

LANDSCAPES



Wild Connections
FROM THE MOUNTAINS TO THE PRAIRIES

May 2017

The future for BLM lands? It's in your hands...

Looking upstream in Badger Creek toward West Table Mountain. Badger Creek is one of the few perennial streams in the Arkansas Canyon. West Table Mountain, a high plateau, is quite different in character from the lower reaches of this wild area. Photo Wild Connections, John Sztukowski.

We have work to do

by Jean Smith

Many years ago Art and I backpacked out to a wilderness campsite in what was then the most remote part of Great Sand Dunes. That night the sky was awash in stars and there were only the sounds of the wind in the pines. But I couldn't see the Big Dipper. My mind insisted that it was just hidden behind Mt. Herard, but my internal compass swung crazily in all directions – I was completely disoriented. Gary Kamiya wrote about a similar experience on a foggy night in San Francisco, "...I could have been on an asteroid hurtling through space. The disorientation – one of keys to experiencing wilderness – felt almost like the first night alone in the Sierra."

We can help ensure that wilderness experiences - among other things – are there for future generations. The Bureau of Land Management will take your comments on the Preliminary Draft Alternatives Report until May 5th. There are some explanations and recommendations throughout this Landscapes, although we admit to a bias toward the most wild and diverse lands that BLM manages. These rocky canyons, high mesas, sparse forests and blessed

seeps, springs and a few perennial streams are places where one might easily experience the disorientation of wilderness.

They are the places where we recognize something greater than ourselves. Paul Kingsnorth says, "...we do need a new sense of the sacred or an awakening of the most ancient one: a sense of awe, wonder, and respect for something greater than us. What could that something greater be? There is no need to theorize about it.

*continued on
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Hiking toward Granite Whale above Hindman Gulch in Table Mountain. Photo Stuart Coles.



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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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The View From Here...

Jim Lockhart, President



Much of this Landscapes concerns the Eastern Colorado Resource Management Plan, covering lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) in our part of the state. However, it is important to recognize that our goal of promoting connectivity across the landscape often involves working beyond established agency boundaries and their separate planning regimes.

An example of this is Badger Creek, one of the areas we have identified as *Lands With Wilderness Characteristics* in the BLM planning process. Badger Creek flows from South Park through a portion of San Isabel National Forest for fifteen miles. It then enters BLM lands and flows through them for approximately eight miles to the Arkansas River. The BLM portion is transected by a power line with an access road just south of the National Forest boundary. (See the photo on opposite page.)

If one were to look only at the BLM-administered roadless land between the power line and the National Forest boundary line, it might seem too small and narrow to be considered a prime candidate for wilderness designation. However, when considered together with the National Forest land, it becomes part of a much larger roadless area which clearly qualifies and which in fact has been proposed for Wilderness designation in Rep. Diana DeGette's Colorado Wilderness Act.

And of course wildlife can move freely beneath the power line, and fish can swim under it, so the actual acreage that can be managed for connectivity is much larger still.

Because it cuts through the band of 10-11,000 foot mountains that separates South Park from the Arkansas River, Badger Creek provides a unique, relatively low-elevation corridor along which wildlife can migrate. In order to properly evaluate Badger Creek's importance as a connecting landscape link, it is necessary to look at the creek as an entity in itself, rather than judging it by the administrative designation of the lands that it flows through.



We have work to do... Cont from page 1

What is greater than us is the earth itself - life- and we are folded into it, a small part of it, and we have work to do."

It is not easy work. For example, Wild Connections' staff, interns and volunteer teams did an independent inventory of BLM roadless areas. Two years of work went into the 24 detailed reports that we submitted to BLM, and which resulted in BLM increasing their *Lands With Wilderness Characteristics* inventory from roughly 78,000 acres to 191,000 acres. It is very hard work to absorb even part of the information in the 600+ pages of the Alternatives Report. It is hard work to maintain momentum through a long bureaucratic process, with flurries of activity followed by long silences.

Whatever your experience of wilderness, of awe or wonder, I am sure you recognize that these particular lands

are irreplaceable, and indeed there is work to do if we want to help create the most sustainable management for wildlife, responsible energy development, recreation, clean water and dozens of other values, not the least of which is wilderness experiences for future generations.



Lest you think that wilderness experiences are found only out there in the back country, Gary Kamiya says "wilderness is constantly breaking through all around, often in the most unexpected places." An urban park, an abandoned lot, a parking strip. He also notes, "Equally important is learning to find the wilderness that is inside us..."

*Kingsnorth, Paul, The Axis and the Sycamore, Orion, January-February, 2017
 Kamiya, Gary, The Wilderness Out Your Front Door, Sierra Magazine, May-June 2017*

Something you can do... talk to BLM

In 2015 BLM's Royal Gorge Field Office began the multi-year process of creating a Resource Management Plan (RMP) that will guide activities for the next 20 to 30 years. They are now asking for your input on the Preliminary Draft Alternatives.

After this comment time is over on May 5th, BLM will take the rest of this year to formulate a draft of the "Preferred Alternative" as well as several options. After more public comment and additional work, the future plan will be official, tentatively scheduled for late 2019.

You can help protect our BLM public lands so that future generations can enjoy these beautiful and cherished lands. In the face of environmental protection roll-backs coming out of Washington, here is something you can do that will have a positive effect in our region.

Making Comments to BLM

The future RMP will guide decisions for 668,000 acres of surface lands and more than 6,500,000 acres of federal minerals under other federal, state, municipal and private lands. These public lands belong to all Americans and are managed on our behalf by the BLM, therefore it's important to make your voice heard in this process. Your support for the best components from any of the alternatives will give BLM guidance in creating the most sustainable management of these BLM lands.

Comments can be as short as a few sentences or as long you'd like. However, it's important to provide substance to your statements. For example, simply stating you would like the area protected from mining is not sufficient. You need to highlight what effect this would have and why you oppose it.

Suggested Talking Points

Here are some options - you might choose several to make your comments more effective.

- Use a personal story to describe why you value access to public lands.
- Highlight the need to prioritize air quality, water quality, wildlife habitat, quiet use recreation, viewsheds, local economies, dark skies and similar conservation values on our public lands versus mining, logging, or other forms of development.
- Mention your concern that the Priority Areas identified by Wild Connections need strong protection to preserve their wilderness characteristics. (See centerfold)

- Discuss striking a balance between promoting the local economy and protecting water resources, wildlife habitat, and quiet use recreation.
- Describe why it's important to protect places that afford opportunities to seek solitude and engage in off trail activities such as hiking, backpacking, hunting, wildlife viewing, photography, horseback riding, etc.
- Highlight the importance of securing protection for lands adjacent to the Arkansas River which contains the longest stretch of gold medal fishing waters in the state and is among the most popular whitewater rafting destinations in the country.
- Mention specific management options such as: manage as Lands with Wilderness Character or as an Area of Critical Environmental Concern; and/or closed to oil and gas leasing, closed to human development, closed to commercial timber harvest, closed to new rights-of-way, closed to motorized use, prohibit new roads, closed to mineral disposal and exploration, etc
- Highlight appreciation for the opportunity to provide public input and express your hope that the BLM will consider your comments when making a final decision.

BLM is accepting public comments through May 5th.

Submit your comments via email, mail, or fax to the following:

Fax: 719-269-8599

Email: ecrmp.comments@blm.gov

Mail: John Smeins, BLM Royal Gorge Field Office, 3028 E. Main St., Cañon City, CO 81212



Badger Creek drains a large area north of these mountains and then through this canyon before it flows into the Arkansas River. The denuded strip is a power transmission line. Photo EcoFlight.

The Eastern Colorado Resource Management Planning area covers the state east of the continental Divide. Most of the surface acres are in the Arkansas Canyon.



Priority Areas for Protection

The conservation coalition used Wild Connections' inventory of "Lands With Wilderness Characteristics" to select these places of exceptional natural values. Learn more at www.wildconnections.org/blmmanagementplan/priorityareas.html.

In addition, there are recommendations for Areas of Critical Environmental Concern. Both of these designations provide for greater protection of natural resources.

Along the Arkansas River in Bighorn Sheep Canyon:

- Echo Canyon, Table Mountain
- North and South Badger Creek
- North of Cotopaxi: Sand Gulch and Falls Gulch Mountain
- Bear Mountain, West Table Mountain

In the Gold Belt Region

- Cooper Mountain, north of Canon City
- Upper Red Canyon, adjacent to the popular Shelf Road climbing area
- Eightmile Mountain - Thompson, Gribble, and Twin Mountains off of Highway 9

Walsenburg

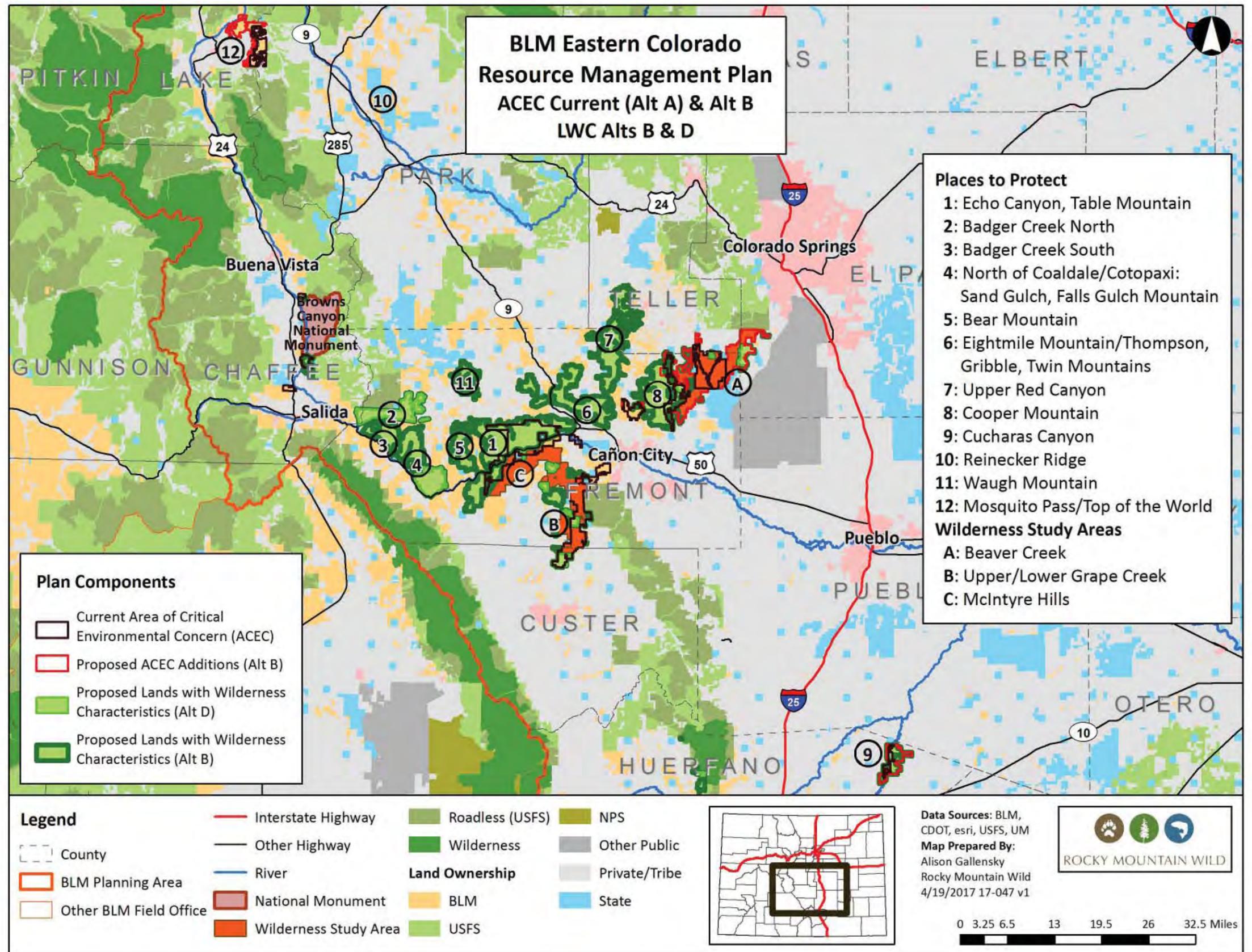
- Cucharas Canyon, northeast of Walsenburg on the plains

In South Park

- Reinecker Ridge

Pew Charitable Trusts' #BLMWild has a splendid presentation with photos and detailed descriptions of many of these areas. <https://medium.com/blmwild/protecting-blmwild-places-in-eastern-colorado-80bfb576a73c>

Ask BLM to designate these Lands with Wilderness Characteristics and Areas of Critical Environmental Concern and manage them to protect their natural values



What is in BLM's Preliminary Draft Alternatives Report?

In 2015 BLM began the multi-year process of creating a Resource Management Plan that will guide activities for the next 20 to 30 years. They are now asking for your input on the Preliminary Draft Alternatives. After this comment time is over on May 5th, BLM will take the rest of this year to formulate a draft of the "Preferred Alternative" as well as several options. After more public comment and additional work, the future plan will be official, tentatively scheduled for late 2019.

This 600 page document is where you will find information about what BLM has crafted from their own analyses, public input and consultations with cooperating agencies.

It is available online (see link below) and you can view or download the Alternatives and other reports. The Table of Contents are hyperlinked, a great help to navigating around the information. There is also a link to a comment form designed to help BLM know exactly which section you are commenting on.

Preliminary Alternatives Themes

The Report identifies and describes four draft alternatives: the No Action Alternative and three action alternatives.

A) The No Action Alternative: represents the continuation of current management of BLM-administered surface land and mineral estate in the planning area.

B) Emphasis on Natural Processes: prioritizes maximization of proper ecosystem function. Management will focus on proactive preservation and restoration of ecoregion components to meet desired future conditions as well as the Colorado Public Land Health Standards.

C) Emphasis on Responding to Demand for Resource Use: keep resources open and facilitate development for commercial and public use for things such as mineral extraction, grazing, rights-of-way, renewable energy projects, and recreation.

D) The Human Ecoregion: adaptively manage resources to allow for local community use and interest based on people's desires, on the interactions the BLM has with the public and cooperating agencies, and on feedback during envisioning, scoping, and other forums.

During the public meetings in April, Resource Area Manager Keith Berger emphasized that the next step in planning is take these themes and public comments, as well as additional analysis by BLM, to create the next set of documents. He encouraged people to pick and choose components from any of the four themes in making comments. (See Talk to BLM, page 3)

Details of proposed actions

The bulk of the document is a descriptive and statistical comparison between alternatives.

The nuts and bolts of the proposed management actions are laid out in tables that compare 14 Resources (such as air quality, wetlands, wildlife, cultural resources, etc.), 8 Resource Uses (grazing, timber, renewable energy, etc.), 5 Special Designations (Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, Backcountry Conservation Areas, etc.) and 2 Social and Economic Conditions.

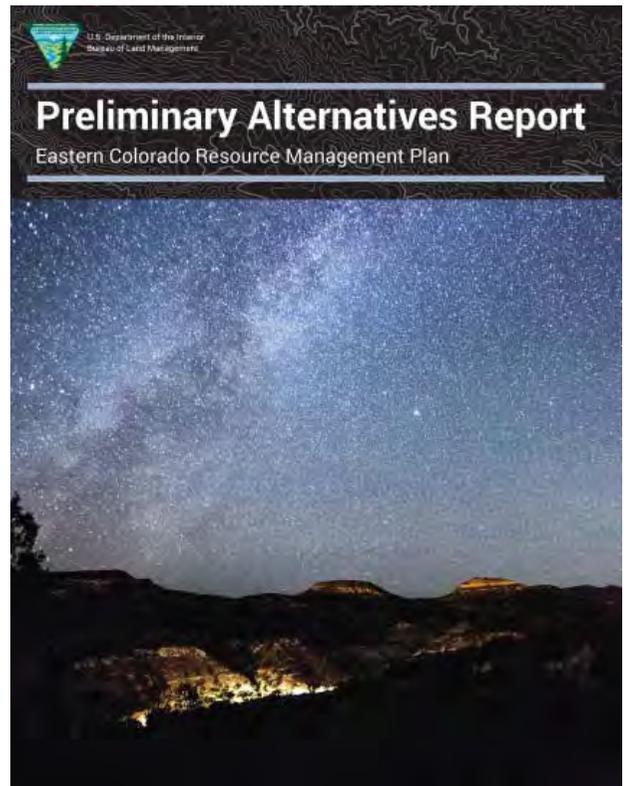
Under each of these 29 sections, Goals, Objectives and Allowable Uses are further described. That's a lot of information!

Table #. Comparison of Alternatives: A Specific Resource

Alternative	Alt A	Alt B	Alt C	Alt D
Goals				
Objectives				
Allowable Uses				

Where the actions are located on the land.

Where each of the components described in the document might be applied on the physical landscape is best displayed on the interactive maps. Different "layers" showing various management designations for each of the Alternatives can be turned on or off. They are found on BLM's ECRMP page in the Maps sidebar.



The Report is found at <https://eplanning.blm.gov/epl-front-office/eplanning/planAndProjectSite.do?methodName=dispatchToPatternPage¤tPageId=53990>

Wildlands Hikes

Browns Canyon National Monument, The Reef Sunday, May 7 8:00 am to 3:00 pm

The Monument is an iconic landscape of rugged rock outcroppings, backcountry forests, and scenic mountain vistas along the Arkansas River. Join us for a hike to the Reef formation, a distinctive face of exposed rock formed by welded tuff, pyroclastic lava ash flows, and erosion. Easy-to-moderate on-and-off trail hike of 5 miles, elevation gain of 500 feet begins near the historic town of Turret. Contact John Sztukowski, 817-939-4239 or john@wildconnections.org by 5:00 pm, Saturday, May 6. Space is limited. Cosponsored by Friends of Browns Canyon.



The Reef. Photo John Stansfield

Cucharas Canyon Hike A BLM Wildlands Outing Sunday May 28, 2017, 8:00 am to 3:00 pm Optional trailhead car camp recommended for Saturday night, May 27

The Cucharas River Canyon, east of Walsenburg, is unique among Colorado BLM lands. It is a prairie canyon with rugged cliffs, diverse wildlife, and remnants of early ranching history.



Chucharas Canyon. Photo BLM

Wild Connections has identified it as one of the *Lands With Wilderness Characteristics*. Moderately strenuous, on-and-off-trail, 6-mile hike with 650 feet elevation gain. Contact John Stansfield, 303-660-5849 or jorcstan@juno.com by 5:00 pm, Friday, May 26.

Celebrate Public Lands Day

Last year at the urging of citizens, the state legislature created a new holiday: Colorado Public Lands Day to be celebrated the third Saturday in May.

Gray Back Peak in Beaver Creek Proposed Wilderness Saturday, May 20 1:45 to 5:00 pm

Hidden behind Cheyenne Mountain and towering over a wooded valley lies a long ridge topped by Gray Back Peak. Moderate half-day, trail hike of 5 miles with 650 feet gain in elevation. Learn about the Little Fountain Creek roadless area, part of a proposed Wilderness for Pikes Peak. Contact John Stansfield, 303-660-5849 or email jorcstan@juno.com by 5:00 pm, Friday, May 19.



View into Little Fountain Creek from Gray Back. PHoto Rick Shan

Lizard Rock, Tarryall Mountains Saturday May 20 Time TBA

Hike in the Tarryall Mountains with Josh Voorhis of the South Park Ranger District. Family friendly (10+ years) moderate out and easy back 4.5 mile hike through an aspen forest to the Lizard Rock formation. Kids will get a Nature Hunt brochure to challenge their curiosity and observation skills while hiking. Contact Misi Ballard, 303-884-7640 or misi.ballard@gmail.com by 5:00 pm Thursday May 18 to register.



Lizard Rock, Photo Kids Hike Colorado, thegozes

Trips are cosponsored by Wild Connections, Sierra Club, Central Colorado Wilderness Coalition and/or Friends of Browns Canyon. For more details go to www.wildconnections.org/events.html. Maximum of 15 participants - please register with the trip leader.

2017 Restoration Projects Preview

Habitat restoration has been boots-on-the-ground for Wild Connections volunteers since 2009. By closing and reseeding illegal motorized routes, these efforts have reconnected roadless areas, notably at Farnum Peak, improved wildlife habitat, particularly in Green Mountain and Selkirk Gulch, reduced erosion into important streams, and captured more carbon in the increased vegetation.

Plans for this summer are still being worked out with Pike-San Isabel Ranger Districts, but the best possibilities are Rock Creek in Lost Creek Wilderness and several locations in Badger Flats in South Park where illegal motorized routes enter Farnum Peak roadless area. We'll let you know more via the monthly E-News and our web site.



Green Mountain Project

In 2010 illegal OHV use left deep ruts in the meadow (above). By 2015 the grass was lush and the wallows that were deliberately left (below) were being used by elk. Photos, Lee Patton and John Stansfield.





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*Hiking in Little Cottonwood
Creek in Browns Canyon. Photo
John Stansfield*

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Celebrate Colorado's First Public Lands Day Saturday May 20th

Hike with a Ranger

Take a family-friendly hike to Lizard Rock in the Tarryall Mountains led by the South Park District Ranger. Time TBA (mid-morning to mid-afternoon)

Gray Back Peak

Gray Back is in Beaver Creek Proposed Wilderness, hidden behind Cheyenne Mountain just west of Colorado Springs. 1:45 to 5:00 pm

See page 7 for hike details

Happy Hour at Triple S Brewing

From 5 - 8 pm. Part of the proceeds will go to Wild Connections to support our conservation programs. Triple S Brewing is located at 318 E Colorado Ave, Colorado Springs.



Make a gift to Wild Connections

Donations from people like you increase our ability to bring people and wild places together and advocate for public lands conservation. Go online at Colorado Gives (<https://www.coloradogives.org/WildConnections/overview>) or mail a check.