



Friday, September 16, 2005

## Browns Canyon 'go'

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The Browns Canyon Wilderness Area as currently proposed by Rep. Joel Hefley represents a reasonable compromise between various users and outdoor enthusiasts.

Originally, Browns Canyon was presented as 35,000 acres, which has been scaled back to just over 20,000 acres. The smaller area makes sense in that it will be easier to manage and define, with boundaries for the most part running alongside existing roads and trails, the Arkansas River, railroad tracks and other readily-recognized features. This will make it easier for users to understand what's wilderness and what's not and easier for officials to educate the public and enforce.

The new area leaves out Railroad Gulch, which had been a point of contention with motorized recreation groups who want the area to remain accessible to four-wheeling and other travel. Also left out is a portion of public land to the south and east which is being considered for timber harvest and insect control.

Rep. Hefley, a Colorado Springs Republican in his 10th two-year term representing Colorado's 5th District, said Browns was not proposed for wilderness by the U.S. Forest Service or the Bureau of Land Management, the federal agencies which oversee the land. Rather, he said the proposal came at the suggestion of citizens.

He said the current proposal has the support of environmentalists, motorized recreation groups, commercial rafters, the USFS and BLM.

Because of its relatively low elevation and dearth of moisture, Browns is a fragile area. These elements make the area accessible and susceptible to abuse. At the same time, because of its wild, untamed and rugged nature along with its unusual rock formations and outcroppings, Browns is deserving of full wilderness protection.

Rep. Hefley is asking Chaffee County and Upper Arkansas Valley residents for comments, because they would be most affected by designation.

Based on the new boundaries, we urge Rep. Hefley to ask Congress to establish Browns Canyon as a new Colorado wilderness area.

— MJB