

WHEREAS, Colorado is prized by residents and visitors for its variety of landscapes and extraordinary winter outdoor recreation opportunities, which in turn supports jobs, business earnings and state and local tax revenues for our State's economy; and

WHEREAS, the Colorado Department of Natural Resources and Colorado Parks and Wildlife, Great Outdoors Colorado, federal partners from the U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and National Park Service, tribal partners and local land managers oversee the conservation and wise use of the State's natural resources, including the management of all types of outdoor recreation; and

WHEREAS, the Colorado Tourism Office is positioned to share information with millions nationally and has joined Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics in founding the Care for Colorado Coalition, enlisting 14 statewide organizations in sharing messages inspiring both Coloradans and visitors to reduce impacts and travel responsibly; and

WHEREAS, the Colorado Outdoor Recreation Industry Office and outdoor industry partners throughout the state have created a Recreate Responsibly Colorado Coalition, working to utilize a variety of audiences and platforms to share the critical need for responsible outdoor recreation by all outdoor enthusiasts; and

WHEREAS, Colorado and our state agencies are committed to sharing our natural wonders and winter outdoor recreation opportunities with all, ensuring a voice and a welcoming space for residents and visitors of color, those with disabilities and anyone who has previously been underrepresented in our outdoor spaces; and

WHEREAS, the COVID-19 pandemic led to record use of our state parks, with visitation increasing by more than 30 percent, with use of city parks, open spaces and federal lands rising statewide as well; and

WHEREAS, these same conditions appear to be fueling unprecedented interest in Colorado's world-class backcountry winter experiences, including snowmobiling, snowshoeing, fat biking and hut trips, as well as cross-country, hybrid and backcountry skiing. While energizing and fun, outdoor recreation in and among Colorado's sprawling forests, wondrous landforms, and magnificent state and national parks also carries risks, especially for those with limited backcountry winter experience; and

WHEREAS, a wave of backcountry winter emergencies could overwhelm the limited resources of Colorado's volunteer search and rescue operations, which has a selfless heritage of saving the lives of Coloradans and visitors who engage in outdoor recreation. With public health resources already strained by pandemic, it will be critically important to prevent backcountry emergencies; and

WHEREAS, increased interest in visitation and discovery of our public land provides an opportunity to educate all Coloradans and visitors about backcountry safety and our State's strong outdoor ethos, which must be respected to maintain our healthy wildlife populations, enjoyable outdoor recreation opportunities, and economy; and

WHEREAS, a broad-based coalition of state agencies, public land managers, search and rescue volunteers and outdoor outfitters are united in encouraging outdoor enthusiasts to take a new Colorado Backcountry Winter Safety Pledge, committing themselves to three principles: Know Before You Go, Recreate Responsibly, and Care for Colorado; and

WHEREAS, this coalition will join in encouraging outdoor enthusiasts, particularly those new to the backcountry winter, to take safety classes, equip themselves properly, donate to Colorado Search and Rescue, and seek guidance from experienced friends, mentors or guides to reduce their exposure to risk; and

THEREFORE, I, Jared Polis, Governor of the State of Colorado, do hereby proclaim the week of December 7, 2020, as,

**COLORADO BACKCOUNTRY WINTER SAFETY AWARENESS WEEK.**