

editorial

Bill would continue assault on wildlife

The wildlife of this state and this nation are up against the wall and a new bill introduced by Rep. Bob Shoemaker (see story this issue) would worsen the situation. Shoemaker's bill, by muzzling the state Division of Wildlife from commenting on the negative effects of developments on wildlife habitat, continues the long American tradition of denying wildlife a home.

An ethical response to this attitude argues that wildlife have a right to inhabit the planet equal to humans' claim to turf. In Gunnison County the practical response is more powerful: With hunting and fishing locally a \$30-40 million business, destruction of wildlife habitat kills the goose that lays the golden egg.

It seems that under Shoemaker's bill, the DOW would have been unable to warn the County of the destruction of elk winter range caused by a planned housing development north of Blue Mesa Reservoir. The DOW also would have been unable to inform us of the detriment to elk calving areas caused by a proposed timber sale. In the case of the housing project, the County got together with the landowner and the federal government to effect a land trade which preserved both the habitat and the development

opportunity.

The complaints by water developers that wildlife mitigation delays projects and is "near blackmail and extortion" shows their true bias: Growth of human population and economy should take automatic precedence over the needs of the planet's other critters.

The Two Forks project would destroy the last free-flowing segment of mountain river in the Denver metro area. Its blue-ribbon cold-water fishery is prized by thousands of anglers seeking a nearby escape from the city. The flat-water recreation Two Forks would provide instead is abundantly available elsewhere. The DOW's mitigation recommendations on Two Forks were merely a call for *balance* in the use and development of our natural resources.

Shoemaker also calls for a uniform statewide policy on wildlife habitat mitigation. That's a reasonable suggestion which could prevent abuses of authority by bureaucrats and give developers a clear idea of what to expect. But his proposed muzzling of the DOW would inevitably result in more habitat destruction than occurs now.

When will our assault on nature end?

-Gary Sprung