

VISTAS



ROCKY MOUNTAIN NATIONAL PARK

NPS Photo by Crystal Brindle

Wilderness, Wildlife, Wonder

Over the last year, we've seen fires, floods, and a government shutdown. It's got us wondering what's next? Hopefully, a quiet winter.

Since the Spring 2013 edition, we've experienced the Big Meadows Fire on the west of the park, a 100 year flood event on the east side, and a government shutdown. With all the moisture this summer, we officially declared the Big Meadows Fire out in September. The fire burned some 650 acres in wilderness just west of the Continental Divide.

A rainy August was capped by 13 inches of rain recorded at Lily Lake between September 9 and 15. Last year's repairs to the dam held up as designed! An update on the flood's impacts in the park is included in this edition.

On top of losing the primary access highways 34 and 36 due to the flood, the government shutdown was a further economic blow to the communities of Estes Park and Grand Lake during a prime time of the fall visitation season. Thankfully, Governor Hickenlooper and the State of Colorado pitched in to reopen the park for the Columbus Day holiday weekend; thus ending the shutdown 5 days early. The reopening of Highway 36 on November 4, and Highway 34 on November 21, hailed as signs that things were returning to normal, although many continue to be impacted by the flood.

The Bear Lake Road construction project was largely completed just prior to the mid-September flood and held up very well during the rain event as did the recent work on Trail Ridge Road. We probably would have lost some of the Bear Lake Road along Glacier Creek had it not been for the new one mile section of road that by-passes the creek. While not quite as disruptive as the 2012 season, we're glad to have the project finished and thank everyone for their patience over the last two years.

The completion of this project represents over 49 miles of improvements on Bear Lake Road and Trail Ridge Road. This amounts to over 80 percent of the park's main road system being rebuilt or repaved since 2001 representing an investment of some \$66 million in park roads. Since 1997, over \$60 million of entrance and camping fees has been spent on various other improvements and projects in the park. Congress recently extended the fee program through 2015. All of this investment is getting the park ready for its next 100 years.

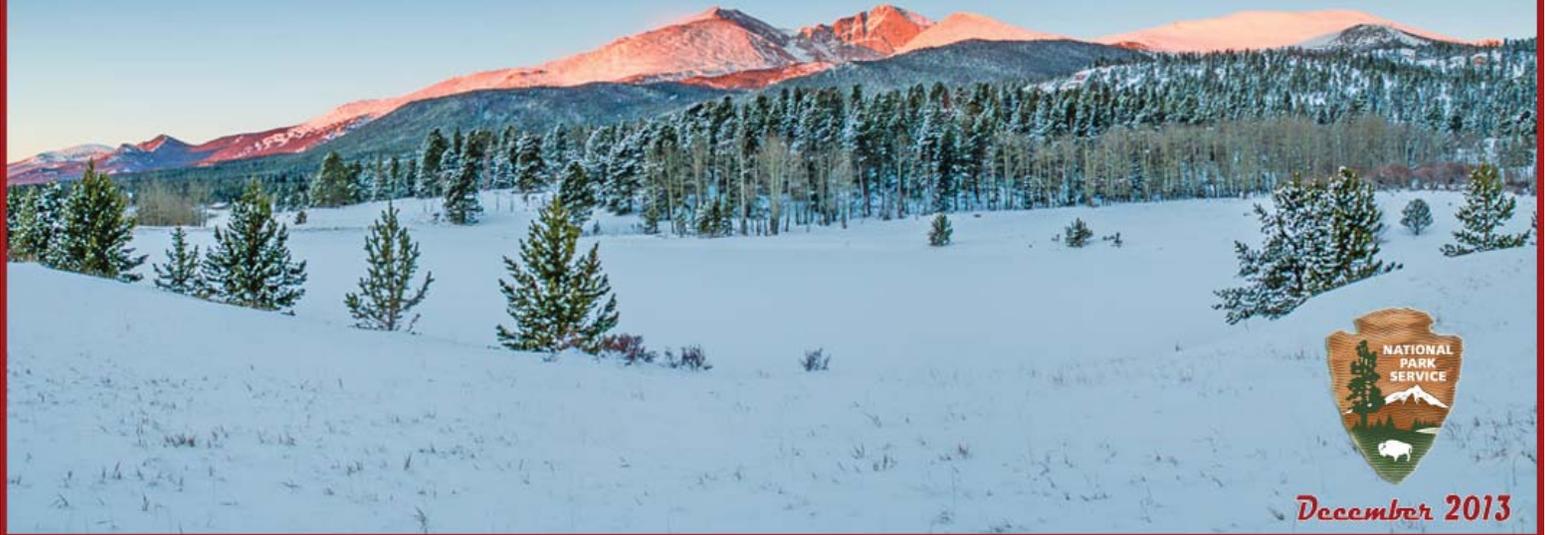
An update on the planning for the park's 100th anniversary is also provided in this edition. The kick-off event is scheduled for September 2014, which isn't far off. Please stay tuned for further announcements related to the centennial in the new year.

The "sequester" is still with us, so we expect to operate with tighter budgets in 2014. Park staff have always risen to the challenges as they are again this year. Our commitment to you is that Rocky Mountain National Park will remain the special place that it has been for the last 100 years, so that your grandchildren and their grandchildren can enjoy the park as much as you have.

Come visit. We're open for business!

Vaughn Baker, Superintendent

Season's Greetings from Rocky Mountain National Park



Keep up on the Latest With Rocky....

Park Website www.nps.gov/romo

Like us on Facebook at Rocky Mountain National
Park

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Flickr http://flickr.com/photos/rocky_mountain_np

Park Information 970-586-1206

Trail Ridge Road & Bear Lake Road Reconstruction
Recorded Status Line 970-586-1222



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Countdown to the 100th Anniversary!

In less than a year, Rocky Mountain National Park will kick off its 100th Anniversary Celebration. Now is the time to get involved in this once-in-a-lifetime event!

Several important events will be sponsored by Rocky Mountain National Park. To start off the celebration year, Rocky Mountain National Park will be hosting a kick-off Picnic in the Park on September 4, 2014. A Centennial Speaker Series will run throughout the year at various Estes Park, Grand Lake, and Front Range locations. A Rocky Mountain National Park Employee Reunion is being planned for the fall of 2015, and a re-dedication Ceremony will honor the park on September 4, 2015 as it heads into its next 100 years of protecting wilderness, wildlife, and wonder. Details about these events will be released as they are finalized.



Many local organizations have stepped forward to add events to the Centennial Calendar of Events, including:

- Rocky Mountain Plein Air Painters will be hosting several Paint Out events throughout the year, including a Children's Painting Session at Lily Lake.
- Brad Fitch will perform a special Centennial Concert on July 25, 2015.
- VintageTimeTravelers.com, a Model T touring group, will kick-off their tour of the historic National Park-to-Park Highway in Grand Lake, CO on August 24 where the Grand Lake Historical Society will host a picnic and evening of historic presentations, western music, poetry, and stories at the Smith Eslick Cottage Court and Cottage Camp. On August 25, 2015, the Model T group will re-enact an historic car camp at Moraine Park Campground.
- The Colorado Mountain Club will lead climbs of 100 peaks in Rocky Mountain National Park throughout 2015.

The 100th Anniversary Logo and Slogan are available for marketing and retail use. Many businesses have already applied to use the logo in print and on-line marketing campaigns. 100th Anniversary merchandise, including hand-made quilted items, fine art prints, and a Rocky Mountain National Park trading blanket designed by Pendleton Woolen Mills, will start appearing in local area businesses as early as January 2014.

Do you have an idea for a special 100th Anniversary Event? Want to use the logo for your business or merchandise? Simply visit our website to find out more information or fill out an application! Rocky Mountain National Park's 100th Anniversary is almost here, so now is the time to get involved!

Visit the 100th Anniversary website for more details: www.nps.gov/romo/planyourvisit/100th_anniversary.htm



Flood Impacts Will Close Old Fall River Road Through 2014

Backcountry Travelers May Encounter Different Conditions

Rocky Mountain National Park received significant damages on bridges, roads and trails in the historic floods that occurred in September. However, damages in the park were relatively minor in comparison to the disastrous flooding that downstream communities east of the park experienced. The west side of the park was largely unaffected by the storm with flooding occurring only east of the Continental Divide.



One area of damage on Old Fall River Road

NPS Photo

Damages on Old Fall River Road are extensive and the road will remain closed to vehicles through 2014. It is unknown at this time whether

hikers and bicyclists will be allowed on the road next year. Park staff are working with the Federal Highway Administration on assessments of the Alluvial Fan area and Old Fall River Road. Cost estimates and design concepts are still being determined.

Repair work has been completed in the Wild Basin parking lot, the Twin Sisters Road, and is nearing completion on the McGraw Ranch Bridge and the Aspenglen Bridge.

Known damage to trails and pedestrian access are mainly in the Fall River, Lumpy Ridge, Bear Lake, Northfork, Twin Sisters and Wild Basin areas. Some trails are closed to stock use.

Due to the flood, backcountry travelers may encounter different conditions than they have experienced in the past. Visitors may find missing foot bridges, missing trail segments, uneven trail surfaces, unstable slopes, falling trees due to soil moisture, rutted trails, damaged water bars and steps, difficult water crossings, and missing directional signs. Visitors should be prepared. Most of Rocky Mountain National Park is designated wilderness, where self-reliance, discovery and adventure are expected.

The next steps will be to assess at what level park staff will "repair" damaged trails. The flood was a natural event which will be taken in to consideration as park staff move forward in determining what repairs should be made.

Completion of 13 Years of Federal Highways Roadwork in the Park

With the completion of the second phase of Bear Lake Road reconstruction this summer, Rocky Mountain National Park concluded a 13-year road improvement program in partnership with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) Central Federal Lands Highway Division (CFLHD). Since 2001, the park and the FHWA have reconstructed or resurfaced 49 miles, or 80 percent, of the mainline roads in the park, reducing the park's backlog of deferred road maintenance by \$66 million. Innovative solutions were required to accommodate Rocky Mountain's short construction season, high altitude and high visitation challenges.



Bear Lake Road Phase II NPS Photo



Bear Lake Road Phase II
NPS Photo

The road program's partnership with the FHWA began in 2001 with the relocation and reconfiguration of a mile of road adjacent to the historic Beaver Meadows Visitor Center, followed by the first phase of Bear Lake Road reconstruction in 2003-2004. The program continued with three phases of Trail Ridge Road reconstruction between 2007 and 2010. The program finished this year with the last phase of Bear Lake Road work.



*Trail Ridge Road at
Knife's Edge*
NPS Photo

Welcome Our International Colleague

Juraj Svajda from Slovakia is currently working as an assistant professor at Matej Bel University focusing on teaching of subjects related to nature conservation, including research. Prior to this he served as the Chief Ranger for several years working at RMNP's sister park - Tatra National Park of Slovakia. In 2013, Juraj competed for a research fellowship with the Slovak-American Foundation. He was successful and thanks to their financial contribution, Rocky is proud to host Juraj for one year as a research scholar.



Juraj Svajda

Juraj's focus of research during his stay is to study different approaches in monitoring and management of visitors in the park. He will bring this new knowledge back to his country with possible immediate application in the park or at his university. During this past summer, and thanks to Dave Pettebone our Wilderness Coordinator, he has already surveyed 8 trails in the park (impact of visitation on status and condition of trail) and worked on the calibration of counters and estimation of number of visitors with park staff. Other potential and inspiring areas of interest which can be transferred to his home country are monitoring of soundscapes, methods and results from visitor transportation survey conducted this summer and winter tourism use in the park.

A highlight of his stay thus far was participation in the international program and seminar "Planning and Managing Tourism in Protected Areas." This course was organized by Colorado State University. Participants visited 13 national parks and protected areas in 4 western states. As a former park employee in Slovakia he would like to use this time and opportunity here for strengthening cooperation between parks.

Trail Updates

East Shore Trail

An Environmental Assessment (EA) is being prepared as part of the decision process whether to allow bicycle use on a two-mile section of the East Shore Trail. Public scoping and all field work have been completed, and the contractor is making the final edits to the EA. It is anticipated that the EA will be available for public review and comment and public meetings will be held in early 2014, with a decision to follow by the end of the year.

East Side Multiuse Trail Study

The park received funding from the Transit in Parks Program to prepare an Environmental Assessment (EA) as part of the decision process on whether to develop a multi-use trail system on the east side of the park.

A 2009 study demonstrated that such a trail system is feasible, and could connect multiple front country locations in the park (visitor centers, campgrounds, trailheads, etc.) with the growing trail network in the Estes Valley. The feasibility study examined a 15.5 mile corridor that roughly parallels existing roads. If approved, such a trail system may or may not include the entire corridor. It would also be many years in the making and would be costly to build.

Public scoping was conducted in February and March, cultural and natural resource inventories were completed this past spring, an alternatives public workshop was conducted in August, and the contractor is now in the process of writing the EA. It is anticipated that the EA will be available for public review and comment and additional public meetings will be held in 2014, with a decision to follow.

Becoming an American Citizen with a Rocky Mountain Backdrop

On the afternoon of August 22, 2013, Rocky Mountain National Park again hosted a naturalization ceremony in the Moraine Park Campground Amphitheater. It was the park's seventh time hosting this event since the first one was held in 2006. This year's ceremony was sponsored by Congressman Jared Polis who addressed and welcomed the new citizens as they were sworn in as new American citizens.

The event was hosted by the park and conducted by the United States Customs and Immigration Service. There were 21 new citizens that were naturalized during this year's ceremony from 14 different countries. In addition to the keynote speaker, Congressman Polis, the acting superintendent of Rocky and representatives from Senator Bennett's and Senator Udall's office gave remarks. During the ceremony each individual was sworn in as a new American citizen while family and friends looked on. The mountain peaks and valley setting at the Moraine Park Amphitheater made a fitting backdrop.

At the conclusion, as is traditionally done every year, a photograph was taken of the group with the American flag and Longs Peak in the background. For these new citizens, the national park, a truly American idea, makes for the perfect starting point.



NPS Photo by Kirsten Moody



NPS Photo by Kirsten Moody

Elk and Vegetation Management Plan Update

This winter begins the sixth year of a 20 year plan to manage Rocky Mountain National Park's (RMNP) elk and vegetation. For a third consecutive winter, no elk culling will occur because the population is estimated to be at or below the management objective of 600 to 800 elk on the park's winter range. Over the spring and summer of 2013, park personnel continued to collect information on winter range vegetation conditions, particularly with respect to riparian



willow and aspen, and this data will be incorporated into a 5-year adaptive management review of the overall plan. No additional elk exclosures were constructed to protect willow and aspen in 2013. In 2014, managers will be reviewing vegetation data, as well as the effects from the Fern Lake Fire and September floods, to determine where additional exclosures or other management actions are needed to maintain or promote aspen and willow recovery.

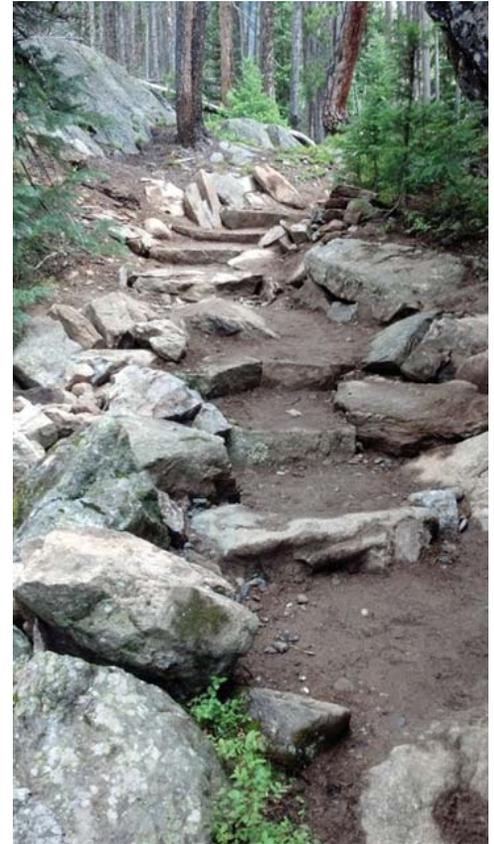
Research continues on this regionally important elk population and December 2013 marks the beginning of the third year of a five-year research project investigating the effects of chronic wasting disease (CWD) on the elk population in RMNP. Dr. Ryan Monello, from the National Park Service's Biological Resource Management Division (BRMD), is leading the research project and is collaborating with Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) and Colorado State University scientists to examine disease progression of CWD and the effects of CWD on an elk population over a larger landscape scale. In addition, park biologists are collaborating with BRMD, CPW, and Colorado State University scientists to learn more about regional elk movements, to understand how movements across the park boundary influence use of park winter range, and to develop reliable ground based population survey methods. Including CPW collared elk (green and purple tagged collars), researchers will collar up to 100 adult female elk (brown collars) and monitor survival, reproduction, and mortality sources (e.g. hunter kills, vehicle collisions, predator kills) on a weekly basis. Collar relocations and monthly elk population surveys (from ground or air) will provide clues to regional, landscape-scale movements, habitat use, and can better inform population models that estimate the elk population on the park's winter range.



Your Fee Dollars at Work - Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Projects Completed in 2013

The Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (FLREA) funds projects in Rocky Mountain National Park to improve facilities that improve visitor experiences and protect resources for future generations. Since 1997, over \$60 million of entrance and camping fees has been spent on various other improvements and projects in the park. The projects completed in 2013 include the following:

- Sewer upgrades to piping in Moraine Park Campground
- Comfort station remodels in Aspenglen Campground
- Historic rock walls rehabilitated on Trail Ridge Road
- Trails rehabilitated on Flattop Mountain, Finch Lake, Lawn Lake, & North Inlet
- Park roadways striped and road shoulders stabilized
- Constructed accessible campsites in Aspenglen Campground
- Solid waste collection improved to reduce visitor and bear confrontations
- Mitigate hazard trees along the road corridors for visitor safety



Stairs on North Inlet Trail NPS Photo



Bear Proof Food Storage Box

NPS Photo

Ribbon Cutting Ceremony for Reopening of Alpine Ridge Trail

On Monday, July 8, Grand Lake Mayor Judy Burke and Estes Park Mayor Bill Pinkham cut a ceremonial ribbon to celebrate the opening of the renovated Alpine Ridge Trail across from the Alpine Visitor Center and Trail Ridge Store in Rocky Mountain National Park .



NPS Photo



Vaughn Baker, park superintendent and Matt Dragon, trails leader on the project, hold the ribbon as Grand Lake Mayor Judy Burke and Estes Park Mayor Bill Pinkham officially open the trail. NPS Photo

The Alpine Ridge Trail, commonly referred to as "Huffers Hill," had been closed since 2010 for major reconstruction. The condition of the trail had significantly deteriorated resulting in erosion around the log steps and unlevel stepping surfaces, contributing to safety concerns and resource impacts to the tundra. This popular trail climbs over 200 feet, has steep grades, and provides incredible views. During the dedication Vaughn Baker commented on the great work by the trail crew and vegetation crew on this project mentioning this is one of the easiest 12,000 foot summits in the state of Colorado!

Top 10 Visitation Days in 2013

As of October 2013, Rocky Mountain National Park recreation visitation had reached 2,822,791 visitors, an 8% decrease over the recreation visitation numbers by this time last year, in 2012. September, typically the park's busiest time of year with some of the highest visitation days, and October were both greatly affected with closures in the park due to historic flooding, main access roads to the east side of the park being closed and the government shutdown.

Top 10 Days in 2013:

- 1 August 3
- 2 July 6
- 3 July 21
- 4 July 5
- 5 May 26
- 6 August 4
- 7 July 20
- 8 July 4
- 9 August 11
- 10 August 10

Top 10 Days in 2012:

- 1 September 29
- 2 September 2
- 3 August 5
- 4 July 22
- 5 September 16
- 6 August 12
- 7 September 3
- 8 July 15
- 9 September 15
- 10 July 30



Dream Lake November 2013

NPS Photo by Crystal Brindle

Big Meadows Fire

On the afternoon of Monday June 10, 2013, a lightning strike ignited the Big Meadows Fire on the north end of Big Meadows on the west side of Rocky Mountain National Park. On June 11, a combination of high winds, low humidity and a large amount of beetle killed trees caused the fire to grow from 2 to 3 acres in the morning to an estimated 300 to 400 acres through the day.

A Type II Incident Management Team was ordered to assist the park in managing the fire. This team successfully stopped the fire's growth to the south where it could have threatened the Town of Grand Lake. Fire managers continued to monitor the fire daily until October 18, 2013 when it was finally called out at 653 acres.



NPS Photo by Mike Lewelling

While fighting the Big Meadows Fire, emergency evacuation plans were put to the test. Early on the morning of Sunday, June 16, a member of an Interagency Hotshot Crew (IHC) walking with his crew from spike camp to the fireline collapsed due to sudden cardiac arrest. Prompt action by members of two Hotshot crews, as well as fire-line Paramedics that arrived minutes later, contributed to the successful resuscitation of the firefighter. An Automated External Defibrillator (AED) was used on site to resuscitate the firefighter. Fellow crewmembers then transported the firefighter to the nearest helispot just as the requested medevac helicopter arrived on scene. The firefighter was then transferred to the medical flight crew and taken to a cardiac care hospital in Denver.

Fern Lake Fire Recovery

The Fern Lake Fire in Rocky Mountain National Park was officially declared out on June 25, 2013, following an infrared detection flight. The Fern Lake Fire started in Rocky Mountain National Park from an illegal campfire on October 9, 2012, in steep and rugged Forest Canyon. Firefighters from across the country battled the fire for two months. Although the nearly 3,500 acre blaze was temporarily halted by an early December snowstorm, the fire continued to smolder and produce smoke until January 7.

The Fern Lake Fire had been managed under a full suppression strategy from the very beginning due to the threat it posed to human safety and infrastructure both in and adjacent to the park. However, wildland fire is a natural and integral component of the forests of Rocky and performs a number of valuable functions. In dry environments such as ours, forest fuels typically build up faster than they decompose. In some areas within Forest Canyon, dead fuels had built up over centuries to depths of over 20 feet. Fire is an important means of removing this dead plant material as well as returning nutrients back into the system. Fires also break up the continuity of the forest, improve habitat for some wildlife species, increase plant diversity, and create conditions suitable for the next generation of forest.

Following the abundant snow this past spring, the meadows of Moraine Park that burned in the fire greened up rapidly. By the end of summer, it was difficult to tell which areas had burned and which had not. Similarly, grasses and forbs in the understory of the forested areas that burned also re-established quickly following snowmelt. However, the forests themselves will take much longer to regenerate. It may take decades for forests to reestablish in the higher elevations of the burn.

Birds Without Borders

The new documentary, *Birds Without Borders*, produced by Nick Mollé (of Nick Mollé Productions) with the park's Chief of Resource Stewardship Ben Bobowski as advisor, was accepted by American Public Television in November. It will be broadcast on PBS stations beginning in the spring of 2014. Western Tanagers are featured in the film. The image of the migration pathway (on right) was constructed from data gathered from a geolocator backpack during the 2012-13 migration.

In June of 2013, Jeff Connor, retired park biologist and now park volunteer, initiated a collaborative Osprey monitoring project with the Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory and the U.S. Forest Service - Arapaho Roosevelt National Forest. This project is yet another example of the effort to protect park migratory bird species.



This project will demonstrate migration pathways south – to where you ask? How far south? We don't know! But, you can follow the path of two osprey via their satellite trackers and learn with us! Find out more about this project focused on the full life-cycle conservation of Osprey at:

http://www.rmbo.org/v3/OurWork/Science_/Research/RaptorMigration.aspx

Ken Unitt ~ July, 1958 - October, 2013



Kenneth Alan Unitt, computer programmer and network administrator for Rocky Mountain National Park for 29 years, passed away peacefully at his home in Estes Park on October 29 following a sudden and unexpected heart attack.

Ken enjoyed a long career as a computer programmer and network administrator for the National Park Service.

During his tenure at Rocky Mountain National Park, Ken was well known for his devotion to his work.

His knowledge of computers was unparalleled, as were his

mountaineering skills, which facilitated countless search and rescue efforts.

Ken will especially be remembered for his love of climbing and all things outdoors. One of his personal achievements was having logged over 26 vertical miles during his many climbing expeditions to Yosemite National Park. He will be greatly missed.

