



FALL NEWSLETTER

Hello COWPL Members and Friends,

This Fall, Colorado Wild Public Lands has exciting news! We continue to make a positive impact with our efforts to keep public lands open and accessible to all. We've submitted comments on the Blue Valley Ranch Land Exchange FEIS, including visiting the BLM land parcels and meeting community members. Our diligent review of land exchange analysis documents, has led to the preparation and submission of Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests to the public agencies for further information. And the support and enthusiasm of you, our members, has led COWPL to hire a new Community Engagement Director! See more details further below.

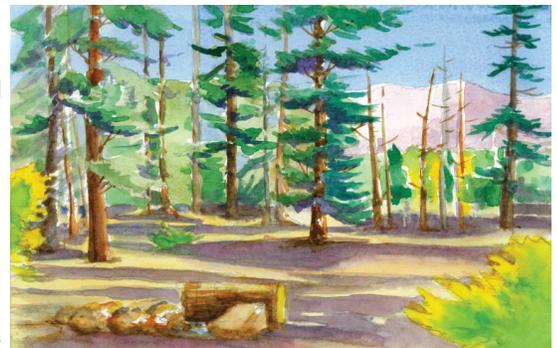


Just released for Public Lands Day, September 25 - Watch COWPL's new one-minute video!

Did you know that over 150 public land exchanges have taken place in Colorado since 2000? Colorado Wild Public lands was formed to protect and maintain access to these places. Learn more about our work in our new video created by Outdoor Adventure Media: "**Colorado Wild Public Lands: Keep It Open, Keep It Ours**" at <https://vimeo.com/604822245>

ACTION ALERT: Valle Seco Land Exchange Draft Decision Notice and Opportunity to Object

The San Juan National Forest issued the Valle Seco Land Exchange Final Environmental Assessment; the Draft Decision Notice and the Finding of No Significant Impact, on September 24, 2021. The project involves exchanging nine federal parcels of land on the San Juan National Forest (SJNF) totaling about 380 acres for one non-federal parcel of land totaling 880 acres. Per the Draft Decision, Responsible Official, Forest Supervisor Kara Chadwick, intends to select Alternative 3 Modified for this project. The modification excludes parcel 11 and proposes to limit motorized road use on parcel A. The notice describing the proposed activities, maps and other information is available on the Valle Seco Project Web page at: <http://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=57154>



An objection to the decision, including attachments, must be postmarked or received by Monday November 8, 2021. Electronic submissions may be submitted at: <http://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=57154>. According to the Forest Service, objections pertaining to the project will only be accepted from those who have previously submitted specific written comments regarding the land exchange during designated public comment periods. Colorado Wild Public Lands (COWPL) intends to submit an objection. More detail will be available on our website. Please contact us at coloradowildpubliclands@gmail.com if you would like to participate in COWPL's objection.

What is the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and how is it used?

Since 1967, the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) has provided the public the right to request access to records from any federal agency. It is often described as the law that keeps citizens in the know about their government. Federal agencies are required to disclose any information requested under the FOIA unless it falls under one of nine exemptions. FOIA is a big part of our work here at Colorado Wild Public Lands. It's often how we obtain vital information about land exchanges (LEXs) that wasn't initially disclosed. Here's how we use it:

1. Determine that the information isn't already available through the LEX or elsewhere.
2. Submit a formal FOIA request to the appropriate agency with all desired information.
3. The agency reviews the request and compiles a response.
4. COWPL reviews the response and determines if it is adequate.
5. Repeat steps 4 and 5 until all requested information is received, or, if necessary, bring in legal counsel to ensure transparency.

Matt Kenna of Public Interest Environmental Law and of Counsel, Western Environmental Law Center has been assisting COWPL with obtaining the Valle Seco appraisal information that COWPL requested via the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). We are looking forward to continuing work with Maya Kane.

COWPL prepared a FOIA request for additional information pertaining to the Blue Valley Ranch LEX FEIS. In response, the BLM has released some of the requested materials including more detailed maps of the proposed exchange parcels and information on mineral rights. However, other important data, for example, agreements between the proponent and other landowners who will be beneficiaries of the exchange, have not been released. The next step will be to work with legal counsel to obtain the information.

Welcome to COWPL's Community Engagement Director, Graham!



As COWPL's new Community Engagement Director, Graham Ward, will lead our efforts to connect with members, broaden our outreach & public participation, and diversify our fundraising. He sees access to public lands as a critical component of human wellbeing and a bridge to catalyzing action on the environmental challenges of our time. Graham comes from a sustainability background with experience in natural resources, waste management and food systems. His previous work with non-profits has taken him to unique destinations like Palmyra Atoll and Antarctica. Public lands have long played an important role in Graham's life and he is excited to put his unique skillset to work with Colorado Wild Public Lands.

Graham grew up in Iowa along the banks of the Mississippi River, where his connection to public lands began. His family made annual pilgrimages to Colorado's Rocky Mountains, which eventually led him to University of Denver where he earned a Master's degree in business administration, environmental policy and data analytics, and a bachelor's degree in business management, sustainability and Spanish. When he's not working to protect public lands, you'll typically find Graham skiing and biking on public lands or playing guitar.

We are sad to say "au revoir" to COWPL's intern, Sarah.



It's been a joy to see Sarah Emery's smile at work sessions, board meetings, and public outreach events. Sarah's work has had a strong impact, including increasing COWPL's Facebook and Instagram following by adding interesting posts and resources. A student at Colorado Mountain College in the Sustainability program, Sarah consulted peers in her classes before drafting a section of COWPL's formal response to the proposed Valle Seco land exchange near Pagosa Springs, Colorado. A number of young people expressed how difficult it is to know what's at stake in a given land exchange and to have time to voice their concerns during the short public comment period. Many made their voices heard by signing form letters distributed by advocacy organizations. It was frustrating to learn form letters are often discounted by federal agencies. Sarah explained the importance of personalizing a form letter to differentiate it.

In 2020, Sarah helped to create a Public Lands Voting Guide, a guide specific to public lands issues and local and state elections impacting Colorado. Based on Pew Research Data from the 2018 midterms, Sarah recognized that younger generations (Gen Z, Millennial, and Gen X) have begun to significantly outvote older generations, and a main priority of the younger voters is acting on climate change. Because nearly 1/4 of US carbon emissions are produced on public lands, disseminating a voting guide specifically for public lands related issues is a way to engage young voters on a priority issue. Thank you for your awesome help, Sarah and congratulations on your soon-to-be new family member!

Next Board Meeting, Wednesday October 6

Join the COWPL Board, sitting outside our office by the river, at 23272 Two Rivers Road, Basalt at 5:30 pm on Wednesday October 6. RSVP to coloradowildpubliclands@gmail.com. Also, please let us know if you'll be there in person or if you'd like to attend remotely.

Feel free to contact us at coloradowildpubliclands@gmail.com if you'd like more information on these events or on other public lands issues.

Please continue to keep your membership current, consider additional donations if possible, and share our work with friends. We encourage and appreciate our volunteers - we'll match you with your preferred activity! COWPL can receive donations from your Amazon Smile and City Market purchases. Please register online on their websites. Thank you for your support!

If you'd like more information feel free to contact us at coloradowildpubliclands@gmail.com
Sincerely, Anne Rickenbaugh, Franz Froelicher, Jean Perry, Stef Davis, James Katzenberger & Hawk Greenway
Colorado Wild Public Lands Board of Directors