In a time not so long ago, before Highlands Ranch was built up, Golden Eagles raised their young on the rock faces of Wildcat Mountain (which are the cliffs across Monarch Boulevard from Rocky Heights Middle School). Unfortunately, Golden Eagles are typically shy birds, avoiding human encroachment as much as possible. As houses moved closer to Wildcat Mountain, the historic eagle nesting site was abandoned by the majestic birds for more preferable nest sites further away from humans.

In 2006, when the Highlands Ranch Community Association (HRCA) became owners of the property that includes Wildcat Mountain, trails were built in the vicinity of Wildcat Mountain so the community could enjoy the Backcountry and the excellent wildlife viewing that it offered. We were extremely careful in designing our trails to ensure that we did not disturb the best wildlife areas on the property, which included the cliffs, in order to allow the wildlife to continue to enjoy this area of the Backcountry while providing people the opportunity to see and enjoy the wildlife in their natural habitat.

In 2007, when the Douglas County East-West Trail was designed, we worked closely with the Douglas County staff and were careful once again to keep the trail near Monarch Boulevard for most of its route, once again to preserve the wildlife habitat and very deliberately to stay away from the cliffs of Wildcat Mountain, in the hopes that the eagles would one day return to nest there.

Sayings such as patience is a virtue, good things come to those who wait, build it (or in this case don’t build it) and they will come all come to mind right now. For the first time in many, many years, there is a confirmed active Golden Eagle nest on Wildcat Mountain!

Eagles and eagle nests are protected by the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act, a Federal Act that prohibits any “take” of eagles. “Take” includes to “disturb” and to “molest” eagles or eagle nest sites. Fines are severe, up to $100,000 and one year in jail.

Following recommendations from the Colorado Division of Wildlife, the HRCA is taking steps to ensure the eagle nest is not disturbed by closing the Wildcat Mountain Trail, which takes trail users on top of the cliffs on which the eagles are nesting. If the nest is successful, the trail will remain closed at least until mid July, possibly a few weeks longer.

The HRCA will keep the public up to date on the nest status through the Backcountry facebook page and other channels. Find us on facebook at www.facebook.com/HRCABackcountry.