

# Grand County Wilderness Group



Fall Issue 2018

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

## *Letter from the President* Jack Reichert

As I am typing this snow is falling!!!!. This morning I filled out my NSCD winter ski volunteer forms and signed up for the annual day of training. Alas, summer is over.

For many of us, the highlight of GCWG summer was the dedication of the Roger Shaw memorial. Roger's brother, children, and many grandkids attended, along with a lot of his Grand County friends. We unveiled a granite bench (quarried in Estes Park) close to the kiosk we dedicated to Joan a few years earlier. There were several heart felt talks about Roger that were very touching. The Grand County chorale sang several of Roger's favorite songs. The weather was fantastic till the end.... then it began to rain (wonder who pulled that off).

We had five new members in 2018: Elanor Conner, Robert Hall, Laure Oles, Charlie and Sara Scott. Welcome and thank you for helping to maintain and improve our Grand County wilderness areas. Our membership is slightly down this year, we now have 146 members representing 87 households, this compares to 154 members last year (94 households). However, we are still ahead of the numbers from 2 years ago. We do recruit during the year, but most new members come as a referral. So, when you meet like-minded wilderness enthusiasts, don't forget to mention the GCWG.

As usual we had a busy year in hosting the Monarch and Junco cabins. Although the 2018 numbers haven't been tabulated, the 2017 numbers show Monarch Lake was the busiest by far. The number of registration sign-ins went from 22,165 in 2016 to 25,064 in 2017. The back country overnight usage also went up from 2,213 to 3,075. For comparison, the Junco registrations went from 3,530 in 2016 to 4,537 in 2017.

On the down side, this summer at Monarch only 86% of the positions were filled and at Junco only 91% of the positions were filled. Naturally we would like these numbers to be 100%, your board addressed this at the last board meeting.... More to follow.

Our volunteer hours are a significant factor in the USFS Granby office being able to get funding from HQ and grants for summer interns. So, please **turn in your hours**. If you forgot some this summer, it's not too late. Get them to Toni Wujek. Based on what was turned in to Toni our volunteer hours, year-to-date, are worth \$40,968 to the Forest Service! WOW, good job GCWG

## *Upcoming events*

**Fall Members Meeting, Oct. 20, 2018**

**Smokey Bear signups at Fall Meeting**

**January 6- White Deer Party**

## *Letter from the President* continued

During the September 23 board meeting we focused on making cabin hosting more appealing. Instead of the mandatory wilderness information training, we will have a 15-minute video broken up into key sections. Members can access the video and watch the whole 15-minute presentation or pick a section at any time. This should help eliminate information "overload" and provide a consistent reference. We will do the same thing with Toni's cabin hosting orientation. Ann Rosati has volunteered to pull this video together and the stars will be Bob Saint and Toni Wujek.

We realize that weekends tend to be bad times for our many of our members and we will discuss this with the Forest Service. We are also going to work with the Forest Service to help resolve some of the communication issues at Junco and Monarch. We will try to simplify the back-country quota system to make it quicker and easier to read. We will have more information on the details on these items as they are addressed.

Remember that cabin hosting is a crucial component in minimizing the impact of the thousands of visitors to Indian Peaks Wilderness. Of the 30,000 visitors that registered at Monarch and Junco, probably another 30-50,000 did not register.

The first year of light trail work hikes went very well. Started up slow, but we had some very large groups and covered a wide range of trails in the county. The Forest Service provided us with several new tools to help us with this effort.



GCWG is a service organization. We ask that each member participate in at least 4 one-day activities.

This newsletter references many fun and productive ways to contribute.

Bluebird houses and monitoring is one.



### **GCWG Members Help Address Housing Shortage for Local Bluebirds**

By Doris Klein

Doreen Sumerlin, Wildlife Biologist for Sulphur Ranger District, says she “inherited” a significant number of bluebird boxes when she started working for the district in the 1980’s. She never knew who installed them, but they were mounted on fence lines from Tabernash all the way to Hot Sulphur Springs. On a recent drive from Granby to HSS only 3 boxes were spotted on this 10 mile stretch of US40; others have succumbed to weather, decay, neglect and fence replacement.

In the past, Doreen has had scout groups and others build boxes for her. For the last two years, GCWG member Mike Braddy has constructed a dozen new boxes each year and mounted them along US 40 between Tabernash and Granby. More recently GCWG member, Gary Piper, volunteered his woodworking expertise, well-equipped workshop and beetle kill from his property to the effort, mentoring three other GCWG members, Carolyn Stahl, Doris and David Klein, through the construction of 6 additional birdhouses built to specifications.

Doreen does not have much storage space for new boxes, but is always happy to have a few on hand and people to call upon when her supply dwindles. She states that while it is great to have new boxes, the real challenge is to have sufficient help to mount and maintain the boxes once they are built. “There is no sense in thinking we are adding to shelter options for our mountain bluebirds, if we don’t maintain them as viable healthy environments.”

House cleaning is needed before the mountain bluebirds arrive for the season. Because they return to Grand County as early as the first week of March, it is best to clean out previously occupied boxes in the fall. The risks of having unclean nesting shelters include the accumulation of debris over the seasons, mold, bugs and parasites, to which nestlings are particularly vulnerable. Doreen counts on GCWG members to help with the cleaning process and reminds us to wear gloves and a mask when sweeping the old contents to the ground.

In addition to Mike Braddy focusing on the Tabernash to Granby corridor, Doreen has a family who volunteers to monitor and maintain boxes on the Granby to Grand Lake stretch of US34.

She works with CDOT and private landowners regarding mounting bluebird boxes. Challenges include property ownership changes and CDOT’s use of T posts for fencing which are less user friendly for attaching houses than traditional wooden posts. Doreen wonders if open habitat (a mix of shrubs, short grasses and some clumps of trees) in neighborhoods may be the best place to introduce bird boxes in the future, as these can be more readily accessible areas for monitoring and cleaning than roadside locations.

Asked about who takes up residency in houses intended for mountain bluebirds, Doreen is both practical and philosophical. “I don’t discriminate. For example, tree swallows are vulnerable and need shelter, too. Mountain blue birds are our first returnees in spring, so they have “first dibs”, but I am happy to provide for any bird in need of shelter.”

If you can “lend a hand” to help Doreen meet the housing needs of mountain bluebirds in Grand County, contact her at [dsumerlin@fs.fed.us](mailto:dsumerlin@fs.fed.us) . And remember to report your volunteer hours to Toni Wujek. This is one of many ways GCWG members can assist the USFS.

### Thinking of adding your own bluebird

“Airbnb’s”? Here are a few tips regarding building and mounting them:

- Find construction plans online at [www.NestWatch.org](http://www.NestWatch.org) (part of The Cornell Lab of Ornithology) search: Right Bird, Right House
- Use rough-hewn wood that is hearty against the elements (cedar, for example) or waterproof the wood with linseed oil
- Mount 4-6 ft off the ground in open areas such as on the posts of perimeter fencing or free standing poles
- Mount boxes at least 300 feet from one another and no closer than ¼ mile from buildings where starlings pose a challenge
- Mount oriented to the east away from prevailing winds
- Do not mount bluebird boxes on utility poles which provide perch for predator birds



### Bluebird Facts

- -There is an estimated breeding population of 4.6 million mountain bluebirds worldwide (Partners in Flight)
- -80% spend part of the year in the US (Partners in Flight)
- -It is difficult to know the mountain bluebird population trends in Grand County; year to year fluctuations are most likely related to weather conditions in spring (D.Sumerlin)
- -Mountain bluebirds live 6-8 years in the wild
- -Mountain bluebirds are “secondary cavity nesters”. That means they rely on nesting shelter from other sources and build their nest within, but they cannot excavate their own.
- (Think of trees with holes created by nature or big billed woodpeckers such as flickers and hairy woodpeckers.)
- -Aspen trees offer prime real estate because their wood is soft;
- -Mountain bluebirds do not need to compete with eastern or western bluebirds for nesting sites in Grand County, because their ranges do not overlap here, but house sparrows, starlings, tree swallows and house wrens are fierce competitors for available “housing.” (This is why constructed bluebird boxes have a specific size opening, so larger aggressive intruders cannot just “move in”.)
- -For a variety of reasons, the number of mountain bluebirds declined by 24% from 1966 to 2015. (All About Birds) In the continental US, they are still in decline in AZ, NM, OK and TX, but appear to be stable in Colorado (NestWatch.org)
- -Boxes (houses) constructed and placed in suitable habitat can support/boost the population

### Do you know about the 4th Grade Pass? By Doris Klein

Working with John Simmons last year on a project to picture all passes that are acceptable substitutes for an ANRA pass, I first learned about the **4th Grade Annual Pass**. Not on your radar either? Here’s the scoop.

The program was initiated by the Obama administration in 2015. The purpose of the Every Kid in a Park program through which the pass is obtained is to promote youth and family use of federally managed lands and waters to “experience the outdoors and learn America’s history and culture”. To earn the **free** pass, starting September 1st of their school year, **any fourth grader** (including those who are homeschooled) can go to [www.everykidinapark.gov](http://www.everykidinapark.gov), answer a few questions about outdoor adventures, and print out their paper pass. (In Grand County, the paper pass can be presented at Rocky Mountain National Park, the Sulphur District Office in Granby or the BLM office in Kremmling to exchange it for a more durable, official looking pass.)

The pass gives the student and their family **free** access to national parks, forests, recreation areas, wildlife refuges, monuments and marine sanctuaries (more than 2000 federal sites in all!) until August 31st of their 4th grade school year. How empowering for a student to be their family’s “ticket” to fun experiences in the great outdoors!

Fourth graders were selected as the program’s target population for several reasons, including that research “shows children ages 9-11 are most open to new ideas and connecting with nature and history”, it is the grade in which most students study state history and go on related field trips, and there are other sponsored programs for 4th graders that dovetail well with this initiative.

We are each in a position to encourage responsible use of federal resources, stewardship of the environment, and the next generation of outdoor enthusiasts. This is one more opportunity to do so! By educating ourselves and others about the **4th Grade Annual Pass**, which classroom teachers are also able to get for their students, we are helping to maximize the use and impact of the program. GCWG members can help to identify and involve our fourth grade “Mini-Me’s” who will partner with others to preserve and protect American’s natural wonders and historic sites in the future.

Information for parents, students and educators (in English and Spanish) is available at [www.everykidinapark.gov](http://www.everykidinapark.gov).

## 2017 Registration Box Report

Stephen Lee

The Grand County Wilderness Group has been monitoring and maintaining registration boxes for trailheads leading to Wilderness Areas for the US Forest Service for 18 years. There are now a total of 11 registration boxes that are maintained by the GCWG. A volunteer provides registration sheets, retrieves them and tabulates the numbers for that trail. These numbers are given to another volunteer who puts them together and writes a report for the Forest Service. This report has been identified as being very important in Forest Service planning and funding.

A tabular listing of all the data obtained for the total number of visitors at each trailhead registration box is posted on the Wilderness Group website (GCWG.org/ Registration Box Info & Forms)

Looking at the registration box data for 2017, no surprise, Monarch Lake has jumped again! After leveling off in 2015, numbers are increasing again in 2017. And not a small increase, but almost 2900 additional folks visited Monarch this past year.

After showing significant increases in 2015, the Bowen & Baker sites are a mixed bag in 2017, an increase for Bowen versus a decrease for Baker. Looking back through the years we have data, there have been fluctuations both up and down. And it is possible that the numbers in earlier years were not as accurate as we would like (broken registration box, etc). We are confident that the current numbers at both Bowen & Baker are indicative of the actual foot traffic through those areas.

Junco showed a strong increase this year, 3530 in 2016 vs. 4537 in 2017. The Junco registration box is one of the few where we have data for all of the past 18 years. There have been some up and down fluctuations, but overall numbers have been fairly steady. Trailhead numbers for the other sites seem to be holding steady as well. The exceptions were Devils Thumb & Roaring Fork that did show increases in 2017. The upward trend for both locations may simply reflect that we are getting more accurate counts. Time will tell.

The Backcountry Overnight Usage Table, also posted on the Wilderness Group Website, gives a better sense of how many people are actually recreating in the various Wilderness areas. After leveling off in 2015, Monarch overnights showed another increase for 2016. Looks like Monarch will continue to be the most popular site in the County for the foreseeable future. Overnights for Baker were lower for 2017, while those for Bowen remained about the same. This does not entirely match the overall numbers we discussed earlier.

The overnight visits at Roaring Fork Trailhead have shown an increase as well. This could be just a natural fluctuation from year to year. However, this area does seem to be getting more usage, both day hikes and overnights. This trend seems to be holding for 2017. And overnight visits to the Vasquez area continue to increase, but these numbers are relatively small, so hard to say if this is significant. And numbers at St. Louis Creek seem to be on an upswing as well.

More information that is easy to pull from the visitor sheets is the number of through-hikers traveling the Continental Divide Trail. Bowen Trailhead recorded 179 hikers on the CDT, while Monarch recorded 58. The registration sheet for Bowen now has a slot where CDT hikers can sign in. What is probably most important is that we are picking up higher numbers for CDT hikers, whether they are hiking from border to border or just some of the segments. According to the Continental Divide Coalition 81 hikers completed the entire CDT in 2017. The Coalition indicates that at least 150 hikers do some part of the CDT each year. So we may be picking up most of the CDT hikers who travel through Grand County.

So what ideas and conclusions can we draw from the Registration Box data for 2017? We talked about increased visitation into the Never Summer Wilderness in 2015. The last 2 years the numbers seemed to have leveled off, and Baker actually showed a decrease in overnight visits.

Monarch Lake still has the highest attendance, both day use and overnight. The numbers have been highest at Monarch since 2000 when the first trailhead data was recorded. A lot of this can be attributed to Monarch's easy accessibility and lower elevation, which does allow for visitation outside the summer tourist season. And of course, fishing is a major attraction at Monarch, as well as climbing in the Indian Peaks.

Once again the other trailhead sites seem to be "holding their own". Numbers are relatively steady with no major decreases in attendance numbers. Junco's overall visitation seems to have changed very little over the last 17 years, but note that overnight numbers went from 245 in 2015 to 343 in 2016 and back down to 282 in 2017. We attributed the increase in Junco overnight visits last year to the rehabilitation of the Columbine Lake Trail. So maybe this is just a natural fluctuation based on weather or other factors.

**THE MOST SPECIAL PLACES IN THE NATION SHOULD BE PRESERVED, NOT FOR ROYALTY OR THE RICH, BUT FOR EVERYONE. KEN BURNS**

There are plenty of ways to be of service. We hope that you became part of GCWG because you care about wild places with wild creatures in Grand County and intend to help preserve them. NOW is the time to make choices for your involvement. All you need to do is set aside the time and sign up. NO ONE WILL CALL, it is up to you to get out there and make a difference. Here is a summary opportunities for your reference:

1. Pay your \$20 dues to GCWG
2. Host one day at Junco Cabin
3. Host one day at Monarch Cabin
4. Open up and clean either cabin to start the season
5. Hike a wilderness trail ANY DAY. REPORT your hours via website form.
6. Lead a Light Trail Work hike.
7. Adopt a registration box and retrieve the reports – Stephen Lee (stephenchris@rkymtnhi.com, [708-990-5967](tel:708-990-5967))
8. Spreadsheet analysis of trail usage from registration boxes – Stephen Lee
9. Take digital photographs for our bulletin boards, newsletter - Holly Whitten ([news1@GCWG.org](mailto:news1@GCWG.org))
10. Help construct signage and update trailhead bulletin boards – Jack Reichert
11. Work on trail maintenance and other projects - Jack Reichert
12. Wear your wilderness tee shirt or sweatshirt every time you hike in the forest and report your hours.
13. Staff the booth at the Art Affair for 2 hours
14. Consider backpacking with the Encampment group or joining the Spring Camp
15. Uproot noxious weeds wherever we can find them – Beth Collins ([970-726-5423](tel:970-726-5423))
16. Record and report volunteer hours – Toni Wujek
17. Distribute our “business” cards
18. Contribute articles to this newsletter– Holly Whitten ([news1@GCWG.org](mailto:news1@GCWG.org))
19. Work on National Public Lands Day
20. Purchase shirts, sweatshirts and hats.
21. Adopt an Osprey nest –USFS ([970-887-4100](tel:970-887-4100))
22. Monitor a blue bird box – USFS ([970-887-4100](tel:970-887-4100))
24. Volunteer at the Forest Service Office.

Contact the Forest Service anytime - USFS ([970-887-4100](tel:970-887-4100)) to check other activities.



Only YOU can earn hours by volunteering to help Smokey this winter.

### ***Volunteers Needed:***

Dick Sprague has been the Monarch cabin coordinator and cabins sign up coordinator for the last 4-5 years. Dick will continue as Monarch cabin coordinator, but we need someone to take over the cabins sign up.

Two board members will be off the board after the spring meeting (term limited). Bob Saint (treasurer and membership) and Gary Perkins (V. President).

If you are interested in any of these positions, please contact any board member.

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**The Spring Membership meeting has been moved back about 5 weeks to May 18, 2019. Your board felt that having the meeting closer to the summer volunteer season would make it easier for members to sign up for the activities and any new information would be more current and fresher.**

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This summer we did not have enough volunteer support at either the Monarch or Junco cabin. Monarch only had 86% of the positions filled and at Junco only 91%. Let's work to get this back to 100%.

### ***Like us on Facebook!***

<https://www.facebook.com/grandcountywildernessgroup>

Special Thanks to Chas McConnell at [McConnell Printing](#) for his help with printing this newsletter.

**Grand County Wilderness Mission Statement:** To Assist the US Forest Service in the preservation, protection, improvement and public understanding of the wilderness areas in Grand County.

**Preservation**

- Patrol shores for fish line filament and recycling
- Work on a National Public Lands day project
- Adopt an Osprey nest
- Monitor a blue bird box

**Improvement**

- Adopt a registration box
- Build a bluebird nest
- Eradicate noxious weeds
- Work on a maintenance project

**Public Understanding**

- Cabin Hosting (Junco and Monarch)
- Hike wilderness trails
- Lead a group hike
- Take digital photos to share
- Staff the booth at the Art Affair
- Wear your tee shirt, hat, vest to bring awareness

**Protection**

- Construct signage
- Update trail bulletin boards

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**2018-19 Membership.** Yearly dues are \$20 per household; due at the October Meeting. New members, please complete the following form and bring to the meeting or mail to Grand County Wilderness, PO Box 4116, Granby, CO 80446. You can also join on-line at GCWG.org.

Name:

Address:

Email:

Phone:

Interests (Please refer to the activity mentioned in this newsletter and make contact accordingly):

Grand County Wilderness Group  
PO Box 4116  
Granby, CO 80446