

Colorado Wilderness Network

Conservationists Urge Prompt Action on Rocky Mountain National Park Wilderness Bill

Strong support for wilderness designation merits quick response from Subcommittee

For Immediate Release: April 6, 2006

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DENVER - As the Senate National Parks Subcommittee hosted a hearing today on Senator Salazar's Rocky Mountain National Park wilderness bill, conservationists, local officials and citizens called for immediate action to pass this legislation. Senator Ken Salazar reintroduced this bill to permanently protect the vast backcountry of Rocky Mountain National Park after hearing powerful support from local towns and counties.

"We're glad this bill is moving forward. The time truly has come to have this wilderness act passed," said Estes Park Mayor John Baudek, whose constituents are eager to protect the town's greatest economic and natural resource. "We're a tourist community, and it's vital for us that Rocky Mountain National Park remains a pristine place for centuries to come."

Forty years have passed since the park land was designated as a wilderness study area in 1964, and 32 since the National Park Service first recommended wilderness protection for the Park's backcountry acres. The recent groundswell of support from local citizens, local government, and the Park Service - with endorsements from the towns of Grand Lake, Winter Park and Estes Park, as well as Grand and Larimer counties - mandates action.

"We have worked closely with local citizens and interest groups to develop a bill that satisfies all parties, one that would secure an incomparable resource for Colorado residents and visitors to the region," said Vera Smith, Conservation Director for the Colorado Mountain Club. "I think everybody is eager to see quick action on this bill."

By designating 94 percent of the Park - 249,339 acres - as wilderness, the extraordinary landscape, expansive and awe-inspiring views to high peaks and green valleys, popular hiking trails and incredible wildlife habitat would be preserved for future generations of park visitors, even those that never travel far from their vehicle.

"As a window to the history of our nation and as a testament to the natural legacy entrusted to us, the wild lands of Rocky Mountain National Park are incredibly valuable," said Steve Smith, assistant regional director for The Wilderness Society. "With inspirational vistas, abundant opportunities for exploration, and remarkable wildlife, this is a legacy we must protect."

Although park management will follow guidelines similar to those first established in 1964, one recently proposed provision may compromise some of the Park's wild character. The provision seeks to carve out a 1/8-mile-wide strip from the proposed wilderness, along the western side of the Park, for future consideration as a potential mountain bike corridor. Mountain bikes are not typically allowed in National Park backcountry areas, and conservation groups remain convinced that a new regional bike path would be more appropriately located outside of the Park.