



Rocky Mountain National Park Wilderness Act **Fact Sheet**

The Rocky Mountain National Park Wilderness Act, HR 4935/S 1510, introduced by Congressman Mark Udall (D-CO) and Senator Ken Salazar (D-CO), will designate the gorgeous backcountry terrain in Rocky Mountain National Park as wilderness. The legislation will provide permanent protection for 249,339 acres of backcountry and wilderness-quality lands, and affirm land management policies within the park.

Location

Rocky Mountain National Park, one of the crown jewels of the National Park System, is located in northeastern Colorado. The diverse and beautiful expanse of pristine backcountry provides a stunning introduction to the Rocky Mountains with access to peaks along the Continental Divide, breathtaking views and myriad opportunities for exploration and discovery.

Seventy miles northwest of Denver, spanning Grand and Larimer counties, the park is cherished by the residents of Grand, Larimer, Boulder and Denver counties, and appreciated by visitors from around the world. The towns of Grand Lake and Estes Park serve as “gateways” to the park, and the tourism that the park’s wildlife and wilderness attract is a major source of economic stability for local businesses.

Adjacent to Indian Peaks Wilderness and Comanche Peaks Wilderness to the south and to Never Summer Wilderness to the west, the park is also surrounded by Routt, Roosevelt and Arapaho national forests. Because of its unique location, wilderness designation for the park will protect wildlife habitat that extends beyond park boundaries, anchoring a continuous stretch of protected wild lands from the Wyoming border to Rollins Pass, near the Winter Park Ski Resort in Colorado.

Progress toward Wilderness

Rocky Mountain National Park has been a candidate for wilderness designation since the Wilderness Act was passed in 1964. The park was established by Congress in 1915 with the help of naturalist Enos Mills and businessman F.O. Stanley. In 1974, President Richard Nixon recommended 239,835 park acres for wilderness designation. The area has been managed as wilderness since the 1960’s, its wilderness qualities protected and celebrated by several generations of park managers and visitors.

Natural, Cultural and Recreational Values

The elevations in the proposed wilderness area range from 7,500 to 14,255 feet, encompassing green valleys and alpine tundra. Longs Peak is the highest peak, and is an extremely popular destination during the summer months; Mount Meeker, at 13,911 feet, rises to the south. The valleys below these high peaks are thick with lodgepole pine, juniper and spruce forests, and rich with wildlife – mountain lions, elk, moose, bighorn sheep and mule deer. Lakes and streams contribute valuable habitat to the area, further supporting the robust biodiversity of the region.

The history of the West, a place where frontiersmen witnessed an untamed and awe-inspiring wilderness, is preserved in these lands. The fact that so many adjacent acres have survived intact is one to cherish: The proposed Rocky Mountain National Park Wilderness provides a window to our past, keeping our history, and the inspirational power of the land, intact.

The park lands have a long history of homesteading, ranching, lodging, tourism and mountaineering. Traces of original roads and bridges, ancient trails and the remnants of cattle ranches can still be found within the park. Currently, the park is widely used for many forms of recreation including hiking, backpacking, fishing, snowshoeing, skiing, birding, climbing and horseback riding.

The Effects of Wilderness Designation in the Park

While permanently protecting and solidifying the wild character of the park lands in perpetuity, wilderness designation will do little to change current park management and function. Park managers will continue to encourage hiking, backpacking, horseback riding, fishing, climbing, skiing, snowshoeing and sight-seeing with ample access to one of the nation's most awesome landscapes (and 355 miles of trails).

Trail Ridge Road and Fall River Road will continue to be maintained for motorized travel so that visitors of all ages and abilities can experience the majesty of the park lands and take with them a lasting and powerful impression of their natural legacy. Existing water storage and conveyance structures will be excluded from the designated wilderness area.

Wilderness designation will ensure that the park remains as it is today for future generations of visitors to enjoy and explore. Wilderness designation will clarify park management procedures and preserve opportunities for scientific research. Non-mechanized recreation and trail maintenance will continue, as will access for emergency vehicles. Wilderness designation will reaffirm the park's original mission to preserve vistas and wildlife, protecting the unscarred landscape from a criss-crossing of roads, and from policies that could degrade the character of the park's forests and its quiet places. In addition, clean air, water and open spaces will be preserved to the benefit of public health in Colorado.

Status of Legislation

Congressman Udall and Senator Salazar have introduced wilderness legislation to designate 249,339 acres of beautiful backcountry terrain adjacent to Indian Peaks Wilderness and within the boundaries of Rocky Mountain National Park (HR 4935/S 1510). Some frontcountry lands near the towns of Estes Park and Grand Lake, and a strip of land for a potential bike path along Lake Granby, have been excluded from the wilderness package, while 94 percent of the park is proposed for wilderness designation. The bill will also add 1,000 acres to the adjacent Indian Peaks Wilderness Area in the Arapaho National Forest.

Wilderness advocates, the National Park Service, local citizens and elected officials are eager to see the Rocky Mountain National Park Wilderness and Indian Peaks Wilderness Expansion Act passed this year. The towns of Grand Lake, Winter Park and Estes Park, along with Larimer County, the League of Women Voters, Colorado Wilderness Network, Headwaters Trails Alliance and International Mountain Bicycling Association, have all endorsed the bill.

For More Information

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