

**8/30/2005**

*by Christopher Kolomitz - Mail Managing Editor and by Denise Ronald - Mail Staff Reporter*

## **Hefley wilderness bill moves forward**



Photo by Denise Ronald Rep. Joel Hefley (R-Colo.) highlights parts of the proposed Browns Canyon wilderness designation plan on a map during a brief talk with about 60 constituents Monday at the Chaffee County Fairgrounds. Map can be seen at: <http://themountainmail.com/ftp/BrownsMap.jpg>

Legislation to establish a 20,025- acre Browns Canyon Wilderness Area may be introduced this fall by U.S. Rep. Joel Hefley (R-Colo.)

Hefley talked with local residents about the proposed wilderness area Monday during a public forum at the Chaffee County Fairgrounds.

Most of the 60 or so people attending the meeting approved designating Browns Canyon a wilderness area.

In a brief speech, Hefley assured those gathered that the proposed wilderness designation isn't a plan being pushed by the U.S. Forest Service or Bureau of Land Management.

"These agencies have been working with me because I asked them to," Hefley said.

Hefley said designating the land wilderness was just that, a designation, not land

acquisition by the government. He then opened the floor to comments.

Earlier in the day, he met with The Mail, gave his timeline for introducing the bill and explained that he felt the designation would be “an enhancement to the county.”

Hefley, in his 10th term as a U.S. Representative, represents the state’s 5th Congressional District including Chaffee, Park, Lake, Fremont, Teller and El Paso counties.

The 7,315-acre Browns Canyon wilderness study area is managed by the Bureau of Land Management and has been managed as such since 1984.

Generally, the study area land extends north-south between Nathrop and Hecla Junction, east of the Arkansas River.

The new proposed wilderness area would include land managed by the U.S. Forest Service and extend east to below Aspen Ridge Road.

The western boundary of Hefley’s proposal is 200 feet east of the Arkansas River. The northern boundary would be 100 feet south of U.S. Forest Service Road 1434 near Four Mile Recreation Area to the intersection with Aspen Ridge Road.

An eastern boundary would be 100 feet west of Aspen Ridge Road. The proposed wilderness area’s southern boundaries would be Railroad and Stafford Gulches and a four-wheel-drive trail in the area.

The plan would close Turret Road, or FSR 184, to motorized traffic beyond the town. The road is on USFS land.

Much of the wilderness study area and proposed wilderness area can be seen from U.S. 285. The low elevation land features rock outcroppings, piñon, juniper, ponderosa pine and Douglas fir.

Hefley said he was worked with both sides of the issue to come up with a plan that has support of rafters, motorized recreational groups, environmentalists, USFS and BLM.

“I’m here to say here is a solution if we want Browns Canyon Wilderness,” Hefley told The Mail.

At the fairgrounds, representatives from Arkansas River Outfitters Association, Colorado River Outfitters Association, Friends of Browns Canyon, Trout Unlimited, raft company owners, horse outfitters and a host of outdoor enthusiasts voiced support of the proposal.

Tim Canterbury, a local rancher, said he wasn't at the meeting for or against the project, but to make sure the livelihood of ranchers is protected if the measure is passed.

Ron Ferris, one of the local outdoor enthusiasts, said he enjoys rafting, hiking and biking.

"I realize that by supporting this plan I'm going to lose access to some of the places I enjoy, but (Brown's Canyon) is so fragile it needs to be protected," Ferris said.

The first proposed wilderness area included nearly 35,000 acres and boundaries for the new area have been scaled back during the past two years.

Land near the southern boundary managed by the USFS was removed because of a beetle kill area the forest service wants to mechanically thin, Hefley said.

He has toured the area and encourages local residents, not out of towners, to submit comments about the proposed area.

"We care about the people who will live with this," he said. "We want an honest assessment. We see it as something that should be managed locally."

Comments to Hefley are due by the end of September. To see an enlarged view of the map please go to: <http://themountainmail.com/ftp/BrownsMap.jpg>