



## Protecting our high-alpine places

Gifts from the Forest

Kim Langmaid Ph.D.  
Special to the Daily

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Volunteers with the Colorado Fourteeners Initiative work to train others on how to repair a hiking trail.  
*Special to the Daily*

*Editor's note: This is the fourth in a series of special stories about the National Forest Foundation and restoring Colorado's forests.*

### About The National Forest Foundation

The National Forest Foundation is a nonprofit organization that works with the U.S. Forest Service and community-based organizations to restore and enhance National Forests. At least 62 million acres of the 193 million acre National Forest System are in need of restorative action due to damage from wildfire, insects, disease and natural disasters.

As the nonprofit partner of the U.S. Forest Service, the National Forest Foundation engages people in programs that promote the health and public enjoyment of the National Forest System. The National Forest Foundation also administers private gifts of funds and land for the benefit of the National Forests.

### How To Protect Alpine Places:

- > Be prepared and use maps to study your route ahead of time,
- > Stay on designated trails and don't be tempted to short-cut,
- > Even when trails are wet and muddy, stay on them to prevent "braided" paths,
- > Minimize and pack out all waste,
- > Contact [klangmaid@nationalforests.org](mailto:klangmaid@nationalforests.org) to find out how you can volunteer this summer.

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One sensitive high-alpine flower species is the Old Man of the Mountains, seen here on Uneva Peak.  
*Special to the Daily*

Alpine ecosystems are "the lands above the trees" starting at 11,300 feet in elevation, at this latitude, and going higher to the tops of the peaks. In Colorado, most alpine areas are within the National Forest System, and many are in wilderness areas. Alpine ecosystems are beautiful, tough and fragile. Tiny alpine wildflowers grow under extremes of solar radiation, high winds, cold temperatures and very short growing seasons. It takes a lot of energy for these miniature plants to get their blossoms out, get pollinated and go back to "sleep" before the snow falls. Alpine wildflowers are a splendor to see above ground, but much of their energy goes into their roots, sustaining them year-round and supporting their low-growing leaf mats that creep closely along the rocky ground. All of this smallness can also make alpine plant life easy to overlook and get trampled.

With so many people seeking the solace and adventure of Colorado's alpine summits these days, there's a need for

hikers to watch where they're stepping and avoid crushing these small beauties. There's also a need for alpine achievers to play an active role in alpine restoration — sustaining Colorado's high places into the future. Alpine wildflowers are not just pretty to look at, they're part of the fabric of life throughout the Rocky Mountains. Many alpine plants are endemic, growing only in local locations and nowhere else on earth. Alpine plants are important for holding the soil in place and preventing erosion, and they are also important habitat for small mammals like pika and alpine chipmunks and for insect pollinators and specialized birds like the alpine-dependent American pipit, the rosy finch and the horned lark. Hummingbirds also use the high peaks as their migratory pathways, relying on flower pollen and nectar along their route.

### Restoration projects

This summer the National Forest Foundation's Ski Conservation Fund, a program supported with \$1 voluntary guest contributions through Vail Resorts, Copper Mountain and A-Basin, is supporting alpine restoration projects happening throughout the White River National Forest and across Colorado's high mountain areas. Through partnerships and collaboration, much work gets done during the short alpine summer. The National Forest Foundation partners with the U.S. Forest Service and local community-based conservation organizations to determine priority needs for ecological restoration, including trail and wildlife habitat improvements that enhance the resiliency and sustainability of the land.

On the iconic 14,009-foot Mount of the Holy Cross near Vail, the National Forest Foundation's partner organization, Colorado Fourteeners Initiative, is in its second year repairing and enhancing the main trail to



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the summit and creating more sustainable camping areas. After a hike last week, Tanya Miller of Trail Wise Guides returned from Holy Cross ecstatic to share her news about the improvements.

"The trek to the top is easier because you know exactly where to step," she said. "And the way they meticulously placed the rocks is impressive. The new trail will protect flowers like moss campion and sky pilot, and the smaller alpine forget-me-nots along the way. The trail is there to stay it's not just a quick fix."

Another partner organization, Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado, is pitching in and organizing overnight volunteering events on Mount of the Holy Cross Aug. 9-12 and 23-26.

Southeast of Breckenridge, the National Forest Foundation's Ski Conservation Fund is supporting multiple partner organizations working to restore the Georgia Pass area along the scenic Continental Divide Trail. Like many alpine tundra areas in Colorado, Georgia Pass is an important travel route for large mammals like elk, bighorn sheep and mountain goats. Two nonprofit organizations, Friends of the Dillon Ranger District and Wildlands Restoration Volunteers, along with U.S. Forest Service are training and engaging volunteers and reclaiming an unauthorized road to prevent further erosion of the fragile alpine tundra plant system. The work includes de-compacting soils, adding compost to boost topsoil, transplanting native grasses, collecting native seeds and mulching the area with straw. When done, this project will benefit hundreds of acres of surrounding wildlife habitat. Volunteers are needed Sept. 8 to help with this project.

With nearly two months of summer left, there's still time to take a trip to the alpine and catch the late-blooming wildflowers with your camera, and if you're willing, to take part in volunteering and restoring and sustaining some of Colorado's most precious and inspiring high places.

Kim Langmaid Ph.D. lives in Vail and is the director of Colorado programs for the National Forest Foundation. Contact her at [klangmaid@nationalforests.org](mailto:klangmaid@nationalforests.org) or visit [www.nationalforests.org](http://www.nationalforests.org).

A vertical advertisement for Tivoli Lodge in Vail, CO. The top section features the lodge's name "TIVOLI LODGE" in a serif font, with "Vail, CO" underneath. Below this is a photograph of a mountain landscape with evergreen trees and a field of wildflowers, including pink and yellow daisies. At the bottom, a green banner contains the text "Visit Vail this summer and receive up to 15% off your stay!" and a brown button with the text "Book Now".

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