



Photo: Madeline Wilson

Celebrating That Which Doesn't Exist in Rocky Mountain National Park

by Diane Burkepile

People come to Rocky for many reasons, whether it's the amazing wildlife, the inspiring scenery or the trails that lead to stunning backcountry jewels. But what would any of these experiences be without the gift of silence that underlies the quality of all of these activities? What would it be like to reach a high mountain lake to find a commercial helicopter flying overhead? Or to watch a herd of elk in the fall be dispersed by the noise of an approaching aircraft.

The sound of no sound is fundamentally important, but it's often not appreciated until it's gone. This is what motivated the League of Women Voters in 1995 to engage in their efforts to ban helicopter tours in Rocky Mountain National Park.

July 18, 2015, is being set aside as a special day to celebrate the quiet of Rocky Mountain National Park. Rocky Mountain National Park is the only national park where commercial air tours are permanently banned by an Act of Congress.

On this special day and in conjunction with World Listening Day, the National Park Service, Natural Sounds and Night Sky Division, and the League of Women Voters of Estes Park, will be pre-

senting an entire day of activities built around the appreciation of silence and the celebration of this distinct honor.

The League of Women Voters of Estes Park (LWVEP) became actively involved in leading the charge to "ban the buzz" in 1995 when park and local authorities came under ever-increasing pressure to allow commercial sightseeing tours, primarily helicopters, within the park's airspace. Because the LWVEP had a long historical connection with Rocky, they quickly recognized the problem and stepped in to help.

They saw that helicopter tours would create noise that people who came to the park to camp, hike and relax, couldn't escape. They also saw helicopters as a safety hazard on many fronts, including for wildlife protection and increased fire risks, not to mention the changeable weather, which is always a variable in high elevation and mountainous areas. So, being an organization of concerned citizens who take their civic responsibility seriously, they developed a plan to prevent helicopters from being a part of the Rocky experience.

They were an indefatigable force. They began a letter-writing campaign, they wore t-shirts that blazed "Ban the

Buzz", they surveyed tourists visiting RMNP and encouraged them to write their congress people, they talked to the governor, the state legislature, to Colorado's congress people, the county commissioners of both Larimer and Grand counties and the Department of Transportation.

They lobbied in all the ways they could imagine and, lo and behold, their efforts were rewarded. The ban on touring helicopters over Rocky Mountain National Park was part of a bill that passed Congress in 1998, signed by President Bill Clinton. Check out the plaque commemorating this event in Upper Beaver Meadows which will be a source of part of the ceremonies this summer.

It can't be stressed enough – Rocky Mountain National Park is the only national park to have a ban against helicopter overflights. Just think what a gift of silence this would be for other national parks – indeed, all of them! Now that's a gift to leave the next generation! For more information about this celebration, go to: www.lwv-estepark.org or the RMNP Centennial website at: www.nps.gov/romo/planyourvisit/100th-anniversary.htm