

# Alpine Plant Community Trends on the Elk Summer Range of Rocky Mountain National Park, Colorado: An Analysis of Existing Data: Usgs Open-File Report 2



Alpine plant community trends on the elk summer range of Rocky Mountain National Park, Colorado: an analysis of existing data:  
USGS Open-File Report 2006-1122

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*(Lawrence Keeling)*

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Bibliogov, United States, 2013. Paperback. Book Condition: New. 246 x 189 mm. Language: English . Brand New Book \*\*\*\*\* Print on Demand \*\*\*\*\*.The majority of the elk (*Cervus elaphus*) population of Rocky Mountain National Park in Colorado summer in the parka s high elevation alpine and subalpine meadows and willow krummholz. The parka s population of white-tailed ptarmigan (*Lagopus leucurus altipetens*) depends on both dwarf and krummholz willows for food and cover. Concern about the effects of elk herbivory on these communities prompted the monitoring of 12 vegetation transects in these regions from 1971 to 1996. Over this 25-year period, data were collected on plant species cover and frequency and shrub heights. These data have not been statistically analyzed for trends in measured variable over time to determine changes in species abundance. Krummholz willow species (*Salix planifolia*, *S. brachycarpa*) declined 17-20 percent in cover and about 25 centimeters in height over the study period. Graminoids (particularly *Deschampsia caespitosa*, *Carex*, and *Poa*) increased slightly from 1971 to 1996. No significant increases of nonnative plant species were observed. An increase in presence of bare ground over the 25-year period warrants continued measurement of these transects. Lack of good data on elk density, distribution, or sue levels precluded correlating changes in plant species cover, frequency, or heights with elk population trends. I recommend development of a more rigorously designed monitoring program that includes these transects as well as other chosen on a random or stratified design and consistent measurement protocol and sampling intervals. Some method of quantifying elk use, either through measurement of plant utilization, pellet counts, or census-type surveys, would allow correlation of changes in plant species over time with changes in elk distribution and density on the parka s alpine and subalpine regions.



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