

@PLAY

Your daily survival guide to sports, recreation and outdoor news in Colorado's High Country

Livin' for the mud season

Can you smell it? The snow is coming. Call it mud season, shoulder season or off-season — it is here. The saying around here goes, "Come for the winters, stay for the summers."

This was true for me when I moved here nearly a decade ago from Ohio. I knew about the legendary winters of Colorado, staying



Drew Mikita
Dear Drewbie

because the summers are even radder, and now... I am "livin' for the mud season."

As Paul Steinweg and crew coined in their classic shoulder-season-embracing

YouTube video, titled "Livin' for the Mud Season": "It's the best time of year ... When the locals get their way." We get Colorado's playground to ourselves. What could be better?

I've made a concerted effort to officially define it as "two-for-one season" (Call it whatever you like). It's the month or so after leaf-peepers RV out of here and before the rest of the world rolls in for Thanksgiving and then again for about a month in May, except with much more actual mud.

In one of the greatest films ever, "Aspen Extreme," two Midwest 20-somethings pack up and move to chase their dreams in the Rocky Mountains. The boys have stayed a "season," anxiously awaiting the snow. Meanwhile, a lifelong local, hottie Robin Hand, professes love for the off-season. The boys were shocked, as many people are. You actually like mud season?

I love it! Yes, I am not waiting for "the season" to start. In fact, it drives me nuts when someone is asked how long they have lived in the county, and they respond in "seasons." As in one per year or four per year?

MUD SEASON JOYS AND DRAWBACKS

Mud season, loved and embraced by many, doesn't sit well with everyone. Others do not have such a welcoming attitude for this part of Earth's revolution. Why do I love it? Empty, beautiful trees, discount dining, limitless parking, my over-worked friends come out of hiding and, most importantly, everything seems slower.

The drawbacks to the fall mud season are significant. People admit to an overall funkiness that accompanies this time of year. When told of the dreariness (both in climate and in mood) that comes with mud season, tourists are shocked. They — and many of us — view this place as a hippie utopia — free from problems, where everything is sugar-plums, powder days and rainbows.

We know better. Our community always seems to be experiencing

This time of year, the High Country gets a bad rap, but there's no need to dread the dead time between summer and winter. Learn to fight the off-season blues.



GETTY IMAGES / MOODBOARD RF

Get outside and enjoy the mud season, Summit County!

tragedy in some way or another. This year seems to be particularly bad, with several substantial, shocking and horrifying losses in our community. I dread opening the Daily for fear of another catastrophe to one of our own. It hurts my soul.

BEATING THE MUD SEASON BLUES

With all this tragedy, the community is rightfully in a rut. I hate seeing us in a funk, so here are some tips to help with the common mud season blues.

Shift in economy

While the drop in mud-season economy is far less than in years past, many locals still lose jobs or battle with reduced hours, house hunting and income drops. Financial and housing worries can be some of the most difficult to deal with for people.

■ **Combat tool:** Being better about saving for mud season is key. Look for odd jobs. There is some employment out there — you just have to find it.

Excessive free time

This is not always the case for locals, as life never slows down! But, for many, minimal work, no ski runs and an exodus of friends can yield more free time. This is the greatest and most dangerous thing for people in the High Country. Playtime is plentiful — so is trouble time. DUIs, drug abuse and suicide all seem higher during mud season. When we don't have commitments, we find trouble.

■ **Combat tool:** Stay busy. Get outside, hike, bike, do yoga — anything outside. This place is even more beautiful with less people in it. You can also give back to your community and volunteer.

Substance abuse

It is easy to say, "Well, I don't have any plans today. Might as well get loaded!" While having fun, partying and raging are staples of many locals in mud season, substance use can often turn into dependence. Look at Dexter Rutecki in "Aspen Extreme" — his cocaine use got out of hand in mud-season.

■ **Combat tool:** Set limits on your use. Setting healthy boundaries (only drink two days a week, don't smoke unless you exercise, only have one beer at dinner, etc.) will minimize the risks of a problem. Be aware of your use.

Isolation

We have an amazing community, particularly in mud season. Yet, it is easy to isolate. Hiding away from friends can be dangerous, leading to a loss of connection, increased loneliness and

mental-health issues. It is normal, healthy and recommended to find time for you. However, too much can be a negative.

■ **Combat tool:** Find a balance between getting alone time and being social. I have made my best friends during mud season because it is much easier to get to know someone when life is less chaotic. Money can be tight, so dial up some of the amazing free activities with a friend, like hiking, enjoying a homemade cup of coffee on a mountainside, playing a game of cards on a deck or hitting up two-for-one restaurant specials. P.S.: Many people meet their spouses in mud season (insert purring kitty noise here).

Shorter, darker days

Seasonal Affective Disorder has probably been around forever and impacts most people to some extent. Our bodies are way more in tune with the seasons than we give credit, and this time of year seems to bring with it a big biological change. I feel dreary, funky and not at my best. The town almost appears to be in a multi-faceted funk.

The shorter, drearier days mean less exposure to sunlight, and that means lower Vitamin D production. Adult children and the school children get less outdoor playtime, so our bodies produce less natural serotonin, dopamine and endorphins. Taking away mountain people's endorphins is like taking away our powder — don't do it!

■ **Combat tool:** Again, be active! Get outside and play — however, whatever, whenever, wherever. "But it gets dark at 5 p.m. before I get home." I am sorry — do you live in Summit County without a headlamp? You are the one. Hiking in the evening is very spiritual and beautiful. "But it's rainy and muddy!" Are you kidding me? We moved and live here because we were the kids who played in puddles and got muddy.

Avoid the technology suck

It is easy to sit on the couch and be on a screen all day. This can lead to a really crappy mud season. Do you live in Colorado because of our great screens? Didn't think so.

■ **Combat tools:** Read a book, write a song, paint a picture, knit a hat, pick up a new hobby (May I suggest canning?). It's a great time to get your nerd on.

GENERAL WELLNESS STUFF

Eat healthy, get sleep (but don't be lazy), exercise, do yoga and make good choices — at least most of the time.

"Livin' for Mud Season" said it best: "The best time of year, and it only comes twice a year!" It is a matter of perspective, but we get Colorado's playground to ourselves, so start L-I-V-I-N for the mud season, Summit County!