

The Reality of Mountain Living

WHAT DOES IT REALLY MEAN TO LIVE IN THE HIGH COUNTRY IN A RURAL COUNTY?

The beautiful landscape that lured you to the high country during the summer will differ considerably in the winter.

Periods of drought create the perception of mild winters, when in fact, Colorado winters can cause heavy snowfall and blocked access to roads and homes. Research the cycle and find out what the historical average snowfall is. Droughts are not reflective of the reality of real winters in the high country.

Emergency snow operations are not the same as routine maintenance.

Services that may have been provided to you in an urban setting on a "24/7" basis may not be available to you in a rural setting.

You must plan to take care of yourself because the isolation that you treasure can become a real hazard that can keep emergency assistance or other services from reaching you.

If, when you purchased your home, it was on a dirt road, the chances are almost a certainty that it will remain a dirt road.

A lack of planning on your part does not constitute an emergency for the local government.

Your 2-wheel drive vehicle that is your best friend during the summer will become your worst enemy at some point during the winter.

Pets and children are at risk from wildlife. Bears and mountain lions are your neighbors in the high country. Protect your pets and children from harm.

The winter months will be longer than summer and spring combined.

The high country winds often gust in excess of 100 m.p.h. Even after the snow stops falling, high winds will create ground blizzards that will make roads impassible and impossible for the county to keep open. Remember, that before modern technology, this area was uninhabitable in winter.

You are responsible for snow removal on your own driveway.

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO PREPARE YOUR FAMILY?

You must learn to be self-sufficient. The local government will not always be able to take care of you.

Keep your propane tank filled. You are not wise to purchase or lease a 500-gallon tank and only purchase 100 gallons of propane.

Be aware that if you contact the county and claim that you have an emergency situation that requires county assistance, and it is not a true emergency, the county will charge you for the assistance.

If you use prescription medications, make sure you have enough of a supply to last in the event that you are trapped in your home due to inclement weather. Also, the effects of some medications are altered by high elevations, you may want to consult your doctor to see if yours are among those affected.

If you have a serious medical condition, determine if the services provided by a rural county will be sufficient to meet your needs before you move to the high country.

If you are not planning on spending winter in your mountain home, winterize it before you leave in the summer. This means that you should drain all pipes, turn your well pump off, make sure your propane tank is filled and set your thermostats to the lowest setting to preserve your propane supply.

If you plan on living in the high country all year round, winterize your 4-wheel drive vehicle. Make sure you have good snow tires, keep the gas tank full, and the radiator fluid at an adequate sub-zero rating.

Plan for power outages. Keep an adequate food and water supply, along with other safety items, such as flashlights, candles, battery-powered radio, etc. Oil lamps are perfect for these situations. Make sure you have plenty of winter clothing and underclothing because you may not be able to do laundry for several days. If you have an electric kitchen stove, think of going to a gas stove. If this is not feasible, make sure your wood-burning stove has a flat surface for heating water and cooking. Consider purchasing a generator.

To allow for all contingencies, It would be wise to invest in a wood burning, heat producing stove and make sure you have adequate firewood. If you purchase a pellet stove that requires electricity select one with a battery back-up system.

Find out if the road upon which you live is a public or private road. If it is a public road, find out what the classification and level of service is. Find out if it is on the snow route. If it isn't, chances are, it will NOT be added.

You are responsible for your job. Give yourself plenty of time to get to it. In inclement weather, consider spending the night in a hotel near your employment.

What are road classifications and what do they mean for snow removal operations?

Primary:

Primary roads consist of Emergency, Main Arterial, Designated School Bus, and are accepted for first day service. (Continually plowed whenever possible until the event subsides)

Secondary:

Secondary roads are plowed only after all Primary routes have been accomplished.

(Example: If a snow event lasts for several days, primary routes will continually be plowed until the event subsides. There is a good possibility that Secondary routes may not be plowed for several days from the start of a snow event.

Ternary:

Ternaries are plowed only after Primary and Secondary routes have been completed. There is a great likelihood that service on Ternary routes will not be possible until several days after the start of a snow event.

Will Call:

The County has a few will call roads. Will call roads will be plowed only by request and will be accomplished only after all Primary, Secondary, and Ternary Routes have been completed.

However:

When the County is experiencing extreme weather conditions, such as winds in excess of 110 M.P.H. and consecutive snowstorms, your road may take much longer to get plowed. The high winds bring snow back onto a road that has been plowed within hours, sometimes minutes, of the completion of plowing.

There have been times when the conditions are so severe that it is not safe to send crews out to plow roads. In this situation, it is certainly not safe for anyone; include citizens of the county to be out. This means that there are times when the county literally cannot assist people who choose to be out in such conditions.

This can be a life or death situation

During the events just described, Road and Bridge receives numerous phone calls. Many of the calls deserve attention, however, there are times when responding to these calls prevent crews from completing routes. For example, because of the nature of the high country, travel or any other movement can be restricted for days.

Please plan for these events. Always prepare to be stranded, whether at home or in your car.