

## The Changing Face of Nature

*By Harry Zirkelbach 10-18-2010*

The summer had been warm, approaching record high temperatures many days, without rain. Trees and vegetation prospered in mountains and plains as winter snow had been generous, as were the spring rains. Vegetation was robust by the end of August, and wild life had plentiful food from the land, adequate water from swollen streams.

It was this blissful scene when the family vacationed at the home in Columbine Lake, near Grand Lake, western slope. Locally, owners had contracted for removal of the diseased pines on their limited acreage. Now cabins long hidden in the trees, were now completely disclosed to passing visitors, at the expense of privacy.

However in the adjacent Rocky Mountain National Park lands, which stretch miles north, and east almost to Fort Collins, private contractors hired by the federal government labored daily, to harvest and remove some fraction of the diseased, now dead pines. In the several counties abutting this National Park on the west, a single road, U.S. 34, handles all the traffic serving the tree removal. Roadside signs warn tourists, and locals, that heavy large truck traffic should be expected all hours during every day.

It is different in the many surrounding private acreages, where once green mountains, are now red peaks of endless dead pine trees. Regretfully these large areas of dead trees defy total harvesting even in few years, for most of this acreage remains roadless.

Locals and visitors wondered how this might be corrected. And who could afford this expense, None wished to even imagine that the summer dryness might make this area a potential endless forrest fire. At local gatherings, considering how it might be paid for, was a frightening as the possibility of the conflagration.

In spite of this concern, tourists came to the National Park and the streets of Grand Lake, in numbers that surprised the locals, who were able to keep all businesses open weeks after the normal closing after Labor Day. Business was good. And hunters had not begun to arrive, excepting the few bow and arrow sportspeople.

At the home, a glorified fifteen year old cabin, birds continued to feast from the feeders which had to be replenished daily. Yes the hummingbirds had flown south.

On one quiet day while watching birds from the 2nd floor deck, there was a noise at the side of the house, and in looking down casually, there stood two massive racks almost hiding the moose who brought them. Then from the tall grasses the moose had been enjoying, came the swishing sounds, as that large body raced away to where the trees were thicker, was gone from sight in a jiffy, like magic, hiding that massive body from the eyes of the visitor.

He would be the exceptional animal seen this week, a spark of energy differing from the otherwise uneventful days in the Rocky Mountains in the warm early October 2010.