

# CSU EXTENSION WILDLIFE TECHNICIAN INTERNSHIP WITH THE ROUTT NATIONAL FOREST (ROUTT COUNTY)

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and Conservation  
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Mentors: Rick Henderson -  
Aquatic Biologist USFS  
Chelsea Johnson - Wildlife  
Technician USFS  
Todd Hagenbuch - CSU  
Extension

Internship Funded by the Garrett Collopy Foundation

## Roles Within Routt National Forest

The Routt National Forest, like all other U.S. National Forests, is designed to be an accessible piece of public land that supports multiple uses, including recreation, livestock grazing, timber harvest, conservation, and more.

Each national forest will manage its land to support its own unique goals and what is best suited for its forest. Each district contains its own specialists designated to fulfill their goal for the forest, which includes timber, hydrology, wildlife biology, range, aquatic biology, and many more.

I spent this summer in the shoes of the wildlife biology team by aiding the wildlife technician, Chelsea Johnson, and occasionally the aquatic biologist, Rick Henderson, in the Hahns Peak-Bears Ears Ranger District. I worked with each mentor to aid in completing their designated goals for the forest.

The main goal of the summer for the wildlife technician is to conduct American Goshawk surveys and raptor nest checks throughout the forest; in doing this, the technician gains an overall understanding of conditions within the forest, as well as creates protection buffers for American Goshawk and other bird of prey nesting territories.

Figure 1. (Pair of Bighorn Sheep rams)



These sheep were found during a Bighorn sheep survey in the Mt. Zirkel Wilderness with a Colorado Parks and Wildlife big game biologist, Eric Vannatta.

## Conducting Wildlife Surveys

I participated in many different types of wildlife surveys with the wildlife technician across the Routt National Forest. We conducted surveys for the American Goshawk, Bumblebees, state-endangered Boreal Toads, Wood frogs, and Bighorn Sheep. Along with wildlife surveys, we also conducted bird of prey nest checks, which included Red-tailed Hawks, Peregrine Falcons, and American Goshawks. Most surveys are conducted within a project area, such as for timber harvest or fuel treatments. Surveys are used to evaluate the presence of the target species and to cover miles of the forest on foot to evaluate habitat conditions (dominant tree species, tree size, etc.) for other potential resident species, such as the endangered Canada lynx. American Goshawks, along with all other birds of prey, Boreal Toads, Wood Frogs, and Northern Leopard Frogs, are considered sensitive species. If a breeding site of a sensitive species is discovered during a survey, then a protection buffer and/or time constraint will be placed around that area so as not to disturb the breeding site.

Figure 2. (Red-tailed hawk nestlings)



These two red-tailed hawk chicks were found during a nest check. This nest was categorized as active and will continue to be surveyed in the following years, and will be protected if it remains active.

## Key Takeaways

As a student majoring in Fish, Wildlife, and Conservation Biology, this was an amazing gateway into the professional world. This internship has allowed me to apply what I have learned so far in my classwork to the field. It has given me a crucial understanding of how conservation work is applied in real-world situations, and a unique perspective on the Forest Service's role in wildlife conservation. It was extremely valuable to work with specialists within the Forest Service and to understand their system further, especially as timber has been pushed as a priority. It was fascinating to speak with everyone in the office and hear how they contribute to making the Routt National Forest what it is. Throughout the summer, I gained great confidence in navigating remote forests when working solo. I learned how to navigate only using satellite imagery and topography maps when alone in the woods.

Figure 3. (Boreal Toad captured to swab for Chytrid Fungus)



### In the field:

