

Seasonal Closure to Protect Wildlife

What's a "seasonal closure"?

State and federal agencies protect wildlife by closing some "winter range" areas to recreational activities. Winter's tough for big game animals; as snow falls and temperatures plunge, deer and elk must leave the high country. Seasonally closed areas provide a refuge for wildlife that helps them survive the winter.

Why do deer and elk migrate to lower elevation winter range?

In the warm months, deer and elk find plenty to eat in mountain forests and on the alpine tundra. But food is not available during winter because of snow and cold. So animals move to warmer areas where some food and shelter is available.

But there's little or no snow on the ground here! Why is the area closed?

While the area looks good for hiking, biking or for riding an OHV, elk and deer need it as a place to rest and conserve energy. High-quality food is unavailable to wildlife during winter. They are living on the edge of starvation. Their only energy comes from the fat stores they gained during summer. When people recreate nearby, animals flee and burn the calories needed to survive.

Why does the closure last so long into spring?

Deer and elk never go indoors! Nights are still cold, food is not yet available in the high country, and animals remain in a starvation mode—barely hanging on. Many animals die at this time. Female deer (does) and elk (cows) that are pregnant are in severe stress. If they are not disturbed by human activity they stand a better chance of surviving. If females are weak when they give birth, the calves and fawns are likely to die.

So what can I do?

Please, observe seasonal closures. Talk to your friends and family about how activities can hurt big game at this time of year. Coloradans love wildlife, and to help them thrive we need to leave them alone during the winter and early spring. Many other places are available for recreational activities.