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JUNE 2020 Newsletter

COVID-19 PRECAUTIONS:

The safety of our community is our top priority, and we are committed to doing our part to limit the spread of COVID-19 (aka coronavirus). We are closely monitoring guidelines from the Center for Disease Control (CDC) and Colorado Department of Public Health and the Environment (CDPHE), and how these might impact our programs. We are also coordinating with our US Forest Service partners to remain in compliance with their COVID-19 response guidelines.

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Note from the Chair – Peter Vrolijk

Beginning in Fits & Starts

The summer season has begun, but we are still working with the USFS to define the conditions under which volunteers can work in the wilderness areas this summer while avoiding the spread of the COVID virus through our activities. What seems almost certain is that any effort or project will be smaller than in previous years, and this in turn will require greater individual initiative from the volunteer membership.



View of the Mount Evans high country from the Rosalie Trail near the Threemile Trail junction

Steve West provides an example in this newsletter of how that individual initiative can contribute to wilderness where he describes the removal of a complex tree on the Threemile Trail, accomplished with only two volunteers. Alan describes upcoming opportunities for participating in invasive plant treatments, but these will entail smaller groups than have gone out before. Many of the Education and Outreach activities that Gordon and others have been developing in the past years are too risky in the current health crisis; we especially regret the cancellation of the Boys and Girls Club event that has been so popular the past few years. This has always required a big effort to pull off, but the rewards from the children's enjoyment have made this an event to anticipate each year.

I have been out on the trails, as the photo above attests, compiling information about blown downs over the past winter and spring. There are a lot of trees down, and various partner organizations like the Front Range Backcountry Horsemen are doing a phenomenal job clearing out long stretches of trail. We can help our partner organizations by taking a hike, using the Survey123 app, and providing map information about the location, size, and nature of downed trees that hinder hikers' trail access.

This is a special time of year in wilderness. The wildflowers are emerging. The land feels fresh with the start of summer. There is solitude to be found deep in the wilderness. I hope to see many of you on the trails.

- Peter

Forest Service COVID-19 Related Closures in Our Area



Mt Evans Road Closure :

This road is access to the following Mt Evans Wilderness Trails: Summit Lake Trail, Chicago Lakes Trail and the Mt Evans Ridge Trail. The Weed Teams use the Mt Evans road to access Lincoln Lake and Beartrack Lakes to spray noxious weeds.

According to the USDA Forest Service Public Affairs, CDOT and Denver Mountain Parks Press Release:

The Mount Evans highway will not open for cars at all this year.

CLEAR CREEK COUNTY — Due to issues associated with COVID-19, USDA Forest Service and Denver Mountain Parks will not be able to provide services for visitors on Mount Evans this summer, and the Mount Evans Highway (Colorado Highway 5) will not open to motorized vehicles for the 2020 season. The Colorado Department of Transportation, the USDA Forest Service, and Denver Mountain Parks — the agencies that jointly manage Mount Evans — have reached this decision after careful consideration of both health and safety risks and economic feasibility.

While there will be no restrooms or services provided by USDA Forest Service and Denver Mountain Parks on Mount Evans this summer, there are no plans to prohibit the use of Mount Evans Highway for non-motorized activities such as hiking and biking. Recreationists should be aware of and plan for extremely limited parking. Visitors to public lands should practice the seven [Leave No Trace](#) (click to follow link) principles and follow state and local orders regarding recreation throughout the summer.

Since the highway will remain closed to motorized use for the 2020 season, CDOT crews plan to perform necessary maintenance of the highway that can't be carried out when the highway is open. This includes filling potholes and fixing damaged delineation markings which outline the edges of the highway and also alert motorists to any obstacles covered by snow. This work will help improve the condition and safety of the highway greatly as all involved agencies look ahead to the 2021 season.

Conditions on Mount Evans could be quite variable and unsafe due to weather and potential icy and snow-packed conditions. Due to the higher demand on law enforcement and rescue operations, high-risk activities that increase your chance of injury or distress should be avoided.

Guanella Pass Road Update:

The Guanella Pass Road reopened to vehicles for the season on Thursday June 4th. This road includes access to Mt Evans Wilderness trails. The road is managed by Clear Creek County and Park County. The pass was named for Byron Guanella in 1953. Guanella was a road supervisor and commissioner in Clear Creek County for nearly 50 years.

The Guanella Pass Scenic Byway provides a route between Georgetown in the valley of Clear Creek to the north and the small town of Grant in the valley of Geneva Creek to the south. Elevation at the summit of the pass is 11,670 feet. The 22 mile paved road is extremely popular during the fall season.

Fire Restrictions

STAGE ONE Fire Restrictions until rescinded: Visitors may not: build or maintain a fire except within a developed recreation site, ie: campgrounds where fees are charged; no smoking except in an enclosed vehicle or in a developed recreation site; use of a combustion engine (including chainsaws) without a spark arrestor device with a fire extinguisher and a shovel; operate a welder or other open flame except in cleared areas of at least 10 feet in diameter and be in possession of a fire extinguisher; and no use of explosives, including fireworks.



Current local fire restriction and recreation area closure information is available at this Forest Service websites:

Pike and San Isabel NF Cimarron and Comanche National Grasslands
Arapaho & Roosevelt National Forest and Pawnee National Grassland

https://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/fseprd745460.pdf

FOMELC Current Event Status

- We are working closely with the Forest Service for policies regarding volunteer work on National Forest. We are working closely with our local Forest Service for direction on group sizes regarding our projects for the upcoming season.
- Monthly FOMELC meetings are suspended until it is safe to resume gatherings like this one.
- Multi-person field activities, like All-Hands Days, remain in flux as we consider how the public health environment progresses into the summer.
- Any further developments regarding FOMELC activities will be communicated to the membership.
- Related forest information (closures, fire special orders, etc.) regarding the areas FOMELC operates in will also be communicated to the membership.
- Neither the Clear Creek District Ranger nor the South Platte District Range have yet authorized volunteers to work on the district, so anything volunteers do at this point is outside the scope of any volunteer agreement, thus any liability is on them. However, FOMELC is currently working with the Districts to develop a plan for volunteer activities in the two Wildernesses.



June 2020 -- FROM THE WEED PATCH

Alan Rockwood

The season for eradicating invasive weeds is upon us. Our first volunteer project is scheduled for Rolling Creek / Colorado Trail Trailhead on June 30th. Please check your email for details on the project and our early plans for 2020. We started this season a little differently from previous years. Dee Lyons and I have surveyed some of our sites in Mount Evans Wilderness to get a reading on the development of the key species – Orange hawkweed, Canada thistle, musk thistle and yellow toadflax. In the other years, we had relied on past schedules for when to start and where. This also gives us the time to assess the effectiveness of last year's projects.

What we found in the surveys was surprising. First, it is very dry in the Bear Creek Watershed! I knew our area had less than normal, but this is “scary dry”. Last year the cold snowy spring retarded weed development but it also stimulated germination of the “seed bank” from seasons long past. If this warm weather continues then plant development will be accelerated. We also have learned that it was a bad winter for blowdowns and deadfall. The cross-cut crews will have to open trails before we can get water caches at the dry sites.

Keep in mind I'm an optimist, but so far, our observations of plant populations are very encouraging. There are still weeds to spray but their densities are way down. In recognizable locations where we use to find dozens of plants, we have been seeing 5-6. Now we have to look a little harder – a nice challenge to have! Second-year musk thistles are beginning to develop rapidly (bolting) but the dry spring is making musk rosettes harder to find. The weakness of species like musk thistle is that we have two seasons to stop them from re-populating their “seed bank”. If we miss a rosette this year, we can kill them next year. (These Pedee Creek second-year musk thistles were easy to find.)



We have about 10 weeks to complete 15 treatments. After Rolling Creek then we will move to Mount Evans Wilderness Captain Mount Trail and Beaver Meadows for a few sites and then back to Lost Creek. I will be completing a treatment schedule in a few days but like all things weather dependent it will be tentative. We will start with lower elevation infestations of musk thistle and Canada thistle then go to orange hawkweed later in July followed by yellow toadflax in August. Canada thistle can also be successfully treated after it has flowered late summer.

Hey, if it was easy to eradicate invasive weeds, they wouldn't be such a problem in the first place, but it only takes caring enough to be persistent. **Thank you FOMELC volunteers for caring!**

Mount Evans History

(From the website: Arapaho & Roosevelt National Forest Pawnee National Grassland)

Located near Idaho Springs, the Mount Evans Highway is owned by the Colorado Department of Transportation and jointly managed by Denver Mountain Parks and the USDA Forest Service, both of which have land and facilities along the highway to the 14,264-foot summit. CDOT partners with these agencies by plowing and maintaining the narrow, winding highway — the highest paved road in North America — from Echo Lake at CO 103 to the summit. More than 200,000 people from all over the world visit the summit of Mount Evans annually while the road is open, generally from Memorial Day Weekend to Labor Day Weekend.

The Mountain

For centuries people have looked up at Mount Evans, the most prominent mountain overlooking what is now Denver. In 1863 the mountain changed from something to admire from afar, to something to experience up close and personal. Famous western landscape painter Albert Bierstadt became the first known person to summit the mountain. He initially named the mountain after his wife-to-be Rosalie. In 1895, the mountain was officially named “Mount Evans,” after John Evans, the second territorial governor of Colorado. The name Mount Rosalie was then moved to a 13,575' peak about three miles southeast.

The Road

July 22, 1923, construction began on the road and by 1930 it was complete. In June of 1931, the road opened to the public. At that time the Mount Evans Road was the highest in the world. Today it is the highest road in North America, ascending to 14,130 feet above sea level, making it 20 feet higher than the Pikes Peak Highway.

If you have ever hiked a high peak, you know how hard it is to function at high elevations. Take a moment to imagine what it must have been like for workers to construct a highway that reaches almost to the summit of Colorado's 14th highest 14,000 foot mountain. In the following contractor report to the Assistant Engineer of the State Highway Department, we get an understanding of what this must have been like:



“During the construction season of 1923, the weather was constantly bad, there being practically continuous rain, hail and snow the whole season or heavy wet clouds. The result was that the use of heavy construction equipment was impracticable, and the contractor did practically all of the work with station gangs, who, with a shovel, hammer and drill, dynamite and determination, and copious amounts of Copenhagen snuff, literally forced the work through by hand, in spite of every obstacle.”

Today, even with the aid of advanced technology, maintenance on North America's highest paved road remains challenging.



1926



1945

What is Wilderness?

In order to assure that increasing population, expanding settlement, growing mechanization, does not occupy and modify all areas within the United States. For this purpose there is established Wilderness Areas where the Earth and its community of life are...untrammled. Where man himself is a visitor, who does not remain, where land retains its primeval character and influence.

-Wilderness Act of 1964

What is the Wilderness Act of 1964? View these short videos to learn more:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-xBeYyc-IR0>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XD0g2ILlz50>

When the Wilderness Act was passed in 1964, 54 areas (9.1 million acres) in 13 states were designated as wilderness. This law established these areas as part of the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS). Since 1964, the NWPS has grown almost every year and now includes 803 areas (111,687,310) in 44 states and Puerto Rico. In 1980, the passage of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) added over 56 million acres of wilderness to the system, the largest addition in a single year. 1984 marks the year when the most new wilderness areas were added.

Lands classified as wilderness through the Wilderness Act could be under jurisdiction of the Forest Service, National Park Service, or Fish and Wildlife Service. The Bureau of Land Management began managing wilderness with the passage of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act in 1976.

Overall, however, only about 5% of the entire United States—an area slightly larger than the state of California — is protected as wilderness.

“The love of wilderness is more than a hunger for what is always beyond reach; it is also an expression of loyalty to the earth ... the only home we shall ever know, the only paradise we ever need -- if only we had the eyes to see.”
Edward Abbey

There are 44 federally protected wilderness areas in Colorado that cover more than **3.5 million** acres (roughly the size of Connecticut).

MAPS – If you love maps, Wilderness Connect has a great National Wilderness Interactive Map that you can zoom into Colorado to view all the Wilderness areas.

<https://wilderness.net/visit-wilderness/maps.php>

News from Marketing & Education – Gordon Brown

Update: Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) Announcement Impacting Mount Evans Wilderness Access

Update regarding May Newsletter article from a press release: **CPW Commission requires a valid hunting or fishing license to access all State Wildlife Areas and CPW-leased State Trust Lands.** A valid hunting or fishing license will be required for everyone 18 or older attempting to access any State Wildlife Area or State Trust Land leased by Colorado Parks and Wildlife, beginning **July 1, 2020.**

It is recommended that FOMELC members doing trail work, spraying weeds or doing a trail patrol wear a FOMELC uniform to be exempt from the hunting or fishing license requirement. However a fishing license will also cover you for any Search and Rescue needs.

You may obtain hunting or fishing license online at CPW or at an agent location close to our Wilderness Areas:

- For Conifer: Big R, KOTM Outfitters or Safeway
- For Bailey: Platte River Outfitters
- For Evergreen: Big R or Safeway

All our Booth events like attendance at the Evergreen Rodeo, Home and Garden Shows, Earth Day and Bailey Days have been cancelled.



TRAILS

Steve West

On May 30th, **Peter Vrolijk and Steve West**, Friends of Mt. Evans and Lost Creek Wilderness, hiked the Three Mile Trail to remove a precarious tree that could have been a danger to the trail users. After working most of the morning and early afternoon the tree was finally cut and on the ground.

On your travels around both Wilderness areas, please let us know where and how many trees are down. Recent indications are that there will be trees that have fallen over the winter, FOMELC will send out saw crews to open the trails.



The idea of wilderness
Needs no defense.
It only needs more defenders
- *Edward Abbey*



FOMELC Mission Statement:

The Mount Evans and Lost Creek Wildernesses encompass 194,400 acres with over 170 miles of trails in Colorado’s Pike and Arapaho National Forests.

We work in partnership with the US Forest Service, engaging in education, outreach and stewardship activities to preserve the wilderness character of these lands for current and future generations.

I Have a Question!

Got a general or specific trail question? Admin@fomelc.org email will go to all board members and one of us will get back to you.

How do I become a volunteer with FOMELC?

Check out our **NEW website** to sign up. www.fomelc.org