

Colorado's Canyon Country Wilderness Proposal

Deep Creek

Deep Creek is a classic Colorado Wilderness, combining dramatically precipitous and towering canyon walls two-thousand feet high, deep stands of conifers, dancing groves of aspen, grassy creekside meadows, and sweeping expanses of prairie-like alpine uplands, all woven together by a wild and sparkling stream that cascades through countless pools and falls on its untrammelled way to the mighty Colorado River.

Steve Smith, Glenwood Springs

Citizens Wilderness Proposal: 20,843 acres
BLM Wilderness Study Area: not studied
BLM Field Office: Grand Junction Field Office (Grand Junction)
Location: Deep Creek drains from the Flat Tops to the Colorado River approximately 15 miles northeast of Glenwood Springs.

Wilderness Qualities

Deep Creek carves a rugged and remote limestone canyon and, in the process, creates one of Colorado's most pristine wilderness retreats. Beginning at Deep Lake near the Flat Tops Wilderness Area, Deep Creek plunges more than 4,500 feet in a span of only 15 miles before it reaches the Colorado River near Dotsero. The many extraordinary features of Deep Creek have prompted the BLM and the Forest Service to evaluate protecting the canyon under the federal Wild and Scenic Rivers Act.

The limestone strata of Deep Creek create ideal conditions for the formation of caves, resulting in more than forty known caves. These include many of the state's most outstanding caves: Groaning Cave is Colorado's longest cave with a length of 10,000 feet; Big A Disappointment Cave has the largest opening of any cave in the state; and 20-pound Tick Cave, still under exploration, is accessible only with scuba gear. These and many other caves in Deep Creek are described in Lloyd E. Paris' book, *The Caves of Colorado*.

Forests of aspen, spruce, and subalpine fir, interspersed with grassy meadows, cover the higher reaches of Deep Creek's watershed. As the creek drops closer to its confluence with the Colorado River, the landscape becomes more arid, and vegetation turns to pinyon-juniper and sagebrush. The combination of dense vegetation and rugged terrain creates ideal habitat for black bear, elk, and mountain lion.

There are a few faint trails in the area, but the primary route for those wishing to explore the length of Deep Creek is the streambed itself. There is a trail in the lower end, but hiking the upper end of Deep Creek is arduous and sometimes requires slithering down waterfalls, groping along cliffs, and ducking under fallen logs. The almost impenetrable nature of Deep Creek's canyon assures the wilderness qualities of the area.

Resource Information

Both BLM and the Forest Service have withdrawn the area from mineral location and leasing to protect the area's wild values.

Several grazing allotments cover Deep Creek but very little grazing occurs within the proposed wilderness because of the inhospitable terrain. Similarly, the area's forests offer no usable sawtimber or other forest products.

BLM has closed its section of Deep Creek to use by motorized vehicles. Currently, the Forest Service manages Deep Creek as a primitive, non-motorized recreation area. BLM has also designated its section as an Area of Critical Environmental Concern for its scenic values.

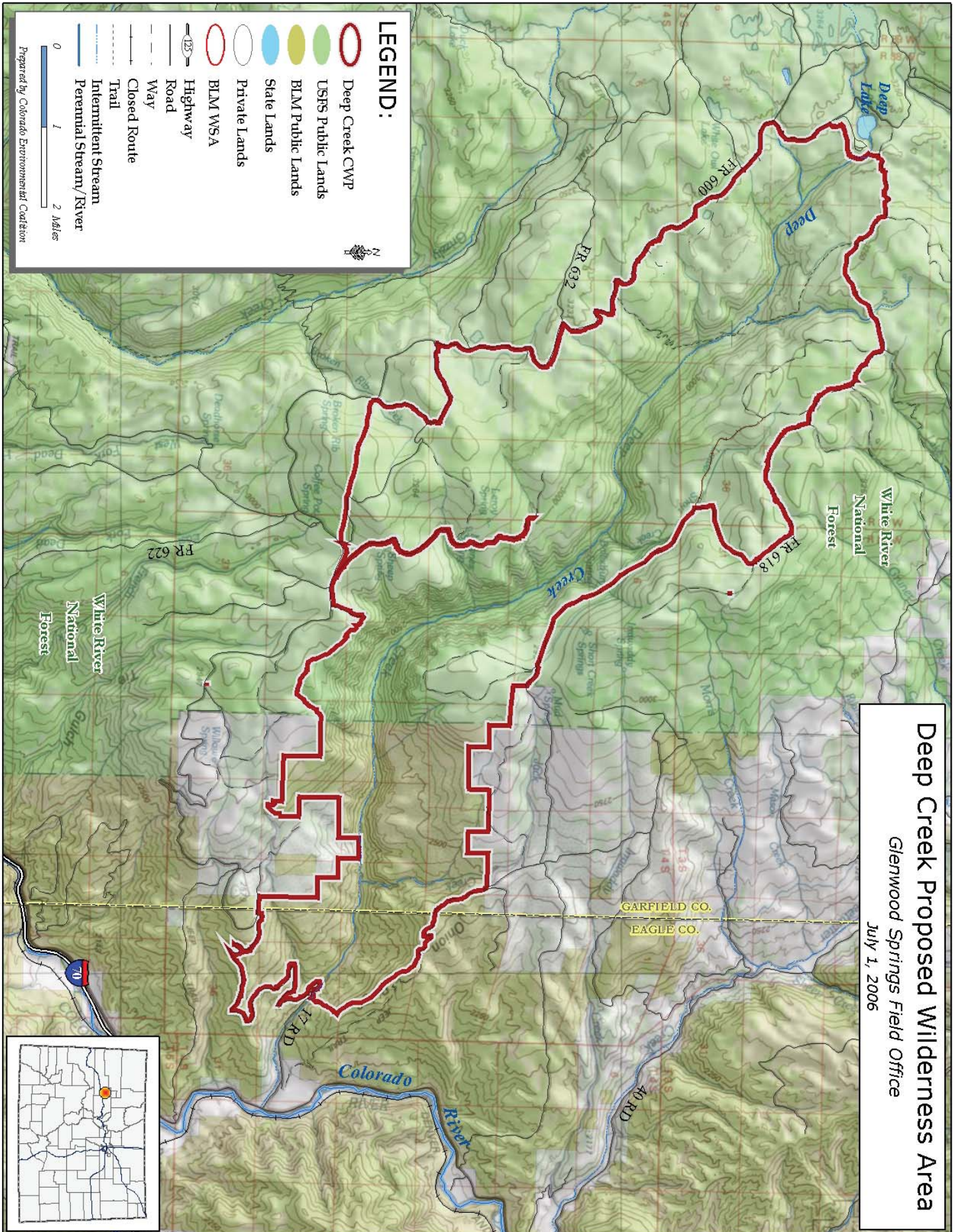
Boundary Issues

The proposed wilderness boundary essentially follows perimeter roads, such as the Coffee Pot Road on the south side and forest access roads on the north. This boundary expands the proposed wilderness beyond the canyon rim itself, and adds rolling meadows and uplands important as big game habitat.



Aspens turning in the CWP.

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Deep Creek Proposed Wilderness Area
 Glenwood Springs Field Office
 July 1, 2006

LEGEND:

- Deep Creek CWP
- USFS Public Lands
- BLM Public Lands
- State Lands
- Private Lands
- BLM WSA
- Highway
- Road
- Way
- Closed Route
- Trail
- Intermittent Stream
- Perennial Stream/River

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 Prepared by Colorado Environmental Coalition