



Happy New Year!

2010 will be remembered as a very busy year here at Rocky Mountain National Park. Fires, road construction, numerous incidents including a small plane crash, and lots of visitors. We had our first major wildland fire since 1978. We completed the resurfacing of Trail Ridge Road. Several successful search and rescues including the assisting occupants of a small plane that crashed in the park. We also experienced the sadness of six visitor falling fatalities along with the loss of a couple of cherished colleagues.

As in past years, we received overwhelming support and assistance from so many different organizations and individuals during these incidents. In addition, almost 1,700 individuals volunteered over 102,000 hours to various park programs and projects. Our gratitude to all of these folks is immeasurable.

On January 26, 2011, we will mark the 96th anniversary of the park's establishment. We have already begun to look forward to and start planning for the park's centennial in 2015.

In 2010, we lost two cherished colleagues. Retired district ranger, Kurt Oliver, passed away after a courageous battle with cancer. Blaine Gillingham, supply technician, also lost his battle with cancer.

One of the most remarkable things that stands out to me about this past year is how, given everything that went on, the park staff, assisted by our wonderful volunteers and partners, dealt with the demanding job of protecting both the visitors and this beautiful and wild place in an amazing manner.

To the friends of the park, we say "thank you" for your continued support and wish you a Happy New Year.

Vaughn Baker  
Superintendent

# Trail Ridge Road Construction Completed One Year Ahead of Schedule



Trail Ridge Road, one of the most impressive alpine highways in the United States, is the highest continuous paved road in America and reaches an elevation of 12,183 feet. The road connects the park's gateway communities of Estes Park on the east and Grand Lake on the west.

A major resurfacing project took place this summer and early fall on a 19 mile section of Trail Ridge Road from the Colorado River Trailhead to Rainbow Curve. This project also involved resurfacing of all major overlook parking areas, pull-offs and the parking lot at Alpine Visitor Center. The project was scheduled to take place during two summers but the project was completed a year ahead

of schedule and within budget (\$17.2 million). According to park superintendent Vaughn Baker, "We are thrilled that this final project on Trail Ridge Road was completed in one year. We have had major work on this one of a kind road for three of the past four years. All aspects of the construction have been funded by the Federal Lands Highway Program for a total of \$34.2 million. It is the first major work on the upper road since it was built in 1932. Starting next spring, we will have many more decades to come without construction delays on Trail Ridge Road."

Trail Ridge Road was officially closed for the season to through travel on October 29, 2010, due to consistent winter conditions of drifting snow, high winds and below freezing temperatures above 10,000 feet. The road is currently closed at Colorado River Trailhead on the west side and Many Parks Curve on the east side.

The average winter closure dates for Trail Ridge Road have been October 23. Although often times the road closes earlier and does not reopen, the previous ten year's official closure dates are: October 21, 2009, November 6, 2008, October 22, 2007, October 23, 2006, November 4, 2005, October 25, 2004, November 6, 2003, November 1, 2002, October 18, 2001, and November 2, 2000. The central portion of Trail

Ridge Road normally opens the last week in May, weather permitting. Last year Trail Ridge Road opened on May 28, 2010.

Old Fall River Road officially closed for the season on October 13, 2010. Old Fall River Road is an unpaved road that travels from Endovalley picnic area to above treeline at Fall River Pass, following the steep slope of Mount Chapin. Due to the road's narrow nature, the scenic 9.4-mile route leading to Trail Ridge Road is one way only.

Both roads have reverted to trail status; therefore bicycles and dogs are not permitted. For current road conditions, please call (970) 586-1206.



# National Park Fee Free Days for 2011

The National Park Service will waive admission fees on 17 selected dates throughout 2011 and encourages all Americans to make a New Year's resolution to visit a national park this year.

“In these tough economic times, our fee-free days will give families many opportunities to enjoy our nation's heritage and natural beauty in meaningful and affordable ways,” Secretary of the Interior, Ken Salazar said.

The 2011 fee-free dates will be:

the weekend of Martin Luther King, Jr. Day (January 15-17),

National Park Week (April 16-24),

the first day of summer (June 21),

National Public Lands Day (September 24),

and the weekend of Veterans Day (November 11-13).

Many national park concessions will also offer discounts on fee free days, saving visitors money on food, lodging, tours, and souvenirs.

More information is available at <http://www.nps.gov/findapark/feefreeparks.htm>.

## Rocky Significantly Reduces Overall Energy Consumption Over The Past Year

In a continued effort to become a ‘Greener’ park, Rocky Mountain National Park is pleased to share its fiscal year 2010 Annual Energy Report findings. The park has achieved a . . .



6.6 percent reduction in overall energy consumption in site delivered BTUs (units that measure thermal energy),

7 percent reduction in estimated carbon emissions, and

7.5 percent reduction in water consumption over the past fiscal year!

This information is based on our total consumption of electricity, natural gas, propane, Alpine Visitor Center generator fuel, and water use at the park.

The park is on track to reduce energy by 30 percent and water by 16 percent by the end of fiscal year 2015 based on its fiscal year 2003 consumption.

# Rocky Mountain National Park Sister Park Conference on Preserving Protected Areas In The Face Of Climate Change

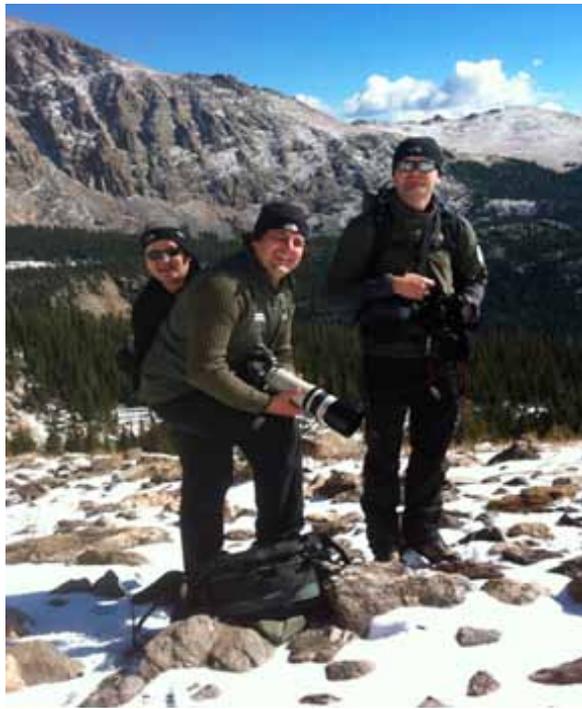


**US Ambassador to Slovakia H.E. Theodore Sedgwick provides opening remarks to the conference and emphasizes the value of the Sister Park relationship and working together, particularly in the face of climate change.**

Vaughn Baker, Superintendent of Rocky Mountain National Park, and Ben Bobowski, Chief of Resource Stewardship, Rocky Mountain National Park met with park and US State Department officials as part of a reciprocal relationship (sister park) among Rocky Mountain National Park (RMNP), the Tatra National Park, Slovakia (TANAP) and the Tatra National Park, Poland (TPN). All 3 parks are mountain parks, international Biosphere Reserves and share mutual issues and concerns involving the conservation, preservation, and management of national parks.

On September 21, a half-day public conference was hosted by the U.S. Embassy in Bratislava, Slovakia, in which the three Sister Parks discussed **“Forest Management in the Tatras: Preserving Protected Areas in the Era of Climate Change.”** The conference was moderated by Ben Bobowski and it was conducted with simultaneous

translation in three languages. Opening remarks were provided by US Ambassador to Slovakia H.E. Theodore Sedgwick and the Ambassador of the Republic of Poland in the Slovak Republic H.E. Andrzej Krawczyk. Each set a vision for the conference that emphasized the value of the sister park relationships. Conference presenters shared information relating to environmental problems that each park faces, focusing on a common issue – large-scale beetle infestation and forest mortality. The parks shared their respective management approaches to environmental issues and in a panel discussion the approaches were challenged, compared and contrasted. All who participated viewed the conference a success and a significant step forward toward international collaboration in the preservation of protected areas, in the face of climate change.



**Pawel Szczepanek, Filip Zieba, Łukasz Peksa – Tatra National Park, Poland - returning from an overnight trek to Lawn Lake, Rocky Mountain National Park.**

## **Sister Park Staff Experience Rocky Mountain National Park**

In September 2007, Rocky Mountain National Park signed a sister park agreement among Rocky Mountain National Park (RMNP), the Tatra National Park, Slovakia (TANAP) and the Tatra National Park, Poland (TPN). All 3 parks are mountain parks, international Biosphere Reserves, and share mutual issues and concerns involving the conservation, preservation, and management of national parks.

Since 2007 the relationship has blossomed into numerous shared conferences, research, and technical information. Additionally, as part of this sister park relationship a reciprocal staff exchange was completed in October 2010, when Rocky Mountain National Park hosted TPN staff Pawel Szczepanek (environmental education), Filip Zieba (biologist), and Łukasz Peksa (environmental monitoring). During a month-long exchange sister park staff experienced issues and topics of interest first hand and by the side of Rocky Mountain National Park's staff. The experiences

were driven by the learning objectives of the individual guests and complimented by activities coordinated by staff that previously traveled to Poland. The month-long exchange was highlighted by an insightful presentation in which the TPN staff compared and contrasted the management of the two protected areas.

The sister park relationship will continue into 2011, with a shared conference and the beginning of a collaborative research project. And although we have taken advantage of technology to maintain this relationship, we have found that the fullest experience and greatest learning is obtained by physically visiting the parks and meeting and sharing face-to-face with our counterparts. All aspects of going to the other parks (travel, communication and language, culture, food, facilities, etc.) has broadened our staff's viewpoints from previously held impressions and has given new energy to meeting the mission of managing these parks for preservation and enjoyment.

# 2011 Lyceum Series

“Can’t See the Forest for the Trees:” Rocky Mountain Forest Health for the Forest As A Whole Join us for our 2011 Lyceum series Saturday nights from February 12 to May 14. This year’s speakers will be focusing on a wide variety of forest health issues. The forests in and around Rocky Mountain National Park provide us wonderful benefits such as water, recreation, wildlife habitat, timber, and other forest products. They are, however, vulnerable to a wide variety of stressors, including diseases, fires (or lack of fires), native and invasive pests, fragmentation, and air pollution. Taking a wide view to encompass ALL the indicators of forest health, as opposed to individual tree health, means looking at insects; diseases; exotics; invasives; fire – wildfire & prescribed burns; ozone/pollutants; wildlife/biodiversity; watersheds; soils; and forests as indicators of climate change. We’ll have the regional experts here to answer your questions! Call (970) 586-1206 for specific topics and dates.

## 2011 Hazard Tree Removal Projects

Providing for visitor safety means park managers must mitigate potential hazards (cut down trees), or close a site. In order to keep as many park facilities open as possible, park crews and contractors will continue to mitigate hazardous trees in high visitor use areas. This is an enormous and costly task, with over 400 locations identified for potential hazard tree mitigation. Each site is assessed annually for potential hazards and prioritized for future mitigation projects.

Several projects are scheduled for 2011, which will involve temporary site closures or delays for hazard tree mitigation operations. In past years, the majority of tree removals were conducted on the west side of the park where the current beetle outbreak first impacted the park. Since many tree removal projects have been completed on the west side of the park and the mountain pine beetle impacts have increased on the east side, more tree removal projects will be conducted on the east side in 2011. Following is a list of planned hazard tree removal projects which may include temporary site closures.

Please note that all dates are tentative and information will be updated on the park website as scheduled project dates change. Thank you for your patience and cooperation during necessary hazard tree removal operations.



*Photo by John Marino*

# 2011 Hazard Tree Removal Projects (cont.)



Site Name	Planned Site Closure	Potential Impact to Visitors
Beaver Creek Picnic Area		Completed 2010
Onahu Trailhead		Completed 2010
Green Mountain Trailhead		Completed 2010
Kawuneeche Visitor Center		Completed 2010
Grand Lake Lodge Road		Completed 2010
Beaver Ponds Picnic Area		Completed 2010
Bowen/Baker Trailhead		Completed 2010
Grand County Roads 49/491		Completed 2010
Coyote Valley Trailhead	Summer 2011	Site temporarily closed during tree removal
Colorado River Trailhead	Summer 2011	Site temporarily closed during tree removal
Timber Lake Trailhead	Summer 2011	Site temporarily closed during tree removal
Holzwarth Historic Site	Spring 2011	Site temporarily closed during tree removal
Shadow Mountain Lookout	Summer 2011	Site temporarily closed during tree removal
Trail Ridge Road – West Side	Winter / Spring 2011	Road open, weather permitting, expect delays
Trail Ridge Road – East Side	Spring / Summer 2011	Road will remain open, expect short delays
Bear Lake Road Corridor	Spring / Summer 2011	Road will remain open, expect short delays
Fall River Road Corridor	Summer 2011	Work will occur during normal road closure
Wild Basin Corridor	Summer 2011	Road will remain open, expect short delays
Longs Peak Campground	Spring / Summer 2011	Campground will remain open
Glacier Basin Campground	Spring / Fall 2011	Work will occur during normal closure period
Aspenglen Campground	Spring / Fall 2011	Work will occur during normal closure period
Moraine Park Campground	Spring / Fall 2011	Work will occur as needed, site will remain open
Highway 7 (near Lily Lake)	Fall 2011	Road will remain open, expect short delays

Please note that all dates are tentative, for the latest information please see our Forest Health section of our website at: [http://www.nps.gov/romo/naturescience/forest\\_health.htm](http://www.nps.gov/romo/naturescience/forest_health.htm)

# The Cow Creek Fire in Rocky Mountain National Park

The Cow Creek Fire began on June 24, about one mile south of Mount Dickinson in Rocky Mountain National Park. It was roughly seven miles from the nearest road and located in heavy timber in a remote area. The area was roughly six miles west of Glen Haven in the West Creek drainage in the North Fork area of the park. The fire was believed to have begun from a lightning storm that had passed through the Lumpy Ridge area about two weeks prior to the fire being reported. The small fire remained quiet until it reached enough burnable material, or fuel to create smoke. While the eastern portion of the fire was contained in early July, the western flank of the Cow Creek Fire continued to be active in the West Creek area. The decision was made to allow the fire to play an active role in the ecosystem. Fires had not burned in this rugged, densely-wooded area for 370 years.

The fire spread rapidly. On July 3, it was 916 acres and contained on the northeast, east and southern portions. The immediate threat to the area on the park's eastern boundary was mitigated; however, there was potential for the fire to spread to the west deeper into the park. It was expected that the fire would likely burn through the remainder of the fire season with the potential of smoke being visible until a significant weather event, such as snow in the fall, put the fire out. It did just that.

Four separate helicopters were assigned to the fire. A helicopter from Salmon Idaho, was the last helicopter stationed on the fire, and was in the area the longest. Its main functions were reconnaissance, resupply work, and some bucket work. The other helicopters used earlier in the summer were from Bridger-Teton National Forest and Grand Teton National Park, Yellowstone National Park and Gallatin National Forest.



By allowing a natural fire to burn in this remote area, it lessens future fire risk by creating a barrier close to local communities. By allowing fire to return to the ecosystem, the overall health of the forest will be improved. Dead, downed logs and debris were consumed, allowing nutrients to be recycled back into the soil. Thick stands of trees burned, opening the area to sunlight and improving wildlife habitat.

# The Cow Creek Fire in Rocky Mountain National Park (cont.)

According to park superintendent Vaughn Baker, “We were fortunate to have great cooperators involved in the Cow Creek Fire including our colleagues from the U.S. Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management, the Nature Conservancy, and National Park Service staff from Zion, Bandelier, Lassen, the National Interagency Fire Center, as well as the Alpine Interagency Hotshot Crew based here at Rocky Mountain National Park. Those relationships were critical for our park’s fire crew to manage a fire that was active for almost four months. Through the duration of the fire, there were many training opportunities for staff from Rocky Mountain National Park as well as other agencies. This experience will benefit all of us in the future.”

Once the crews left the area in late October, the park fire crew continued to monitor the fire from a distance by using an existing lookout and a live video camera. The fire was officially declared out on December 8. Total incident acreage was 1200.



# Third Year of Elk & Vegetation Management Plan



An important part of the park's Elk and Vegetation Management Plan calls for preserving and restoring degraded vegetation, specifically aspen and willow, on elk winter range. Scientists and interagency partners conducted research that indicated there are major ecological issues on the elk winter range and some components in some areas (e.g. aspen, willow, beaver, water tables and stream flows) are so degraded that ecosystem functions are disrupted. Taking no action would not provide for sustainable aspen and willow dependent systems.

Park staff continue to focus fence exclosures on high elk-use areas where the need for ecological restoration is the greatest and that have the highest potential for restoration of willow and aspen communities in the shortest time. For context, the most visible elk winter range totals approximately 3,400 acres and

we have protected approximately 144 acres of willow habitat and 48 acres of aspen. This represents a little more than 5% of the elk winter range and just over 50% of the 365 acres of willow and aspen that could be protected on the elk winter range as part of the management plan.

These fences are temporary and will be assessed every 5 years to determine if management actions are achieving the objectives called for in the plan. The management plan is a twenty-year plan and we do not expect the degraded vegetation to recover within a couple of years. However, if the vegetation responds more quickly and meets our restoration goals, the fences could come down sooner. We may also plant willow and use other vegetation restoration measures, where needed inside the exclosures, to speed the recovery process and remove the fences sooner.

# Third Year of Elk & Vegetation Management Plan (cont.)

While we understand that exclosures can detract from a natural setting and scenic views in some areas, we believe they also provide many beneficial outcomes such as improving degraded riparian habitat and providing for a diversity of other species dependent on willow such as beaver, Wilson's warblers, Lincoln's sparrows, fox sparrows, and butterflies. Because the exclosures protect aspen and willow in high elk-use areas, we are able to manage for a larger elk population (600-800), we can decrease the overall number of elk that need to be culled to maintain that population, and we can still provide visitors with ample opportunities to see elk throughout their range.

Rocky Mountain National Park's Elk and Vegetation Management Plan relies on a variety of conservation tools including fencing, elk redistribution, vegetation restoration and culling. The park began implementing the plan in the fall of 2008. For the 2010-2011 winter, the NPS may remove up to 50 adult female elk (in total) to maintain the population at the low end of its range (600-800 animals), as called

for in the Elk and Vegetation Management Plan. In December 2010, National Park Service and university personnel resumed research removals related to Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) and fertility control. Culling activities, that are not part of the research project, will begin in January and be completed before March.

Qualified volunteers, as well as Colorado Division of Wildlife staff, are members of NPS lead teams engaged in culling activities. A lottery process for meat disbursement has been established for the non-research animals. Each animal culled will be tested for CWD. Carcasses are transferred to the Colorado Division of Wildlife and those that test CWD not detected will be disbursed, through lottery and informed consent, to the public. Carcasses that test CWD detected will be used to support a Colorado Division of Wildlife captive mountain lion study. All volunteers will participate in classroom, range, and field training in January prior to conducting culling activities. Volunteers will participate in the full range of culling activities as well as other projects related to the Elk and Vegetation Management Plan.



# Onahu Fire in Rocky Mountain National Park

The second fire this summer in Rocky Mountain National Park was the Onahu (on-a-who) Fire.

This 40 acre fire which started on September 18, 2010, was located on the west side of the park near the Onahu Trailhead, 3.5 miles north of the Kawuneeche Visitor Center.

Trail Ridge Road was temporarily closed due to the fire being on both sides of the road, firefighting efforts, heavy smoke and the potential for dead trees to fall on the road.

Trail Ridge Road reopened to one-lane traffic at the site of the fire just before noon on September 19, 2010, allowing cross-park traffic to flow once again during a beautiful fall weekend.



Crews responded from throughout the region and two Hot Shot crews arrived overnight to contain the fire to 40 acres. Ninety-percent of the fire burned in grass and shrubs. A water-dropping helicopter greatly aided suppression efforts.

Rocky would like to acknowledge the tremendous support provided by fire crews from Granby, Grand Lake, and the Sulphur District of the Arapaho-Roosevelt National Forest. We would especially like to recognize Grand Lake Fire Chief, Mike Long, who was instrumental in taking the role of Incident Commander and coordinating with the NPS Fire Duty Officer to ensure NPS policies were followed. Chief Long then acted in

an “operations” role and made his staff available for continuing fire support. Their presence during this event assisted us in reaching our primary objective: providing for public and fire fighter safety while managing the fire in the most effective possible way.

The Onahu Fire provides evidence that interagency efforts benefit all participants, so thank you all once again for your assistance!

# Grand Lake Entrance Station Renovation Complete



**The Grand Lake Entrance Station was completed in November.**

**The new buildings have improvements such as a fresh air system, which pulls in clean air away from the street and not from right outside where vehicles are idling, and a modern security system for employees and public safety. The entrance station now has correct lane widths for vehicles which also aids with proper snow removal.**

**A fast pass lane has been added which allows the quick entry for visitors who have park passes. All hard plastic passes purchased from Rocky, such as the interagency, annual, Rocky, senior & access passes are already coded to work in the new fast pass lane. If your pass was purchased from somewhere other than Rocky, just bring it in to have it coded for use in the new lane.**

**Revegetation efforts at the entrance station have begun and will be completed in 2011.**

# 2010 Park Visitation

People flocked to Rocky Mountain National Park in 2010 and broke the 3 million visitor mark for the first time in nearly seven years! The last time that RMNP broke this record was back in 2003. December saw a 37 percent increase in visitors over the previous December and the fee-free day, Public Lands Day, on September 25 saw more visitors than any other day of this year. The park has seen about a 4.58% increase in visitation over last year with 3,128,445 visitors in 2010.

## Top 10 Days in 2010

Rank	Date	Visitors
1	Sep. 25	31,031
2	Sep. 5	25,461
3	Aug. 14	24,109
4	Sep. 26	23,913
5	Aug. 15	23,746
6	July 18	22,988
7	July 25	22,731
8	Sep. 6	22,639
9	Oct. 2	22,547
10	July 17	22,472

While the traditional visitation period of Memorial Day through the Labor Day holiday remains the core visitation period, the fall shoulder season continues to see increased visits to the park. The elk rut, fall colors and favorable weather conditions contributed to five of the park's top ten visitation days occurring during the Labor Day holiday or after.

More of those visitors in 2010 utilized the park's shuttle system, as shuttle ridership increased by about 18% over last year. Total ridership passed the 400,000 mark for the first time since the 2003 and 2004 seasons, during which the Bear Lake Road Reconstruction project restricted access to that area via the shuttle system only.



# Busy Year for Incidents in Rocky Mountain National Park

Numerous high profile incidents occurred in 2010 at Rocky Mountain National Park. In addition to the Cow Creek Fire and the Onahu Fire, we had 37 major search and rescue (SAR) operations. Our ten year average is 25. A “major” operation is defined by the unprogrammed dollar amount that is spent on the operation. If it is over \$500 then the operation is considered major. Sometimes that is a little confusing since on occasion we have large SAR operations but due to staff available that day, we might not have to call in others on unprogrammed funds who are off duty. We may also be able to assist the injured or lost person without helicopter assistance. It may be an extensive operation or a serious injury but already covered by our basic daily staffing. If we happen to call an air ambulance such as Flight for Life, the injured person is responsible for those costs.



There were many challenging rescues including a small plane crash with two survivors in Forest Canyon and an overnight rescue of a technical climber on the east face of Longs Peak. Sadly, there were seven fatalities in the park in 2010, six of which were falling fatalities.

