

Compromise reached on Rocky Mountain National Park wilderness

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WASHINGTON- Congressional Republicans and Democrats from Colorado have reached a compromise on a proposal to create protected wilderness areas throughout much of Rocky Mountain National Park.

No details were immediately released, but the two sides were at odds on whether a private company should be immune from liability for any future damage from an irrigation ditch it owns in the park.

Sens. Wayne Allard and Ken Salazar and Reps. Mark Udall and Marilyn Musgrave said they will release details of the compromise May 14 at a campground in the park.

President Nixon first suggested protecting the park three decades ago by officially designating much of it as wilderness, keeping those areas free of logging, mining and vehicles. As part of a national park, the areas are already protected from many of those activities.

But eight months ago, Allard and Musgrave, both Republicans, broke from the version favored by Democrats Udall and Salazar and introduced their own legislation.

Udall and Salazar were infuriated, saying the move killed chances for the wilderness bill to pass Congress last year.

Allard and Musgrave said they went out on their own because they felt Udall and Salazar had not won the support of several of the communities surrounding the park.

A key provision in Allard and Musgrave's bill protected the company that operates the Grand River Ditch from liability for damage from accidental breaches in the park.

The government sued the water company last year for damage caused when the ditch overflowed, scouring a mountainside and forcing the temporary closure of trails and campsites.

The lawmakers will be joined at next week's announcement by park Superintendent Vaughn Baker and elected leaders from Boulder, Grand and Larimer counties and from the towns of Estes Park and Grand Lake.

The park is about 50 miles northwest of Denver.

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