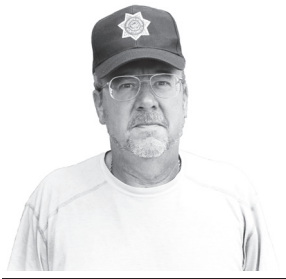


Allergic to snow and cold



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

When I was a youngster, I loved the snow and snowy days. When it snowed enough, they would close the school, meaning I got a day off from prison. As I grew older, I began to tire of the cold and snow, so I left Colorado for a quarter of a century, moving to the tropics of the Florida Keys.

After a number of years, I grew tired of the heat and humidity. There are only two seasons in the Keys, summer and hurricane season, and both mean hot and humid weather. Since I spent most of my time outdoors, I was always in the heat and humidity and began to long for the winter solstice.

We returned to Colorado some 20 years ago, happy to have winter and summer, but as I age, I am having trouble coping with the cold and snow, seeking longer summers and more time outdoors. I never really got into the winter activities like skiing, snowshoeing, and ice fishing, so I mostly sit and stare out the window and complain about the cold.

I told my wife that I am allergic to snow because every time I am outside when the snow is falling, my eyes itch and get watery, and I get a bout of sneezes. She said, "The only thing you are allergic to is work and constructive activity. You spend the entire winter complaining instead of

doing something constructive."

Well, turns out little missy know-it-all missed that one. You can be allergic to snow, although it is quite rare. The most common cold-weather condition that can result in allergy symptoms is cold urticaria, sometimes called cold allergy or cold hives. In people who have this disorder, cold weather or low temperatures can cause redness, itching, swelling and hives on the skin. These symptoms result from a histamine release in the body.

Another source of the problem could be sunlight. Some people have a light triggered reflex that causes sunlight to provoke sneezing or itchy eyes. During the winter months in cold climates, this reflex can be exaggerated by light that's reflected off the snow, resulting in increased symptoms.

In addition, cold temperatures can trigger the lining in your nose to produce excess mucus. The excess mucus can cause an increase in sneezing, creating even more mucus. That is why many people always have a drippy nose when out in the cold.

It doesn't seem like we get as much snow in Colorado as we did back in the 60s through the 80s. I remember sitting on a school bus and looking out the window at the snow piled up by the snowplows in the center of Main Street. The snow often was higher than the windows on the bus.

A walk in the fresh falling snow can be a memorable experience. Fresh snow cover dampens sound because it absorbs sound waves. If temperatures rise, causing the top layer of snow to melt. As that layer refreezes at night, the newly formed ice layer reflects sound wave,



I think a couple weeks on this beach in Florida would do wonders for my snow and cold allergies, but my wife of many years vetoed the idea. (Courtesy photo/Mark Rackay)

allowing sound to travel far and clear.

Speaking of a walk in the falling white snow, it is actually not white. Snow appears white, but it is actually translucent. When light reflects off it, snow looks white to our eyes. The many sides of a snowflake scatter light, defusing the color spectrum in many directions. Snow can look dark when dust, dirt, or pollution cover it. When freshwater algae get to the snow, it can turn it other colors like orange, blue, or even a watermelon pink.

Eating snow is something every kid has done, and even a few adults. The fresher the snow, the less contaminated it can be with algae, bacteria, and pollution. However, as pollution persists in the atmosphere, all snow captures it while forming. As the snow falls, it can lock the contaminants within it.

The most common con-

taminant is black carbon from coal burning plants and wood burning stoves and fireplaces. If you are going to eat snow, it is best to wait a few hours into the snowfall. The longer the snow falls, the cleaner the air, and that means the cleaner the snow. This is one of the reasons why the air smells so fresh after a snowfall.

In a survival situation, many people think eating snow is a source of much needed hydration, but the exact opposite is true. You use more energy to melt the snow with the heat from your own body, than you gain from the snow. Any hydration you may gain from eating snow isn't as great as the energy and hydration you are using to melt it. Over time, if you are consuming a large quantity of snow, it can actually dehydrate you.

In the outdoors, it is better to melt the snow

before ingesting it. Freshly melted snow is usually considered safe to drink without further treatment, although I would still melt the snow and bring it to a boil for 10 minutes. This is best to remove any possible contaminants and make it easier on your body to ingest.

While many people complain about snow and snowy winters, remember that without snow cover, the ground absorbs 4 to 6 times more of the sun's energy. The presence or absence of snow controls the patterns of heating and cooling over the Earth's land surface more than any other land surface feature.

Snow is a vital source of drinking water, especially to us on the Western Slope. Snow affects wildlife, hibernation, and all plant life. Besides, without a heavy winter and spring snowfall, we get to spend the

summer contending with wildfires.

Since my wife didn't buy into the whole snow and cold allergy routine, I might tell her I suffer from aquagenic urticaria, which is an allergy to water. On second thought, I better not. She might not let me go fishing anymore.

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Over-the-counter bull elk licenses no longer available in the northern Gunnison Basin

SPECIAL TO THE MDP

Years of discussion surrounding over-the-counter versus limited hunting in the Gunnison area culminated in a recent regulation change specific to bull elk hunting in the northern Gunnison Basin.

At the Parks and Wildlife Commission (PWC) Meeting held Jan. 14-15 at the headquarters of Colorado Parks and Wildlife in Denver, the commission approved CPW's staff recommendation to eliminate over-the-counter (OTC) hunting licenses for bull elk that had previously been available during the second and third rifle seasons in Game Management Units (GMUs) 54, 55 and 551 in the northern Gunnison Basin.

This management shift now aligns with GMUs 66 and 67 in the southern Gunnison Basin, which were converted to totally limited for elk licenses in 1999. The entire Gunnison Basin is now completely limited across all hunt codes, and hunters will need to plan on applying for elk licenses in these GMUs through the annual draw process. For the 2026 hunting seasons, draw applications are due by 8 p.m. on April 7.

To phase into this new model, staff have proposed

that bull license numbers for the second and third rifle seasons initially be set near the three-year average or reduced by no more than 10% of the number of OTC licenses used across the three GMUs. A phase-in period would maintain a high level of hunting opportunity while managers assess demand and draw statistics. Final license numbers are approved annually at the May PWC meeting.

"Our elk management objectives have not changed and are outlined in our local Herd Management Plans," said CPW Area Wildlife Manager Brandon Diamond, who oversees CPW operations in Gunnison. "We are still managing toward a bull-cow ratio and a population objective. However, we now will have a more surgical ability to adjust bull licenses in response to herd dynamics, local and statewide events such as severe winters and wildfires, and we also can help manage toward hunter preferences and hunt experience. Limited licensing doesn't mean severe restriction in opportunity, but it certainly changes how you get a license in your hand each year."

Diamond and CPW's Southwest Region Senior



A bull elk walks through a clearing. (Wayne D. Lewis/CPW photo)

Wildlife Biologist Jamin Grigg credited local stakeholders for their leadership, collaboration and extensive work in surveying the public to gauge interest in making the change.

"We have been discussing this issue for most of my career, with strong opinions on all sides," Diamond said. "There are pros and cons for most decisions we make, but in instances where we have flexibility in management, community opinion

matters. Our commission has been engaged in this discussion for several years and has been hearing from the Gunnison community throughout that time."

In 2025, the Gunnison Wildlife Association (GWA) hosted informational meetings in partnership with CPW to discuss current status of local herds and explore pros and cons of limited licenses.

GWA conducted online surveys of the public and received responses from

hunters, ranchers, outfitters, local business owners, non-hunter wildlife watchers and non-resident hunters.

Surveys showed 70% of Gunnison Basin residents supported converting OTC bull elk licenses to limited, and another 15% said they may support the concept depending on specifics of the proposal.

"Gunnison Wildlife Association's support for these license changes reflects our continued push

for adaptive, science-based management of our resources in a manner that puts wildlife first," said GWA President Cody Dyce. "The outcome of this proposal also is testament to the importance of public involvement in wildlife management decisions and collaboration with Colorado Parks and Wildlife and other stakeholders to address wildlife concerns. We send our heartfelt thanks

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