Dear Members, Colleagues, and Friends,

We hope you’re as excited as we are about the longer days, warmer weather, and the moisture we’ve been seeing this spring! Colorado Wild Public Lands (CWPL) has been working hard on some new projects and we’re proud to share some updates with you. We are energized by each of our members’ enthusiasm to Keep It Open and Keep It Ours, and look forward to continuing to protect public land.

Thank you all for your engagement and support! Additionally, our grantors so far this year—Pitkin County, Yamaha, and Patagonia— help make possible the special projects and outreach described below. Thank you!

WE ARE HIRING!

Are you, or is someone you know, passionate about working to keep public lands public and accessible?

CWPL is hiring a new Director to carry our organization through the next chapter. We’re seeking someone with leadership, a passion for public lands, and ideally some experience with fundraising & NEPA and/or FOIA. This role is open to remote work, as long as the candidate lives in Colorado.

If you or someone you know may be interested in this role, please let us know! See the CWPL website for a full position description and application instructions.

Reach out to us at coloradowildpubliclands@gmail.com with any questions.

Q3 Board Meeting

Join us for our next board meeting! Details below:

- Wednesday, July 12, 2023
- 5:30 pm
- 23272 Two Rivers Road, Basalt, CO.
Land Exchange Updates

Blue Valley
In January 2023, the BLM released its Decision approving the Blue Valley exchange near Kremmling. Throughout our engagement with this exchange beginning in 2016, we have raised a consistent and constructive set of concerns about this exchange including:

- The net loss of river frontage and access in the exchange. Access to river frontage is becoming increasingly difficult for anglers in Colorado,
- The conveyance of lands containing unique natural and cultural resources,
- The lack of Conservation Easements to protect the now public lands and unique resources against future development,
- Uncertainty regarding the realization and management of the future recreational amenities proposed to offset the loss of current recreational uses.

Because the BLM has consistently disregarded all of these, we formally protested the Decision in March. We are waiting for a response to our protest, but are prepared to undertake the next steps if the agency does not address these issues.

Valle Seco
The Forest Service made a final decision approving the Pagosa Springs area Valle Seco exchange in June 2022. CWPL filed an objection and, when our concerns were not adequately addressed in the Forest Service’s response, we partnered with San Juan Citizens Alliance to bring suit against this decision. The CWPL/SJCA attorneys are currently wrangling over whether the Forest Service has provided an adequate record of the land exchange process for all parties to review (Discovery). Once this issue is resolved, the attorneys will prepare briefs on the substantive issues for the Court’s consideration. We are also engaged in litigation over the Forest Service’s unlawful withholding of pertinent documents requested through the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

Mt. Emmons
After forty years of angst over the possibility of a strip mining operation on the outskirts of Crested Butte, Forest Service representatives released a Draft Decision in April 2023 approving the Mt. Emmons exchange which will prohibit any future mining. CWPL has worked closely with Crested Butte’s High Country Conservation Advocates (HCCA) and other environmental organizations to ensure the Exchange meets the requirements for the Categorical Exclusion (an abbreviated NEPA process) the Forest Service chose to analyze potential impacts of the Exchange. Ordinarily, none of the participating organizations would support the use of this short process. However, the final proposal preserves all existing uses of the now public lands, prohibits future development and mining on all lands in the Exchange, and ensures appropriate oversight of ongoing Mount Emmons Mining Company activities on the exchange parcels. The assurance of an improved version of the status quo combined with Forest Service transparency and public engagement, make us comfortable with the faster track.
Recent Happenings

Bilingual Birdwatching
On Saturday, May 20 (A.K.A. Colorado Public Lands Day), CWPL hosted another bilingual birdwatching outing with our friends at Roaring Fork Audubon.

We gathered at Sutey Ranch, which, as you may know, was the exchange CWPL was formed around in 2014. Our group saw over 20 different species (see the list below!) and enjoyed spending time on this piece of BLM property acquired via land exchange.

- Mourning Dove
- Broad-tailed Hummingbird
- American Kestrel
- Gray Flycatcher
- Dusky Flycatcher
- Ash-throated Flycatcher
- Plumbeous Vireo
- Common Raven
- Tree Swallow
- Violet-green Swallow
- Ruby-crowned Kinglet
- White-breasted Nuthatch (Interior West)
- House Wren
- Mountain Bluebird
- American Robin
- House Finch
- Chipping Sparrow
- White-crowned Sparrow (otorhina)
- Vesper Sparrow
- Spotted Towhee
- Virginia’s Warbler
- Yellow-rumped Warbler (Audubon’s)
- Black-throated Gray Warbler
- Western Tanager

"Since 2000, the BLM and the Forest Service have proposed over 150 land exchanges in Colorado. Last year alone, the agencies proposed to trade more than 4,500 acres of public lands, worth over $9 million, in three major Colorado land exchanges"

Future Clarity on Corner Crossing?
Last month, public land users in Wyoming gained a win for clarity and access around corners between public and private lands. A federal judge ruled that hunters were not trespassing when they crossed over adjacent corners of public property that shared corners with private land. CWPL has paid close attention to this case for the implications it may have on Colorado’s historically murky rules around this issue and is hopeful that it may lead to clarifying legislation and increased access here.
Ways to Get Involved

Make Your Voice Heard
The best way to get involved and have an impact on our public lands management is by making your voice heard on important issues! You could voice your opinions on two critical public lands subjects today:

- **Interior Department Rulemaking to Prioritize Conservation:** In March, the Department of the Interior released proposed amendments to the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) which directs how the BLM and the Forest Service manage lands in their jurisdiction. The new rules purportedly would change how the BLM approaches the management of public lands by making stewardship as important as managing the revenue generating uses of BLM lands. The proposed rules would:
  - Direct more resources toward stewardship and restoration projects on BLM lands
  - Direct land management agencies to inventory and assess the environmental health of public lands to help identify trends and changes in the landscapes
  - Prioritize the identification of Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (a catch-all for Wilderness Study and Roadless Areas, Wild and Scenic rivers and other special designations) in agency land and management planning
  - Increase access to recreational opportunities by “putting conservation on equal footing with other uses, consistent with the BLM’s multiple use and sustained yield mission.”

CWPL is reviewing the proposed language to verify that it does what the agency is promoting; we will submit comments on or before the June 20 deadline. To view the proposal, click here.

- **Upcoming Council on Environmental Quality Rulemaking:** Rumor has it that this summer, the CEQ (the agency that oversees NEPA conduct for the entire federal government) will issue proposed new language on the National Environmental Policy Act which would undue the Trump era evisceration of NEPA. CWPL will review and comment on this proposal at the very least and likely create an accessible opportunity for all of you to comment as well.

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1 NEPA, the National Environmental Policy Act is the cornerstone of all environmental advocacy. It is the law that requires the Federal Government to conduct environmental review of the vast majority of its management and infrastructure projects. The most important element of this procedural law is the requirement for agencies to engage the public through comment periods; this is why CWPL and every other environmental groups spend so much time on comments.
Ways to Get Involved

- **Thompson Divide Withdrawal:** This is another project that has received a lot of attention lately, as it involves a proposal to prohibit mining and oil & gas leasing on nearly 225,000 acres of Colorado’s public lands. It also happens to involve land directly adjacent to the Mt. Emmons land exchange, which CWPL has largely supported. The Thompson Divide Withdrawal recently began its NEPA scoping, during which you can comment on the project through June 16.

Submit a Photo to our Annual Photo Contest!
The theme for this year’s photo contest is **Wild Colorado Water**. With the heavy snow and big runoff this year, and also in celebration of National Rivers Month, we’d love to see some wild water you’ve witnessed recently! Send in your submissions (one per person) to coloradowildpubliclands@gmail.com by end of day on June 30 for a chance to win a NEMO Stargaze reclining camp chair generously provided by our friends at Ute Mountaineer!

Cameron P. of Denver won last year’s photo contest, themed *Public Lands, My Way.*

THANK YOU!
Colorado Wild Public Lands could not exist without YOU! Our members are both *why* and *how* we do what we do and we cannot thank you enough. As we transition to a new Director, your support is extremely appreciated to ensure we remain as nimble and capable as ever. Please support our vital work via mail at our address below or online.

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