

# Wildlife



In the 2015 year end report, Dr. Christy Carello, the Town’s wildlife consultant found the overall special richness, diversity, composition or abundance in the Preserve to be stable. The number of beaver lodges increased, while there were no reported sightings of Boreal Toads (two had been sighted in 2014). Research along summer recreational routes indicated wildlife abundance increased during the early summer trail closures, which corresponded with a decrease in human activity (installation of fencing and signage has helped promote more compliance with the closures). The overall health of wildlife in the Gulch remains good, but continues to require monitoring and assessment.

## Overview

Cucumber Gulch has been one of the main areas of focus for the Town of Breckenridge since the inception of the Open Space program. The area, which contains 77 acres of wetlands, is one of the Town’s most treasured yet threatened resources. It provides vital habitat for the state-endangered boreal toad, moose, elk, deer, mountain lion, beaver, and over forty-seven species of birds.



Due to its location between town and the base of the Breckenridge Ski Resort Peak 8 area, Cucumber Gulch and its wildlife inhabitants are surrounded by, and vulnerable to, human disturbance. The area also encompasses many of the trails that make up the Breckenridge Nordic Center, as well as seasonal hiking and biking trails. At the same time, the Gulch is almost completely surrounded by existing or pending development.

One of the greatest threats posed to the wildlife in Cucumber Gulch Preserve is an off-leash dog. By swimming in the ponds, disturbing the beavers, and pursuing vulnerable wildlife and ground-nesting birds, dogs have exacted a heavy toll on the area’s wildlife. As a result, dogs are not permitted in the Cucumber Gulch Preserve.

## Management

Other management efforts to protect the Preserve include: adopting the Cucumber Gulch Preserve Management Plan; establishing the Cucumber Gulch Overlay Protection District;

enacting seasonal wildlife closures; improving interpretive signage; installing fences to protect vulnerable fen wetlands; working cooperatively with the Breckenridge Nordic Center to ensure wintertime wetland protection efforts; and conducting ongoing research to assess changes in the wetlands and the wildlife.

The Town hires a third party consultant to monitor wildlife and water quality conditions and changes in the Gulch.

### **More Information**

- Dr. Carello, Christie, “Cucumber Gulch Annual Conservation Monitoring Report 2015”, dated February, 2016.