

PRESS RELEASE
COLORADO WILDERNESS NETWORK

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A ‘Call to Action’ for wilderness

Conservationists, recreation businesses, sportsmen deliver 13,700 comments calling on Congress to support new wilderness protections

Denver – Wilderness advocates gathered along the Platte River, near the state’s largest outdoor recreation company, and called on Colorado’s congressional delegation to support new wilderness protections.

“We need to think big and be big when it comes to new wilderness protections,” said Suzanne Jones, Central Rockies Regional Director of The Wilderness Society. “This is the most conservation-minded Congress we’ve had in decades. Our Senators and Representatives should join together and make new wilderness protection a priority for the sake of our state and future generations.”

Mountaineer and author, Aron Ralston, kicked off the “Call to Action” drawing on his experience traveling the state and advocating for wilderness. Ralston is the first climber to traverse all of Colorado’s 14,000 foot peaks during the winter and has become a champion for new wilderness in the White River National Forest region, known as the “Hidden Gems” wilderness proposal.

“Spending time in Colorado’s wild lands inspires my life,” said Ralston. “We need our leaders to protect the ‘Hidden Gems’ of the White River region and lands throughout the state.”

Ralston was joined by other supporters at the event, including conservationists, outdoor recreation businesses, sportsmen, and students. The group delivered more than 13,500 comments to the offices of U.S. Senators Michael Bennet and Mark Udall.

The “Call to Action” comes on the heels of a month-long campaign supporting new wilderness protections that includes internet organizing campaigns, paid advertisements, and meetings statewide with decision makers.

Advocates drove home the point that wilderness protection can be a boon to local outdoor recreation and tourism economies. According to the Outdoor Industry Association, outdoor recreation contributes more than \$10 billion to Colorado’s economy each year.

Bill Dvorak is a longtime conservation advocate, sportsman, and Colorado’s first commercial outfitter. His company operates rafting in several current wilderness areas such as the newly designated Dominguez Canyon National Recreation Area and new proposals such as the Dolores River Canyon and the popular Browns Canyon.

“Wilderness protection means Colorado’s great outdoors are open for business,” said Dvorak. “Wilderness attracts people from instate and across the nation to those landscapes. New wilderness protections mean new jobs and a growing outdoor recreation industry.”

A coalition of environmental organizations, the Colorado Wilderness Network, is supporting three wilderness proposals of more than 1,894,000 acres of wild lands, including Rep. John Salazar's San Juan Mountains Wilderness Act, the Hidden Gems wilderness proposal, and Colorado's Canyon Country Wilderness proposal.

Over the last year, Environment Colorado activists traveled from Steamboat Springs to Durango to Denver to help gather the more than 13,700 comments delivered to Colorado's U.S. Senators today.

"While healthcare and energy are making the front page, there's a growing grassroots movement to support new wilderness protection in Colorado," said Matt Garrington, advocate with Environment Colorado. "Coloradans want to see our public lands stay the way they are, and new wilderness protection is the best way to protect our land, water, and wildlife."

More than ten organizations and businesses participated in the wilderness "Call to Action" event, including Colorado Environmental Coalition, Colorado Mountain Club, Dvorak Expeditions, Patagonia, and others.

Wilderness on the web:

- Rep. John Salazar's San Juan Mountains Wilderness Act:
www.house.gov/salazar/sjmw.shtml
- Hidden Gems wilderness proposal:
www.WhiteRiverWild.org
- Colorado's Canyon Country Wilderness proposal:
www.CanyonCountryWilderness.org
- Colorado Wilderness Network:
www.ColoradoWildernessNetwork.org

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Colorado Wilderness Network is a broad coalition of citizen groups knowledgeable and enthused about our remarkable wild lands heritage. For more information please visit: www.coloradowildernessnetwork.org.