

Coalition chooses lands rich in 'wild qualities'

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No roads. That's the first identifiable characteristic of a potential wilderness area.

And that's the first thing members of an organization looked for when they identified potential wilderness areas in the region more than a year ago.

When they looked, members of the Central Colorado Wilderness Coalition found 110 roadless areas in the Pike and San Isabel national forests and in nearby land administered by the Bureau of Land Management.

The group had been working for years to map the region, says John Stansfield, a spokesman. "About 150 people had been mapping and photographing potential areas for eight years. We took those huge files of documentation and started the process of deciding which ones really stood out."

The group looked for land in what Stansfield calls "our sphere of influence."

"We asked ourselves, 'Do recreationists from the Pikes Peak region care about these areas, or do they not know about them, when they are really little gems hidden away?'"

Asking that question, the group narrowed the list to 30, then, finally, 11. The group calls the parcels chosen "The Wild Ten" (even though there are 11), and will present the list with slides and narration at a program Thursday at the Penrose Public Library.

The 11 areas, Stansfield says, were chosen for their wild qualities. Many are at a lower elevation than typical Colorado wilderness areas — more than 3 million designated acres across the state that mostly lie at 8,000 to 13,000 feet — and because of that, they provide a greater diversity in wildlife and habitat.

The wilderness coalition's project was spurred on by recent changes in environmental policy, Stansfield says. "A series of events in the last 10 years lent a sense of urgency to our work. We decided it was time to raise the public profile of potential wilderness areas."

Along with roadlessness, coalition members looked for land with other common components of wilderness: naturalness and solitude.

"We believe that those components are important and that protecting roadless areas is one of the best ways to get a handle on ecosystem management by protecting

diversity.”

Stansfield quotes environmentalist Aldo Leopold, who said, “ ‘The first rule of intelligent tinkering is to save all the parts.’ Protecting an area as wilderness gives us the opportunity to preserve all that we understand and all that we don’t understand.”

The coalition’s work has just begun, Stansfield says. “We still have a lot of homework to do, building bridges to communities and county governments, and with private groups as well.”

He says he believes most people understand the concept of wilderness.

“I think when they get into it, they say ‘That’s a wild place.’ But they might not understand Wilderness with a capital W. We’re trying to teach them what that means.”

Proposed Wilderness parcels

As determined by the Central Colorado Wilderness Coalition

