

Canyon Country Wilderness Plan Spawns Legislation Protecting Areas Statewide

Six *Wild Ten* areas included in new wilderness legislation

~John Stansfield, Wilderness Chair

The Colorado Canyon Country Wilderness Proposal, sweeping through rapids in the famed Browns Canyon reach of the Arkansas River, where rafters are dwarfed by the forested slopes and rocky towers that flank the river. Birds, large and small, soar overhead. Red, ochre, and gray hues in stone are set off by the varied greens of pines, oaks, and riverside grasses. Splashes of buff and white in the rocks might be bighorn sheep, which inhabit the canyon year-round.

Each year more than 100,000 people float through Browns Canyon on the Arkansas River; the most heavily rafted in the United States. The public lands flanking the Arkansas add considerable value to the visitor experience and economic benefit generated there. As valuable a resource as it is, the 20,000-acre Browns Canyon citizens' proposed wilderness encompasses only a small portion of a huge, unprotected, treasure trove of wild lands—the Colorado Canyon Country Wilderness Proposal (CCCWP.)

CCCWP includes 62 areas statewide, totaling 1.65 million acres of pristine Colorado, composed mostly of lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management. Also part of the wilderness proposal are high-quality national forest and state lands adjoining some of the BLM parcels. Included in CCCWP are many of the state's most beautiful and most ecologically diverse regions. The diversity ranges from low elevations, as in far western Colorado's Dolores River Canyons, to Colorado's highest elevations, such as 14,000-foot Handies Peak in the San Juan Mountains.

Six of the CCCWP areas are located in the spectacular Arkansas River Canyon between Buena Vista and Pueblo. Browns Canyon, McIntyre Hills, Grape Creek, and Beaver Creek are included, along with new additions Badger Creek and Table Mtn.

"The lower elevation lands, as in the Arkansas Canyon, provide exceptional recreation opportunities and wildlife habitat when the higher mountains are under snow," said Kurt Kunkle of the Colorado Environmental Coalition. "All 62 areas are begging to be protected from the bite of the bulldozer, the ATV, and the drill rig."

Updated and expanded from wilderness inventories dating back to the 1970s, CCCWP has a fresh and informative new look online at www.canyoncountrywilderness.org. An overview of each proposed wilderness features a map and scenic photo keyed to a narrative detailing wilderness qualities, natural resource information, and boundary issues. A hardcopy version of CCCWP is forthcoming.

Check out our website, <http://www.rmc.sierraclub.org/ppg/Wilderness.html> for the rest of the story!



Chair's Corner by Jane Ard-Smith, PPG Chair

As another year begins, the Conservation Committee will be setting the Pikes Peak Group's conservation priorities for the coming year. In previous years, our conservation priorities have included the Pikes Peak Highway, Wilderness Protection, and Mining. I suspect that those priorities will again be among our top issues – especially since we have activists who are passionate about and involved in each of those issues.

This year, I'm advocating that Energy/Climate Change be added as one of our top five priorities. In 2007, I spent a great deal of my time advocating for and promoting renewable energy and energy efficiency. I plan to continue that effort in the coming year – and I'd like the Pikes Peak Group to make it a priority as well.

You may be wondering why we set conservation priorities and what it means for the group. Basically, the Conservation Committee uses the group conservation priorities to allocate our time and evaluate what issues to tackle over the coming year. In some cases, our priorities reflect an ongoing commitment by the Sierra Club— such as restoration of the wetlands on the Pikes Peak Highway. In other cases, our conservation priorities guide our issue committees in focusing their work. We also use the conservation priorities to identify speakers for our general meetings.

As we begin our priority assessment, we'd appreciate hearing your opinion - what conservation issues are important to the Pikes Peak area? Please share your thoughts with Jim Lockhart, jlock@datawest.net, or me, jane.ard-smith@lexisnexis.com.

NATIONAL WINTER TRAILS DAY 2008 January 12, 10a.m.—2 p.m.

The Sierra Club is one of several local groups involved in this national celebration, to be held this year at Fox Run Regional Park. This FREE event, put on by El Paso County Parks, is for all ages and abilities. Experts will be on hand to share information on snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, trails, safety, and more. BYO skis or snowshoes and hit the trails while you're there! Hot cocoa and refreshments will be served in the new warming hut. Reservations are encouraged, call Bear Creek Nature Center at 719-520-6387. You can also check out www.wintertrails.org for more information on this and other CO Winter Trails events.

