



**PROTECTING AMERICA'S
WILDERNESS AND PUBLIC LANDS ACT**

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Sewemup Mesa

Overview

Colorado is home to some of the most unique and treasured landscapes in the country, and for many residents, these outdoor spaces are what make life here so special.

A recent [survey](#) by Colorado College found that 90% of Coloradans surveyed say they support the creation of more federally-protected areas, such as national parks and wildlife refuges, throughout the state, while 70% of respondents said they want their member of Congress to focus on conserving more of the state's public lands for conservation and recreation, instead of for energy development.

“Colorado is known for its treasured landscapes and abundance of natural resources. Protecting our public lands is not only essential to our state’s overall economy, it’s essential to preserving our renowned way of life.”
– Rep. Diana DeGette

Colorado’s public lands provide more than just a unique place to visit, they are a major economic driver for our state’s economy.

According to the Colorado Office of Economic Development and International Trade, Colorado’s outdoor recreation industry generates \$37 billion in consumer spending each year in our state and supports 511,000 jobs.

Without our public lands, this massive industry would not exist. And to ensure that some of Colorado’s most treasured landscapes remain protected – and available – for generations to come, U.S. Rep. Diana DeGette (D-CO) has introduced legislation to permanently protect nearly 3 million acres of land across the U.S. – including more than 1 million acres in Colorado.

Included in DeGette’s legislation – known as the Protecting America’s Wilderness and Public Lands Act – is a bill DeGette has been championing for more than two decades to protect 36 unique areas across Colorado. If approved, DeGette’s legislation would finally give these areas the permanent protection they deserve and ensure they remain available – an untouched – for many years to come.

While Colorado currently has more than 3,500,000 acres of land designated as wilderness, much of it is at higher elevations and includes many of the alpine landscapes that our state is so famous for.

DeGette’s bill seeks to protect more of Colorado’s mid-elevation ecosystems that provide valuable habitats for a staggering variety of plants and wildlife – and that have often been overlooked by previous Congressional efforts to designate new wilderness areas in the state.

The Benefits of Wilderness

Backcountry Recreation

- Wilderness provides a diverse and unique range of landscapes – free of any motorized vehicles or commercial development – for hikers, equestrians, rafters, kayakers, hunters, anglers, mountaineers and climbers to enjoy.

Economic Benefits

- Wilderness pays dividends for nearby local communities. Protected public lands increase nearby property values, help attract new businesses and residents, and support direct tourism businesses. Outdoor recreation generates \$28 billion in consumer spending each year for our state and is responsible for 229,000 jobs that pay \$9.7 billion in salaries and wages.

Biological Diversity

- Untouched wilderness areas provide undisturbed refuge to rare and endangered species. Many endangered species, such as the canyon tree frog, kit fox, kachina daisy and sage grouse depend on these areas for their survival. They also provide critical winter range for big game herds of elk, mule deer and bighorn sheep.

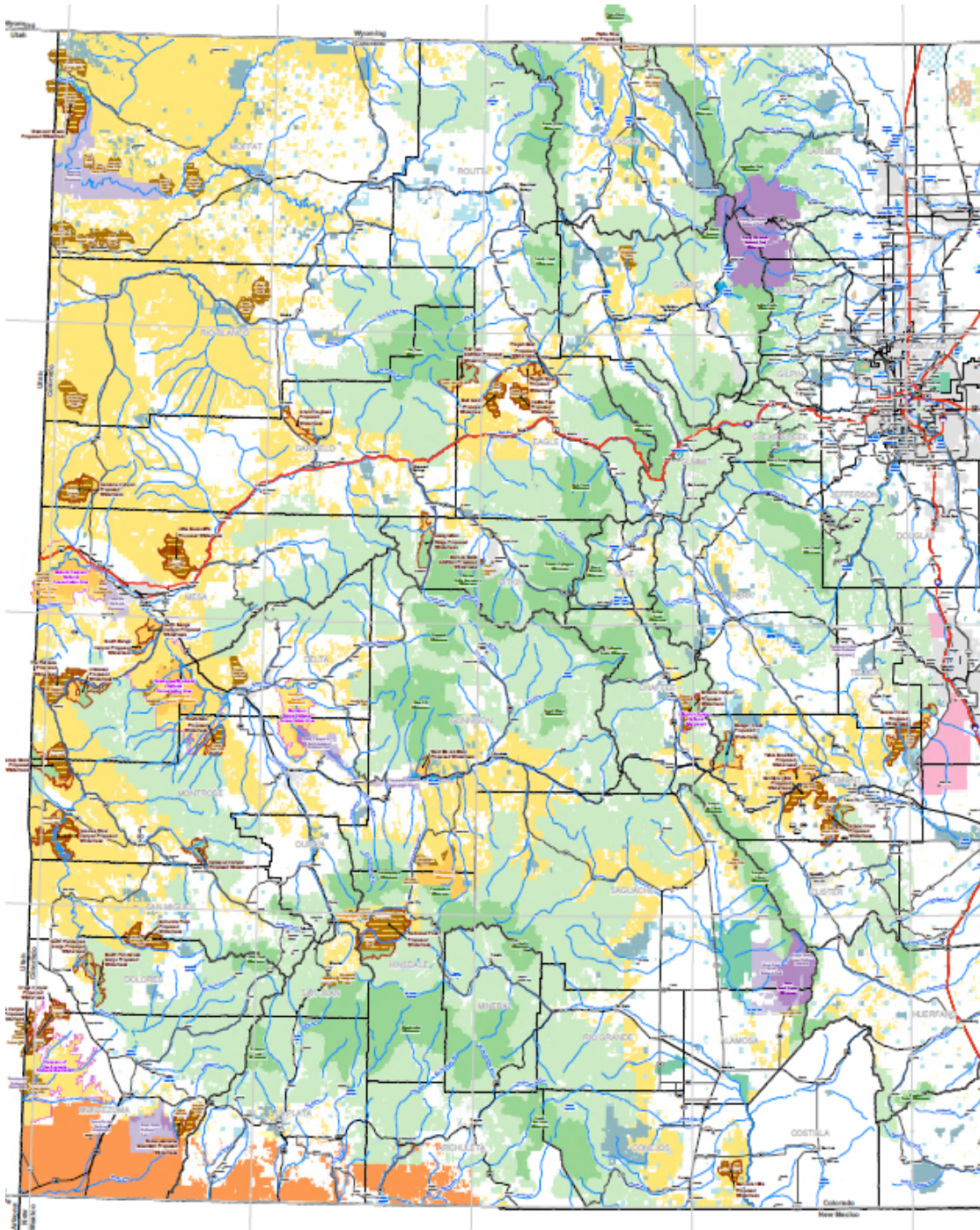
Clean Water

- Wilderness helps maintain the quality of our rivers and drinking water by protecting watersheds from damaging activities that often remove vegetation, erode topsoil and leach minerals into our streams.



Hikers at Little Bookcliffs Proposed Wilderness (left); Snaggletooth Proposed Wilderness (right)

Map of Proposed Protections



Proposed Protection Areas

Title I of the Protecting America's Wilderness and Public Lands Act incorporates the 36 areas that were originally included in DeGette's Colorado Wilderness Act. These areas, which make

up approximately **660,000** acres of the total land that would be permanently protected under the bill, include:

Assignment Ridge – 19,240 acres

Assignment Ridge is home to a diverse wildlife population including elk, bear, mountain lion, wild turkey and others, as well as providing much of the regions domestic and agricultural supply. The area is lush with cottonwood, ponderosa pine, scrub oak, pinyon-juniper, Douglas fir, and aspen, all of which wildlife call home. It is a popular spot for recreational activities including hiking, ice and rock climbing, and skiing.

Badger Creek – 23,116 acres

Badger Creek is perhaps most notable because of the lack of human impact. The people who do make it to Badger Creek find a pristine habitat for bighorn sheep, black bears, mountain lions, and a litany of other species that live in the shadows of the Sangre de Cristo range. The area also serves as winter forage and winter range for the bald eagle. In addition, as one of very few spring-fed waterways in Colorado, Badger Creek provides consistent moisture to the ecosystem and supports a healthy population of trout and a happy population of fishermen.



Badger Creek (Photo Credit: Kate Spinelli)

Bangs Canyon North – 13,351 acres

High desert plateaus and canyons form the landscape of this proposed area. It is increasingly hard to find impressive wild recreation areas in such close proximity to an urban center, but Bangs Canyon remains one of those treasures just outside of Grand Junction. The area offers views of red rock mesas and, at the right time, blooming cacti. Among the species of cacti is the Uinta basin hookless cactus, which is endemic to the area and receives protection under the Endangered Species Act. The land also supports bighorn sheep and its waters support rainbow trout.

Bangs Canyon South- 5,144

Just below Bangs Canyon North, you'll find this area surrounded by the same high desert plateaus and canyons that make this a well-known climbing and recreation spot. Similarly, the land supports bighorn sheep, rainbow trout, and Uinta basin hookless cactus.

Beaver Creek – 35,251 acres

Beaver Creek, positioned within the Pikes Peak Massif area, is nestled among a number of wilderness areas and state parks. The biodiversity of the area ranges from junipers at lower levels to Douglas fir, aspen, and ponderosa at higher elevations. The creek runs year-round and provides recreation opportunities to residents of nearby Colorado Springs and surrounding communities. A characteristic feature is the two canyons of the East and West Beaver Creeks, which come together at the edge of the area.

Browns Canyon – 17,922 acres

Browns Canyon, in addition to being a popular location for recreational activities such as hiking, fishing, and rafting, is also important for paleo-climatological research. Due to changes in the climate and other events, a variety of endemic plant life such as, Brandegee's buckwheat, Fendler's Townsend-daisy, Fendler's cloak-fern, Livermore fiddle-leaf, and Front Range alumroot. Additionally, the area is rich with animal species of all varieties including raptors like peregrine falcons, prairie falcons, and golden eagles, as well as mammals such as mountain lions, bighorn sheep, elk, mule deer, bobcat, red and gray fox, black bear coyote, and several others.



Browns Canyon (Photo Credit: Bob Wick)

Bull Gulch – 14,886 acres

The landscape of Bull Gulch demonstrates the Colorado River's beautiful transition from alpine forests to desert canyons. While the Colorado River never crosses into the area, it provides the defining boundary. Sandstone formations dominate the scenic horizon of an area known for populations of sage grouse, elk, and mountain lion. The area also serves birders interested in bald eagles and prairie falcons. In addition to the natural beauty, the area offers culturally relevant sites such as ancient campgrounds with lithic scatter.



Bull Gulch (Photo Credit: Jon Fielder)

Castle Peak – 12,016 acres

With elevations ranging from 8,400 to more than 11,000 feet, this area features dramatic mountain scenery and a breadth and depth of conservation and recreation potential. Because it receives more precipitation than many areas in Colorado, Castle Peak is able to provide forage for both cattle grazing and healthy populations of elk and deer. The elk and deer in turn provide ample hunting opportunities that are accessible to the Front Range, as this area is just miles from Interstate 70. Recreation is not limited to hunting; trails wind their way through the area for hikers and horseback riders.

Cross Canyon – 24,475 acres

The contrast of rising mesas and steep canyons outline the scenery in Cross Canyon. The area features pinyon-juniper woodlands and a full slate of birds, including sage and jays. But beyond its natural beauty, Cross Canyon deserves recognition because of its historical and cultural significance. The area was inhabited by the Anasazi people between 450 and 1300 and their presence is well-preserved in Cross Canyon. In fact, the area has the densest collection of cultural artifacts anywhere in America. In some parts, there are over 100 sites per square mile.

Demaree Canyon – 25,624 acres

The rugged canyons of this area are some of the most intricate and interesting geology of Western Colorado. A combination of sandstone, clay, and shales, create a dazzling area of colors. The arid ecosystem supports mule deer, and predators including mountain lions, bobcat, and coyotes. This secluded area is perfect for people looking to experience solitude in the wilderness.

Diamond Breaks- 32,535 acres

The WSA consists of the broken, mountainous land mass known as Diamond Mountain, part of the eastern extension of the Uinta Range. A dominant feature of the area is a series of northeast-southwest trending mountain peaks with ridges, steep draws, and canyons draining

north and south. This series of colorful, rugged red sandstone ridges “break” toward the Green River to the north in Browns Park. The diverse vegetative communities range from sagebrush and pinyon-juniper woodlands to aspen, mountain brush, Douglas fir, limber pine, and Ponderosa pine forests. Significant cultural resources such as rock art, granaries, rock shelters, and lithic scatter sites related to prehistoric and historic occupation can be found in the WSA.

Dolores River Canyon – 33,351 acres

The Dolores River Canyon boasts towering red cliffs that shepherd the Dolores River before its confluence with the Colorado River. At points, the canyon rim rises more than 1,000 feet above the river. Important species, including the endangered peregrine falcon, the golden and bald eagles, and the river otter call the area home. In early summer, several thousand rafters come through Dolores Canyon, and other recreationists include hikers and kayakers.

Flat Tops Addition – 16,101 acres

The Flat Tops encompasses a multitude of different types of terrain. From sweeping valleys to sharp peaks, the Flat Tops area is a stunning Colorado emblem that incorporates the best of what Colorado nature has to offer. With over lakes and ponds sprinkled throughout the area, it is a popular destination for fishing. The mountains that comprise Flat Tops today are a result of ancient volcanic activity that has had a lasting impact on the area. The land itself is home to moose, elk, and deer and is an area that is also rich in the diversity of its vegetation.

Grand Hogback – 10,282 acres

As the dividing geological feature between Colorado’s Plateau and the beginning of the southern Rocky Mountains, the Grand Hogback lives up to its name. The ridge provides the perfect environment for both the adventure-seeker and wildlife, supporting a thriving ski community and flourishing elk population. The Grand Hogback is one of the only geomorphic features of its kind in North America, its continuity and distinctive ridges make it a valued natural phenomenon.

Grape Creek – 32,884 acres

Grape Creek is a secluded and serene body of water that flows into the Wet Mountain Valley of southern Colorado. This creek is responsible for nearly all the snowmelt that comes through this valley, creating a lush habitat with diverse vegetation and wildlife. Grape Creek above all is a destination for fisherman. It has few points of access, and can be successfully fished throughout numerous seasons due to the low elevation of the Valley. These factors create a pristine environment that is a haven for both fish and fisherman alike, a true example of sustainable Colorado recreation.

Handies Peak – 26,734 acres

With breathtaking vistas and an impressive elevation of 14,048 feet at the summit, the Handies Peak Wilderness area is one of Colorado’s crowning gems. As the area boasts of a trademark fourteener, glacial ponds, canyons, and waterfalls its geomorphic individuality is indisputable. Beyond the impressive land features however, the area is also home to a diverse crop of vegetation and wildlife. This wildlife is including but not limited to elk, black bear, deer, and

bighorn sheep. Animals are not the only ones who flock to Handies, as adventures come from all over to revel in and enjoy the beauty of this Colorado wonder.



Handies Peak (Photo Credit: Bob Wick)

Little Bookcliffs – 28,279 acres

As the only Wild Horse Range in Colorado Plateau province, the Little Bookcliffs Range is clearly unique. Beyond just a sanctuary for wild horses, this land is home to an array of wildlife. Animals such as deer, bobcats, mountain lions, elk and bears all inhabit the stunning Colorado Plateau. Characterized by its sweeping vistas that are dotted with numerous types of vegetation but particularly the juniper plant, the Little Book Cliffs Wild Horse Range is a beautiful and functional paradise in northwest Colorado.

Maroon Bells Addition – 316 acres

The Maroon Bells are noted to be the most photographed place in all of Colorado. Photographs however, are unable to truly capture the majesty of this geologic wonder. The results of 300 million years of geologic erosion, the Bells are works of art that have inspired adventurers for generations. With 14,000 foot peaks and reflective glacial pools the Maroon Bells are an ideal destination for fisherman, hikers, and anyone who enjoys a beautiful view. The valley hosts a variety of animals such as moose and deer. The area is a stunning landscape that encapsulates Colorado's natural wonder, the staggering peaks, clear water, and fields of wildflowers all drawing people from near and far. This addition on Eagle Mountain will help define the existing wilderness along topographical contours.

McIntyre Hills – 16,481 acres

Rugged and underdeveloped natural land is becoming rare in the modern world. The McIntyre Hills area is an exception. It has remained relatively untouched, and consists mostly of semiarid vegetation. The dense nature of the vegetation makes this land an attractive destination for cross country hikers, horseback riders, and backpackers. The area also is home to a distinct array of wildlife that includes elk, black bear, mountain lion, and wild turkey. Geologically, McIntyre Hills features continuous area of canyons and rolling hills.

McKenna Peak – 21,220 acres

The McKenna Peak Proposed Wilderness area is a distinctive and stunning feature of Colorado's landscape. The vista boasts a photo-worthy sandstone peak that rises an impressive 2,000 feet directly above the plains. Surrounded by eroded adobe and other sediments localized to the southwestern region, the land itself is a treasure to paleontologists who have found fossils within its soil. It is host to a number of animal species, including elk, antelopes, mountain lion, and the majestic bald eagle. The Proposed Wilderness Area offers sharp changes in elevation from the plains to the peak, enabling all sorts of adventure activities within this diverse and striking area.

Norwood Canyon – 12,102 acres

With majestic views of the La Sal Utah Mountains, the Norwood Canyon serves as one of Colorado's best rafting sites. The San Miguel River rushes through the canyon, passing through momentous granite passageways and past sandstone towers. The rapids are beloved by adventurers and explorers and home to a variety of aquatic creatures. The area serves as the only western Colorado riparian woodland with water birch as the main component. Norwood canyon is a unique gem distinctive for its "ledge" cliffs and lush landscape.

Papoose Canyon- 4,782 acres

Papoose Canyon WSA includes two beautiful, steep, and winding canyons eroded into the uplifted Morrison Formation and Dakota Sandstone. Due to the arid nature of the area, sparsely vegetated canyon slopes reveal exposed rock outcrops and steep talus slopes. Numerous tributary canyons merge into the main canyons. Vegetation includes pinyon-juniper, sagebrush, mormon tea, mountain mahogany, rabbitbrush, cliffrose, antelope bitterbrush, Naturita milkvetch, cottonwood, tamarisk, saltbrush, sedges, rushes, and cattails. Fauna includes black bear, mountain lion, coyote, gray fox, bobcat, beaver, badger, long-tailed weasel, golden eagles, owls, and various other raptors. Exposed stratigraphy reveals the geologic processes of the Jurassic and Cretaceous periods; the Morrison Formation is rich in fossilized plants and vertebrates. The reminders of the Ancestral Puebloan culture, such as lithic sites, masonry dwellings, and food storage structures are found within the area and date from six to 20 centuries ago. Activities include hiking, backpacking, horseback riding, hunting, rock climbing, and photography.

Pisgah Mountain East– 7,376 acres

The rugged, wild terrain known as Pisgah Mountain in Central Colorado is perfect for visitors yearning to explore the areas rich history of gold mining or lush landscape. Once home to the Ute tribe, the mountain now includes two grazing allotments. Despite the grazing facilities, the

land remains quite remote with expansive wild mammals and thriving vegetation. The soil is some of the state's most fertile due to the mountain's location in the Central Colorado Volcanic Field. Home to some of the state's most prized scenic views, Pisgah Mountain is emblematic of Colorado in its most natural form with flourishing wildlife, breathtaking views, and a rich plant-life.

Pisgah Mountain West- 6,828

Characterized by the same rugged terrain, Pisgah Mountain West is full of history and lush vegetation. The area is perfect for hiking, backpacking, and horseback riding—just make sure you have your GPS!

Platte River Addition – 31 acres

This small addition to the existing Platte River Wilderness would preserve the North Gate Canyon. This scenic, rushing whitewater canyon is popular among rafters and fisherman. The area is primarily steep, rocky hillside covered by Douglas fir, pinyon-juniper, and sagebrush.

Ponderosa Gorge North– 10,884 acres

Ponderosa Gorge North, a launching area for backpackers heading into the Chemehuevi Mountains, is a multifunctional outdoor arena. The area serves hikers, horseback riders, and campers, providing all guests with exquisite views of the mountainous surrounding region. Referred to as the “Southwest Secret” of Colorado, the area includes lush meadows of wildflowers, the commanding Dolores River, rocky Ponderosa Gorge. Ponderosa Gorge is famous to visitors for its wild rapids that are sure to give visitors a thrilling adventure.

Ponderosa Gorge South- 12,393 acres

Perhaps best known for its boating opportunities, Ponderosa Gorge is also a great area for backpacking, hiking and other wilderness activities. This truly is the “secret of the Southwest.”

Redcloud Peak – 38,217 acres

With an elevation just over 14,000 feet and as one of Colorado's famous fourteeners, Redcloud Peak yields stunning views of red-topped peaks and lush green valleys. The peak, regarded as one of Colorado's quintessential mountain views, connects by saddle to its sister mountain, the Sunshine Peak. The Umcompahgre fritillary butterfly, an endangered species, has been found to only exist on the Redcloud and Uncampahgre peaks in Colorado. The land hides many other treasures, including aquifers providing locals with drinkable water. Along with many other animals, the peaks are famously home to a thriving population of big-horn sheep.

Roubideau – 17,587 acres

Home to a striking array of animals, the Roubideau lower desert canyon is rich in wildlife. The diverse assortment includes black bears, deer, bobcats, mountain lions, and golden eagles. This ecologically dense region includes rare vistas, riparian areas, and occasional streams. The red and orange rock is covered in expansive foliage, providing visitors with breathtaking views. The land spans from the Sonoran desert to the subalpine forest, enriching the canyon with a massive variety of plant and animal life as well as unique geomorphic structures.

San Luis Hills – 10,527 acres

The San Luis Hills are rolling hills in the middle of the otherwise flat and arid San Luis Valley. The dry climate limits vegetation, but it is enough to sustain wildlife including deer and antelope as well as a variety of songbirds and raptors. The hills boast breathtaking views that attract hikers, climbers, and horseback riders. Keen eyes often spot the Sage Sparrow, a common patron of the always-blue Colorado Sky.

Sewemup Mesa – 37,637 acres

With stunning views of the Dolores River cradled by steep sandstone, the Sewemup Mesa is a beloved favorite of hikers. Surrounded by 1,000 foot cliffs on three sides, the mesa is covered in towering Ponderosa pines. The land, home to elk, mountain lions, deer, provides much-needed nesting areas for the Golden eagle and endangered Peregrine falcon. In the winter, bald eagles swarm to the cliffs edges to create nests from the Ponderosa pine needles. Sewemup Mesa's majestic views, thriving foliage, and spiky cliffs are deeply valued by nature lovers and explorers.

Table Mountain – 23,559 acres

Together with McIntyre Hills to the south, Table Mountain comprises one of the steepest Arkansas River canyons. Table Mountain acts as a wildlife corridor along the Arkansas River and to other regions to its north, and it also serves as the home and nesting ground to a variety of raptors, including bald eagles in the winter. There is also a broad array of habitat in the area of Table Mountain including arid shrubland, woodlands, and meadows. This allows a variety of animal life to inhabit the area including the aforementioned raptors, as well as bighorn sheep, mountain lion, coyote, elk, deer, rattlesnake, among others. The area also offers opportunities for recreational activities such as hiking, horseback riding, and rock climbing.



Table Mountain (Photo Credit: Kate Spinelli)

The Palisade – 26,624 acres

Palisade, home to the rare Great Basin Silverspot butterfly, rests approximately 60 miles south of Grand Junction. The area offers magnificent views of both mountainous regions and the

plains, making this the ideal location for hikers, climbers, and explorers. The region includes both desert and mountainous areas, including Ponderosa and Juniper forests. The valley area is shadowed by commanding red cliffs that tower above, exemplifying the beauty of sedimentary rock.



The Palisade (Photo Credit: John Fielder)

Unaweep – 19,776 acres

This area encompasses the deepest portions of Unaweep Canyon, with steep granite cliffs contributing to a dramatic elevation drops. Unaweep acreage benefits from a woodland mix of pinyon-juniper and aspens to create scenic vistas. The area is frequented by large wildlife such as black bears and mountain lion as well as deer and elk. Many outdoor enthusiasts value the area for its hiking, backpacking, and horseback riding opportunities.

Weber-Menefee Mountain – 14,270 acres

Renowned for its sandstone cliffs and widespread Juniper, Douglas Fir, Ponderosa, and Mountain Mahogany forests, the Weber-Menefee Mountain is a diverse landscape in Southwest Colorado. The land, practically untouched by modern-man, serves as a wildlife haven for deer, big-horn sheep, mountain lion, black bear, and many other woodland creatures. The Mexican Spotted Owl, a rare breed in North American, nests along the rugged hills. The mountain calls all adventurers to experience the scenic vistas, hiking, horseback-riding, exploring.

West Elk Addition – 6,695 acres

Located in Gunnison National Forest, the West Elk wilderness isn't frequented by humans, except during the autumn hunting season, when there is an overabundance of elk and deer. Additionally, there are many valleys that contain ponds that are home to beavers and surrounded by trees. Given the secluded nature of the area, hiking and backpacking are another recreational activity popular in the West Elk Wilderness.

Supporters

DeGette's Colorado Wilderness Act of 2021, which has been incorporated into DeGette's larger public lands protection package, known as the Protecting America's Wilderness and Public Lands Act, is supported by some of the nation's leading local and national public lands groups, including:

- Sierra Club
- Conservation Colorado
- Wild Connections
- Outdoor Alliance
- San Juan Citizens Alliance
- Mountain West Strategies
- Colorado Mountain Club
- The Wilderness Society

Here's what some of those groups are saying about the bill:

"Colorado Mountain Club is pleased to see the re-introduction of the Colorado Wilderness Act which protects a variety of landscapes, from west-slope deserts to San Juan peaks, for natural resources and primitive recreation. The bill codifies some long-standing Wilderness Study areas in remote Northwest Colorado, as well as iconic mountain vistas in the Southwest part of the state." – **Julie Mach, Conservation Director, Colorado Mountain Club**

"Wild Connections board and members are greatly pleased to see Congresswoman Diana DeGette reintroduce the Colorado Wilderness Act (CWA). These are primarily rugged and scenic lower-to-mid-elevation areas and ecosystems that are currently underrepresented in Colorado's wildernesses. All of the areas in the bill are most deserving of Wilderness designation. We are especially pleased that it would offer protection to the remarkable wild values found in six of the bill's proposed wildernesses in Eastern Colorado--Beaver Creek, Grape Creek, McIntyre Hills, Table Mountain, Badger Creek, and the Browns Canyon National Monument. With ever increasing development pressure on Colorado's wild lands, the protections afforded by the CWA become more valuable." – **John Sztukowski, Conservation Director, Wild Connections**

"The Colorado Wilderness Act importantly offers protection to some of the wildest regions in Colorado that are also most at risk from the Trump Administration's relentless assault on America's public lands. I've been intensively engaged in advocacy on behalf of these wildlands for over 30 years, and have had the great privilege of visiting a number of these areas with Rep. DeGette." – **Mark Pearson, Executive Director, San Juan Citizens Alliance (Durango)**

"Colorado's BLM lands mark a grand transition in the American landscape from the southern Rockies to the Colorado Plateau. Places like Roubideau, Castle Peak, and The Palisade are not only prime examples of high desert and canyon country, but critical wildlife habitat, and the kind

*of natural places that will only grow more critical over time. But only if we have the foresight and vision to protect them now. As someone who have live surrounded by, found solace in, and worked to defend and support these lands for over two decades, I remain committed to seeing them protected by Congress. I applaud Rep. DeGette for her leadership, and for introducing this legislation today.” – **Pete Kolbenschlag, Mountain West Strategies***