAMS

