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Wilderness designation closer for national park

By **Todd Hartman, Rocky Mountain News**
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A long-running effort to formally designate Rocky Mountain National Park a wilderness area has taken a major leap forward, as once-feuding members of Colorado's congressional delegation say they have reached a compromise on the matter.

A statement issued jointly by four members of the delegation — two Republicans and two Democrats — promised all the details at a press conference next Monday at a park campground. Sen. Ken Salazar and Rep. Mark Udall, both Democrats, and Sen. Wayne Allard and Rep. Marilyn Musgrave, both Republicans, plan to participate.

The quest to make the park a wilderness area dates back three decades, to the Nixon administration. Rep. Mark Udall has carried a bill on the issue every year since 1999. But a variety of hang-ups have prevented the measure from passage in Congress.

The practical effect of a wilderness designation would mainly be preventative: it would keep a future administration from further developing park, should they "get the great idea to build a hotel inside the backcountry or another highway across the park," said Suzanne Jones of the Wilderness Society.

"It basically locks in the current protections that are there," explained Lawrence Pacheco, spokesman for Udall.

Pacheco and other congressional aides wouldn't divulge how the compromise was reached.

"All I can tell you is this is a really significant accomplishment to have the whole delegation united on this effort," said Allard spokesman Steve Wymer. "This has been a long time coming."

The bill came unraveled last year due largely to election-year politics. Republicans who had been working with Democrats on the bill abruptly proposed their own version.

That led to charges that Musgrave, who was up for re-election wanted her own bill with her name on it and counterclaims that the Republican bill was needed because it wasn't clear the Udall and Salazar-backed bill would incorporate the items Musgrave wanted.

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