

History of the Colorado's Canyon Country Wilderness Proposal

1964 Passage of the Wilderness Act

The National Park Service and the U.S. Forest Service, but not the Bureau of Land Management, were directed by the original Wilderness Act to undertake studies of lands under their jurisdiction and make recommendations to Congress about which lands should be placed in the National Wilderness Preservation System. Congress reserved to itself the final decision as to the designation of wilderness areas. Only five areas in Colorado were designated with the enactment of the original 1964 Act — Rawah, Mount Zirkel, Maroon Bells, West Elks, and La Garita. (720,553 acres)

1970s National Park Service and U.S. Forest Service complete required wilderness inventories and reports
In Colorado, both the National Park Service and the U.S. Forest Service completed the required wilderness studies and reports during the 1970s.

1973 One of the first citizen wilderness proposals completed for a Rattlesnake Canyon Primitive Area, located on Bureau of Land Management lands.

1975 Weminuche and Flat Tops wildernesses designated (723,424 acres)

1976 Eagles Nest, Black Canyon, Mesa Verde, and Great Sand Dunes wildernesses designated (232,635 acres)

1976 Congress passed the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA)
FLPMA for the first time placed BLM on equal footing with the Forest Service. In FLPMA, Congress stated that it was the policy of the United States to retain ownership of the hundreds of millions of acres of BLM public lands throughout the West, and directed BLM to conduct a thorough review of its lands and make recommendations about the wilderness suitability of those lands to Congress by 1993.

1978 Hunter-Fryingpan and Indian Peak wildernesses designated (158,737 acres)

1980 The majority of Colorado wilderness set aside in legislation, with the culmination of the Forest Service Roadless Area Review and Evaluation II and in follow-up 1993 legislation. Legislation designated 14 new wilderness areas.

1980 Less than 800,000 acres identified as wilderness study areas by BLM
Colorado BLM completed review of the public lands under the authority of FLPMA and designated 54 Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs) with 772,000 acres. BLM manages 8.3 million acres of public lands in Colorado.

History of the Colorado's Canyon Country Wilderness Proposal (continued)

1980-1991 BLM Makes Wilderness Recommendation

BLM field offices around Colorado conducted exhaustive reviews of potential wilderness areas, and after considering alternative uses for them such as mining and water projects, finally proposed approximately 400,000 acres, or just five percent of BLM land in Colorado, for designation as wilderness. Colorado BLM officials forwarded their recommendations to the President in October, 1991 and President Bush submitted the recommendations to the Congress.

Colorado citizen groups conduct field studies separate from BLM.

1993 Designation of 9 new wilderness areas (427,098 acres)

1994 Publication of Citizens Wilderness Proposal

Citizens initially published their 1980s-era citizen wilderness inventories in a 1994 proposal released as the Citizens' Wilderness Proposal for BLM Lands (CWP). Whereas the Colorado BLM recommended only 395,792 acres for wilderness designation, this first citizens' proposal recommended wilderness designation for approximately 1.3 million acres of BLM lands.

1990s Colorado citizens groups, now under the umbrella of the Colorado Wilderness Network, continue their field inventory efforts

1999 Gunnison Gorge wilderness designated (17,700 acres)

2000 Black Ridge Canyons and Spanish Peaks wildernesses designated (93,294 acres)

2001 Colorado Wilderness Network Updates and Re-Issues CWP

After several years of inventorying additional BLM roadless lands and holding public meetings across western Colorado, citizens unveiled proposals for another 17 areas totaling 245,519 acres. These areas were consolidated with the original 1994 Citizens Wilderness Proposal and comprise the present proposal.

2002 James Peak wilderness designated (14,000 acres)

Colorado Wilderness Act of 2002 introduced by Congresswoman Diana DeGette

The bill included new Citizens' Proposed Wilderness areas, and recommends about 1.2 million acres of BLM lands, or about 15% of BLM surface, to be designated Wilderness.