

Colorado's Canyon Country Wilderness Proposal

Castle Peak

11,275-foot Castle Peak, eight miles north of Eagle and prominently visible from I-70 east of Wolcott, is aptly named because the underlying sandstone resembles a castle. The summit is the eastern high point of a plateau which caps a narrow half-mile long ridge and gives a marvelous feeling of isolation and provides stunning panoramic views.

Hal Sundin, Glenwood Springs

Citizens Wilderness Proposal: 16,263 acres
BLM Wilderness Study Area: 12,237 acres
BLM Field Office: Glenwood Springs Field Office (Glenwood Springs)
Location: Castle Peak is located six miles north of Eagle in Eagle County.

Wilderness Qualities

Castle Peak has an unusual place among Wilderness Study Areas in Colorado as one of a few that spans the mid-level elevations from 8,000-11,000 feet. Unlike many WSAs, it receives abundant precipitation. Castle Peak supports a large range of plant and animal habitat, from the mixed sage and grasslands on its extreme east side, through park-like openings intermixed with aspen groves, to spruce-fir forest with trees of substantial size at the highest elevations. The combination of lush forage, edge effects, and deeply wooded shelter make the proposed wilderness ideal for elk, deer, grouse, and raptors. The area offers superb summer range for 400 elk and 1,000 deer. Due to the abundant game, hunting is a popular recreational activity in Castle Peak.

In parts of Castle Peak, old vehicle ways create a trail network through the often chest-high grasses and downed timber. Castle Peak itself is not only a visual reference point for the whole area, but interesting in its own right as an outlier of volcanic rock similar in age and origin to that covering the Flat Tops. The expanded boundaries of the proposed wilderness add additional variety by including more of the sage-grass environment.

Castle Peak's location four miles from I-70 at the Wolcott exit, places it within easy driving distance of the Front Range, an added bonus for tourism and recreation.

Based on new information provided to BLM by citizen groups, BLM conducted additional field inventory

work in 1998 on approximately 4,000 acres adjacent to the WSA's northern and eastern boundaries. These adjacent lands include elk calving areas, streams, lakes, scenic forests and meadows. As a result of its field work, BLM agreed that essentially all of the adjacent 4,000 acres is roadless. One vehicle routes was cherrystemmed to allow continued vehicular use.

Resource Information

Castle Peak is heavily timbered, with 5,450 acres of spruce-fir and 3,640 acres of Douglas fir potentially available for logging. However, only 6,600 board feet of timber could be harvested annually on a sustained yield basis, a tiny fraction of the harvest available from the surrounding White River National Forest.



Wetlands area in the Castle Peak CWP. (John Fielder)

No saleable minerals are known to exist within the proposed wilderness and no mining claims or mineral leases are located within the WSA. The area is assumed to be uneconomic for energy minerals and no known appropriate geologic structures underlie the area.

Livestock graze in the area in spring, summer, and fall, but the lush vegetation is able to support them without apparent degradation of other resources.

Castle Peak is a headwaters area with the exception of a tiny portion of Castle Creek which flows into the area along the western boundary. Some water diversions exist within the area. On Alkali Creek, within the boundary, a 7-cfs diversion fills an 80 acrefoot stock reservoir. Similarly, a 2-cfs diversion and two small reservoirs are filled from Castle Creek within the WSA. Finally, two diversions take 7.9 cfs and 6 cfs from Catamount Creek near the wilderness boundary.



Grassy hillsides in the mid-elevation portion of Castle Peak.

out to follow two existing and frequently used jeep roads and section lines will include additional forest and grasslands habitat, and give old scars from past grazing activities a chance to heal.

Boundary Issues

Castle Peak is surrounded on all sides by parcels of private land, thus limiting opportunities for expansion of the WSA boundaries to accommodate natural topographic boundaries. However, citizens propose a 3,996-acre addition on the northeastern side of Castle Peak where the WSA boundary apparently follows an irregular fence line. Moving the boundary



The striking volcanic formation of Castle Peak. (John Fielder)

Castle Peak Proposed Wilderness Area

Glenwood Springs Field Office

July 1, 2006

