

There has been increasing interest in the closure of illegal trails in the Bear Creek Watershed especially the Mays Peak trail and associated illegal trails in the area. We want to ensure you have the correct information regarding the project.

1. Is the Mays Peak Illegal Trail open to the public?

No. The Mays Peak Illegal Trail was formally closed on June 27, 2017 after the special order that closed the area to off-trail travel was signed.

The trail has always been an illegal/unauthorized/user-created trail.

2. Why is the trail closed?

The Mays Peak Illegal Trail is steep, eroded, and unsustainable. The trail is located within the Bear Creek watershed and contributes sediment into Bear Creek. As part of ongoing and legally required efforts to protect the habitat of the threatened greenback cutthroat trout, this trail was formally closed to prevent continued use, degradation, erosion, and sedimentation.

3. Who has jurisdiction of the Mays Peak Illegal Trail?

The Mays Peak Illegal Trail is located on land managed by the U.S. Forest Service.

4. When are illegal trails going to be decommissioned?

The U.S. Forest Service has been working to close and decommission illegal trails in the watershed since 2017. The Mays Peak Closure is scheduled to start in September of 2023. Closure of other illegal trails will continue into the future.

5. Why are you cutting so many live trees?

Although cutting live trees to protect a watershed may seem counterintuitive, it is an environmentally sound practice in an area that is overstocked with trees. During the project analysis, fires and fuels specialists determined that this area falls under Fire Regime Condition Class 3, indicating a significant departure from its historical condition and thus significantly overstocked with trees.

Since 2017, the Forest Service has diligently worked with partners to fulfill the requirements of the Bear Creek Watershed Restoration Project, including the decommissioning of illegal trails. Despite consistent closures, a small group of destructive users continuously builds and reopens illegal trails. After years of working in the watershed, it has been found that cutting trees to block access is the most ecological, effective and efficient method of closing trails and preventing further degradation. This approach serves a dual purpose: it blocks human travel while providing sheltered micro-habitat for plants to take root and revegetate the bare ground.

6. Are there special regulations in place in the Bear Creek Watershed?

To simplify management in the Bear Creek watershed, regulations have been standardized across the three land management entities (Forest Service, City of Colorado Springs and El Paso County)

In the Bear Creek Watershed:

- All users are required to stay on authorized/system trails
 - This requirement applies to all users and thus prohibits building and utilizing illegal trails and reopening closed trails. Mineral exploration outside a previously established claim by the authorized claimant, is prohibited.
- Humans and domestic animals are prohibited from entering or being in the water in Bear Creek.
- Camping and fires are prohibited.
- Dogs must be on leash on the Bear Creek Trail (666) and Buckhorn Connector (776)

The forest order implementing these regulations on National Forest System Lands can be found [here](#)

7. Why are the greenback cutthroat trout so important and worth protecting?

As a multiple-use land management agency, The U.S. Forest Service manages for many resources including watersheds, wildlife, recreation, range, and timber. The greenback cutthroat trout (*Oncorhynchus clarkii stomias*) is Colorado's state fish. It is currently a Federally-listed threatened species under the Endangered Species Act. At present, the only self-sustaining population of genetically pure greenback cutthroat trout inhabits just a 4-mile stretch of Bear Creek, located west of Colorado Springs. This is a species in serious peril and worth protecting.

8. Is anything being done to recover the species in other streams?

Significant time and resources have been dedicated to restoring the greenback cutthroat trout into streams in the South Platte Watershed. Recovery is ongoing in Zimmerman Lake, Herman Gulch, Dry Gulch, East Fork Roaring Creek, West Fork Clear Creek, Williams Gulch, and Square Tops Lake with other projects being planned. Even with all this effort put into recovery, Bear Creek remains the only self-sustaining population at this point. Colorado Parks and Wildlife, US Fish and Wildlife Service and the US Forest Service, in cooperation with many other groups, are consistently working toward a time that greenbacks are thriving on the landscape and can be removed from the endangered species list.

9. Does the U.S. Forest Service have more in-depth information about the Bear Creek Watershed Restoration Project?

Yes, please follow [this link](#) to the Bear Creek Watershed Restoration Project webpage to access the Environmental Assessment, Final Decision, Closure Order, Timeline and Map

https://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/psicc/landmanagement/?cid=FSEPRD895162#main_content

10. Who can I speak with at the U.S. Forest Service to learn more?

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