

Colorado's Canyon Country Wilderness Proposal

Thompson Creek

Thompson Creek is definitely one of the wildest places I've encountered, and unquestionably worthy of wilderness protection. On my first visit, I found a fresh elk kill at the trailhead – if that's not wild, I don't know what is!

Clare Bastable, Carbondale

Citizens Wilderness Proposal: 25,285 acres
BLM Wilderness Study Area: not studied
BLM Field Office: Glenwood Springs Field Office
Location: Thompson Creek lies on the west side of State Highway 113 between Carbondale and Redstone in Pitkin County.

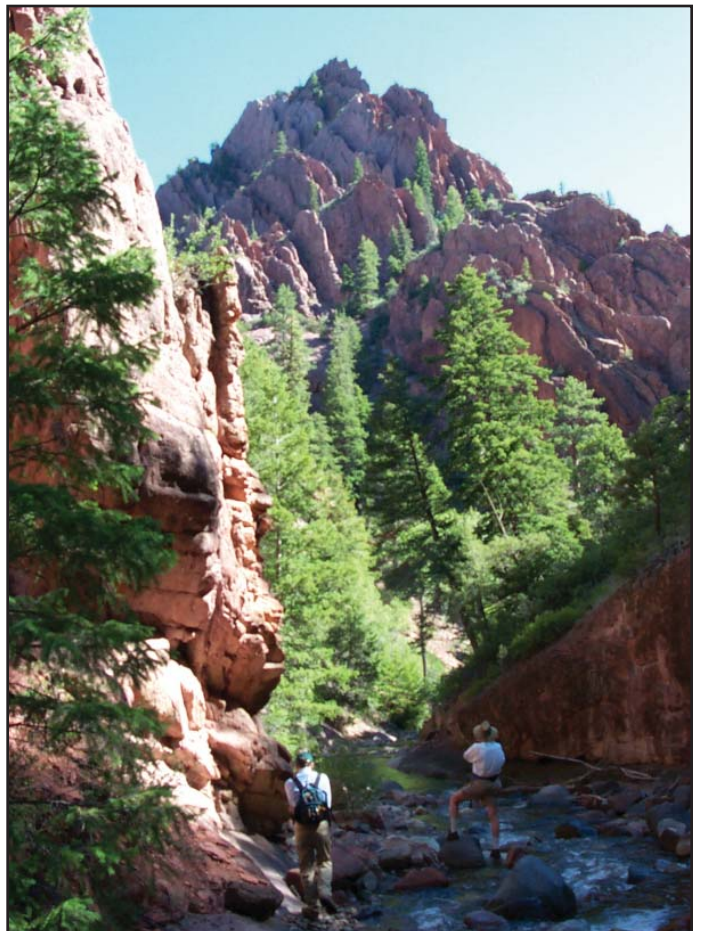
Wilderness Qualities

North Thompson Canyon reminds one of a western slope "Garden of the Gods". It contains geologic strata and vertical faulted hogbacks of the same geologic era as that of the Colorado Springs phenomenon and also includes an upwelling of gypsum which formed the epicenter for a number of minor earthquakes in the Carbondale area a few years ago.

Thompson Creek itself is a beautiful stream with undisturbed woods ranging from cottonwoods and ponderosa pine to scrub oak, pinyon-juniper, Douglas fir, and aspen. The forests provide a haven for wildlife including elk, bear, mountain lion, wild turkey, and small game, as well as the ubiquitous deer.

Along with the striking vertical hogbacks, one is surprised to find the remnants of trestles and the long abandoned grade of the Aspen and Western Railroad in the lower canyon. The railway grade and the Thompson Creek streambed provide a track for hikers and cross-country skiers that is unequalled for spectacular scenery.

The Bureau of Land Management has long recognized the beauty of the canyon and designated it an Area of Critical Environmental Concern. Thompson Creek has also been considered as a possible addition to the potential Wild and Scenic River designation of the Crystal River. The White River National Forest's Assignment Ridge Roadless Area borders Thompson Creek on the south and continues the jumble of vertical red sediments paralleling the Crystal River. Joint administration of these two areas as a single wilderness would add an outstanding canyonlands-like parcel contrasting with the mountain wilderness in this region of the state.



Hikers exploring the CWP. (Kurt Kunkle)

Resource Information

Although no oil and gas development has occurred in Thompson Creek Canyon, some of the area is leased for oil and gas. Some seismic activity has occurred just to the west of the unit. Future leasing of the canyon itself is restricted to No Surface Occupancy.

Grazing exists along South Thompson Creek and Braderich Creek, but grazing does not conflict with wilderness designation.

Some prescribed burns have occurred on Assignment Ridge to improve wildlife habitat, but the burns do not affect the wilderness character of the area.

BLM has been conducting some small fuelwood sales on its lands to improve wildlife habitat, and these areas have been eliminated from the proposed boundary.

Thompson Creek is a perennial stream that drains from White River National Forest lands above.



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Boundary Issues

The proposed wilderness includes about 8,100 acres of BLM land and roughly 17,000 acres of National Forest land. For the most part, boundaries are defined on the east and west sides by private property, and in other places by roads or trails.

The boundaries were selected to include not only the spectacular Thompson Creek Canyon, but also the Braderich Creek backcountry trail. Both of these areas include excellent opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation.



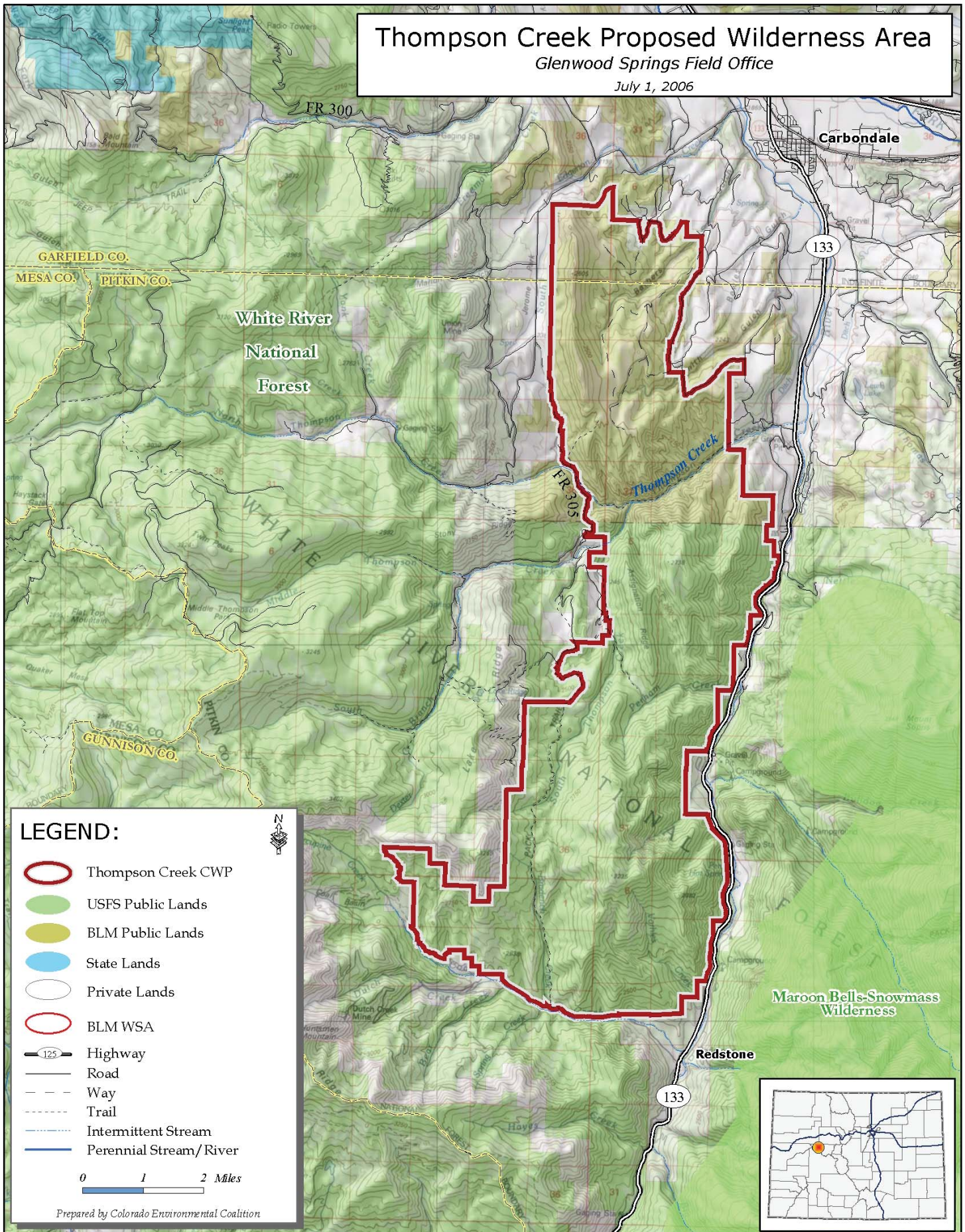
Braderich Trail (Mark Pearson)

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Thompson Creek Proposed Wilderness Area

Glenwood Springs Field Office

July 1, 2006



LEGEND:

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

0 1 2 Miles

Prepared by Colorado Environmental Coalition