

# Get Wild: Why not volunteer to help the wilderness areas you love?

Mike Browning



**Volunteer Wilderness Ranger Brad Benz admires a "No Campfires" sign in the Eagles Nest Wilderness in summer 2023.**

*Ian Zinner/Courtesy photo*

Would you reply to a help wanted ad like this: volunteers needed to help preserve, maintain and protect the wilderness areas in Eagle and Summit counties. Pay is nonexistent, but the working environment is spectacular, job satisfaction is high, hours are flexible (whenever you want), and your co-workers are wonderful people who share your love of wilderness.

I did, and have never regretted it. Best job I ever had. My "boss" is the Eagle Summit Wilderness Alliance, a local all-volunteer nonprofit that helps the U.S. Forest Service look after the four wilderness areas in Summit and Eagle counties — the Eagles Nest, Ptarmigan Peak, Holy Cross, and a portion of Flat Tops. As you probably know, our local wilderness areas are some of the most beautiful in the country. They are likely one of the reasons you moved here.

But our wilderness areas don't take care of themselves. The trees that fall across their paths every year don't remove themselves. The trails don't repair themselves from overuse or water damage. And many of the users don't even know what a congressionally-designated wilderness area is, let alone what special rules are in place to help protect these fragile places.

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Doesn't the Forest Service take care of all this? They try, but in Eagle and Summit counties alone there are over one-quarter of a million acres of official wilderness areas. And the Forest Service is under-staffed and under-funded. They just can't do the job alone.

That's where Eagle Summit Wilderness Alliance — and hopefully you — come in. Eagle Summit Wilderness Alliance's volunteer wilderness rangers hike the wilderness trails, help educate and assist visitors and report downed trees and trail damage to local Forest Service staff. Last year alone, Eagle Summit Wilderness Alliance rangers conducted over 400 patrols, hiked over 2,700 miles and encountered almost 11,000 wilderness users.

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Our Eagle Summit Wilderness Alliance rangers also volunteer as trailhead hosts, greeting people at trailheads to answer questions and provide information. Commonly, many visitors have not been to these trails before and know little about the area or the regulations designed to protect wilderness areas and wildlife (like the requirement that dogs be on a hand-held leash at all times). For those times you're not up for hiking, trailhead hosting could be a fun job for you.

Eagle Summit Wilderness Alliance's trained cross-cut sawyers help clear downed trees blocking trails. We cleared 1,500 trees over the last two years. Our trail crews help repair trails, build water bars (no, these are not bars that only serve water) and cut back encroaching vegetation. These efforts help keep trails from getting continually wider and braided.

And, even more fun, each year we lead four or more llama-supported, multiday trips deep into the wilderness. The llamas help carry the heavy loads, allowing us to rebuild damaged trails, rehabilitate illegal campsites, remediate campfire scars and chat with overnight users.

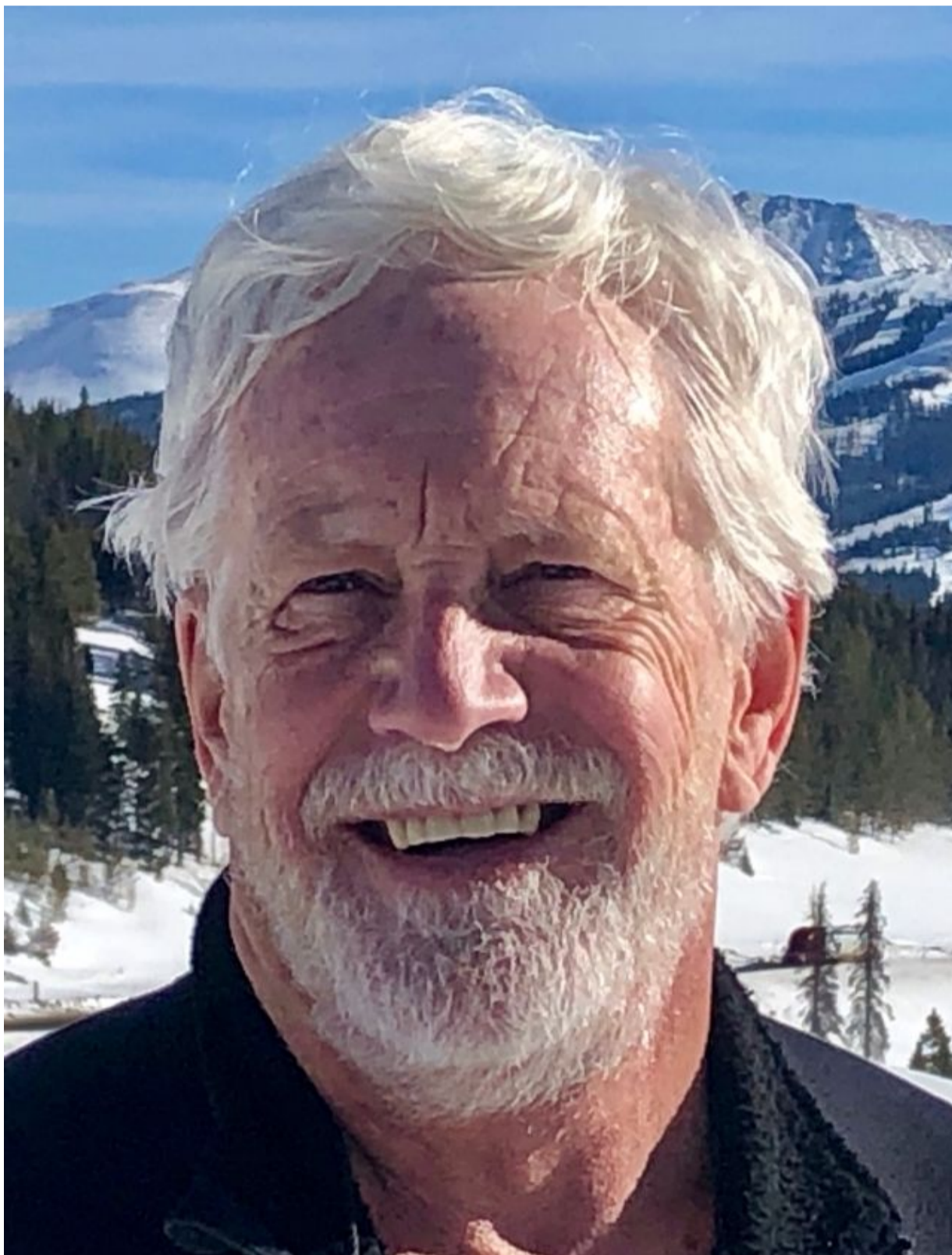
This year's in-person training for our volunteer wilderness rangers is June 1, just north of Silverthorne. To apply to be a volunteer wilderness ranger, which only requires you do a minimum of four hikes a year, on days and wilderness trails of your own choosing, visit the [volunteer wilderness ranger](#)

page on Eagle Summit Wilderness's website and fill out the application. The deadline for applications is May 15, so apply now before you forget.

So, if you love wilderness, consider giving back to it. It's fun, rewarding, and you will make great friends. For more information about Eagle Summit

Wilderness and its programs, visit [EagleSummitWilderness.org](#)

You'll be glad you did — and so will the wilderness areas you love.



**“Get Wild” publishes on Fridays in the Summit Daily News. Mike Browning is on the Board of the Eagle Summit Wilderness Alliance, a local nonprofit that helps the U.S. Forest Service protect, preserve and maintain the four wilderness areas in Eagle and Summit counties. More information about Eagle Summit**

**Wilderness Alliance can be found at [EagleSummitWilderness.org](#)**