



Colorado's Canyon Country Wilderness Proposal

Powderhorn Wilderness Addition

The Powderhorn addition has great importance for its remaining pockets of large ponderosa pine and high quality wildlife habitat. The addition of this area would provide permanent protection to the lower elevation, northern flank of the Cannibal Plateau.

Dan Morse, Crested Butte

Citizens Wilderness Proposal: 3,306 acres
BLM Wilderness Study Area: not studied
BLM Field Office: Gunnison Field Office
Location: The Powderhorn Addition is 30 miles southwest of Gunnison

Wilderness Qualities

The 61,500-acre Powderhorn Wilderness Area was designated in 1993 and is an expansive alpine plateau on the edge of the San Juan Mountains dotted with fish-filled lakes, including Powderhorn Lakes.

The plateau was formed by Tertiary volcanic deposits comprised of lava and ash flows (tuff). The deposits are believed to be 5,000 feet thick in some areas. Scoured by glaciation, the Calf Creek and Cannibal Plateaus are said to be the largest unbroken expanses of alpine tundra in the lower 48.

Elevations in the proposed addition start at 8,000 feet and rise to 9,500 feet. The area is covered with aspen and conifer trees and contains several small drainages with riparian complexes. The study area is mixed with sagebrush meadows and aspen, with spruce-fir forests, ponderosa pine, and Douglas fir at higher elevations.

Elk and mule deer roam the area and find shelter in the deep timber. There are populations of beaver, coyote, bobcat and mountain lion, and there is a chance of seeing a moose wandering north from the Spring Creek Pass herd.

This addition offers outstanding opportunities for solitude. With many access points and 45 miles of trails throughout the existing Wilderness Area, hikers can enter the Powderhorn from any direction.

Resource Information

There are no right-of-ways within the area and no oil and gas leasing. There is one old vehicle route in the area that has been closed for several years.

The area is part of a summer allotment that is grazed only a short time during the year. There are no grazing facilities in the area with the exception of some short fence lines near the boundary of the with the proposed addition.

The addition is a headwaters area.

Boundary Issues

The Powderhorn Addition sits on the northern boundary of the existing wilderness. One portion was private land acquired by the BLM in the 1990's. A second portion is part of the Powderhorn WSA that was not designated in the 1993 wilderness legislation. Initially the BLM felt a better boundary for the Powderhorn Wilderness Area would be along West Fork of Powderhorn Creek rather than following what was private property. When the BLM purchased the property that formed the boundary of the WSA, citizens inventoried this area and found it to have wilderness qualities. The addition's proposed boundary generally follows BLM access roads and an old timber cut.

Powderhorn Addition Proposed Wilderness Area

Gunnison Field Office

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