June 2016

LANDSCAPES NEWSLETTER

Wild Connections

FROM THE MOUNTAINS TO THE PRAIRIES

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BLM Management Plan and Wilderness Inventory

BLM adds more than 104,500 acres to its wilderness inventory

by John Sztukowski

The Bureau of Land Management Royal Gorge Field Office (RGFO) is about one year into their Resource Management Plan (RMP) Revision, which is determining how 668,000 acres of public land in central and eastern Colorado will be managed for the next twenty to thirty years.

Sitting at Falls Gulch with a view of the Sangres. Photo John Sztukowski

In preparation for this plan, the BLM inventoried or re-inventoried all of the resources that they manage, including wilderness. The BLM assessed these areas for "Lands with Wilderness Characteristics" (LWC), a somewhat new classification, and the highest designation they can administer locally for wilderness

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BioBlitz in the Arkansas Canyon

Teaming up to record diversity in Falls Gulch

by Megan Mueller and Alison Gallensky

Flowing from the top of the Rockies to the Mississippi River, the Arkansas River is one of America's mighty river systems. Its headwaters make up an ecological wonderland and a recreational hotspot, cutting through rugged canyon country full of hair-raising land features like rock hoodoos and rough crags. This breathtaking Colorado landscape could be protected for future generations thanks to the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM's) new emphasis on landscape-level planning and balancing conservation with other uses.

Which way shall we go? Photo Kate Spinelli.

Wild Connections' science and advocacy partners crafted a proposal for an Area of Critical Environmental Concern (a type of protective BLM designation) for over 100 thousand acres of lands adjacent to the Arkansas River. The BLM can use this designation to address unique conservation needs of an area

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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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Making a Difference

Conservation happens when people work together. Collaborating with other groups brings together a variety of skills and resources. We've worked with Conservation Colorado, The Wilderness Society, Coalition for Upper South Platte, Mosquito Range Heritage Initiative, Greater Arkansas River Nature Association, Friends of Browns Canyon, Rocky Mountain Wild, Rocky Mountain Field Institute, Colorado Mountain Club, Great Old Broads for Wilderness, Sierra Club, Wildlands Restoration Volunteers, and The Forest Service, BLM and Colorado Parks and Wildlife staff over the years.

Here are a just a few of the many others who are making a difference.

Some of the Farnum Peak workday voluteers. They represent several hundred people who have restored habitat in Trout Creek, Geen Mountain, Geneva Basin, Farnum and those who will be there this summer for Selkirk Gulch. Without them these projects would not happen.

Jim Lockart, Wild Connections' Board President, leads out on one of our monthly wildlands hikes. In addition to having a great back country experience, hikers are among the strongest advocates for wildlands.

Wild Connections Board and staff at our last retreat: back row Lee Patton, John Sztukowski, Kristin Skoog, Deb Overn; front row, Misi Ballard, Jim Lockhart, Jean Smith, Alison Gallensky, Claude Newuman and John Stansfield. Another retreat is in the works.

Special recognition is due to those who provide financial support for Wild Connections. We thank all the individuals who contribute - you provide the regular support for restoration projects, advocacy and citizen organizing, mapping roadless areas, back country hikes and working to make sure the Forest Service and BLM live up to their stewardship responsibilities for our public lands.

Pew Charitable Trust is underwriting major costs of the BLM work, with additional help from the Wolcott Family Foundation. Patagonia Denver has given grants for habitat projects for many years and has just awarded us a special grant to undertake a strategic planning process that will guide Wild Connections for the next five years. South Park National Heritage Foundation and Park County Land and Water Trust Fund are giving major support for the Selkirk habitat project. Maki Foundation, New-Land Foundation, Norcross Wildlife Foundation, National Forest Foundation and Fund for Wild Nature regularly provide flexible grants for program and general operations. Thank you...

Selkirk Restoration Project Gearing Up

Friday through Sunday, August 19-21

by Misi Ballard

Wild Connections' summer 2016 stewardship project is focused on protecting the headwaters of North Tarryall Creek and the rich biodiversity found there in the Selkirk basin. The project area, situated at 10,500 feet, is just above the town of Como and south of the Boreas Pass Road. With views of the Continental Divide to the west and the expanse of South Park to the east, the scenery for this project is hard to beat!

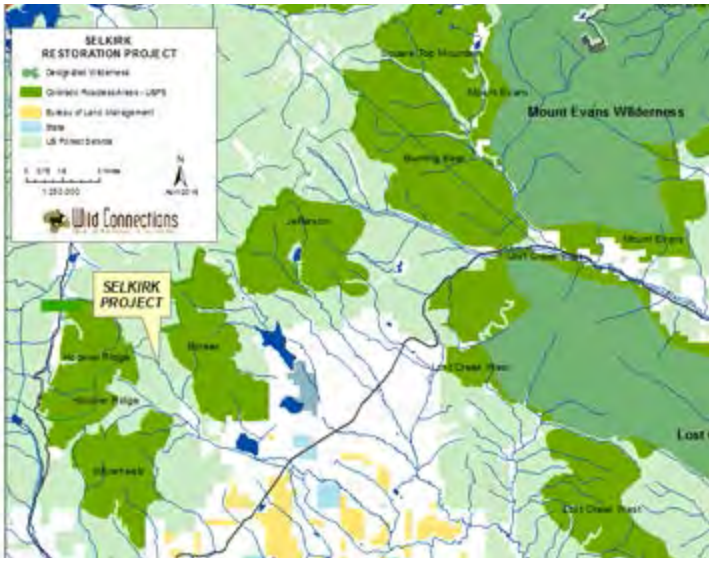
The Selkirk Basin is tucked into a long string of roadless areas (RAs), including Hoosier Ridge and Silverheels RAs just north of Fairplay across Boreas, Jefferson, Burning Bear, and Square-Top RAs to the Mt. Evans Wilderness, creating a broad sweep of core reserves to the north and east. This thirty-mile long swath of roadless lands is home to herds of elk, deer and moose, providing critical habitat for wintering and calving and important migration routes for these large ungulate populations between their preferred habitats.

Moose use the North Tarryall wetlands for forage and elk have calving areas and major migration routes along the riparian corridor. Photo CPW

This high mountain valley is a favorite destination for bird and big game watchers, hikers, wildflower enthusiasts, and campers, all coming to enjoy the natural beauty of the area.

The South Park Ranger District has identified a growing problem in this biologically diverse area where dispersed camping and illegal motorized travel is invading the headwaters of the North Tarryall Creek, adjacent to the Selkirk Campground. Both illegal dispersed camping and off-road vehicle incursions into the wetlands of this important South Park water resource are causing increased sedimentation, significant erosion and damaging impacts to the flora and fauna of this area.

Working in partnership with the USFS South Park Ranger District, Park County Land and Water Trust Fund, South Park National Heritage Area, Mosquito Range Heritage Area, Coalition for the Upper South Platte, Central Colorado Wilderness Coalition, and the Great Old Broads for Wilderness, Wild Connections has developed a three-day project plan, with a full contingent of volunteers needed each day.



The Selkirk Restoration Project calls for installation of 1,700 feet of post and cable fencing in the area immediately adjacent to Selkirk Campground, installation of two seasonal gates to protect wintering and calving areas surrounding the campground and wetlands area, and 200 feet of post and cable fencing at the legal end of FR 801, where an illegal track travels another 1.5 miles onto the delicate tundra above, threatening endangered plants and tundra animals.

Volunteer work days are scheduled for Friday Aug 19, 2016 through Sunday, Aug 21, 2016. (These are revised dates.) With your help, we can protect this area of rich biodiversity for wildlife and human visitors alike. Once the illegal trespass is stopped, the North Tarryall River will see improved water quality and water retention in these upstream wetlands, wildlife habitat will be improved for both terrestrial and aquatic flora and fauna, and visitors to the area will enjoy a more natural experience.

But we need you to help make this happen. Come join us for all four days, or whatever time you can contribute. Wild Connections and our partner organizations will provide campsites and meals. Bring your friends, co-workers, neighbors and families! Meet kindred spirits, make new friends and join in this community effort to give back to these lands we love and enjoy.

Probable location of post and cable fencing along FR 801. Photo USFS

The project is coordinated by a stellar team: Ginny Greer (greerginni@yahoo.com) is the lead, backed up by Misi Ballard and Kristin Skoog. Registration is required at Selkirk Eventbrite beginning June 6th.

Surrounded and Enveloped by Connected Wildlands

Wildways in the Arkansas and South Platte Basins and beyond

By Jean Smith

The idea of a network of protected core reserves used to be a somewhat wonky idea discussed mostly at meetings of scientists. Now it's mainstream. *Half Earth,* E. O Wilson's 2015 book that promotes a global wildlands network, was highlighted in Smithsonian , *The New York Times, Aeon, Nature,* and Audubon with titles ranging from a cautious "Wilson wants us to…" to a bold "Half the earth must be preserved…"

Will pronghorn have passageways to roam across their preferred lands? Photo CPW,

Wild Ways, shown on Nova in April, says unequivocally that the current protected National Parks and Reserves in North America, and indeed across the world, are too small to support populations of large animals like grizzlies, wolves, elephants, wildebeests, tigers, Dall sheep, lions, antelope and others. Then it describes the efforts across the globe from the huge Kavango Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area in Southern Africa to the eastern coast of Australia to the gigantic Nahani National Park Reserve which anchors the northern end of the Yellowstone to Yukon Initiative in North America.

It seems that the idea of large-scale wildlands networks connecting protected areas with permeable conservation corridors across public and private land is an idea whose time has come.

Biologist Michael Soulé concludes the *Wild Ways* film with "This ... could be a wonderful opportunity or a tremendous failure for humanity. It's our last chance to protect the diversity of life on earth." Knowing Soulé and his work, I am convinced that he opts for the wonderful opportunity.

However, no one underestimates the magnitude of the present extinction crisis where species, most undiscovered and unnamed, are disappearing forever at 1,000 times the historical background rate. No one underestimates the changes on the land or in culture that will be required. David Quamenn noted in *Wild Ways* that it will take years of dedicated work, patience and working with the people who live in the areas between the protected reserves. No one said it would be easy, but communities and governments are rising to meet this challenge.

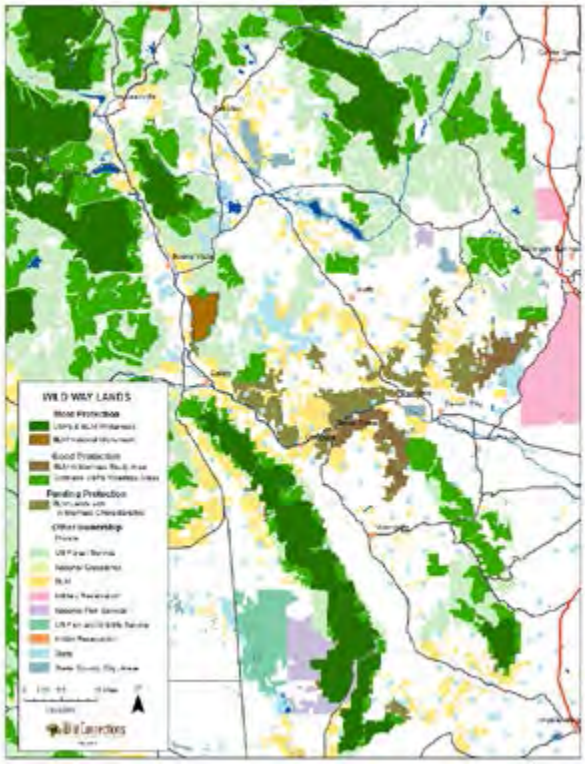
It is that hope for the future that intrigues me. I believe that we as the predominant species can create a future where, as David Quamenn said, "People can live with animals and animals can live with people."

Protected lands

How does this wildlands network play out in south-central Colorado? Many conservation groups, individuals, and government agencies contribute something to protected areas and connecting wildlife friendly habitat. Let's explore how Wild Connections fits into this larger picture.

Wild Connections has focused primarily on the mountain headwaters of the South Platte and Arkansas Rivers for more than twenty years. From tiny trickles fed by snowmelt high on Weston Pass and north of Leadville, or along the Culebra crest, a web of streams feed the South Platte and Arkansas Rivers, flowing across at least fourteen different natural ecosystems.

In our region, Congressionally designated Wilderness areas (dark green) at more than 450,000 acres are the most strictly protected lands because there is no mechanized/motorized travel and mineral extraction and grazing is generally off-limits. USFS Roadless Areas,



nearly 775,000 acres (medium green) and BLM's 60,000 acres of Wilderness Study Areas (dark brown) will remain wild because they have no public roads. BLM's Lands with Wilderness Characteristics at more than 180,000 acres (medium brown) are pending for protection when BLM revises its management plan.

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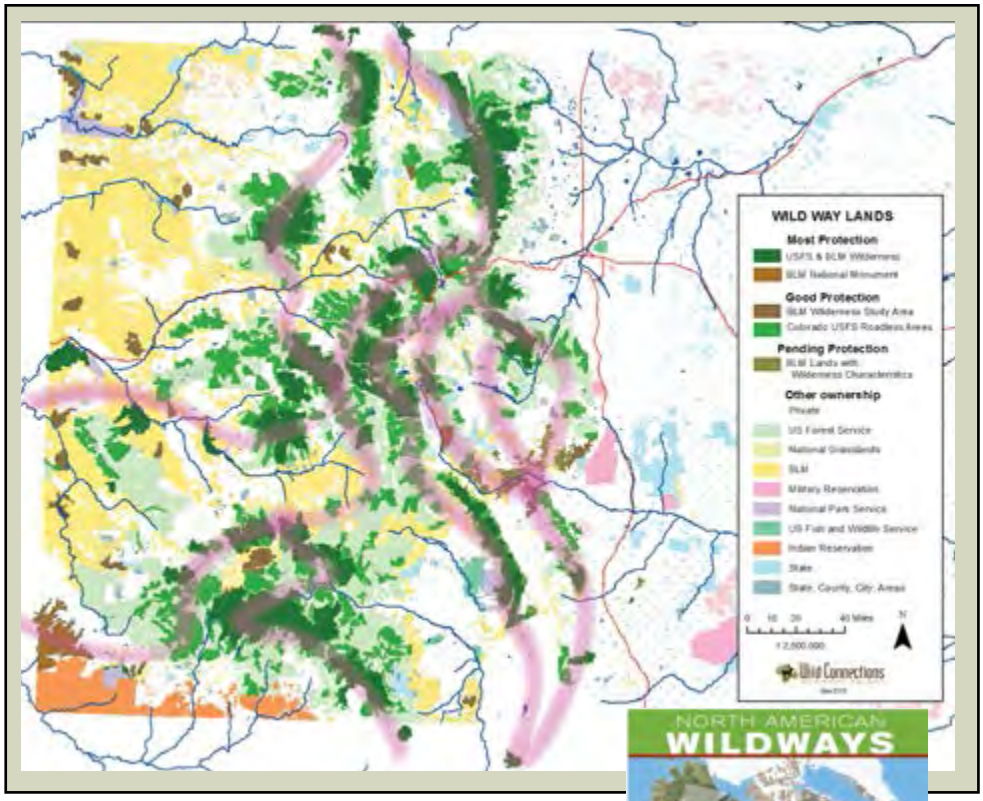
Surrounded... continued from page 4



Connecting them up

However, if Yellowstone National Park is not big enough for grizzlies and wolves, then these Wildernesses and wild areas in central Colorado are less capable as they stand for future lynx, mountain lions, large ungulates, and wandering wolves. To make an obvious point – the wild areas must be connected in a network of wildlife friendly corridors (wild ways) if they are going to contribute to the preservation of large mammals and all the smaller critters.

What if the existing Wildernesses and roadless areas in our region were connected to each other and into similar areas across the state? And what if they were connected beyond Colorado into the Wildlands Project's North American Wildways?

The land itself might look like an integrated system of reserves and permeable wildlife corridors that includes both natural and developed areas. It would likely represent a sea change in how non-federal lands are managed, as well as a dramatic cultural shift in people's attitudes toward the nature in which they are immersed. Wilson, who has wide experience where large reserves are inhabited by farmers and communities, said "Why, when this thing gets really going, 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."

In such a system animals would have a safe passage across the landscape. Elk could move from spring calving areas to summer range to fall range, and younger animals could disperse across larger areas to find mates or better forage. Lynx, which have a stable population on the Sawatch Range, could expand to other suitable habitat and make better connections to the original introduced population in the San Juan Mountains. Black bears would more easily find natural foods and not be drawn into communities that had adopted bear proof regulations. Pronghorn could move across South Park and the Wet Mountain Valley unimpeded where wildlife friendly fences replaced woven wire. And by providing for the large animals, the habitat also will be a safe haven for the hundreds of smaller mammals, for resident and migratory birds, and for the millions of species of reptiles, fish, amphibians, insects, and organisms in the soil.

Progress in central Colorado

Is there progress in protecting lands in this part of Colorado? The Pike-San Isabel NF and the Royal Gorge BLM together manage approximately 2.9 million acres in our region. Only the 450,000 acres of Congressionally designated Wilderness have the strongest permanent protection: these are the central core reserves that total about 16% of these federal lands. Add in Forest Service Roadless Areas and BLM WSAs and the percentage rises to about 44%. In addition there are other state, county and private conservation efforts. That is certainly respectable, even though some of these lands do not have a level of protection that guarantees a biodiverse future.

In addition to the mainstream discussions on wildlands networks, resilience in the face of climate change, and transitions to non-fossil fuels, there are many encouraging on-the-ground examples of protection.

- The Colorado Roadless Rule added more acres to the Pike-San Isabel inventory. In 2012 Colorado completed an arduous review of all USFS roadless lands in the state. This extensive public process was in lieu of accepting an earlier inventory and it resulted in many changes. Wild Connections' independent inventory of roadless areas was instrumental in the addition of 107,300 acres to the Pike-San Isabel National Forest official inventory, about 14% of the total under the new rule. Although the Roadless Areas do not have the protection level of Wilderness, they are relatively wild and contain some of the largest concentrations of wildlife of all sizes and a wide diversity of plant life.

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Arkansas Canyon BioBlitz... continued from page 1

Flowing from the top of the Rockies to the Mississippi River, the Arkansas River is one of America's mighty river systems. Its headwaters make up an ecological wonderland and a recreational hotspot, cutting through rugged canyon country full of hair-raising land features like rock hoodoos and rough crags. This breathtaking Colorado landscape could be protected for future generations thanks to the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM's) new emphasis on landscape-level planning and balancing conservation with other uses.

Wild Connections' science and advocacy partners crafted a proposal for an Area of Critical Environmental Concern (a type of protective BLM designation) for over 100 thousand acres of lands adjacent to the Arkansas River. The BLM can use this designation to address unique conservation needs of an area ranging from biodiversity protection to climate change vulnerability to wildlife migration. For the lands surrounding the most popular river segment for kayakers and rafters in the country, an Area of Critical Environmental Concern designation is crucial for not leaving lands vulnerable to pollution and development. For more information on the proposed Area of Critical Environmental Concern, see https://wilderness.org/ark.

BioBlitz weekend

On May 14 and 15, volunteers from Wild Connections joined other conservation organizations to do a BioBlitz of the Falls Gulch area north of Cotopaxi, within the proposed

Learning how to photograph using a smart phone or IPad.

Area of Critical Environmental Concern. A BioBlitz is an intensive period of biological surveying that attempts to record as many plant and wildlife species as possible within a designated area. Scientists, event organizers, and volunteers looked for rare wildflowers, plants, birds, mammals, reptiles, insects and more. The results are being entered into a national database of species observations using the iNaturalist app and website (www.inaturalist.org).

Thirty-five volunteers gathered with their smart phones in hand to help conservation groups document the diversity of life in this area. Volunteers enjoyed spending time in a beautiful area, meeting new people, and getting away from the hectic pace of everyday life and taking time to observe and learn about all of the fascinating wildlife and plant species that share the land with us.

Though results are still being compiled and tallied, the group cataloged an impressive array of species in a short time. Volunteers found evidence of frequent use of the area by black bears and elk. A wide variety of songbirds were observed singing in the meadow and splashing in a small spring, while raptors soared overhead. Plant life was abundant and very diverse, from a variety of wildflowers in the meadow, to cacti, hanging ferns and many different lichens in the drier canyon areas. Small caves in the cliffs and canyons around the meadow were occupied by bats.

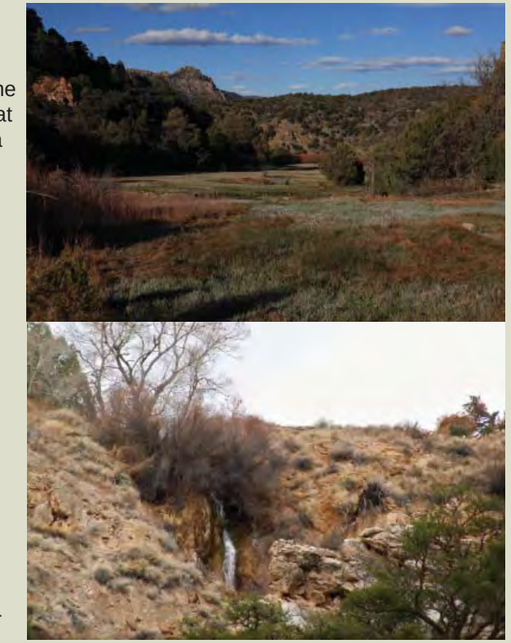
We are looking forward to working with scientists to compile the results and share them with the Bureau of Land Management and the broader scientific community. We anticipate that these site specific results will reinforce broader

Attention to detail was important.

Happy campers

Falls Gulch Area features a lush, spring-fed wet meadow in a lovely hanging valley over a travertine cliff. The springs in the meadow form a small stream that plummets over the cliff face as a 100 foot waterfall.

The verdant green meadow contrasts sharply with the dry, rocky, pinion-juniper forest in the surrounding hills. On the margins of the wet meadow, there are very large trees that have benefited from the water provided by the springs. On the north facing slopes adjacent to the meadow, the forest is moist, shady, and dominated by Douglas fir trees. Upstream from the springs, the gulch becomes a narrow, dry canyon with steep cliffs and many small caves. This variety of different environments creates habitat for a diversity of plant and animal species.



Wet meadow and the falls.

Just a few of the sightings

Surrounded... continued from page 5

- Browns Canyon National Monument and Wilderness is a good example of patience. It took thirty years of mapping and advocacy to finally see the dedication in 2015 of this protected area along the Arkansas River. Geological features, archaeological sites, big horn

Hikers in Railroad Gulch in Browns Canyon experience real solitude and may see some of the animals of this new National Monument. Photo John Stansfield

sheep, mountain lions, deer and elk, and many other natural values are now permanently protected and a premier white water rafting run provides recreation and supports a robust local economy.

- The *Lands With Wilderness Characteristics (LWC)* inventory was completed this year by the BLM Royal Gorge Field Office in preparation for its Resource Management Plan revision. Wild Connections led the conservation community in our own survey of these lands, and as a result of our detailed documentation and BLM's own review, BLM increased the LWC inventory to 182,518 acres, an increase of over 100,000 acres! (See page 1) Now included are places like Falls Gulch (See page 1), the site of a recent weekend BioBlitz, and Table Mountain, the largest wild land in the Arkansas Canyonlands.

- Conservation easements can provide wildlife friendly management. There are nearly 3,000 easements across Colorado, with 66% or 1,020,000 acres designed to protect environmental systems. Two-thirds of these are held by non-governmental organizations, including in our area Land Trust of the Upper Arkansas, Palmer Land Trust, San Isabel Land Protection Trust, The Nature Conservancy and others.

- South Park National Heritage Area includes a variety of natural, cultural and historic resources, including the Nature Conservancy's High Creek Fen Preserve, a rare groundwater-fed wetland system which is a vestige of the last ice age and home to many rare plant species.

- Colorado Natural Areas Program protects areas of special biodiversity across the state. In our region there are at least 18, including Geneva Iron Fens, High Creek Fen, Hoosier Ridge, Hurricane Canyon, Dome Rock, Garden Park Fossil Locality, and Trinidad K-T Boundary among others.

Geneva Iron Fen, a Colorado Natural Area, is one of only eight in Colorado. Photo Dave Bathke, CPW

- County open spaces and state parks, such as Pine Valley Ranch, Cathedral Spires Park,Mueller State Park or Arkansas Headwaters Recreation Area, often have extensive backcountry areas in addition to their developed sites.

- Wildlife overpasses and underpasses are recognized as one of the best ways to allow animals to roam through their traditional areas and to prevent highway accidents which take an unacceptable toll of humans and animals. The first wildlife bridge on I-70 will be built east of Vail: I-70 is the major barrier to north-south wildlife movements, with many vehicle-animal collisions with deer, elk, bears and even a wandering wolf. Countless animals killed and loss of human life. Many other structures on a smaller scale are completed or projected, including an underpass-overpass location on Highway 9, elk underpasses near Woodland Park and Sedalia, and an underpass is planned for Highway 285 near Nathrop, where as much as 70 percent of all reported crashes over the study period are wildlife-vehicle collisions.

Moose on the wildlife bridge on Highway 9. Photo CBS

These are just a few examples of what it might mean to put our share of a global Half Earth on the ground. It is a great opportunity.

♋

BLM ... continued from page 1

quality land. In 2013, the BLM RGFO listed 77,765 acres of LWCs, but they added about 104,500 acres to that in 2015, due in large part to Wild Connections' independent inventories.

Wild Connections mapping

We began inventorying BLM RGFO managed land for LWCs in 2013, a three year process in which we surveyed and mapped approximately 300,000 acres of potential wilderness quality land, from South Park to near Walsenburg, CO, including much of the Arkansas River Canyonlands. We found 246,000 acres of Lands with Wilderness Characteristics in 24 different units! We compiled a 700+ page document with our findings, complete with 28 maps, 1,200 documented photopoints, and supplemental information from Rocky Mountain Wild, Colorado Parks and Wildlife, and the Colorado Natural Heritage Program, among other sources.

Wild Connections formally submitted these reports to the BLM RGFO when they officially began their RMP revision process, likely a four to five year process, with the "Scoping Period" last year in June 2015. This began a public comment period (the first of several) when the BLM held public informational meetings and accepted public comments on how you and I and the general public want to see these BLM lands managed for the next two to three decades.

We have a great group of hard-working BLM staffers at Royal Gorge that converses with the public and considers public input. Furthermore, this plan is incorporating new elements from a current BLM planning overhaul (Planning 2.0), which emphasizes the importance of public input and its inclusion in the planning processes. We need to speak up for these lands and special places that we care about for their natural/ecological values because other people and industries are surely lobbying for the resources that they value from the land such as mining, logging, and oil and gas.

The BLM published their "Scoping Report" in November 2015; this is essentially a summary and index of the aforementioned public comments submitted during BLM's Scoping Period. Of 31 BLM planning issue categories, Lands with Wilderness Characteristics received the second most public comments, behind only the public concern for impacts, mitigation and alternatives to fluid minerals*. Thanks so much to those that sent the BLM public comments during this first year of the plan revision, as it's really important to get into the conversation at the forefront, when the structure and foundation of the plan is still being shaped.

The next public comment period (tentatively scheduled for Fall 2016) will be just as important as the Scoping Period, as the BLM will not only provide draft management plan options or alternatives, but this new step in the planning process (also part of Planning 2.0) will allow them to go back to the drawing board one more time based on public input and then come out with the traditional "Draft RMP." The BLM will also release an Impact Analysis Study as part of this new "Draft Alternatives" period. (Note – this next step in the planning process, "Draft Alternatives," is new and the BLM has not yet determined if their field offices will host public meetings; however it is a possibility and may be at the discretion of the local field office, a process that Wild Connections is advocating for.)

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**The RGFO is also responsible for 6.8 million subsurface acres across Colorado east of the Continental Divide They administer mineral leasing underlying lands managed by the U.S. Forest Service, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the National Park Service, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, as well as beneath surface lands owned by non-Federal entities such as States and private landowners. Decisions about future minerals, which include oil and gas, will be part of the Resource Management Plan.*

Canyon
by John Stansfield

There is a wind,
a wind that dances up to the canyon bend,
twisting wildly in the sun.

From the dry creek bed
the sand rises, the wind's brief partner,
and falls, scattered about.

Just above,
in the alcove niche,
the owl waits alone for night
when wind dances are done.

BLM ... continued from page 9

Finding 104,500 More Acres of BLM Wild Lands

When BLM re-inventoried and reevaluated their Lands with Wilderness Characteristics in response to the 24 LWC reports that Wild Connections submitted during BLM's Scoping Period last year, they agreed with a large proportion of our findings. Earlier this year, the BLM hosted a meeting for Wild Connections and our conservation allies, in which they unveiled their updated 2015 Lands with Wilderness Characteristics Inventory – which now stands at 182,518 acres, an increase of more than 104,500 acres!

The additions include large natural areas of valuable habitat and species range in the Arkansas River corridor such as Sand Gulch/Falls Gulch Mountain, Backdoor Gulch, and Table Mountain/Echo Canyon, connectivity corridors north of Cañon City at Thompson/Gribble/Twin Mountains and Booger Red/Red Canyon, and smaller yet vital spaces like Stanley Creek/Green Mountain on the east side of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains' Blanca Massif and Cucharas Canyon east of Walsenburg, one of the most easterly BLM Wildlands.

The BLM and Wild Connections did not see eye to eye on every unit; however we are very excited about their updated inventory and commend them for assessing our LWC reports and reassessing the public land on the ground. Bear Mountain (north of Cotopaxi, CO) is one unit that we are still advocating that the BLM add to their updated LWC inventory, reestablishing the approximately 7,200 acres of LWC that they found in 2013. Otherwise Wild Connections and BLM's LWC inventories are pretty closely aligned, and we are eager to advocate for protective management of BLM's inventoried Lands with Wilderness Characteristics through the remainder of their planning process.

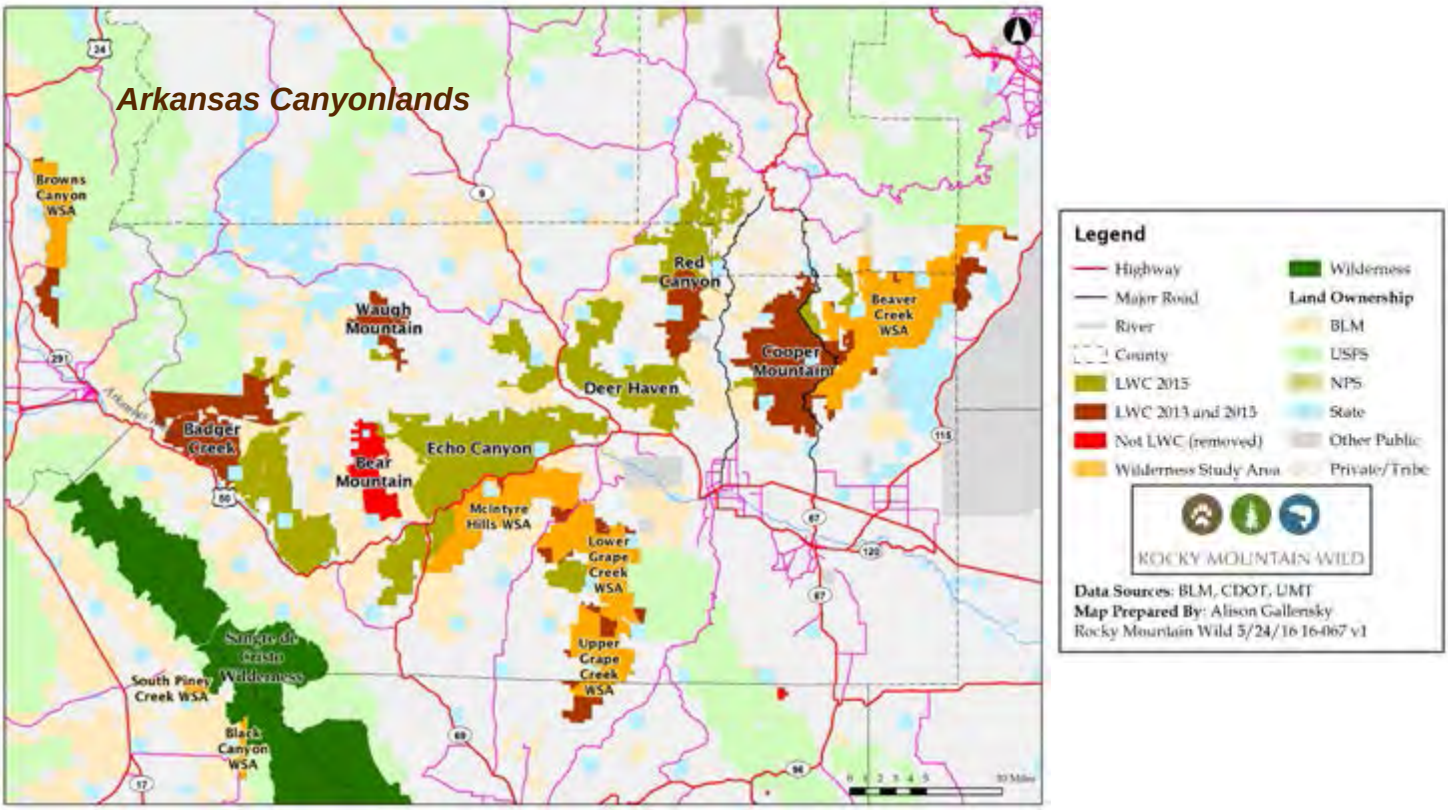
A few of Wild Connections proposed LWC areas, some of which the BLM also found LWCs, ended up being discarded right off the bat due to technical language in the BLM manual for smaller LWC areas that are contiguous to United States Forest Service (USFS) "Recommended Wilderness" areas. There are some BLM LWC areas (Badito Cone, Sangre Foothills, and Chipeta, Pahlone Foothills) that are contiguous with "Top Tier USFS Roadless Areas" and what appear to be wilderness quality lands. however it has been so long since the Pike and San Isabel National Forest (PSI) has done a management plan revision themselves, that "Recommended Wilderness" did not even exist as a protocol when they established their current plan (circa 1984). Therefore the PSI would not and do not have any Recommended Wilderness for the 2,226,837 acres of land that they manage. While this is unfortunate for the BLM planning process, it only affected a few of the smaller proposed LWC areas, some of which may be protected through other proposed management prescriptions (Areas of Critical Environmental Concern or Backcountry Conservation Areas).

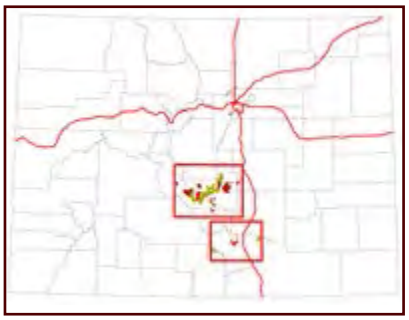
Cliff swallow nests in Cucharas Canyon, the most easterly of BLM's wilderness lands.
Photo John Sztukowski

We consider BLM's updated LWC inventory a successful first step; however it is just the first step. We the public have demonstrated and convinced the BLM that many of these lands have wilderness characteristics, so now we need to voice our desire for the BLM to *manage* these lands for their wilderness character, which in turn will protect our watersheds, wildlife habitat and connectivity corridors, natural and scenic spaces, and recreational terrain.

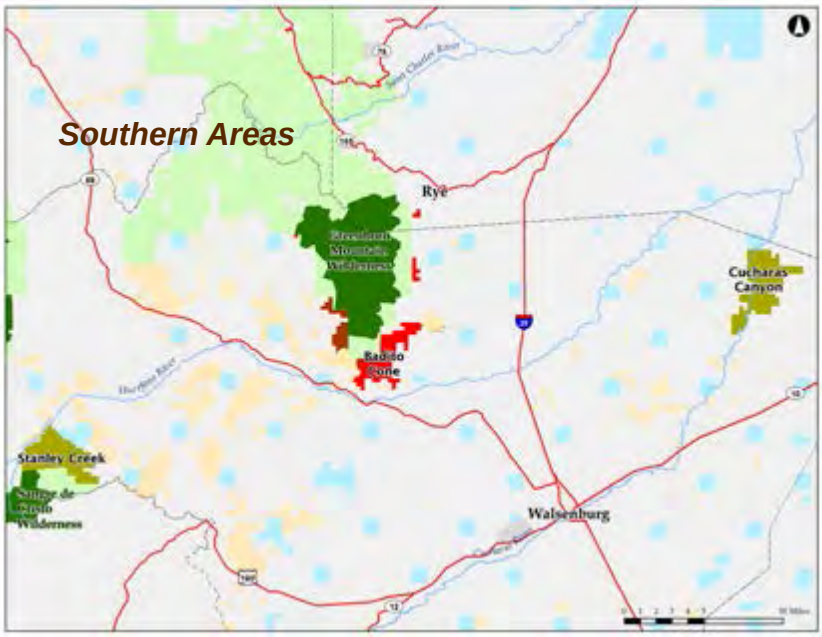
Get involved and come see these lands for yourself! We have a packed 2016-hiking schedule, in which we will visit and discuss many of these BLM Lands with Wilderness Characteristics, including Table Mountain, Booger Red Hill, and Cooper Mountain. Meanwhile look out for action alerts and monthly E-news concerning BLM public meetings and comment periods, as well as Wild Connections events, such as the recently concluded BioBlitz at Falls Gulch Springs in support of our conservation coalition's Arkansas River Corridor Area of Critical Environmental Concern.

Table Mountain and Echo Canyon, recently added to the LWC inventory, with the Arkansas River in the foreground.
Photo John Sztukowski





Much of the wilderness quality land managed by BLM's RGFO is located in the Arkansas Canyon between Buena Vista and Penrose shown in detail on the Arkansas Canyonlands map, as well as some areas to the south adjacent to the Sangre de Cristo and Greenhorn Mountain Wildernesses, and on the prairie along the Cucharas River, shown on Southern Areas map.



By the Numbers

- In 2013, BLM listed 77,765 acres in their Lands with Wilderness Characteristics inventory.
- In addition, there are about 60,000 acres in designated Wilderness Study Areas. (Orange)
- Wild Connections staff, interns and volunteers inventoried about 300,000 acres of potential wilderness lands over three years.
- In response to Wild Connections detailed documentation, BLM re-inventoried and reevaluated their areas and in 2015 published an updated list that added more than 104,500 acres to bring their total inventory of LWC's to 182,518 acres. These are shown on the maps in olive green (newly added in 2015) and dark brown.
- BLM removed some areas, shown in red, from the inventory.
- We don't know how many miles were hiked, biked or driven, but it was a lot!

You can help…

Keep in touch online **Wild Connections' web** **Friend us on Facebook** **Follow us on Instagram**

Join the Roadless Area Inventory Campaign

The Pike-San Isabel National Forest (PSI) is beginning a court ordered Travel Management Plan (TMP) across all the Ranger Districts. About a dozen organizations met on June 1 to learn about the TMP and craft an initial strategy for conservation action. Wild Connections will be working on a campaign plan but there are some initial ideas for volunteer action:

- **Our Wild Connections Conservation Plan (WCCP) can provide a framework for determining which areas in the PSI are particularly valuable for such things as wildlife habitat. We will be meeting with various Forest Service staff to provide them with this resource.**
- **Join a sub-committee to help identify areas or routes of particular concern to us**
- **Do field surveys to determine routes or areas of particular concern**
- **Lead field trips this summer and fall to these areas of concern.**
- **Send your comments to the PSI during the scoping period (PSI is expected to announce dates for the scoping soon.)**

Contact info@wildconnections.org – ask a question or tell us where you might be involved.

Respond to the summer fund-raising appeal

We ask for your financial support for programs at this time of year. The BLM Resource Management Planning continues; wildlands hikes are scheduled for the summer and will continue through November; materials and travel for Selkirk Restoration Project and monitoring trips to previous projects are ongoing. Give on line at Colorado Gives or send a check by mail (download a form.)

Celebrate our National Parks

Friends of Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument Seminar
Climate Change in the Rockies Past and Present
Tues., June 14
8:30 am – 4:30 pm
Various Presenters Call 719-748-3253 ext 109 or 719-510-5518 for details

Register for the Habitat Restoration Project

Selkirk Gulch near Como
Thursday to Sunday, August 18-21

Go on a BLM Wildlands Hike

Table Mountain Lands with Wilderness Characteristics
Sunday, June 5
8:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

Fourmile Creek Roadless Area Hike
Saturday, June 11
9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

Black Canyon Hike on the Colorado Trail, Lost Creek Wilderness
Saturday, June 18
9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

Click here for registration details and trip leaders contact information

Hiking in Red Booger BLM Roaldess Area. Photo Nick Calleros