



News Release

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

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

Disturbance of Local Big Game Herds in Winter Range Remains an Issue

(STEAMBOAT SPRINGS, Colo.) December 19, 2014 – A long-standing request for public involvement in big game, winter range management is being made by the Routt National Forest again this year. The U.S. Forest Service is asking recreational users to stay out of designated elk and deer winter range areas from November 15 to April 15.

Courtesy closure signage has been posted at multiple trailheads, including Red Dirt, Hot Springs, and Spring Creek, where conflicts between wildlife and people are inevitable. 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.

To do their part in protecting wintering deer and elk, 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.

The current closure areas include:

- Spring Creek Trail (Trail 1160) ***MANDATORY CLOSURE** on National Forest
- Swamp Park Trail (known as the Mad Creek Trail- NFST 1100)
- Red Dirt trail (Trail 1171)
- Hot Springs Trail (Trail 1169)
- Lower Bear Trail (Trail 1206)
- Area between the Steamboat Ski area and Alpine Mountain Ranch
- Greenville Mine area (Road 440)
- Coulton Creek area (Road 429)
- Sarvis Creek Trailhead
- Silver Creek Trailhead
- South of Long Park on Forest Road 225
- North of Toponas on Forest Road 285
- Areas adjacent to the Radium and Indian Run State Wildlife Areas

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

"The National Forest provides valuable elk habitat, but this habitat is only preferred by elk if they are protected from human disturbance," said Becky Jones, Hahns Peak/Bears Ears District Wildlife Biologist. "If disturbed, they leave these areas and may end up in hay stacks, people's yards and crossing roads in the lower valley where they can cause problems.

"We are asking the public to please respect these closure areas this winter so that we can keep these animals on their native winter range."

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.

Big-game wintering grounds are characterized by areas of lesser snow depths due to lower elevations and southern exposures, and mountain shrub vegetation (gamble oak, serviceberry, and chokecherry). 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 voluntary closure areas or other areas recommended to recreate outside of winter range, please stop in or contact the Hahns Peak-Bears Ranger District office at (970) 870-2299, 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, **@MBRNFsTBNG**.

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