



**ROARING FORK VALLEY HORSE COUNCIL**

P O Box 127

Snowmass, CO 81654

[www.rfvhorsecouncil.org](http://www.rfvhorsecouncil.org)

8/15/2018

To: Pitkin Board of County Commissioners

Cc: To Pitkin County Road and Bridge- Brian Pettit, Scott Mattice, Gerald Fielding

Dear Steve, Rachel, Patti, George and Greg,

The Roaring Fork Valley Horse Council requests that Pitkin County BOCC close Prince Creek Road with gates and signs indicating Seasonal Closure for wildlife and habitat protection. We also respectfully ask that these closure gates be placed, one just after the last neighbor's driveways for their private access at the bottom of Prince Creek Road, just above Stark Mesa, and one just below the Divide Parking Lot on West Sopris Creek Road, just above Candice Resnick's driveway. We would like this issue to be placed on your agenda for discussion in your next available meeting.

**WILDLIFE**

Of utmost importance to our 460 members is protecting wildlife from habitat destruction caused by human recreation. We are committed to educating our members about the human impact on wildlife, and we support the Pitkin OST Biodiversity Policy. We look forward to the new scientific studies being initiated in the Roaring Fork Valley at this time. We support shared recreational activities to minimize fragmentation and degradation to the wildlife habitat, for example combining parking and trails for all users will keep human recreation on tracks and trails, while wildlife will thrive within their untouched areas.

Perry Will, Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) Area Wildlife Manager, recently reported elk and deer herd declines. From 1990 through 2016 elk herd numbers 7,046 (1990), 4,170 (2016) declined by 2,876 (40%) decline; deer herd numbers

11,412(1990), 5,740 (2015) declined by 5,672 (49.7%) decline. According to Perry Will one of the biggest changes CPW has seen since the beginning of the 2000's is the increased demand for recreation on the landscape. New trails are being built at an alarming pace on winter range habitat, production areas, and summer solitude areas. Such increase in demand also seems to correlate to our observed decline in production rates for both species.

Addendum A –

Letter from Perry Will

Letter from Kevin Wright, retired DOW Unit 43, District Ranger

## WINTER CLOSURE

The Crown is closed for recreational access from December 1<sup>st</sup> through April 15<sup>th</sup> to benefit our local wildlife herds. John Groves, Carbondale District Ranger for CPW states that **“The Crown” and its’ 9,100 acres to be the largest and most critical winter range for elk and deer habitat in the Roaring Fork Valley.** Light Hill is another of the remaining critical big-game winter areas on public lands in the Roaring Fork Valley. The Fat Tire recreation is damaging our wildlife winter range areas.

Because of the mild winter with low snowpack, the Prince Creek Road has been accessible by 4-wheel drive vehicles through early February. According to Scott Mattice, Pitkin Road and Bridge Superintendent, when conditions permitted, the county has piled snow on the West Sopris Creek Road side of the Crown, just below the Divide Parking Lot, to prevent over the top access to Prince Creek and the Crown. The lack of snow has created ample access for winter recreation on the Crown. Eye witnesses have reported that fat-tire bike riders are entering the Crown from the West Sopris Creek side. They are using the two track, at the top of the Divide Parking area to ride through the Middle Country of the Crown. This area is closed for winter wildlife protection. These fat tire bike riders are trespassing and breaking the law.

On January 25, 2018, Holly McLain and Pam True drove up Prince Creek Road, through a gate to the left of the cattle guard and the main closed gate, which is the boundary between Pitkin County OST Lands and the BLM on the Crown. They proceeded to the Crown Road Parking area by #5 on the attached map. They turned into the access road for the Crown Road #8342, and parking area, which had a closed gate stating “Travel Protections to Protect Wintering Wildlife” and “Critical Winter Wildlife Habitat”



This area leads to the Middle Country of the Crown. There were several cars parked before the gate, and there were fat-tire bike tracks leading around the closed gate and on many of the trails after the closed signed gate area.

Normally Prince Creek Road is closed because of heavy snowpack. This year of drought makes it imperative to close Prince Creek Road with gates.

The BLM has not policed Prince Creek during this no-snow, 2017-2018 time frame, to keep winter fat-tire riders in check. No oversight or enforcement is allowing this illegal mountain bike activity all across the wildlife closure habitat area. This is a fact. BLM says that Pitkin County loaned them three cameras to check for law breakers. They claim there are very few trespassers harming wildlife. These few cameras are not adequate to capture the illegal entries and activities during the winter wildlife closure season on the Crown. **SEASONAL CLOSURE GATES AND SIGNAGE, CAMERAS, TICKETS AND FINES WOULD HELP TO CURTAIL THIS INTOLERABLE SITUATION ON THE CROWN.**

Holly McLain sees the Crown, "front and center" from her living room every day and night. Throughout the summer of 2017, almost every Saturday night, there were pallet-fueled bon fires evident on the Divide Parking Lot, between Prince Creek and West Sopris Creek. These fires were reported to BLM several times in 2017, and most recently on February 18, 2018, to Brian Hopkins, BLM planning and environmental coordinator for the Colorado River Valley Field Office. Even through the winter wildlife closure, these bon fires have been evident.

### **BLM - OVERSIGHT AND ENFORCEMENT IS NON-EXISTENT**

It appears that there are no boots on the ground to issue tickets and fines.

The enforcement for the Crown area is challenging for the BLM. It seems that the BLM cannot enforce the rules and regulations as stipulated in the appendix F Recreation and Visitors Services for SRMAs and ERMAs for The Crown Special Recreation Management Area. The BLM has one enforcement officer for over 700,000 acres of our public lands. For this reason, we ask the BLM to support closing Prince Creek Road to all motorized and mechanized vehicles, preventing entry into this critical winter wildlife habitat area.

## THE FINAL SOLUTION?

Human recreation is impacting our wildlife by people building new trails at an alarming pace on winter range habitat, production areas and summer solitude areas. The Pitkin OST Management Plan for Open Space Lands places biodiversity and wildlife importance above human recreation. The wildlife is supposed to be protected, but this is not the reality. Wildlife is systematically being removed from their precious habitat by human excess and their perception of entitlement.

Global warming causing droughts and wildfires, along with human recreation pressure may continue herd declines, and potentially decimation of our beautiful elk and deer herds. With a different cause but with a similar effect, it has happened before, here in the Roaring Fork Valley.

The early miners actually killed every creature that they could cook and eat. In the 1880s, when you went into downtown Aspen for a meal, steak on the menu could mean elk, deer, mountain lion, raccoon or beaver. In 1913, elk were brought from Wyoming by train car, and were held overnight at Holden-Marolt property. We think they were turned-out at the base of Hunter Creek to repopulate the Elk Mountains of Aspen. The elk we have here are not the original native herd.



1913 - reintroducing elk back into the Roaring Fork Valley

The RFVHC, local neighbors, and concerned citizens throughout the Roaring Fork Valley ask that Pitkin and Garfield Boards of County Commissioners please consider winter closure for Prince Creek & West Sopris Creek Roads. Gates and signage, placed at the last resident's driveways on both sides of the Crown, starting December 1, 2018 through \* May 15<sup>th</sup>, 2019, will protect the Crown, one of the most critical winter wildlife ranges in the Roaring Fork Valley. Cameras at gates will also discourage trespasser's entry. This may not eliminate all human, winter intrusion, however gates will slow the ambitions of those, who put their own wishes above the needs of our wildlife. At the very least, they will have to work hard at their intent to ride fat tire bikes into the "protected winter refuge".

Thank you for your consideration and commitment to protect the Crown's winter wildlife refuge.

Holly McLain – Communication Chairman  
For the RFVHC Board of Directors

Please read John Groves letter regarding wildlife seasonal closing and opening dates.

Please see the following Addendums on subsequent pages:

Addendum A –

Letter from Perry Will

Letter from Kevin Wright, retired DOW Unit 43, District Manager

Letter Draft to OST for bio-diversity

\*Letter from John Groves for winter wildlife seasonal closing and opening dates

Addendum B -

Letter from Wilderness Workshop

Letters from concerned Pitkin county residents

Addendum C

– BLM-SRMA Crown phase 2 map showing 9,100 acres

Addendum A –  
Letter from Perry Will:



**COLORADO**

**Parks and Wildlife**

Department of Natural Resources

Glenwood Springs Service Center  
0088 Wildlife Way  
Glenwood Springs, CO 81601  
P 970.947.2920 | F 970.947.2936

March 28, 2017

Holly McLain  
Citizens for Responsible Open Space  
Carbondale, CO 81623

**RE: Significance of the Crown to Local Wildlife**

Dear Mrs. McLain,

Thank you for your continued interest and support of Colorado's wildlife species and their habitats. In follow up to our letter dated Jan 12, 2017 we are providing population trends for Elk DAU E-15 and Deer DAU D-13. It is impossible to break down the numbers for the Crown alone as we manage these populations at a much larger scale.

**Elk**

<b>1990</b>	7046	<b>2000</b>	7953	<b>2010</b>	4694
<b>1991</b>	7310	<b>2001</b>	7840	<b>2011</b>	4593
<b>1992</b>	7105	<b>2002</b>	6963	<b>2012</b>	4448
<b>1993</b>	7154	<b>2003</b>	5872	<b>2013</b>	4134
<b>1994</b>	7495	<b>2004</b>	5971	<b>2014</b>	4288
<b>1995</b>	7517	<b>2005</b>	5313	<b>2015</b>	4194
<b>1996</b>	7806	<b>2006</b>	5546	<b>2016</b>	4170
<b>1997</b>	7770	<b>2007</b>	5385		
<b>1998</b>	8121	<b>2008</b>	4652		
<b>1999</b>	8217	<b>2009</b>	4857		

Without context, our elk population trends alone do show a steep decline since the year 1999. At that time the elk herd size was estimated to be at 8,200 animals, and today is estimated at 4100 animals. Part of that decline was intentional and wanted by CPW as our herd sizes were well above objective and thought to be over carrying capacity for the available winter range habitat.

A bigger factor that CPW is looking at is the continuing decline of young to adult females in elk populations. Calf:Cow ratios have steadily declined in DAU E-15. During the 80's ratios were 58 young per 100 cows. In the 90's those ratios dropped to

Bob D. Broscheld, Director, Colorado Parks and Wildlife • Parks and Wildlife Commission: Robert W. Bray • Jeanne Horne  
John Howard, Vice-Chair • Dale Pizel • James Pribyl, Chair • James Vigil • Dean Wingfield • Michelle Zimmerman, Secretary • Alex Zipp



50:100. The 2000's dropped to 41.5:100. 2010-2016 those ratios declined to 34.1 with the current 3 year average at 31.7. For a stable to increasing population those ratios need to be in the range of 48-52:100.

**Deer**

<b>1990</b>	11412	<b>2000</b>	9704	<b>2010</b>	6227
<b>1991</b>	11521	<b>2001</b>	10379	<b>2011</b>	5681
<b>1992</b>	8881	<b>2002</b>	10962	<b>2012</b>	5930
<b>1993</b>	8119	<b>2003</b>	9932	<b>2013</b>	5880
<b>1994</b>	8490	<b>2004</b>	11092	<b>2014</b>	6168
<b>1995</b>	8380	<b>2005</b>	8980	<b>2015</b>	5740
<b>1996</b>	8874	<b>2006</b>	8325		
<b>1997</b>	7000	<b>2007</b>	7873		
<b>1998</b>	8198	<b>2008</b>	5996		
<b>1999</b>	9507	<b>2009</b>	6222		

Deer Populations in DAU D-13 have also dropped significantly since the mid 2000's. Since the winter of 2007/2008 population levels have not rebounded to levels seen before that. Even with a virtual elimination of doe hunting opportunity, which is the mechanism used to control population size, herd size has stayed stagnant which indicates something is askew in the system.

Deer fawn:doe ratios have also decreased during that time. Historical ratios showed upwards of 75 young per 100 does. Recent classifications have seen ratios in the mid 40's. This ratio should be closer to 70-75:100 for a healthy population.

It is impossible to determine all factors that may be related to these declines without a full comprehensive study. Factors can include loss of habitat from development, winter range degradation, predation, habitat fragmentation, etc. However, one of the biggest changes CPW has seen since the beginning of the 2000's is the increased demand for recreation on the landscape. Few new housing developments have been created, but the demand for trails and places to recreate has grown dramatically. While other factors seem to be relatively constant, new trails are being built at an alarming pace on winter range habitat, production areas and summer solitude areas. Such increase in demand also seems to correlate to our observed reduction in production rates for both species.

Due to these factors, CPW has recommended a motorized/mechanized closure of the Crown from Dec 1- May 1, and has consistently advocated for this throughout the BLM's RMP process. The Crown had previously been closed to winter motorized use from Dec 1-May 1 for close to 30 years before the recent travel management plan adoption. CPW still recommends an opening date of no earlier than May 1, but would appreciate

an opening date of May 15 to be consistent with the current opening of the Glassier Open Space, the access point for the north side of the Crown.

Thank you for your continued interest. If there are any questions or needs for additional information don't hesitate to contact Land Use Specialist, Taylor Elm, at (970) 947-2971 or District Wildlife Manager, John Groves, at (970) 947-2933.

Sincerely,



Perry Will, Area Wildlife Manager

Cc. John Groves, District Wildlife Manager  
Taylor Elm, Land Use Specialist  
File

Letter from Kevin Wright – retired Unit 43, DOW wildlife Ranger:  
November 15, 2015

Pitkin County BOCC  
Pitkin County OST  
Dale Will  
Gary Tennenbum

Dear All:

I have been contemplating writing you a letter for quite some time and decided I should do so. My name is Kevin Wright and I have lived in the Roaring Fork Valley for over 30 years. I worked for the Colorado Division of Wildlife (now CPW) as a District Wildlife Manager for 31 years serving the Carbondale and Aspen Districts my entire career before retiring in July 2015. I have witnessed a lot of changes over the years and have always strived to represent wildlife and our natural values and help minimize impacts to wildlife.

I have become very concerned the way our valley is progressing with respect to recreational pressures and its impact on our wildlife resources. It seems that it has become recreation at all costs with very little regard to the impacts it is having on our wildlife resources and their habitat. The dramatic increase in recreation and endless trail building is having significant negative impacts to wildlife. Impacts are often considered but are often dismissed as non-significant or believed they can be “mitigated”.

Obviously, it is not just recreational pressures that are having an impact. Our human base population has grown significantly and with that comes loss of habitat to development. Combine that with the maturation or aging of our habitat and inability to significantly manipulate it to set back succession to provide better



forage conditions is having its impact. Much of our winter range is over-mature and becoming decadent but it is difficult to manipulate it due to costs, funding, and the encroachment of human development. We have made some strides with habitat work in places such as Light Hill, William's Hill, Arbaney-Kittle, Basalt Mountain to name just a few. But the most significant change in the last 5-10 years is the dramatic increase in recreational pressure.

As evidence of this observation are the declining trend of young to adult females in our mule deer and elk populations. Both populations have declined and mule deer are close to the lowest population level they have ever been in over 40 years. In the past, the DOW has always been able to recover the mule deer population after a hard winter but this is no longer the case. In addition, the elk population is at the bottom of the population objective. Please consider the following:

**Mule Deer** – current population is hovering around 6,050 with an objective of 7,500-8,500. This objective was lowered from the more historical objective in the 80's and 90's of 11,100, which is no longer achievable and unrealistic.

Fawn: Doe ratios are 50.4 fawns:100 does. This ratio should be closer to 70-75:100 for healthy population.

**Elk** – current population estimate is 3,650 with an objective of 3,800-5,400. In order to stabilize the population the calf ratio should approach 47:100 and to increase the population it should approach 50:100. Calf:Cow ratios have steadily declined:

1980's – 58.5 calves:100 cows

1990's – 49.0

2000's – 41.5

2010 – 2014 – 35.1

last 3 yr average – 33.7

This is a very disturbing trend and is indicative that something is wrong or askew in the system. It is telling us that the populations are not healthy as some believe.

As stated earlier, one of the most significant changes has been the increase in recreational pressure. We are continually building more and more trails, placing these trails where there has never been trails and fragmenting the habitat, and placing more and more people where there were few before. We now ski, snowshoe, hike, bike (with and without dogs; with and without dogs on leash) throughout our important winter ranges, production areas, and summer solitude areas. We also are now using fat tire bikes to ride winter ranges. Wildlife has little places they can go to escape the pressures.

Impacts from trail building and resulting recreational pressure include the following:

1. habitat fragmentation – carving up the habitat blocks into smaller and smaller pieces and increasing the zone of influence.
2. changes in species diversity, density, and abundance. More parasitic bird species come in to the areas along new trails displacing native species.
3. Increase in stress, disturbance, harassment, and displacement. Many believe that as they recreate, especially in winter, if the elk or deer does not flee but just stands/remains in place there is no impact. But

what really happens is the animals must make a decision whether to flee or stay. Which utilizes less energy - running through 2-3' of snow or standing there with the disturbance. If they stand there, stress increases, metabolic rates increase, and more energy is utilized.

4. Decrease in reproductive success
5. Lower population levels

These impacts have been determined through various research activities such as Dr. Richard Knight, the Vail elk production study, and the various studies referenced/summarized in Montana Chapter of the Wildlife Society literature review on recreational impacts, and studies referenced in the elk-roads-logging symposium just to name a few. Yet, we still seem to ignore these impacts and information when it comes to recreational activity, its promotion, and resulting trail building.

We are always compromising wildlife values for peoples' benefit and then we compromise the compromise. Very seldom are we proactive and actually prevent these impacts. Wildlife and their habitat are always losing, piece by piece. We MUST start to look at the cumulative impacts, not just the impacts of one particular project.

Shouldn't it be time to take a step back and re-evaluate? The public does not need to have a trail built into every piece of public land. I propose there is already sufficient, adequate access and trails to our public lands without the need to build more and more.

It was once thought and even brought up at a meeting in Snowmass Village that if we encourage more trail building on ski areas where there is the infrastructure that it would help curtail other trail building and bandit trail building. Ski areas have become more or less sacrifice areas in terms of wildlife. But constructing more trails here has NOT stopped or reduced trail and bandit trail building in other areas important to wildlife.

Sometimes we justify new trail construction in important wildlife habitat by conducting habitat improvement projects to help mitigate impacts. These habitat improvement projects can be helpful to wildlife but does it really offset or "mitigate" the negative impacts of fragmentation, increased stress and disturbance, and displacement? Habitat improvement may not help that much if wildlife species are displaced from all of the new human activity. We also try to place certain restrictions on new trails such as seasonal closures. These measures are only as effective as they are **aggressively** enforced. People just do not always comply. As specific examples one only has to look at the trail closure violations in the East Village area of TOSV. There is a seasonal closure for elk production with signage, education, and physical gates. Yet, there is a fair amount of noncompliance with people going around gates, lifting bikes over gates, creating new trails around them. Almost every year in the winter there are either ski tracks or snowmobile tracks up on Sky Mountain Park as I have witnessed while conducting aerial game census.

A few of the questions that I have asked in the past:

1. When is enough enough? When will we have enough trails?
2. What trails are at or over capacity now, which should dictate if new trails are needed?

3. Where is the NEED versus the DESIRE? There may be the desire and expectation for new trails but is there really a NEED? Especially if one considers the negative impacts to our natural resources, wildlife, and their habitat just so we can have another trail. Is it really worth it??
4. Where is the guarantee that there will **always be adequate** enforcement and funding for this enforcement into the future 10, 20, 50 years down the road? Once a trail is built it will most likely remain forever.

Throughout my career part of my job was to review projects and recommend mitigation to help minimize impacts. Pitkin County has one of the strongest land use codes for wildlife in the Colorado and has been very good at implementing the code for private development. It has been a leader for others to follow.

But, it appears that there is a different practice in place when the county purchases a property for open space and then builds a public trail encouraging use. If a private citizen wished to do the same and construct a trail through winter range, winter concentration area, severe winter range, production areas, or riparian areas and the DOW recommended against it, it most likely would not be approved to be built. It appears the same standards are not applied.

We should not be purchasing property and then building trails through or connecting to public land if this compromises winter range or other important wildlife values. This definitely should not be done when there is no formal public land trail where the county's trail would connect. This only encourages increased impacts, bandit trail building, and pressure to build new trails on public land when there are other access points and trails. There may be a public expectation that because the county purchased the property there has to be a trail and public use. There is tremendous value to having a parcel preserved for its wildlife and open space value. There does not always have to be a new trail or active public use.

I do not say these things lightly. I am very concerned with the direction this valley is going. There needs to be a **balance** but right now there is **no balance**. I hope what I have said makes you think, sit back, and evaluate. Do not just think of the benefits to active recreation and believe it is OK if we put a few restrictions in place or do a little habitat improvement. We need to strongly consider what these actions are doing to our wildlife resource and their habitat.

I hope what I have tried to express is taken seriously and not just dismissed. If I have made a few of you hesitate and think, then that is a very good thing. Change is hard for us all, even harder for wildlife who cannot speak for themselves. Wildlife is an important resource and enhances the quality of life for us all.

Thank you for listening.  
Respectively,  
Kevin Wright

Letter from Kevin Wright – Draft to OST for bio-diversity:

## Draft Policy: Protection of Natural Biodiversity and Compatible Human Use

I appreciate OST drafting a policy trying to address this issue. The issue definitely needs to be looked at as we continue to place more and more recreational pressures on wildlife and their habitat.

The policy statement is generally vague which may be OK if it is followed up with a set of specific guidelines and standards, otherwise I am not sure there will be much change to achieve a balance between wildlife and human recreational use.

The policy identifies sensitive habitats as those used by T & E species, those identified by Colorado Natural heritage Program and those habitat types used by more common species that have special needs such as critical winter range/summer range, breeding/nesting habitat, and migration corridors. I would suggest that OST use the sensitive wildlife habitat as is defined under 7-20-70 of the Pitkin County Land Use Code (LUC) so there is consistency within the county and with what the county has already adopted. The LUC identifies sensitive habitats as “constrained areas”: wetland, riparian, critical wildlife habitat, severe winter range, winter concentration area, migration corridors/habitat, birthing/calving areas, significant mountain sage, aspen, and mountain shrub habitat.

The policy states that it will use the best available science for property specific study of natural habitat conditions. Using the best available science is good but I feel that this property specific approach is not a good or best approach to use. While studying the specific property is very important, I strongly believe that OST needs to look beyond that boundary and look at the cumulative impacts of several properties and other uses. Impacts from one specific property may not be that great, but when combined with others the impact may be more significant. We must start looking at the cumulative impact. Wildlife and their habitat is always being compromised as soon as another use or trail is developed. We must start to look at the broader picture.

Habitat fragmentation is not addressed. Studies have shown what happens to species diversity, density, and abundance when new trails are constructed. There are also countless studies that show the effect of human recreation on wildlife. Whenever another new trail is constructed it is beginning to fragment the habitat, especially when multiple trails are constructed in a given area. We can't continue to look at one property in isolation but need to look at the properties and area as a whole.

I suggest that OST needs to follow 7-20-70 LUC (b) General Principles - “principles shall be evaluated not only on a site specific basis but should also be used to consider the location and role of the property in context of larger habitat and wildlife patterns. Implementation of these principles may also include consideration of connectivity between other parcels and the cumulative effect of the proposed activity in light of other activity in the area affecting related habitat areas.”

\*Letter from John Groves winter wildlife seasonal closing and opening date:



**COLORADO**  
Department of Natural Resources

Executive Director's Office  
1313 Sherman Street, Room 718  
Denver, CO 80203

October 26, 2016

Karl Mendonca  
Field Manager, Colorado River Valley Field Office  
U.S. Bureau of Land management  
2300 River Frontage Road  
Silt, CO 81652

Dear Mr. Mendoca,

The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has recently become aware of concerns raised by community members, as well as Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW), related to the length of winter recreation closures for big game species in the area south of Carbondale - locally referred to as the Crown. I understand that you have also heard these same concerns.

DNR is one of the state agencies working to implement Governor Hickenlooper's Colorado the Beautiful initiative, which sets an ambitious target to ensure that within a generation every Coloradan lives within 10 minutes of a trail, park, or vibrant green space. Within this initiative the seeks to promote new recreational trail opportunities, while, importantly, preserving environmental and ecological values. The situation in the Crown is an example of an area where recreational opportunities are in high demand, yet the BLM and CPW are charged with avoiding, minimizing and mitigating recreational impacts to wildlife.

I am writing to thank you for the conversations to date you and your colleagues have had with Perry Will, Area Wildlife Manager at CPW, as well as members of the public. (For your reference, I have attached August 2016 correspondence on this matter from Mr. Will.) And I encourage continued conversations among BLM and all interested parties to identify solutions that can allow for recreational use on the Crown, while also protecting the most important places for wildlife.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Madeleine West".

Madeleine West  
Assistant Director - Parks, Wildlife & Lands





## COLORADO

### Parks and Wildlife

Department of Natural Resources

Glenwood Springs Area Office  
0088 Wildlife Way  
Glenwood Springs, CO 81601

8/5/2016

Holly McLain  
Citizens for Responsible Open Space  
Carbondale, CO 81623

**RE: Significance of the Crown to Local Wildlife**

Dear Mrs. McLain,

Thank you for your continued interest and support of Colorado's wildlife species and their habitats. Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) has a statutory responsibility to manage all wildlife species in Colorado; this responsibility is embraced and fulfilled through CPW's mission to protect, preserve, enhance, and manage the wildlife of Colorado for the use, benefit, and enjoyment of the people of the State and its visitors. One way CPW fulfills this mission is to review and participate in local land use processes and provide recommendations to avoid, minimize, and compensate for impacts to wildlife.

Big-game species, including deer, elk, bear, moose, etc., are very important economically for the state of Colorado and local communities. A 2008 Report by BBC Research & Consulting estimated that in 2007 there were roughly 12.7 million hunting and fishing days enjoyed by hunters and anglers in Colorado. These activities generated a total direct expenditure of approximately \$1.1 billion. Garfield and Pitkin County experienced direct expenditures of \$54.42 million and \$24.85 million respectively (BBC Final Report, 2008).

Locally, the area referred to as the Crown is located south of Carbondale and encompasses approximately 9,100 acres of land managed by the Bureau of Land Management (Figure 1). It's long been considered the most important winter range habitat for mule deer and elk in the Roaring Fork and Crystal River Valleys. Other remaining islands of critical winter range include William's Hill and Light Hill farther to the south. With the ever-increasing development (i.e. residential, commercial, recreational, etc.) occurring within big-game winter range habitats, these large relatively undeveloped blocks of land are becoming more and more crucial to support our local big-game populations.

**Importance of Winter Range Habitat**

The availability of high quality winter range is often considered a limiting factor for big-game species. Heavy snowpack and frigid temperatures throughout the winter months force animals to conserve energy and maximize their thermal efficiency. High quality winter range habitat generally contains slopes with southern exposures, accessible browse species during periods of high snowpack, and sufficient topographic and vegetative features to provide thermal, security, and escape cover.

Bob D. Broscheid, Director, Colorado Parks and Wildlife • Parks and Wildlife Commission: Robert W. Bray • Chris Castilian, Chair • Joanne Horns, Vice-Chair  
John Howard • Bill Kane • Dale Pizzi • James Pribyl, Secretary • James Vigil • Dean Wingfield • Michelle Zimmerman • Alex Zipp



having the greatest effect on wildlife. Studies have shown the area of influence (within which wildlife may be displaced from otherwise suitable habitat due to human activities) for mountain biking may be as great as 1,000 meters for elk and 390 meters for mule deer (Wisdom et al. 2005, Taylor & Knight 2003). The application of these buffer distances around existing trails in the Crown eliminates nearly all available habitat for mule deer and elk (Figure 2).

#### Recommendations from CPW and Proposed Mitigation Measures

CPW staff reviewed and submitted comments throughout the BLM's Colorado River Valley Field Office Resource Management Plan Revision process. CPW has also been involved with Pitkin County OS&T's management plans for nearby Open Space properties and their new policy on protecting biodiversity. These processes have been somewhat successful in implementing seasonal closures and other restrictions; however, there is still much work to be done to protect wildlife in this area. For the Crown, CPW would like to see the following recommendations implemented to reduce impacts to wildlife moving forward:

- Extend winter recreation closures to May 15th for the Prince Creek side of the Crown to be consistent with opening dates at Glassier Open Space. This will help facilitate movements from winter range to fawning and calving areas further south.
- Adopt a "no net gain" policy when it comes to new trail construction. Any new trails should require an equal or greater amount of old trails be decommissioned and reclaimed.
- Increase awareness and compliance of seasonal closures among users.
- Increase enforcement of seasonal closures to ensure violators are being penalized.

Colorado Parks and Wildlife appreciates your support and interest in the wellbeing of our local wildlife populations. By further understanding these issues, we can hopefully move forward with effective measures to protect these animals during the most critical times of their lifecycles and conserve the habitats they depend on for survival. If there are any questions or needs for additional information don't hesitate to contact Land Use Specialist, Taylor Elm, at (970) 947-2971 or District Wildlife Manager, John Groves, at (970) 947-2933.

Sincerely,



Perry Will, Area Wildlife Manager

Cc. John Groves, District Wildlife Manager  
Taylor Elm, Land Use Specialist  
File

### Literature Cited

- BBC Research & Consulting (2008). The Economic Impacts of Hunting, Fishing and Wildlife Watching in Colorado. Prepared for the Colorado Division of Wildlife.
- Bergman E.J., Doherty PF Jr, Bishop C.J, Wolfe LL, Banulis BA (2014). Herbivore Body Condition Response in Altered Environments: Mule Deer and Habitat Management. *PLoS ONE* 9(9): e106374. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0106374
- Bishop C.J., White GC, Freddy DJ, Watkins BE, Stephenson TR (2009). Effect of enhanced nutrition on mule deer population rate of change. *Wildlife Monographs* 172, 29p.
- Colorado River Valley Approved Resource Management Plan (2015). Appendix F: Recreation and Visitor Services Management Framework for Special and Extensive Recreation Management Areas.
- Taylor A.R., and Knight RL (2003). Wildlife Responses to Recreation and Associated Visitor Perceptions. *Ecological Applications* 13:951-963.
- Thorne E.T., Dean RE, Hepworth WG (1976). Nutrition during gestation in relation to successful reproduction in elk. *Journal of Wildlife Management* 40:330-335.
- Unsworth J.W., Pac DF, White GC, Bartmann RM (1999). Mule Deer Survival in Colorado, Idaho, and Montana. *Journal of Wildlife Management* 63(1):315-326.
- Wisdom, M.J., Ager AA, Preisler HK, Cimon NJ, and Johnson BK (2005). Effects of Off-Road Recreation on Mule Deer and Elk. Pages 67-80 in Wisdom, M. J., technical editor, *The Starkey Project: a synthesis of long-term studies of elk and mule deer*. Reprinted from the 2004 Transactions of the North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference, Alliance Communications Group, Lawrence, Kansas.



Addendum B -  
Letter from Wilderness Workshop

WILDERNESS WORKSHOP  
P.O. BOX 1442  
CARBONDALE, CO 81623  
TEL (970) 963-3977  
FAX (970) 963-8447  
[www.wildernessworkshop.org](http://www.wildernessworkshop.org)

July 18, 2016

Karl Mendonca  
Colorado River Field Office  
23 River Frontage Rd.  
Silt, CO 81652

Dear Mr. Mendonca

I am writing on behalf of the Wilderness Workshop to support Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) and the many concerned citizens and organizations that are requesting a change to the existing opening date of April 15<sup>th</sup> for the Prince Creek trail access to the 9,100 acres BLM parcel named The Crown. This area is mapped by CPW as critical wildlife winter range and is one of the largest contiguous pieces of winter habitat for wildlife in the Roaring Fork Valley.

Specifically, we are requesting a May 15<sup>th</sup> coordinated opening for both the Prince Creek side and the Glassier Open Space side of The Crown. This would provide for more coordinated management of the area. A May 15<sup>th</sup> opening would reduce confusion among people using The Crown and benefit wildlife by providing a longer time with minimal to no human disturbance in advance of and at the beginning of calving season.

Wilderness Workshop understands that balancing the desire for recreational opportunities with the needs of wildlife is an ongoing challenge and appreciates BLM's willingness to consider the request for a later opening date for The Crown.

I understand that the BLM will be meeting with CPW and other concerned citizens regarding this issue on July 19, 2016. Following that meeting I would be happy to discuss this letter and you and your staff's thoughts on how to resolve the matter.

Sincerely,

/s/ Will Roush

Conservation Director | Wilderness Workshop  
PO Box 1442 Carbondale, CO 81623  
[www.wildernessworkshop.org](http://www.wildernessworkshop.org)  
970.963.3977 (office) | 206.979.4016 (cell)  
*Protecting wildlife and wild places for their sake...and ours.*

Letters from concerned Pitkin County residents:

Sno-Cap Caucus Letter of Support – e mailed July 17<sup>th</sup>

To whom It May Concern,

I am writing in support of changing the opening date for the Prince Creek access to critical winter ground for wildlife. Delaying human activity there for one month would make the traverse to calving grounds much easier for our already stressed wildlife.

My understanding is that the opening date for access to the Glassier side of the Crown is May 15<sup>th</sup>. Given that wildlife cross both sections on a contiguous path to their calving grounds, the earlier opening currently set for Prince Creek makes little sense.

I write this letter from the perspective of both a mountain biker and a hunter. While I love access to trails for mountain biking and hiking when appropriate, I believe local wildlife is already under tremendous pressure. We human beings can wait an extra month for our activities in areas needed by elk, deer, bear, etc.

There are plenty of places to hike and bike elsewhere in the valley from April to May. Let's share the earth and be good stewards to the land and the wildlife by adapting the later access date on the Prince Creek trail to the Crown.

Respectfully yours

Mark Harvey  
Basalt, Colorado

Email – July 16, 2018

**Janice Martin**

From Jan Martin

Snowmass Creek Caucus

Holly, please forward this letter to the appropriate party.

It is concerning how our valley is progressing with respect to recreational pressures and the impact those pressures have on our wildlife resources. It seems that every new open space almost immediately becomes a candidate for more trails for recreational users. This ultimately has a cumulative negative effect on wildlife habitat. One could extrapolate and eventually see where all these trails become intertwined and leave the habitat nowhere to migrate for calving, or just peaceful existence. It is akin to a family living in a bucolic setting suddenly tapped for an interstate highway and soon surrounded by intersecting roadways.

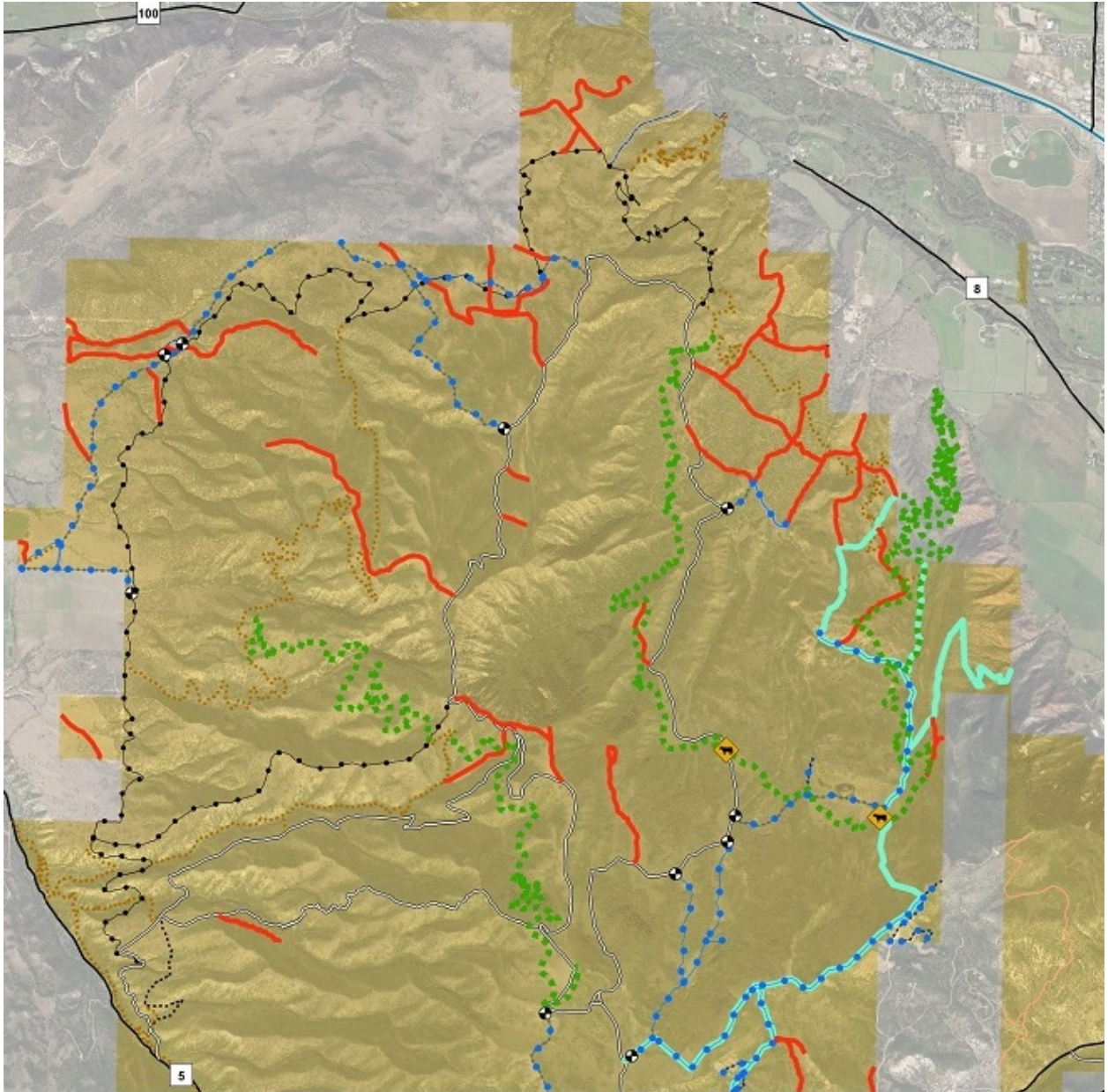
Allow for recreational trails? Certainly, but with balance in terms of undisturbed habitat. Every area does not have to be a public use.

Jan Martin

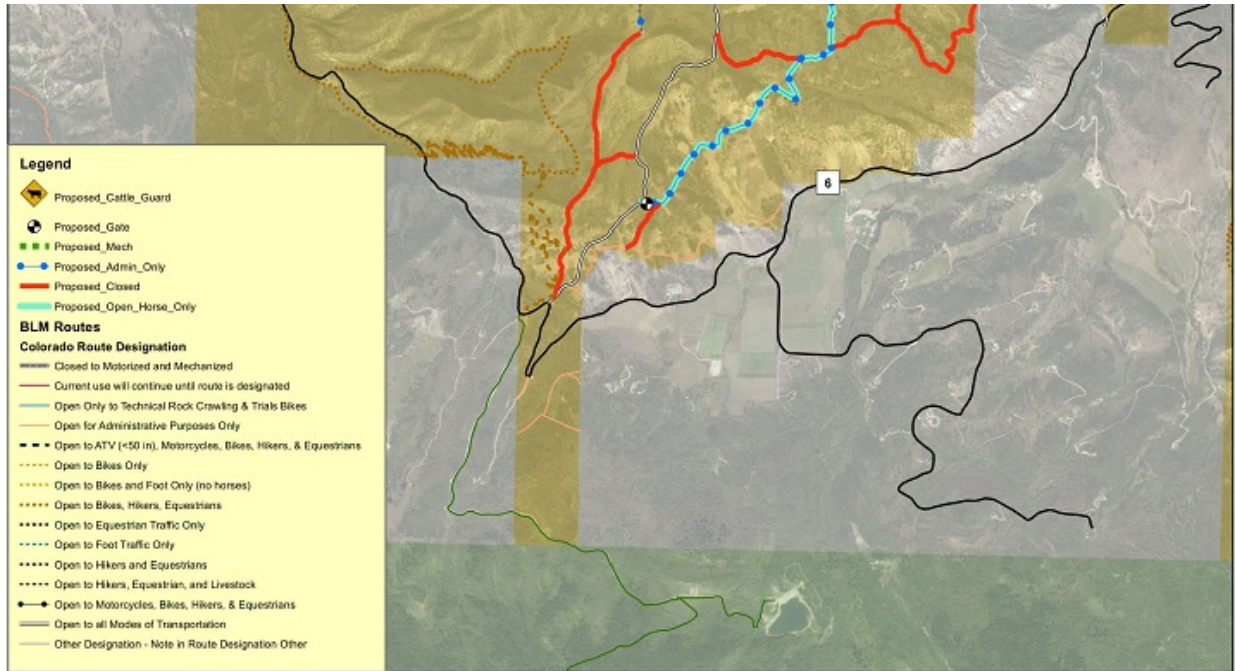
## Addendum C

– BLM-SRMA Crown phase 2 map showing 9,100 acres

#5 – Prince creek Road, #8 – Hooks Spur Road. \* non-numbered - White two track – The Crown Road #8342 is an existing two track trail, which in itself is a complete trail system in the Middle Country of the Crown. Access from Prince Creek Trail near #5 on map. Excellent trail with good line of sight for all trail users.



Eastern part of the Crown map showing the White line, two track, The crown Road #8342.  
#6 – West Sopris Creek Road.



Prince Creek Road is open all the way over the divide connecting to West Sopris Creek Road, which is allowing this illegal mountain bike activity all across the wildlife closure habitat area.