



## News Release

Medicine Bow-Routt National Forests &  
Thunder Basin National Grassland  
<http://fs.usda.gov/mbr>

**Media Contact:** Aaron Voos, (307) 745-2323

### **Mandatory Closures in place for Big Game Winter Range Areas near Steamboat**

(STEAMBOAT SPRINGS, Colo.) **November 9, 2015** – Permanent, seasonal closures for big game winter range are taking the place of voluntary closures in some locations near Steamboat Springs on the Routt National Forest (RNF). Mandatory closures were part of the recently signed Steamboat Front Fuel Hazard Reduction and Habitat Improvement Project on the Hahns Peak/Bears Ears (HPBE) Ranger District.

Approximately 11,792 acres on the RNF now have a seasonal closure of winter range for deer and elk, including trails such as Mad Creek, Red Dirt, Hot Springs, and the City parcel of Spring Creek, where conflicts between wildlife and people are inevitable.

In previous years the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) has made annual requests for public involvement in big game, winter range management by utilizing voluntary closures on trails and certain areas. Although some voluntary closures are still intact, largely they were ineffective in preventing disturbance and relocation of big game herds, mostly elk. Dogs running off leash have often been a factor associated with disturbance on big game winter ranges.

Both mandatory and voluntary closures are now in place annually from **December 1 to April 15** at trailheads and in areas where conflicts between wildlife and people have historically occurred.

A full list of closure areas is below. If respected, these closure areas provide pockets of habitat where deer and elk find security and food during the harsh winter months without being disturbed by human activities.

The current closure areas include:

#### **Mandatory**

- City Parcel of Spring Creek Trail 1160
- Mad Creek Trail 1100 (Swamp Park Trail)
- Red Dirt Trail 1171
- Hot Springs Trail 1169
- Foothills south of Steamboat Ski Area to Hwy 40

#### **Voluntary**

- Greenville Mine area (Roads 440 & 471)
- Coulton Creek area (Trail 1188 & Road 429)
- Lower Bear Trail 1206
- Upper portion of Spring Creek Trail 1160 from Dry Lake
- Sarvis Creek Trail 1105
- Silver Creek Trail 1106
- Areas adjacent to the Radium and Indian Run State Wildlife Areas (Roads 212 & 214)
- Area north of Toponas off Forest Road 285

Closure signage will be posted at affected trailheads, and maps and brochures are available at area businesses and at the District office.

Since some of the closure area borders Steamboat Ski Area, the District has been working closely with the resort to publicize the public access changes. The ski area has included the big game winter range closure areas in their ski area trail maps this year and new mandatory closure signs will be posted along the ski area operating boundary between South Peak Lift and Broadway ski trail.

In place of the closure areas, recreationists are asked to use the following winter recreation areas on the Forest: Buffalo Pass, Rabbit Ears Pass, Gore Pass, Lynx Pass, Bear River Corridor (entrance to the Flat Tops), and Dunckley Pass.

Other areas include the South Fork Trail (Trail 1100.5A) south of the Elk River with parking at the Hinman parking area (a non-motorized area) and Forest Road 430/Scott Run (Trail 1177). Another alternate area is located west of Routt County Road 129 at the Hahns Peak Lake Area on Forest Roads 486 and 488.

Local wildlife officials believe that threats to winter range for elk and other big game species are negatively impacting the prized herds in north western Colorado. As big game winter range on private land becomes developed, public lands become more important for wintering elk and deer herds.

"Resident elk herds can no longer spend the winters on the valley floor due to increasing development, and their winter habitat is limited," said Missy Dressen, Hahns Peak/Bears Ears District Wildlife Biologist. "We're hopeful that the closures will give elk a necessary break from pressure so they can maintain a healthy body weight throughout the winter."

According to both USFS and Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) officials, as big game herds are forced out of native winter range due to human disturbance, the animals move to town and into inferior habitat where conflict occurs with the public, vehicles and the agriculture industry. This is neither good for the animals or the public, and necessitates seasonal winter range closures. Even in years with heavy snow, if left undisturbed the big game herds will stay on their historic winter range.

"The Forest Service and CPW have worked closely on habitat improvement aspects of the Steamboat Front Project since its inception," said Jim Haskins, CPW Steamboat Area Wildlife Manager. "We support the project and think that the closures on Forest will make a positive difference for area elk herds."

Big-game wintering grounds are characterized by areas of lesser snow depths due to lower elevations and southern exposures, and mountain shrub vegetation (gambel oak, serviceberry, and chokecherry). The areas have been defined by USFS and CPW through radio telemetry and winter flight survey information. These areas of shallower snow provide critical food to deer and elk during the winter.

Deer and elk survive winters by using their stored body-fat reserves and every ounce of energy counts in cold temperatures. As winter progresses, human disturbance and encounters, such as snowmobiles, cross country skiers, snowshoeing, or being chased by dogs, can upset the animal's energy conservation mechanism, reducing chances for survival.

For more information about closure areas or other areas recommended to recreate outside of winter range, please stop in or contact the HPBE Ranger District office at (970) 870-2299 or the Yampa Ranger District office at (970) 638-4516.

Information may also be found on this website, <http://fs.usda.gov/mbr>, or you can follow the Medicine Bow-Routt National Forests and Thunder Basin National Grassland on Twitter, [@FS\\_MBRTB](https://twitter.com/FS_MBRTB).

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