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May 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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Forest Service COVID-19 Related Closures in Our Area

Recreation Area Closures

Through May 31, 2020, all developed recreation sites and facilities on both the Pike and San Isabel, and Arapaho and Roosevelt National Forests are closed to all use. This includes all developed campgrounds, picnic grounds, and day-use areas, and any other constructed facility amenities – such as fire rings/grills, picnic tables, restroom facilities with vaulted toilets, and trash collection services. This does not include associated parking areas and trails. Trail users must adhere to social distancing and COVID-19 prevention orders and guidelines issued by local, state and federal authorities while using trails. Trail users should be prepared for no restroom facilities and must pack out all trash and human waste.



Temporary closures of recreational facilities (located along Guanella Pass Pictures by Dee Lyons) More information will be available on the Forest Service websites regarding closures beyond May 31st.



Fire Restrictions

Through May 31, 2020, both the Pike and San Isabel, and Arapaho and Roosevelt National Forests, igniting, building, maintaining, attending or using a fire, including charcoal grills and barbecues, coal and wood burning stoves, and shepherd's stoves, and smoking, except within an enclosed vehicle, trailer, or building, are prohibited.

Pressurized liquid or gas devices (stoves, grills or lanterns) with shut-off valves in an area at least three feet from any flammable materials are exempt.

More information will be available on the Forest Service websites below regarding closures beyond May 31st.

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

Pike and San Isabel NF Cimarron and Comanche National Grasslands
<https://www.fs.usda.gov/psicc>

Arapaho & Roosevelt National Forest and Pawnee National Grassland
<https://www.fs.usda.gov/arp>

Guanella Pass Road Closure

According to the Colorado Department of Transportation website: Per the COVID19 Pandemic, Guanella Pass Road is closed until further notice. Closure gates located at Naylor Lake on the Clear Creek county side and Burning Bear Campground on the Park County side.

Guanella Pass Road Information Line at 303-679-2300, ext. 2 for updates.

(Closure gate past Burning Bear Campground)



FOMELC Current Event Status

- We are working closely with the Forest Service for policies regarding volunteer work on National Forest. Currently the Clear Creek Ranger District is recommending patrols be families located from same household or individual FOMELC members to be consistent with the social distancing required by the CDC and Colorado State guidelines.
- 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

Note from the Chair – Peter Vrolijk

Summer is Nigh

I am happy to be back after missing the last newsletter. While I was quite sick at the last newsletter deadline, I was suffering a bacterial infection – Shigella – rather than the dreaded viral infection. The emergency room nurse asked me if I had been drinking pond water, and that comment made me think about whether I always carry water treatment when I venture into wilderness. If something goes wrong, we can always survive longer without food than without water, yet I know that I try hard to take no more water than I need. There are so many small, lightweight water treatment options available, ranging from iodine tablets to water filtration straws and pumps. What's in your pack, and could you provide yourself safe drinking water if you got stuck with only the items in your pack? For the record, I hadn't drunk any untreated water, and I have no idea how I picked up those bacteria.



I did my first patrol of the season yesterday, a sunny Saturday at the beginning of the holiday weekend. Even though I headed out early in the morning, the number of people on the trail for my late morning return was staggering. Maintaining good social distance was a distraction but a necessary part of my outing.

Which brings us to the question of how we make wilderness contributions during this period of altered norms. While there are things that we don't yet fully know, there is a lot we do know. First, it seems likely that we can continue to collect information about the heartbeat of wilderness on patrols. We may be unable to take our friends along on patrols and may have to limit ourselves to including only other household members, but maybe this provides us an opportunity to collect more information about things like trail conditions than has been done in past years. I encourage each FOMELC volunteer to consider setting a personal patrol challenge for the year and use that goal to motivate your wilderness contributions. Contact me or another board member to discuss ideas, or consider contributing to the FOMELC/VOC/CMC joint project to collect campsite inventory data in the Goose Creek corridor.

Second, it looks likely that volunteer work crews will be possible, and if they are, they will be small and designed to promote commonsense behaviors to limit virus transmission as outlined in CDC guidelines. Emphasizing these norms and behaviors will be a critical part of any project that does take place. We await final USFS decisions on whether volunteer work crews will be possible. Popular large group activities like our All Hands Days likely will be skipped this year, and for now we have no plans for any. What this means is that if small work crews are allowed, we will need more events to accomplish the same amount of work as in past years. To achieve this, volunteers who have come along as participants will need to lead small group efforts. This is a challenge to all volunteers to elevate her or his engagement in wilderness projects.

We can still make a difference in wilderness this year. How we do it will be different, and some aspects of that difference remain to be defined. However, nothing stands in our way from putting on a pack tomorrow, having our phone with the FOMELC app in our pocket and a small saw to cut out small trees in our pack, and heading out on a trail.

Peter



It's time to start thinking about weeds again after a long winter break—not that we haven't had other things to worry about this year! I hope you are well and being safe. A few days ago, I found myself missing Spring Training this year and so a few of us checked out the “experiential hike” route at the AG Ranch—we, of course, properly maintained “social distances”. With JeffCo Open Spaces overrun, it was not surprising to finding a few others on the trail. Still was a very beautiful day.

Controlling invasive weeds always involves many challenges. This year we face some new ones. I'm sorry to say that after six years of awarding us a noxious weed grant, the Colorado Department of Agriculture did not accept our application for 2020. Their budget was reduced this year, but they have encouraged us to apply again in 2021 and offered suggestions for our program in future applications. On May 4th, I applied for another grant from the National Wilderness Stewardship Alliance (NWSA) that would replace most of the funding lost. We should know by the first of June whether that application was successful or not.



Next, there is the matter of staying safe with the COVID-19 pandemic. FOMELC's Board of Directors has been considering how we can responsibly conduct projects this season. For weed projects we anticipate the following protocol, provided that Colorado does NOT have to return to “STAY AT HOME” restrictions. Teams will consist of two individuals—a sprayer and a scout. Masks will be required. There will be no more than two teams working on an infestation at a time. Volunteers on the project will maintain appropriate social distances. Equipment used will not be shared by team members. Volunteers that wish to participate as a sprayer, should have experience in that role and will be assigned equipment for the season. They will need to maintain it after each project. I will continue to mix the herbicide concentrate solutions for all projects. As we get closer to the treatment season, I will prepare a schedule for treating our priority sites given how annual variations in weather patterns are impacting plant development.

If we receive the grant from the National Wilderness Stewardship Alliance, I believe we can continue to make overall progress toward our goal of total eradication, but priorities will change given our successes to date and funding realities. The grant funds will again be used to hire Foothills Vegetation Management (FVM) for the treatment of selected infestations. FVM will begin treatment of a large yellow toadflax infestation on the Hankins Pass Trail, Lost Creek Wilderness. In my opinion, this is the highest priority site in Lost Creek. In return, FOMELC volunteers will treat the Pedee Creek musk thistle infestation, previously an FVM site, in Mount Evans Wilderness. The thistle population there has been dramatically reduced in recent years.



Given safety guidelines for COVID-19, organizing treatments requiring thru-hikes will be more complicated. We probably won't do the upper Beartrack Lakes projects. Since the Canada thistle along the upper trail has been virtually eradicated, we will recheck the areas in 2021 and apply the hours elsewhere this season. We still need to treat the orange hawkweed in Resthouse



Meadows accessed from Lincoln Lake. I will continue to work on a plan for that. If FOMELC does not receive a grant from NWSA, then we regroup and make plans to minimize our losses this year on the long path to total eradication.

“Stay tuned”...we will update you on our summer plans as they evolve. *Alan*

A Short History of the Abyss Lake Trail

By Ralph Bradt

As with many of our Wilderness trails, the Abyss Lake trail, or at least part of it, predates the establishment of the Forest Service. The first known use of the trail was by early Native Americans following what is now Scott Gomer Creek as they migrated from the drainage of the North Fork of the South Platte over what is now Guanella Pass into the Clear Creek valley, following the game.

As miners and settlers moved into the area, the demand for mine timbers, railroad ties, and construction lumber brought mills to the area in the late 1800s. One of those lumbermen was Scott Gomer, who cut for five years in the gulch, which now bears his name. It is said the daily capacity of his mill was twelve thousand board feet. If you watch carefully, you can still see old tall stumps from his work, particularly along the Rosalie trail north of the Abyss Lake trail. In addition, on the south side of the valley near the second crossing of Scott Gomer Creek, sharp eyes may spot the remains of a chute for skidding logs down from above.

On very early Forest Service and USGS maps, today's Scott Gomer Creek is called Geneva or East Geneva Creek. The name appears to have changed around 1915-1920. These same maps show the trail extending only up to the area of the present day junction with the Rosalie trail.

In 1916, the Geneva Fire burned in Scott Gomer Gulch. Newspapers at the time reported the size at 1,000-2,000 acres, but Ingval Horgan's 1924 History of the Pike National Forest and my own analysis of past aerial photography indicate it was between 500 and 700 acres. That fire is responsible for today's huge aspen groves and the spectacular colors found in the fall along the trail.

At one time, there was a three-sided camping shelter, like those in Beaver Meadows, near the present junction of the Abyss and Rosalie trails. Based on aerial photos, it would appear that the shelter was constructed sometime in the early 1950s. In the Pike National Forest supervisor's office, I was able to locate one undated photo of the shelter, possibly taken in the 1950s-1960s. It was likely removed when the Wilderness was designated in 1980 and now only the foundation remains.



Undated - The shelter



2015 – The foundation

In 1956, the 5,880 acre Abyss Lake Scenic Area was set aside by the Forest Service under the 1939 “U Regulations.” Plans were made to develop the area further for recreation, including two backcountry campgrounds, one at Abyss Lake and the other above the first crossing of Scott Gomer Creek, and one full campground at or just below that same crossing. Only that last campground was ever constructed and by the 1990s little remained of it except a trash vault and a few broken picnic tables. At one time, a rough road could reach it. At about that same time, the trail was relocated and extended from the Rosalie trail to the lake.



The Abyss Lake Scenic Area



2016 – The remains of the Scott Gomer Campground

On the Fourth of July, 1969, a Beechcraft Bonanza on a sightseeing flight crashed about ¾ mile down the valley from Abyss Lake. The pilot, with only 80 hours of experience, apparently found himself caught in the cirque and was unable to turn out of it. There were two fatalities, and the wreckage remained scattered along the trail until 1996, when the Forest Service’s Region 2 Packstring hauled it out.



Jeff Outhier and John Kinkade pack up airplane parts and load them on the mules.

The most recent major work done on the Abyss trail was a couple reroutes necessitated by beaver activity flooding the trail. One was at the second crossing of Scott Gomer Creek and the other was at the junction of the Abyss and Rosalie trails.

Trail Patrols Survey 123 App

By Ralph Bradt

TIPS FOR GOOD DATA COLLECTION WITH OUR PHONE APP

- **Automatically fill in Patrol Data**

On every patrol there will be data that will be the same for the whole trip, i.e. Last Name, Number in Group, Wilderness, and Trail Name (although this may change mid trip). To save having to repeatedly enter this information, start each patrol by beginning a survey and filling in the information that will be the same each time. Then, touch the three horizontal bars (AKA, the hamburger) at the far upper right of the screen and touch “Set as favorite answers”. Last, touch the X at the far upper left to close the survey, and select “Save this survey in Drafts”. You’re good to go!

Next time you start a survey, touch the “hamburger”, pick “Paste from favorite answers”, and all your information is added to your new survey.

- **Patrol events**

These are the key events in your patrol:

Start Patrol – This is a great way to test your favorite answers and tells us where and when you started your patrol, how many were in your group, and what trail you are currently hiking.

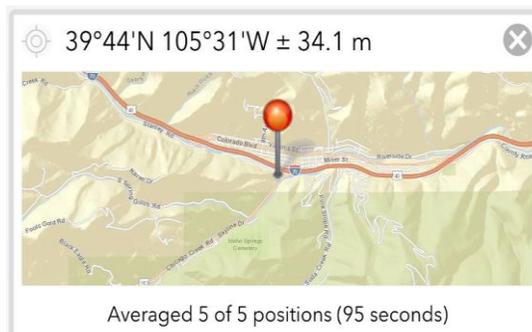
Start Return – This tells us how much of the trail was patrolled. You can also record Trail Junctions if you’re doing a loop or through hike.

End patrol – This is probably the most important one. You’re probably tired at the end of the patrol, but remember to take the time to record your patrol’s end. When you put in the time you were out, it calculates the total hours for your team, which is very important when we apply for grants. Get credit for the hard work you put in!

- **Use waypoint averaging for accuracy**

Each time you create collect a survey, the first thing you should see is a small map at the top of the screen. If not, either your phone doesn’t have a GPS fix yet (wait a minute) or the location setting on your phone is turned off (check to be sure it’s turned on). If you have a map, touch the symbol at the top left of the map window. At the bottom of the map window, it will begin letting you know it’s collecting positions.

Continue with your survey and, when you close out your survey, it will automatically average all those positions into a single, very accurate, point.



TIPS FOR GOOD DATA COLLECTION WITH OUR PHONE APP con't

- **Don't forget to close out each survey**

When you're done with your survey and are ready to hit the trail again, when you hit the check mark at the bottom right to close the survey, there's one last step. A window opens and, depending on whether you're offline or online, you have a last choice or choices to make your choice and the survey goes to the outbox. Done!

- **Use airplane mode on your cell phone**

This saves your battery when you're out of cell service, but GPS still works.

- **Use Comments/Notes**

You can record anything you want that isn't in the normal menu by selecting "Other" as your Recorded Event and typing your note in Comments/Notes. See a moose? Find an arrowhead? Chased by Sasquatch? Just add a Comment/Note and take a picture if you want.

- **Include photos**

Noxious weeds? Signs? Good campsites? Bad campsites? Take pictures when you do a survey. The exception is when encountering other folks on the trail. Not everyone wants their photo taken by others.

- **Submit your data!**

At the end of your long day, settling in with a cold beverage and back in cell or wireless range, don't forget to send in your hard earned data. Start up your app one more time and you'll see you have an outbox with the number of surveys you have waiting to send. Touch Outbox and you'll see all your surveys. At the lower right, touch send and your surveys will begin to upload to the big map.

Any questions, comments, or great ideas to improve the survey? Don't have, but would like the survey app on your phone? Please contact me at ralph@fomeic.org

News from Marketing & Education – Gordon Brown

Colorado Parks and Wildlife Announcement Impacting Mount Evans Wilderness Access

The following announcement appeared on the Colorado Park and Wildlife website. **It affects the Mount Evans Wilderness because of the Mount Evans State Wildlife Area (SWA) but does not impact the Lost Creek Wilderness.**

Neither Wilderness area has either CPW-leased State Trust Lands or State Wildlife Areas within its boundaries. However, you must enter the Mount Evans SWA to get to the trailheads accessing the Lost Creek, Captain Mountain, Beartrack Lakes, and Beaver Meadows Trails.

CPW Commission requires a valid hunting or fishing license to access all State Wildlife Areas and CPW-leased State Trust Lands

Travis Duncan
Statewide Public Information Officer
720-595-8294 / travis.duncan@state.co.us

DENVER – 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.

The rule change was adopted unanimously April 30 by the Colorado Parks and Wildlife Commission.

“By policy, state wildlife areas are acquired with hunter and angler dollars, and are intended specifically to provide wildlife habitat and wildlife-related recreation,” Southeast Regional Manager Brett Ackerman told the commission at its meeting. “This rule is aimed at curtailing non-wildlife-related use of these properties.

At the meeting, Ackerman presented examples from across the state of the increasing use of state wildlife areas inconsistent with their purpose, including set up of temporary residences, vehicular use on big game winter range, vandalism, and other uses detrimental to wildlife and wildlife-related uses.

“There’s certainly an impact on staff and resources, potential public health impact, degradation of habitat and displacement of wildlife,” Ackerman told commissioners. “There is a pattern of non-wildlife related issues we’re seeing out there.”

Beginning on July 1, 2020, anyone entering a state wildlife area or state trust land leased by CPW must hold either a valid hunting or fishing license in Colorado.

Ackerman emphasized that, “As with all new regulations, especially one as far reaching as this, our policy is to first educate. Especially when talking to constituent users of state wildlife areas, we want to help people understand why we’re taking this action. We’re not seeking to catch people off guard and write them tickets. We want to curtail non-wildlife use of these properties and return them to their original intended purpose.”



Trails & Mud

Article by Spencer McKee
From Out There Colorado

December 13, 2019



Next time you encounter a muddy trail, think twice about traveling it – and not just for the sake of your boots. Traffic on muddy trails – whether it’s foot traffic, bike traffic, or otherwise – leads to erosion and soil compaction that can cause long-lasting damage and be expensive to repair.

Erosion often comes in the form of travelers taking odd lines down the trail opposed to the norm. For instance, if a hiker is avoiding a mud puddle in the middle of the path, they may walk along a weaker edge of the trail not meant to bear weight. This breaks down the edge of the trail, often widening the path and destroying nearby vegetation. Pressing into the mud on a trail can also displace parts of the path – another factor that leads to misshapen or uneven trails.

Soil compaction is also a scary result of muddy trail usage. When soil compaction occurs, it hampers the ability of a trail to absorb precipitation. This can result in flooding and additional erosion.

Tips for muddy days:

- **Get muddy** (this sounds counter-intuitive, but hear me out) – While **travel on muddy trails should really be avoided altogether**, sometimes mud is spontaneously encountered and unavoidable. When this happens, walk through the mud, not around it. Walking through mud found center-trail prevents erosion in places off of the path. It’s the lesser of the evils in this case.
- **Start early** – If you’re **hiking in an area with cooler mornings**, you may be able to get your hike in while the mud is still frozen. A frozen trail is less susceptible to reshaping.
- **Pick trails wisely** – **South-facing and west-facing trails tend to dry out quicker**. Seek out trails with this orientation for the best chance of avoiding mud and reducing your impact. **Utilize paved or gravel options** – **Trails that aren’t dirt are obviously less susceptible to mud**. Consider switching up your choice of trail accordingly if mud is present.

HIKING ON MOTHER'S DAY

By Dave Swinehart

Bushwhacking through an aspen forest with down timber and large boulder obstacles, I hiked up the steep slope of Martland Peak, my second nondescript summit of the day in the Puma Hills of Colorado's Front Range. Like most bushwhacks, the going was steep, rugged and tedious, just another perfect day. As I hiked, I let my mind wander to distract it from the torture I was imposing upon my body, running over lists of things I needed to do when I would get home later on this beautiful Sunday.

In between my huffs and puffs and grunts, I said to myself, "I think today is Mother's Day. I'll have to be sure to call my mom when I get home. No, I think maybe next weekend is Mother's Day...oh, this hike is from hell...today is Mother's Day. Mother's Day! I'm hiking on *Mother's Day!*" At that point, I realized I had left home without wishing my wife a happy Mother's Day. "Dawn is going to think I forgot Mother's Day...well, I guess I did..."

*Hiking on Mother's Day—Is it good or is it not?
Whatever the answer, "I love you, I love you a lot".*

Hiking down the mountain, I felt stupid and embarrassed because I had forgotten Mother's Day. As I accelerated my decent from the summit, almost unconsciously, I started putting together a poem in my mind that expressed some of the feelings I had in my heart.

*Down the mountain I rush, I hurry, I trot;
My heart running full speed, my nose full of snot.*

Almost every adventurer, whether climber or backpacker, has faced the guilt and pain of leaving spouse, children and other loved ones behind to get the...hard to explain...fix that comes with spending long periods of time pursuing summits and wilderness trails. Like a junkie, many times over my 27 years of marriage, I've hugged, kissed and said goodbye to my wife, shouldered my backpack, and headed for the hills, seeking my next high. I leave feeling guilty and selfish, but return having found the spiritual tranquility that nature never fails to provide.

Then, there is always the possibility that the adventurer never will return. Etched in our minds are the heart-tugging conversations, during the 1996 Mount Everest epic, between the dying mountain guide Rob Hall and his wife, Jan. Through satellite technology, base camp was able to patch Rob and Jan together via his radio and her phone. Jan ends their last conversation with, "Don't feel that you're alone. I'm sending all my positive energy your way!"

And before he signed off, Hall told his wife, "I love you. Sleep well, my sweetheart. Please don't worry too much." I'll be sure to keep that book hidden from my wife.

John Roskelley, the famous mountaineer, once described an emotional departure from his wife. As they were driving to the airport for one of John's tremendously dangerous climbs in a remote area of the world, his wife, Joyce, tried to broach the subject of the possibility that they might never see each other again. Even though John had many of the same feelings as his wife's, in typical male fashion, he did not contribute to the conversation; instead, he just stared blankly through the windshield. Finally, his teary-eyed wife cried, "This is just ridiculous! Why do you have to go off and get killed? All for a stupid mountain! This is just absolutely ridiculous!"

At the airport, John kissed his wife good-bye, then turned and walked away, without saying a word. He realized his mute response was unkind, but it was the only way he knew how to handle the emotional separation.

*Whether you're angry, or sad or you're not;
Thoughts of you make me all bothered and hot.*

And if my own guilt isn't enough, there is always the constant reminder, from friends, co-workers and especially my mother in-law, that I am a terrible husband for leaving my wife and kids alone while I go play in the mountains. I remember once, many years ago, I was in my office on a Monday morning after I had returned from a week-long backpacking trip. My administrative assistant, Alta, walked into my office to hand me a report. Alta was 69 years old, had worked for the company for decades, and was known for speaking her mind. As she turned away and walked out of my office, she growled, "If I was your wife, I'd take a baseball bat to your head. To leave your wife and young children by themselves while you're out screwing around in those mountains..." Oh yes, those friendly reminders.

It is interesting that the one person who never makes me feel guilty for taking these trips is my wife, Dawn, the very person my friends tell me I am offending. She has this tolerant, intuitive knowledge that these forays into wilderness are necessary and good for me. For some strange reason, the very characteristics that drive me to go solo-backpacking, off-trail, for a week are part of the intertwined reasons she tells me why she loves me.

*And tonight—please, please, not alone on the cot;
Curled up to you in bed is my best spot.*

There is always trepidation after longer adventures when I place the first phone call home and I worry that something bad has occurred. As much as I try not to think about it, I can never help but imagine the possibilities as the phone begins to ring that something intolerable has happened to Dawn or to one of our kids. If an emergency had occurred, it would have been impossible to reach me while I was backpacking in a remote locale. I think how terrible I would feel that I was not home when a husband or father was needed.

Of course, everything always is fine, and Dawn is thrilled that the trip was fun and successful.

When I reached my car, I quickly wrote down the poem that I had mentally created. On my drive home, I stopped at a convenience store in Fairplay and purchased a blank greeting card with a picture of a pretty woman and horse on the front. I converted it into a Mother's Day card by writing my poem inside.

When I finally arrived at our mountain home, Dawn was unsaddling and grooming Chance, our bay-colored mare, and smiled to me as I walked up to her wishing her a happy Mother's Day. "You poop-head, you forgot!" she teased. As she put her arms around me, I could smell her blonde hair mixed with the sweet aroma of horse. It turned out she had had a great day horseback riding with some of the other neighborhood mothers. Once inside our house, I placed the card on the kitchen table and went upstairs to shower. When I came down, she gave me a big kiss and said how much she loved my card and poem.

After a delicious dinner of grilled salmon, we headed upstairs with the remaining bottle of wine to conclude our Mother's Day. All I can say is I didn't end up sleeping on the cot that night after all!

*Hiking on Mother's Day—Good it is Not!
Oh darling, I love you, I love you a lot.*

**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