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\$163,920 Invested in Wildlife Protection and Habitat Restoration in the Eagle Area

Wildlife in the Eagle area is getting a powerful boost this year.

The Eagle Ranch Wildlife Committee (ERWC) has approved \$163,920 for three significant habitat enhancement projects that will protect a rare species, restore a damaged landscape, and improve movement corridors for big game.

Protecting a Rare Native Trout

ERWC has committed \$50,000 to fund the Abrams Cutthroat Trout emergency intervention project in partnership with Colorado Parks and Wildlife, the Eagle River Coalition, Town of Gypsum and the Eagle River Fund.

Recently discovered in 2010, the Abrams Cutthroat Trout is a rare native strain found only in this area. It is considered 99.7% genetically pure; well above the 94% benchmark CPW uses to define a conservation-quality lineage. In fact, it is the only trout of its kind in the world!

The project was designated an emergency after off-highway recreation vehicles damaged a critical spawning area, disturbing and destroying eggs during reproduction season. Restoration work will stabilize the streambed, protect spawning habitat, and ensure this unique fish continues to survive and thrive in Colorado waters.

Removing Dilapidated Fencing on Bellyache Ridge

Another \$12,200 will remove 1.8 miles of unused rusted barbed wire fencing on Bellyache Ridge. Old agricultural fencing is one of the leading human-caused killers of deer and elk; fatally entangling wildlife and disrupting movement routes. Removing this rusted infrastructure will immediately reduce injury and mortality for big game and other species. This effort is aimed at improving movement corridors, specifically for the E-16 elk and D-14 mule deer herds. Both herds continue to experience a variety of issues, to include decreased recruitment - low survival of calves and fawns into adulthood, poor herd demographics and continuous impacts to critical habitats from development and recreation.

Rehabilitating Habitat Through “Lop & Scatter”

The largest investment - \$101,720 supports a habitat enhancement “Lop & Scatter” project on 1,219 acres of Bellyache Ridge in partnership with Colorado Parks and Wildlife, Bureau of Land Management, and Mule Deer Foundation.

This project will thin encroaching pinon junipers to stimulate native grasses and shrubs; essentially “growing a grocery store for wildlife.” The work improves forage quality, strengthens winter range, and enhances habitat for mule deer, elk, and a wide range of other species.

Pinon-/pine juniper communities, while native, can consume up to 75 gallons of water per day per tree. They take up valuable real estate and outcompete other native forage that wildlife depends on. The 1,219 acres to be enhanced is close to the same size as the Eagle Ranch housing development.

A 27-Year Commitment to Wildlife

The Eagle Ranch Wildlife Committee was established in 1999 as a required safeguard before the Eagle Ranch development could be built. After four years of drafting the foundational document and creating a Wildlife Protection Board, ERWC became the mechanism to ensure development and wildlife protection would move forward together.

Over the past 27 years, ERWC has:

- Helped acquire land that was converted to permanent Open Space sanctuary
- Repaired severely degraded sections of Brush Creek
- Completed large-scale sage and pinon juniper mastication above Hernage Creek
- Funded wildlife education outreach through Respect The Wild and Public Service Announcements at the Eagle Ranch movie theater

Funding comes from a real estate transfer fee: each time a home sells in Eagle Ranch, 0.02% is deposited into a Wildlife Trust Fund dedicated exclusively to wildlife and wildlife habitat projects. These funds support stream and riparian restoration, wetlands, winter range enhancement, open space acquisition, and wildlife-related education.

Looking Ahead

Next on the horizon: more habitat enhancement initiatives that have a meaningful effect on wildlife, including the removal of more miles of unused barbed wire fencing. One large mammal is killed for every 2.5 miles of barbed wire, according to the "One in 2.5 Miles" Rule: research conducted by [Utah State University](#).

For nearly three decades, the Eagle Ranch Wildlife Committee has quietly endeavored to ensure that growth in Eagle does not come at the expense of the wildlife that makes this valley extraordinary. This year's projects continue that legacy: protecting a one-of-a-kind trout, rehabilitating critical habitat, and making the landscape safer for the animals who call it home.

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