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## Opinion

Publish Date: 6/29/2006

### Designate park as wilderness

The gateway towns of Estes Park and Grand Lake are in favor of it.

So is Larimer County. Boulder County is on board. So are officials in Grand County.

Everywhere you look, the powers that be can find no reason not to officially designate most of Rocky Mountain National Park a protected wilderness area.

In fact, 90 percent of the 265,828-acre park, most of it rugged backcountry, is already managed as if it were wilderness. It's essentially been that way since 1964, when the Wilderness Act was signed into law. The park has also been on the books as an official candidate for designation since President Nixon made that recommendation in 1974.

So, why isn't the current legislation that would make the park an official wilderness sailing through Congress like an eagle on the wing?

To realistically make it through their respective committee hearings and gain bipartisan support, the legislation — S. 1510 in the Senate and H.R. 3193 in the House — needs consensus backing from Colorado's congressional delegation.

It doesn't quite have it, yet.

Our own 4th CD Rep. Marilyn Musgrave says she wants an economic analysis of the Rocky proposal before she'll throw her support behind it.

It's odd that she didn't ask for the same sort of study before signing on as a co-sponsor — along with 2nd CD Rep. Mark Udall and 7th CD Rep. Bob Beauprez — of similar legislation to create the 20,000-acre Browns Canyon Wilderness Area in the Pike and San Isabel national forests.

That legislation was sponsored by fellow Colorado Republicans Sen. Wayne Allard and Rep. Joel Hefley.

The Rocky legislation is sponsored by Sen. Ken Salazar and Udall, both Democrats.

So Musgrave wants an economic analysis? Here it is: Roughly 3 million visitors — and their wallets — make their way to Rocky each year to take in the grandeur of snow-capped peaks and to catch a glimpse of elk and other wildlife.

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A former principal in June held a public meeting to air concerns about the Thompson School District and Superintendent Dan Johnson.

[Read his speech and other discussion regarding the topic.](#)

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Quite simply, wilderness is what all these people come to bask in.

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Their visitorship is the economic engine driving places like Estes Park and Grand Lake, and its leaders know how valuable the park is. Estes Park's mayor recently called Rocky the town's "golden goose."

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There is no salient reason not to have Rocky on the books as a protected wilderness area, officially a place where, as the Wilderness Act says, "the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain." A place of "primeval character and influence" and with "outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation."

Sounds like a place that should remain untrammelled by partisan politics.

Also sounds like a place we'd like to visit.

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