



In January 2015 Wild Connections will celebrate 20 years of conservation work. We will be sharing highlights of our history, profiles of the people who made it possible and actions you can take to continue this legacy.

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BLM Mapping Finds 230,000 acres With Wilderness Qualities

by John Sztukowski

Wild Connections' mapping of BLM Lands with Wilderness Characteristics is drawing to a close. Over the past two years, with help from volunteers and interns, we inventoried approximately 280,000 acres of BLM land managed by the Royal Gorge Field Office. We found roughly 230,000 acres to have wilderness characteristics, encompassing about 25 potential wilderness areas in central Colorado.

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Volunteers from GARNA hiked up South Badger Creek. Photo John Sztukowski.

Getting to Half Earth Thinking Big about Conservation and Connectivity During the Sixth Mass Extinction

by Jean C. Smith

"It's been in my mind for years that people haven't been thinking big enough—even conservationists," E. O. Wilson said. "Half Earth is the goal, but it's how we get there, and whether we can come up with a system of wild landscapes we can hang onto."

For Wilson, renowned conservationist widely known as the father of sociobiology, *Half Earth* means setting aside half of the planet for permanently protected areas for the millions of species of plants and animals that co-habit the Earth with its most dominant species – man.

He goes on to say, "I see a chain of uninterrupted corridors forming, with twists and turns, some of them opening up to become wide enough to accommodate national biodiversity parks, a new kind of park that won't let species vanish." It is the only way to prevent what he calls the "biological holocaust," his label for the current sixth mass extinction event, the only one caused not by some natural cataclysm but by human activity.

Scientific reports, one after the other, show that thousands of species of plants and animals are in serious trouble everywhere, suggesting that the Half Earth vision may be very difficult to reach:

- The World Wildlife Fund's 2014 *Living Planet Report* says that "The Living Planet Index, which measures trends in thousands of vertebrate species populations, shows a decline

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E. O. Wilson has a big conservation vision.

BLM mapping *continued from page 1*

Much of the proposed Lands with Wilderness Characteristics (LWCs) are located in the rugged pinion-juniper landscape of the Arkansas Canyonlands, such as Browns Canyon, Badger Creek, and Table Mountain. However many of these lands also include montane grasslands and higher elevation mixed forests of ponderosa pine, quaking aspen, Douglas-fir, Colorado blue spruce, and even bristlecone pine. And with the numerous creeks, tributaries, and gulches that drain through the proposed LWCs, rich riparian life is abundant as well. Narrowleaf cottonwoods and willows generally line these drainages, with bird song and animal tracks common. Given the many ecosystems encompassed in these lands, it's no wonder they support a diversity of plant and wildlife habitats.

Many of Wild Connections' proposed wilderness units align with areas of high biodiversity identified by the Colorado Natural Heritage Program as Potential Conservation Areas. For example, the Arkansas Canyon stickleaf and the Brandegee wild buckwheat, both globally imperiled and Colorado endemic species that are found only in Chaffee and Fremont counties, have their only habitat on many of these public lands. Several wildlife species with high habitat and range values also dominate this region, including Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep, mountain lion, black bear, elk, mule deer, and pronghorn. Much of this region also serves as critical potential habitat for the Canadian lynx, a threatened and endangered species. Many bird species of most concern also take refuge in this region, including the bald eagle, peregrine falcon, and the Mexican spotted owl.



A big horn ewe watched us in Table Mountain's Hindman Gulch. Photo John Stansfield.

While our on-the-ground work is wrapping up, the real effort is just beginning. We have been assessing BLM land for wilderness characteristics in anticipation of a new Resource Management Plan (RMP) that will begin shortly in the Royal Gorge Field Office's region. This plan will essentially determine how 680,000 acres of BLM public land in central and eastern Colorado gets designated and managed for over the next 20 - 30 years. The BLM operates with a multiple-use mission, which means that they manage land resources for a variety of reasons, such as oil and gas leasing, timber harvesting, livestock grazing, recreation (motorized and non-motorized), wilderness, or some combination thereof.

The formal announcement of the RMP revision will coincide with a critical period for Wild Connections and

our colleagues. It will be the first available public comment period for citizens to submit findings or voice concerns in relation to BLM land use in the region, and also the first opportunity for Wild Connections to submit our citizen inventory reports of proposed Lands with Wilderness Characteristics to the BLM for review.

Our goal is to have the Royal Forge Field Office recognize and manage for more wilderness, which we plan to achieve by engaging the public and working with the BLM throughout the RMP process.

This will be much more attainable with public support for wilderness. The upcoming RMP public comment period is open to all, and we encourage you to take action if you feel as strongly for wilderness and biodiversity protection as we do. It will be very important for our collective voices to be heard up front, when there is more time to inform and help shape the plan before it enters its draft and final phases. BLM recommends that it is important to support your concerns with facts and references, information that Wild Connections will soon make available on our web site.

So make your voice heard! Be on the lookout for Wild Connections' Action Alerts that will help you make comments for this first phase of BLM's Resource Management Plan revision. Thanks to all of you that have supported us in our inventory field work. However the real effort to protect more wilderness, our public land and water, is just getting started, and you can make a difference.



South Park Oil and Gas Master Leasing Plan to Begin

by Misi Ballard

The Royal Gorge Field Office held public information meetings in South Park in September announcing that they will develop a Master Leasing Plan for oil and gas development in South Park. A public comment period will begin once the notice is printed in the Federal Register.

Many conservation groups are working together to provide support to the public for submitting substantive and effective comments. Wild Connections, Great Old Broads for Wilderness, The Wilderness Society, Colorado Wildlife Federation, and Trout Unlimited are involved.

The strength of the Master Leasing Plan, which will be folded into the larger Resource Management Plan, will depend on the active participation of the public letting BLM know how you want your public lands and natural resources managed.

Watch for Action Alerts



Exploratory well in South Park. Photo Doris LeDue.

Albuquerque Hosts “50 Years Of Wilderness” Conference

by Claude Neumann

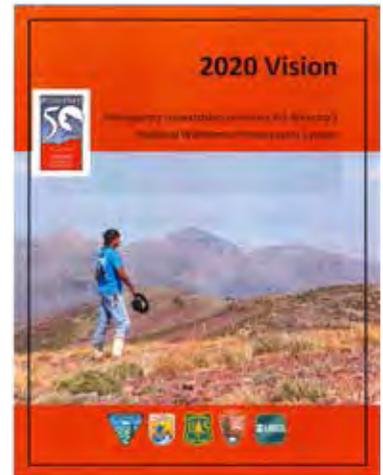
It was a grand celebration. Twelve hundred wilderness champions descended on New Mexico from all over the country in October, the month fifty years ago when President Johnson signed into law the Wilderness Act of 1964 – arguably the most successful wilderness law in the world. For that week we were a community – living and breathing wilderness almost constantly and most of us seemed to relish it.

As we walked the streets of downtown Albuquerque around the conference hotel, there were wilderness advocates dining, laughing, and enjoying the October warmth, blue New Mexico sky and pleasant evenings. There were special presentations at the historic Kimo Theater including Friday evening when the ghost of Edward Abbey seemed to fill the room as special guests including Dave Foreman and Terry Tempest Williams reflected on the man who helped ignite our passion.

We were young, old, some radical and some not so radical, volunteers, scientists, paid staffers, land managers from the federal and state agencies, U.S. Senators, and a multitude of conservation and environmental groups, amongst others. You name them, they were there.

Our days were filled with almost 100 focused sessions to help bring us up to speed on critical wilderness issues including fire and forestry, habitat, stewardship, history, advocacy, and threats to wilderness. Our evenings were inspiring and engaging as well as a time for socializing and connecting. “Wilderness veterans” recounted their individual experiences over the years as the list of designations grew.

But the conference would have been incomplete without participation from the Federal agencies. Along with many attending agency land managers, we were fortunate to have Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell as one of the keynote speakers. She gave us an entertaining travelogue of the many special places she has visited in her official role. Also encouraging was witnessing the leaders of the Forest Service, BLM, Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Park Service – the four agencies that oversee the 110



million acre wilderness system - signing a cooperative stewardship agreement called the “2020 vision plan”.

Yet in the air was the realization that wilderness laws are not “attack proof”, perhaps quite vulnerable, and there are those that would willfully and gleefully dismantle what so many have fought to accomplish. Indeed, numerous states have legislative proposals for state takeover of federal lands. Though highly questionable from a legal and constitutional basis, that didn’t stop the Utah legislature from recently passing and the Governor signing one such law.

This realization imparted perhaps the most important theme of the conference: we must reinvigorate the wilderness movement once again in the public eye. Of critical importance, we must bring new “wilderness warriors” into our effort and engage our younger people, those who were not around for this great evolution and its battles, so that they will not take these endowments for granted.

As Albuquerque faded in our rear view mirror, I couldn’t help but feel a bit teary. It had become a special place for my five days there amongst 1200 dedicated people, many instrumental to the effort past and present. And so our message to you from Wild Connections is to go out and do what you can to keep wilderness on the front burner. Advocate, educate, join in, support us, and go out and hike! For more information on keeping the wilderness cause vibrant, go to www.wilderness50th.org. Here’s to another 50 years of setting aside those most precious lands – for us and the wildlife. ☺



The Pike-San Isabel National Forest has nine Congressionally designated Wildernesses totaling over 450,000 acres: Holy Cross, Mt. Massive, Collegiate Peaks (left on the horizon), Mt. Evans, Lost Creek (center, Goose Creek Trail), Buffalo Peaks, Greenhorn Mountains, Sangre de Cristo and Spanish Peaks (right). Photos by Michael Rogers, John Stansfield and Jean Smith.

Finding the Skipper

by Jim Lockhart

On August 30th, 2014, Wild Connections conducted the third survey of the rare Pawnee montane skipper butterfly (*Hesperia leonardus montana*) in the Trout Creek area, near Deckers, Colorado, where in 2009 and 2010 Wild Connections carried out a project to restore and revegetate a closed motorcycle trail. Pawnee montane skippers were found in numbers similar to those found in earlier censuses conducted in 2010 and 2012.



Pawnee montane skipper on liatris flower.

The Pawnee montane skipper butterfly, listed as a threatened species under the federal Endangered Species Act, is known to occur only in the South Platte River drainage within an area of approximately 38 square miles. A portion of this area was burned during the 2002 Hayman Fire. Because of its limited range, the butterfly is particularly vulnerable to loss of habitat. Monitoring of the butterflies and their habitat is crucial to planning for the preservation of the species. Wild Connections' survey was part of a broader Forest Service and Fish and Wildlife Service census program which has been ongoing since the year 2000.

The butterflies were counted along both of the previously established transects. The lower transect is along the banks of Trout Creek, in an area recognized as good butterfly habitat. The upper transect is in the area where the Forest Service had "ripped up" an old motorcycle trail using mechanical equipment, and where Wild Connections volunteers had recontoured the soil, placed erosion control barriers, and reseeded the area with a native plant mixture.

The 2014 survey examined whether and to what extent the trail restoration benefited the Pawnee montane skipper by



The old ATV trail is slowly but surely recovering after the restoration work. Photos Kristin Skoog.



increasing the suitability of habitat for them in the restored area. The surveyors found good vegetation regrowth in the restored area. Biodegradable matting which was laid down to protect the soil from erosion has become almost invisible. The survey also meant to find out whether other factors not affected by the restoration work, such as the amount of forest cover, were more important in determining suitability of the area as butterfly habitat, and therefore whether forest thinning, such as has been done in other portions of the butterfly's range, would be beneficial.

John Sovell, from the Colorado Natural Heritage Program, principal researcher on the monitoring project since 2000, conducted the census.



The team: John Sovell, Leslie Sovell, Melissa Walker and Rosemary Brink. Photo Kristin Skoog

John was assisted by a team of volunteers who served as butterfly "spotters," walking along the transect and watching for butterflies, which John would then identify as Pawnee montane skippers or as members of a more common related species, the comma skipper. The butterflies are members of a family called "skippers" because of their darting, irregular flight habits, very distinguishable from other kinds of butterflies. Spotters would also walk up and down the hillside within the designated survey area, reporting the number of blooming prairie gayfeather (*Liatris*), a plant which the adult butterflies primarily rely on for nectar, and blue grama grass, on which butterfly larva feed. The surveys also recorded the number of trees in the survey transects to quantify the forest cover.

In addition to documenting butterfly numbers, the surveys have also produced information about butterfly behavior. The year 2012 was a drought year, when the census located relatively few *Liatris* plants, the flower on which the adult butterflies ordinarily feed. Apparently because of the shortage of their preferred plant, butterflies were observed nectaring on a couple of different composite flowers. It is encouraging that despite a shortage of their preferred plant, butterfly numbers in 2014 remained similar to 2012, suggesting that they withstood the impacts of the drought.

The 2014 Pawnee montane skipper survey was partially funded by a grant from Prairie Biotic Research, Inc., and Wild Connections gratefully acknowledges their assistance.

Getting to Half Earth *continued from page 1*

of 52 per cent between 1970 and 2010. In other words, vertebrate species populations across the globe are, on average, about half the size they were 40 years ago.”

- Audubon's *Birds and Climate Change* (September 2014) list 314 bird species “on the brink.” Forty-nine of those are found in Colorado, with eleven that have lost between 90 and 98 per cent of their summer range.
- A study published in the journal *Science* revealed that humans are causing wild species to disappear at one thousand times the natural rate, mostly due to human-caused climate change, deforestation, habitat encroachment, overfishing, pesticides, poaching, and pollution. Even in protected areas, animals, plants, and invertebrates are rapidly vanishing.

We all know that the bison in their millions were slaughtered, that the passenger pigeon went from billions to extinction in only a century, and that polar bears are swimming miles to find seals. But it's a shock to realize that the energetic red-breasted nuthatch who comes to my feeder year round is in serious danger, or that the US Fish and Wildlife Service just proposed that African lions, who have declined by 30 per cent in the last twenty years, be listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act. Once it comes home that this extinction crisis is real today, then we either go into total despair or start looking for solutions.



Wilson, at 86, is not one to despair, and his very fertile mind looks at the biggest picture: the whole earth. The Half Earth concept has two key elements: *big* and *connected*. In addition it is also immensely complex and dauntingly hard to implement on the ground.

I was intrigued by his “new kind of park.” “Why, when this thing gets really going,” Wilson said, “you’ll be so surrounded, so enveloped by connected corridors that you’ll almost never not be in a national park, or at any rate in a landscape that leads to a national park.” I tried to imagine that for where I live: Colorado Springs is less than 15 miles to Pikes Peak and 40 miles to Rampart Range, both wild with remote valleys and sheltered streams. That envelopment by nature is even easier to imagine if you live in South Park or the Wet Mountain Valley surrounded by the high peaks and forested foothills in virtually all directions.



Who is working on this?

Getting to Half Earth is going to take some monumental efforts, but a surprising number of people are already working on it in North America and around the world. Here are just a few examples.

Wilson is particularly interested in the M. C. Davis' **Nokuse Plantation** (pronounced no-GOOH-zee), about 50,000 acres of private land between the protected lands along Choctawhatchee River and Elgin Air Force base in Florida. Davis is restoring the long leaf pine forest that once



Gopher tortoise, FL.

covered some 900 million acres between Virginia and East Texas. That was before the “Big Cut” after the Civil War which reduced it by 97 percent. Davis has spent close to a million dollars a year for the last ten years planting

long leaf pines, reintroducing fire, thinning pulp wood pines and restoring other species such as the keystone gopher tortoises. He says, “We’re in Year 13 of a 300-year program.”

Another large conservation effort is the **American Prairie Reserve (APR)** along the Missouri River in Montana. I visited there this fall and found that the Lewis and Clark campsites along the river now have boat ramps, RVs and a few tents, no bison or grizzlies, but 500 or so elk gather for the rut and the mosquitoes are as ferocious as they likely were more than 200 years ago.

The prairie north of the Missouri is the most incredible expanse of rangeland dissected by a few gravel roads, no trees in sight for miles and miles except at a ranch building now and then. APR is working toward a prairie conservation area of 3,000,000 acres in cooperation with ranchers,

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American Prairie Reserve, MT. The land and sky are immense: the three bison (center) are nearly lost to view. Photo Jean Smith

Getting to Half Earth *continued from page 5*

land conservation groups and governments. The Reserve currently spans more than 300,000 acres of deeded and leased land. In addition to protecting prairie dog towns and establishing a free-roaming bison herd, APR does public education and volunteer work projects, stream restoration, reintroduction of fire and removing or modifying fencing. An interactive map at <http://www.americanprairie.org/visit/where-is-the-reserve/> illustrates how APR fills the rolling prairie landscape between the Missouri and Saskatchewan.

The **Wildlands Network**, founded in 1991 by Dr. Michael Soulé and others, is inspiring networks of wildlands across the world and especially in North America. They propose four Wildways spanning the continent: the Eastern Wildway from Florida into Canada, an Arctic-Boreal Wildway across the north, a Western Wildway from Alaska to Central America, and a Pacific Wildway along the western coast. Each of these has active partner groups ranging from national organizations to government agencies to individual landowners and regional groups like Wild Connections.



I am drawn to the **Spine of the Continent** and how Wild Connections is embedded in the Western Wildway. The Wildlands Network says, “Along the entirety of the Rocky Mountains and associated ranges, we are reconstructing the world’s most extensive network of protected, connected landscapes – the 5,000-mile-long Western Wildway. Our vision is one of coordinated international conservation action that will protect, connect, and restore a contiguous network of private and public lands along the spine of the Rocky Mountains and associated ranges, basins, plateaus, and deserts from Alaska’s Brooks Range to the Mexican Sierra Madre Occidental.” A grand vision and a grand contribution to Half Earth.

Wildlands Network in Central Colorado

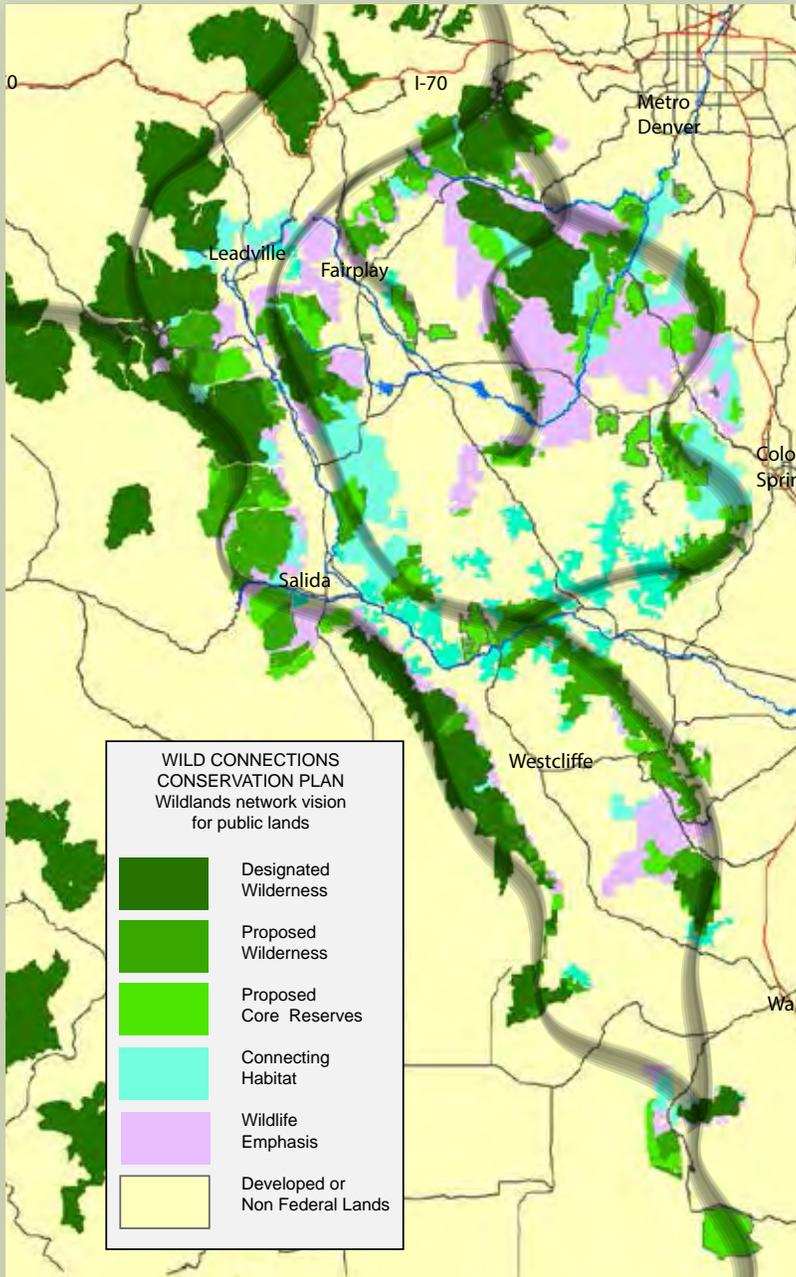
For two decades Wild Connections has promoted a wildlands network in our geographical focus in the Arkansas and South Platte basins. When our volunteers started mapping roadless areas in the Pike-San Isabel National Forest, we may not have realized that the greatest challenge would be a practical way to protect the wild areas and link them into a functional network:

- What would it look like here in Central Colorado to have that system of wild landscapes that Wilson describes, the chain of uninterrupted corridors, a new kind of park that won’t let species vanish?
- How can we provide the right habitat and solitude that allow the lynx who live on the Sawatch Range to thrive and perhaps move along the high mountains to the north and east? Or when the next wolf from Yellowstone comes to Colorado and this time makes it across I-70, will there be wild space and human tolerance for this top predator?
- What configuration of roadless areas and functional connections on federal, state, county or private lands will serve the needs of the people, communities and the thousands of amphibians, birds, fish, mammals, insects, mollusks, natural communities and plants found here?
- How will we keep our perspective that “nature” is not

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Will we make sure that our great carnivores can thrive and roam across the land? Photo Colorado Parks and Wildlife



separate from people, that since the advent of the human race we are embedded in the natural world and are diminished when we forget that simple fact?

Here is how the wildlands network for our part of the Southern Rockies and the Spine of the Continent Wildway might look. It is based primarily on Wild Connections surveys of roadless areas, applying various biological data and input from stakeholders. It does presume that areas that are roadless or have high biodiversity values will require strict protection to retain true wilderness values and viability.

Over the next year, Wild Connections will be updating the *Wild Connections Conservation Plan*. Since it was published in 2006, better data on wildlife, vegetation and land use is available from public sources, and Wild Connections has added to our roadless area inventory for both Forest Service and BLM lands. So the picture is not complete, by any means, and we welcome your comments.



Thinking Bigger

Making connections from my tiny brain-sphere to the spines of continents

by Lee Patton

The inspiration of first seeing the term “Southern Rockies Ecosystem Project” in a Sierra Club newsletter in 1996 led to my volunteering with Wild Connections in early days. (As I remember, the mapping projects proposed by Jean and Art Smith were then folded into SREP’s goals.) Even learning that the Southern Rockies had a geographical distinctness—meaning the continuous mountain ranges from Caspar, Wyoming down to Santa Fe—provided new neural connections in my own mind. Without realizing it or yet knowing of E.O. Wilson’s concepts, working as a mapper was helping me to think bigger.

I thought it was exciting to be part of a gigantic regional project, all of it helping me to “embed myself in the natural world” in a more concrete way than just enjoying mountain vistas or hiking the usual iconic trails. The physical roaming required when mapping segments of our forests or slipping along tributaries flowing into riverways made connections in my tiny brain-sphere to the wider regional ecology. I just naturally started making wild connections from the Pike-San Isabel to the West’s wider wildways, then the continent’s and beyond, to the hemisphere’s. Why not expand the “Yukon to Yucatan” concept of uninterrupted wildways south to Tierra del Fuego?

Depending on the widening maps we carry in our minds, we might crest a hilltop in the Tarryalls on a mapping quest near Lost Creek wilderness only to envision ourselves on a position along the wild spines of two continents. How’s that for thinking big enough?



South Park Update

by Misi Ballard

Badger Flats Habitat Restoration Project

The South Park Ranger District's "Badger Flats Habitat Restoration Project" got off to a productive start this summer. This is a multi-year plan to close an estimated 250+ miles of illegal OHV routes and to restore critical wildlife habitat on the 50,000 acre Badger Flats area of Pike National Forest in northeastern Park County.

Wild Connections partnered with Colorado Mountain Club, Great Old Broads for Wilderness and Mosquito Range Heritage Initiative to provide volunteers on four work weekends of stewardship, camaraderie, hard work and fun. Grandmothers and grandfathers, millennials, and Boys Scouts were some of the many volunteers who joined the Ranger District's trail crew to build several sections of post-and-cable barriers to illegal OHV routes. These user-created routes have fragmented large areas of winter and birthing habitat for Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep, elk and mule deer.

More than 50 volunteers worked alongside the Forest Service crews to dig post holes, pour cement, rake and reseed disturbed ground. Two large dispersed camping areas and three separate illegal "OHV play areas" were closed, protecting many acres of wildlife habitat. Return visits to the worksites have shown the closures are being respected and the disturbed ground is recovering.

The stewardship field season ended in mid-October with a chili and brew celebratory dinner following the last work day. Participants enjoyed the beauty of a quiet fall evening on Badger Flats sharing stories, a delicious dinner and a deep sense of accomplishment in working together to protect public lands.



Installing post and cable to prevent off-road use at Badger Flats. Photos Misi Ballard

Farnum Roadless Area

As many long-time Wild Connections members may remember, the Farnum Roadless Area was one of seven South Park areas proposed for wilderness management in the 2006 Wild Connections Conservation Plan. Farnum's moderate peaks and meadows lie on the east side of South Park from the Tarryall River corridor and south across Farnum and Schoolmarm Peaks to the edge of South Park. The WCCP described its natural characteristics, including five kinds of forest trees, several Tarryall Creek tributary headwaters, pronghorn winter range, summer or winter range for mule deer and elk, lynx denning and winter habitat and several areas of high biodiversity value identified by The Nature



Conservancy. It also is a connecting bridge between Lost Creek Wilderness on the north and the parklands to the south.

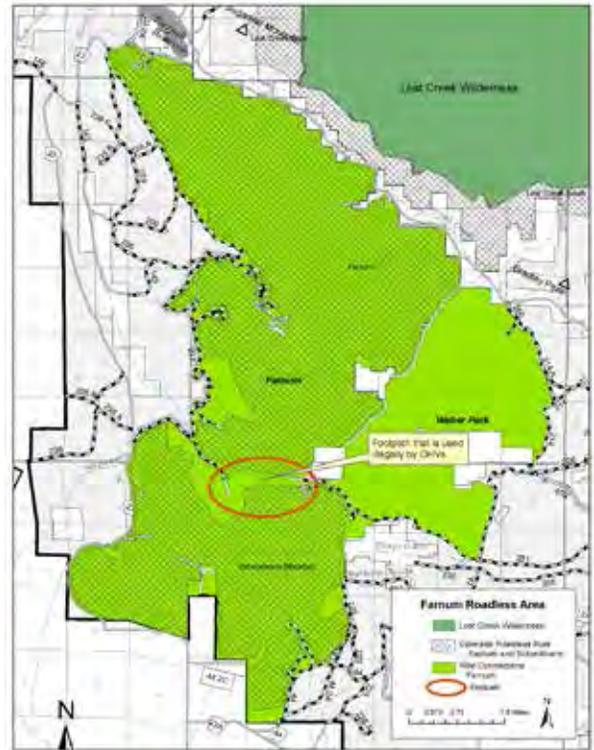
Early on Wild Connections volunteers found that Farnum's roadless extent was much larger than the Forest Service's 2001 determination of about 7,000 acres. By 1998 our mapping teams had verified 19,000 roadless acres. The Forest Service had access to our documentation, but they stuck to the smaller boundaries until the Colorado Roadless Rule was finalized in July, 2012.

The Roadless Rule was a milestone for Wild Connections. Based at least partly on the data Wild Connections submitted, the Forest Service added 107,400 acres to the official Pike-San Isabel inventory, including major additions that brought Farnum nearly to the size of the Wild Connections roadless area!

However, rather than being determined a single protected area, the Roadless Rule split Farnum into two separate areas, Farnum and Schoolmarm, named after the dominant peaks in the two areas. (Shown as cross hatch on map.) An existing east/west footpath was cherry-stemmed between Farnum and Schoolmarm.

This footpath is closed to motorized traffic by the Forest Service with signs and soil berms, but this closure is regularly ignored and OHV use continues.

Motorized recreation is a legitimate use of public lands, but it has exploded in South Park over the past several years. According to Colorado Parks and Wildlife, local wildlife



populations have been severely impacted and pushed out of their historic wintering and calving areas to the east of the Puma Hills. With the tremendous proliferation of illegal, user-created OHV trails in adjoining Badger Flats to the east, the Tarryall Reservoir to the north and Turner Gulch on the west, the continued illegal motorized use of the path across Farnum further stresses local wildlife and creates safety and management problems for both the Forest Service and Colorado Parks and Wildlife.



Wild Connections is working with the South Park Ranger District to address the problem and will be partnering with them to permanently close the illegal motorized route in summer 2015. With limited budgets and staff, the Forest Service will need volunteer help to get the job done. We will keep you posted as plans develop and hope you will join us as we work to stop this threat to the integrity of the Farnum Roadless Area.

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This footpath (left) between Farnum Peak and Schoolmarm Mountain is being used illegally by OHVs. Motorized vehicles regularly drive past the sign and over the berms at the Forest Service closure (right). Photos Misi Ballard

To celebrate the twentieth anniversary of Wild Connections in 2015, we begin an on-going series of profiles and interviews of people involved with the organization in many ways through the years. Appropriately, in this issue of Landscapes we feature Wild Connections founder and inspiration.

Preserving Wild Connections: Founder Jean Smith

by John Stansfield

More than twenty years ago, Jean, a Colorado grandmother, had a problem. It was not a personal problem. It was a natural one. The southern Rockies were losing their biological diversity, their wealth of native plant and animal species, their wild lands and ecological connections, due to excessive human development. Acting upon this recognition, she pioneered numerous practical ways to stop the loss, to implement the principles of the science of conservation biology.

To put her concern for biodiversity protection into action, Jean became involved early in the development of the Southern Rockies Ecosystem Project (SREP). This nonprofit conservation science organization is now part of Rocky Mountain Wild. For many years, Jean served as a SREP board member, acting as interim executive director for a time. During her board tenure, SREP produced two landmark documents, the *State of the Southern Rockies Ecoregion Report* and the *Southern Rockies Wildlands Network Vision*, and began implementation of the findings set out in the reports.

In 1995, Jean founded the Upper Arkansas-South Platte Project, now known as Wild Connections (WC.) The group organized hundreds of citizens to do field mapping and other scientific research on more than 100 roadless areas in the Pike-San Isabel National Forest and other public lands.

“The thing that excites me about this conservation work,” she reflects, “is that a band of citizen scientists can make a difference. We took to the mountains on foot, bicycle, trucks, jeeps and sedans, bringing back detailed hard data about wild places. Over the years these records have helped build a practical vision for the future where the earth’s bounty is protected rather than squandered. It is hard work, rigorous science, sometimes discouraging, more often fulfilling, and attitudes change because of it.”



Mike (visiting from Minneapolis), Jean and Art Smith on an inventory trip east of Buffalo Peaks Wilderness in 2000. Art handled driving and logistics for the team until his death in 2003.

The roadless field data became the foundation for another important document, the *Wild Connections Conservation Plan* (WCCP). The plan, which appeared in 2006, is a science-based, citizens’ land management proposal.

Through the years from 1995 to 2006, she wore many hats for WC--volunteer coordinator and trainer, trip organizer, data manager, map-maker, grant writer, treasurer, newsletter editor, webmaster, and many more--always moving the organization forward in implementing its mission. In 2004, the Wilderness Society recognized Jean’s work by awarding her an Environmental Heroes Award.

Wild Connections began educating the public and land managers on the contents of the WCCP in 2007. Two years later, the WC board expanded the group’s outreach to restoration projects in public land roadless areas which contain threatened wildlife and plant populations. In 2011, much in line with recommendations in the WCCP, the Pike-San Isabel National Forest expanded its final Colorado Roadless Area inventory by more than 107,000 acres, a greater increase than any other national forest in the region. Roadless areas hold the wild material from which Wilderness areas can be designated, providing the highest form of land protection.

Under Jean’s guidance, Wild Connections has grown to be the first group of its kind in central Colorado. WC deals with a full spectrum of ecological concerns on public lands: identifying, protecting, and restoring lands of the Upper Arkansas and South Platte watersheds to ensure the survival of native species and ecological richness, while safeguarding present and potential Wilderness.

Perhaps Michael Rogers, former WC board and staff, captures best Jean Smith’s value to the group and to central Colorado’s environment when he states: “What she has done through her passion, dedication, and innovation is to create SREP and Wild Connections. She is always seeking creative solutions for new programs, funding, and our mission-related work. So, I’d praise her not for a single “big win” on a single campaign, but instead for ensuring and instilling her passionate approach in all of us, creating a sustainable organization for not just one campaign, but for many years to come.”

Several years ago, Jean retired from her full commitment to WC. Today, she continues as a volunteer providing Wild Connections with a clear organizational memory, as well as the vision to guide us into the future.



From my desk... (er, Ballard's deck)

Though hard to believe, I first met Jean Smith nearly twenty years ago. She had recruited a small band of wildland lovers under the banner "Upper Arkansas-South Platte Project," and was sending them out with quad topo maps to ground truth where roads were located in some of the most remote corners of the upper Arkansas River and South Platte River watersheds.



We "Mappers" would drive to the end of not just the pavement but the end of the roughest dirt roads, and then walk to ensure we documented the real rather than political boundaries of roadless acreages. We also noted special places in these areas – old growth forest, goshawk nests, hidden but healthy wetlands and fens. Then Jean would gather us – in libraries, Safeway community rooms, and other free public meeting places – and we drew lines on maps and created narratives combining all our many excursions. The ultimate result was the peer-reviewed *Wild Connections Conservation Plan*, a citizen-driven plan to preserve ecological diversity and roadlessness in central Colorado.

And here we are, celebrating the 20th Anniversary of those early meetings. Much has changed since those early days. We still send Mappers out to ground truth conditions in the farthest reaches of these watersheds, but we now use GeoJot on I-pads rather than pencil-marked paper maps, and we upload reports wirelessly into GIS systems rather than meeting in the library to draw lines on paper. And we are now "Wild Connections," with a pretty logo and a website, rather than the more science-project-sounding "UASPP" whose participants carried around the 3-inch thick Conservation Plan.

But some things have not changed. Wild Connections still relies on science in our advocacy, our data is still gathered through the boots-on-the-ground efforts of our Mappers. Jean still reminds us of the remote corners of this lovely state that need our attention. We still pull together the individual efforts of many Mappers to create a unified vision for roadless area management in central Colorado. We still actively restore areas that link roadless habitat and connecting wildways. We still have a hard-working Board who help with inventories, write proposals, dig post-holes and guide the organization. And we still love wildlands.

I am proud of what our small group of thoughtful, committed citizens has accomplished over the past 20 years, and how we have adapted to and taken advantage of new technology. I look forward to working with you all as we move forward into our third decade.

Deb Overn, president



Fall Board retreat at the Ballard's South Park cabin.

Front, L to R: Misi Ballard, Jim Lockhart, Jean Smith, Alison Gallensky, Claude Neumann, John Stansfield; Back, Lee Patton, John Sztukowski, Kristin Skoog, Deb Overn. Tom Mowle was unable to attend.



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Mission: Wild Connections, a science-based conservation organization, works to identify, protect and restore lands of the Upper Arkansas and South Platte watersheds to ensure the survival of native species and ecological richness.

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Wild Connections has worked for 20 years to keep central Colorado's roadless areas wild. We want future generations to know that we were vigilant and preserved this heritage for them and their fellow creatures. You can be a vital part of our next 20 years by sending your year-end contribution. Help protect these wild places, the plants and animals that live there, and the trails where the roar of motors is left behind.

Go on line today at <https://www.coloradogives.org/WildConnections> and schedule your donation for the December 9th Colorado Gives Day. It will renew your membership and also count toward a proportionate share of the Gives Day \$1 million incentive fund! The full amount is tax deductible and a receipt will be sent.

Or mail a check to Wild Connections, 2168 Pheasant Place, Colorado Springs CO 80909.

We thank you in advance for your support.



*The Reef, Browns Canyon proposed National Monument and Wilderness.
Photo John Stansfield*

