

October 1, 2003

Paul Semmer
Acting District Ranger
Dillon Ranger District
White River National Forest

Dear Paul,

I am writing this informal letter today in response to your request for a summary of activities and accomplishments of the Friends of the Eagles Nest Wilderness (FENW). On behalf of the members and Board of Directors, I would like to thank you for your support and consideration for the recognition you propose. Your kind thoughts are humbling and immensely gratifying.

I am referring this letter to our Board for their additions and corrections. A brochure will also be included for your review. Additional brochures will be found at the interpretive display we designed and installed with the District's permission at the Silverthorne office.

The Friends of the Eagles Nest Wilderness was founded in May 1994. The concept was "floated" to the Summit County community by local writer John Fayhee. While writing for the *Summit Daily News*, John took a backpacking trip in the Eagles Nest Wilderness with his wife, Gay, and photographer Mark Fox. The purpose of the trip was to accompany the District's two Wilderness Rangers, Holly English and Katie Larson, and relate the experience to his many readers.

John noted disturbing trail conditions and a need for current, attractive signage which would impart necessary information to trail users. John's article was extensive and informative. In an opinion published as a sidebar to his article, John suggested that local hikers band together and meet challenges he related in his article and establish a then tentatively called Summit County Wilderness Foundation. John suggested this foundation could assist the Dillon Ranger District by providing volunteers to perform trail work supervised by USFS managers, explore opportunities for grants to provide needed financial support, raise local awareness of wilderness conditions and issues, while encouraging active stewardship of natural resources.

Bolstered (nagged) by local business owner Tom Jones, Jr, John placed a notice in the *Summit Daily News* inviting interested individuals to a meeting at the Frisco Public Library. The meeting was very well attended, and the assembled backcountry enthusiasts agreed to form a steering committee to explore the required path to organization. The question of a group's name was discussed and voted upon. The name Friends of the Eagles Nest Wilderness or FENW for a shorter handle was chosen.

Among those in attendance was Mr. Frank Smith of Houston, Texas and Frisco, Colorado. Frank brought a wealth of wisdom and experience in land stewardship matters. He is active in the Texas-based Galveston Bay Foundation. The Galveston Bay Foundation was modeled after the highly respected Chesapeake Bay Foundation, whose four central tenants were adopted by the Texas organization, and were likewise suggested by Frank as a positive outline FENW might choose to follow. Those guiding principles are Education, Outreach, Stewardship, and Advocacy. Frank's suggestion remains central to FENW's mission.

The steering committee quickly realized in order to be eligible for grants vital to FENW's new mission, federal tax-exempt status was essential. Local legal and accounting advice was contributed on a "pro-bono" basis. The federal status of 501 (c) (3) was obtained. As a central educational focus, backcountry ethics endorsed by Leave No Trace (LNT) was an obvious choice, supported by members' commitment to deeply held convictions of wilderness values and the value of designated Wilderness.

The formulation of this organization was received as a partnership by Forest managers who identified several projects for the initial field season. The first was in the newly created Ptarmigan Peak Wilderness Area, the clean up of an illegally placed "semi permanent" hunters' camp. This project was deemed appropriate for a new stewardship group assisting the USFS in restoring wilderness characteristics to a new Wilderness Area.

The following is one version of a "boiler plate" description of a mission statement for FENW:

FENW educates users about the special nature of Wilderness, its regulations and Leave No Trace ethics in order to raise awareness of our stewardship responsibilities and in order to minimize impacts on wildlife and vegetation. Working in conjunction with other Summit County outdoor and public stewardship volunteer groups, FENW provides a volunteer clearinghouse to work with the USFS and to coordinate, assist, train, and supervise volunteers working in the Eagles Nest and Ptarmigan Peak Wilderness Areas. We strive to provide a forum to facilitate an information exchange among the USFS, local government and interested citizens.

Some accomplishments include:

1. Active stewardship and participation as concerned citizens in matters affecting the White River National Forest for over nine years. FENW supports responsible multiple use on National Forest System Lands.

2. Establishment and maintenance of dues paying membership of well over 100 individuals, families, and businesses, several from other parts of Colorado, as well as those who reside in other states.
3. We have contributed over 9,500 hours of volunteer service. FENW organizes, with USFS approval and supervision, a minimum of three volunteer projects annually. The yearly "Gateways to the Wilderness" project is very successful, bringing locals and second home owners to various trailheads in the spring to clear multiple trails to snowline, thus minimizing resource damage on muddy trails.
4. FENW has raised \$46,000 in grants, and additional \$20,000.00 in member dues. As an all-volunteer organization with no paid staff, the vast majority of funds have funded projects directly supporting the White River National Forest. FENW has contributed \$6,000.00 directly to the USFS for supplemental funds to pay Wilderness Ranger salaries which, due to budget shortfalls, would not provide ranger presence during the critical hunting seasons.
5. FENW designed and installed a Wilderness Interpretive Display for the Dillon Ranger District office in Silverthorne. This is an excellent medium for explaining and demonstrating Leave No Trace (LNT) principles and tools, such as backpacking stoves, water filters, and sanitation practices.
6. Our work is funded largely through grant partnerships with local government (Summit County, Towns of Frisco and Silverthorne), the Summit Foundation, the Colorado Mountain Club Foundation, the Pembroke Foundation, the Bayou Fund, and State Trails/GOCO. FENW also receives donations from area merchants and community members, as well as membership dues mentioned above.
7. Through support received from the Summit Foundation and Great Outdoors/GOCO, FENW has sponsored extensive reconstruction of parts of the Gore Range Trail by the Rocky Mountain Youth Corps (RMYC). This has been a very productive partnership. The RMYC is a highly respected organization employing youth and at-risk youth who work under experienced crew leaders and complete large scale projects which are beyond the scope of weekend volunteers. Utilizing collaborative approaches for funding, this partnership has successfully turnpiked the Gore Range Trail at the Middle Willow Creek bog, and replaced two badly degraded and very dangerous bridges at Slate Creek and Squaw Creek. Continuation of this partnership is central to our current goal of establishing a properly constructed, sustainable, and safe trail up one of Summit County's most popular peaks, Buffalo Mountain. Broad community support has been vital in obtaining needed grants. The State Trails/GOCO grant selection committee was particularly impressed that one constant supporting organization has been the Summit Fat Tire Society, whose typical means of recreation, mountain biking, is not allowed in designated Wilderness.

8. Grants and memberships have allowed FENW to procure and install 24 Wilderness Portal signs, twelve trail junction signs, and seventeen Bulletin Boards with Interpretive Posters. The USFS did not have monies available for this signage.
9. FENW has been involved from the beginning in the White River National Forest Plan Revision. Currie Craven was on the Special Areas Work Group, and Jonathan Kriegel participated in the Travel Management Work Group. FENW was a sponsor and participating organization in a Summit County wide forum on the proposed Forest Plan.
10. FENW has commented on local issues which effect Summit County Wilderness, or areas having wilderness values, such as habitat and connectivity of habitat. FENW Board members have participated in Summit County Government groups such as the Winter Travel Management Work Group, Wildlife and Wetland Advisory Commission, and the Lower Blue Trails Technical Advisory Group.
11. FENW has successfully networked with local, statewide, and regional user, volunteer and advocacy groups. FENW members have assisted with projects outside of Wilderness boundaries and of much larger scope than usual Wilderness projects which consist of groups no larger than recommended group size. FENW is participating in the USFS R2 Wilderness Stewardship Network (WSN).

Thanks again for your support and friendship, Paul. If you need additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Currie