

COLORADO WILDERNESS ACT (H.R. 4289)

U.S. REPRESENTATIVE DIANA DEGETTE

GENERAL FACTS:

- The Colorado Wilderness Act of 2009, proposes to designate 34 pristine areas making up 850,000 acres of Colorado public land as federally protected wilderness. Approximately 615,000 acres are currently managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and 218,000 acres are managed by the United States Forest Service. The remaining acres are State or private lands.
- Congresswoman Diana DeGette has introduced a version of the Colorado Wilderness Act since 1999. The legislation has evolved over the years as a result of additional on the ground field work from dedicated citizen volunteers.
- The Colorado Wilderness Act is a balanced proposal that will protect just over 1% of Colorado's total land area. This legislation does NOT affect over 90% of BLM-managed lands, which are open to oil and gas drilling, mining, off-road vehicle use and other development activities. The legislation honors all existing water rights and mining claims and allows existing livestock grazing to continue.
- The legislation adopts similar water rights language included in the establishment of the Great Sand Dunes National Park, which states that the federal government must file all water rights claims within the State of Colorado water rights system and abide by all Colorado water laws and regulations.
- The Colorado Wilderness Act preserves critical mid-elevation wilderness in Colorado, which are not well represented in the National Wilderness Preservation System. Currently, nearly all existing wilderness in Colorado is above 9,000 feet, even though mid-elevation wilderness provide critical winter range and other wildlife habitat.
- The Act includes Colorado gems such as the soaring alpine 14,000 ft. vista's of Red Cloud Peak, the red rock canyons of Dolores River Canyons, and the vital riparian areas and wildlife habitats of Beaver Creek near Colorado Springs.
- This legislation builds on strong public support for protecting wilderness areas in Colorado. Polls show that over 70% of Coloradans support additional wilderness. More than 347 businesses and organizations, including hunting, commercial rafting, outdoor retail, conservation organizations, and senior citizens groups have endorsed the legislation. In addition, 14 Colorado counties and municipalities have expressed their support for wilderness.

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