

Staying safe in a wildfire

In our previous columns about wildfires we have covered mitigation for your home and safety with your campfires while enjoying the outdoors. In this column we shall discuss what to do if you see or happen to be caught in a wildfire while out in the woods.

The chances of you being caught in a wildfire are actually very slim. There are a score of other calamities ahead of them on the list of what might do you in. With all that being said, knowing what to do just in case could mean the difference between life and death.

Like everything else we do, situational awareness is the key. Before you head up to the mountains, be aware of the risk. During dry summer months, where humidity levels are low and winds can be high, the risk of fire can be very high. Before you go, check with authorities for any active fires in the area you wish to visit. An active fire in the area might cause you to not be allowed in the area you wanted to visit.

If you chose an area to visit, plan ahead. Have multiple routes planned and several exits chosen so you don't get trapped. Make sure someone here knows where you

are going, when to expect you back, and what routes you are taking. Always use trailhead registers and then, stick to your planned route. Do not deviate, as the authorities may have to search for you in the event of an evacuation.

Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

I know that this is just common sense, but follow the rules. If an area is closed to hiking or camping or there is an open fire ban in effect, then obey those rules. Overlooking some simple rules can lead to tragic consequences.

Watch for warning signs at all times while afield. If you smell or see smoke during the day or see an orange glow on the horizon at night, it could mean a fire is nearby. If you hear cracking or see embers in the air, a fire is within a mile and you are at risk. Move away from the area, in the opposite direction of the wind. Remember to try to move downhill as fire travels faster going uphill.

If the fire is upon you, find a place to make your stand. You cannot ever outrun a fire so don't try it. Many firefighters have died trying to outrun one. Your biggest risk of injury from a fire is not the flames but from the superheated air, which can sear your lungs. Find an area away from forest



Smoke in the distance could be a warning sign of a nearby wildfire. Be constantly aware of your surroundings while in the outdoors. The photo shows the Grammar Fire near Norwood in 2009. (Photo courtesy of Paul Martin)

fuels to lie down in, paying attention to height of trees above you as well. A swampy and wet area or a large body of water is best. The general rule for water is that it should be at least a couple feet deep. Swimming out into the lake and treading water is a very effective self-rescue. As a last resort, find the largest opening free from any fuels such as trees, shrubs and grass and lie down. Sand bars, gravel washes and rocky areas can all work. Keep your face down close to the ground and find the coolest air you can to breathe. Try to shield yourself from flying embers and debris.

Remove any synthetic clothing you may have on. Wool will offer the best protection against the flames and heat. Synthetics will melt at very low temperatures causing severe burns to your skin. If synthetic is all you have, it is better than nothing at all. It will off a small amount of protection from low heat where bare skin offers none. Keep your feet pointed toward the approaching fire and cover your face as much as possible. Seems hard to say this but don't panic. The air above you is superheated. If you get up and run that air can severely injure you in seconds. It is Best to remain calm

and on the ground.

After the fire passes there is still a danger present. Burned trees can fall very easily and debris on the ground will be white hot. Travel through a burned area very carefully.

Dry lightning storms this time of year can touch off a dozen or more storms in an area as they pass. If you see any signs of a fire, notify the authorities immediately. If you escape a fire, immediately contact your notification people so that others do not risk life and limb out looking for you. Report all fires immediately, even if you have accidentally caused one. While it may carry

some consequences for you, it is much better to get people to put the fire out before it becomes a major disaster.

Keeping your wits about you and staying aware of your surroundings will keep you safe while outdoors. This holds true for just about all the emergencies that stalk us when we are in the woods. Until next time, stay safe and see you on the trail.

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Butterflies: precarious lives in our midst

Drive down any open highway and you can experience the carnage; splat, splat, splat. Highway 50, 550, or any of Colorado's open roads will do; splat, splat, splat. You can sometimes feel the impact when the bug guts hit your windshield, but there is more to the massacre than just simply squirting fluid on the glass and running the wipers; splat, splat, splat.

I recently wondered just who was on my car when at a filling station, squeegee in hand. It was hard to tell, but an average sampling probably included grasshoppers, beetles, flies, bees and butterflies. Oh well; they're just bugs. Who cares? As it turns out, there are a whole bunch of people who care, especially about butterflies.

Of particular note is the monarch butterfly. Populations of this species have been declining for a number of years, and because of this, the monarch has drawn a great deal of attention, recently. Yet, there are 20,000

butterfly species worldwide, each as fragile and delicate as the monarch. Each of them reflect the health of the natural world in which we live.

On one level, the biology of butterflies is pretty simple.

They have a head (eyes, antennae, proboscis — sometimes likened to a tongue but more like a straw); thorax (kind of like our chest) where the wings attach; and abdomen. The latter one probably makes the big colorful impact

at 65 miles per hour.

Butterflies are the basketball players of the insect world. Their long legs allow them to easily lift and flit from flower to flower, and their proboscis can easily unroll for a slam dunk into the nectar-rich base of most any flower regardless of how shallow or deep.

Like us, they have preferences for habitat or home, and because their life cycle tends to be short, they are pretty interested in the opposite sex. Detailed knowledge on courtship for many species is lacking, but seeking like-minded



A Weidemeyer's Admiral butterfly flits along the Gunnison River at East Portal in Black Canyon, searching for various salts dried near the riverbank. (Photo courtesy National Park Service)

butterflies, some will flit among hill tops at high elevations. Some males can be territorial, like staking out a corner at a fancy tavern. Others prefer canyon or gully bottoms and are happy enough to bully the others out of competition for a female as if they were in some big city dive bar downtown.

Romance blossoms among the flowers, eggs are laid

on a specific plant or plants which the hatched caterpillar will happily munch. When the larva or worm reaches its full size it will develop a pupae, sometimes likened to a cocoon. Better known as the chrysalis, the life cycle bumps to a new level.

The transformation of the worm inside the chrysalis is not a switching of features as a transition might be. Within

If you go

• **Crested Butte Wildflower Festival:** through Sunday. Butterfly programs are conducted through Saturday. Information: www.crested-buttewildflowerfestival.com.

• **Western Colorado Botanical Gardens:** Less wild, but a great place to encounter butterflies, especially for children; www.wcbotanic.org/.

• **Mountain basins:** Most high country basins have wildflowers and butterflies. Look for them above Ouray, Lake City and Telluride. Meadows at lower elevations at Black Canyon or Owl Creek Pass are also full of butterflies.

• **North American Butterfly Association:** Learn more to make your home butterfly friendly; www.naba.org.

• **Good News:** Butterflies have to wait for sunlight to warm up and become active. It's better to watch for them after mid-morning (you can sleep in).

the nearly air-tight chrysalis hormonal triggers cause a chemical breakdown of larval tissues. The caterpillar breaks down into a thick soup-like fluid, with a few body

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