

# LANDSCAPES

## NEWSLETTER



# Wild Connections

FROM THE MOUNTAINS TO THE PRAIRIES



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## Worthy of Protection: *New Mapping in BLM Wildlands*

by Jim Lockhart

**W**ild Connections' major project this past summer was surveying the roadless areas in the Bureau of Management (BLM) Royal Gorge Resource Area in preparation for the BLM's revision of its resource area master management plan and to update our Wild Connections Conservation Plan.

As an initial step in their process, the BLM conducted "lands with wilderness characteristics" inventories, assessing all BLM lands within the region for their suitability for wilderness designation.

Our primary emphasis in 2013 was to visit large roadless areas which seemed to have suitability as wilderness areas, including areas adjacent to, but not within current Wilderness Study Areas, and other large tracts of BLM land. For this purpose, we used newly-acquired iPads and GeoJot mapping software, which tags photos with

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*Routes leading into Slide Mountain. Inventory Coordinator John Sztukowski, with his mapping tools in hand, helped identify wilderness qualities of the roadless area.*

## Geneva Basin Illegal Side Routes Obliterated

by Claude Neumann

**I**n the high mountain country south of Guanella Pass, Forest Road 119 branches off to the west from the Guanella Pass road. Volunteers helped restore areas along Geneva Creek this past summer.

FS 119 is a popular and scenic recreation area as it winds toward the continental divide. Dispersed

camping is permitted along the road but driving off-road is not allowed.

Yet in some places the dispersed camping is out of control. Vehicles leaving the road illegally have scorched the meadow with deep muddy ruts and braided vehicle paths, sometimes extending to Geneva Creek riparian zone. The damage can even be seen in the Google Earth view (right).



*Hand work prior to sowing native grasses. Photo Deb Overn*

The South Platte Ranger District for the Pike National Forest was receptive to Wild Connections' offer to provide some funding

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## BLM Mapping, cont from page 1

both location and direction and allows mappers to attach data and comments directly to the photo file. (For a more detailed description of the mapping project and the new “paperless” mapping technology, see the June 2013 Landscapes.)

During the 2013 season, Wild Connection mappers made a total of nineteen trips to thirteen different areas. Most were in the vicinity of the Arkansas River between Salida and Canon City, but we also visited areas at the southern end of South Park and near Blanca Peak. Our surveys considered such factors as whether the area was primarily in its natural state, whether it offered opportunities for solitude or unconfined primitive recreation, and whether it had other values making it worthy of wilderness protection. (See the side bar Blanca Peak/Slide Mountain report summary as an example.)

Mapping efforts were greatly assisted by Wild Connections’ four student interns, James Howe, Ryan McCarley, Jamie Reis, and Will Schaar. Each intern assumed responsibility for overseeing the mapping of one of the priority areas, Mitchell Gulch, Booger Red/Shelf Road, Blanca Peak, and Thompson/Gribble Mountains, respectively, and for preparing a report on that area. None of these areas is currently a BLM Wilderness Study Area, so that they required both boundary surveys to determine their actual roadless acreage and interior surveys to determine their wilderness characteristics. The interns also participated on a number of other mapping trips.

In August, thanks to EcoFlight and its founder and Executive Director Bruce Gordon, we were able to fly over the priority areas in the Arkansas River Canyons area, taking over 100 photos from the air.



*Wild Connections staff and mappers ready to take off on the flight over roadless areas along the Arkansas River Canyon. L to R: Jamie Reis, intern; Bruce Gordon, EcoFlight Executive Director; Jim Lockhart, Wild Connections Board; John Sztukowski, Wildland Inventory Coordinator; and Kristin Skoog. Many thanks to Bruce and EcoFlight for the donated fly-over.*

## Cooper Mountain

Perhaps the most productive portion of the 2013 season was mapping the Cooper Mountain roadless area. Located between the Phantom Canyon road and Garden Park to the north of Canon City, this large tract of land covers 28,000 acres.

The central portion of Cooper Mountain was recently acquired by the BLM in a land exchange, making it an area of particular interest. In addition the Palmer Land Trust and other partners recently completed a conservation easement on the historic headquarters of the Chapman Ranch which is west of Cooper Mountain. ” The ranch hosts an important big game migratory corridor between the Arkansas River Valley and the higher elevations of Pikes Peak, as well as a valuable habitat area, identified by the Colorado Natural Heritage Program, which includes over 5 miles of riparian habitat along Fourmile and Cripple Creeks.”

Mapping teams visited the area several times, both to clarify roadless boundaries and to determine the characteristics of the interior. Aside from minor human impacts, mostly associated with past prospecting activities and current permitted grazing within the roadless area, we found the area to be in its natural state, much like the Beaver Creek area to the east of Phantom Canyon Road, which is a designated Wilderness Study Area. We therefore feel that it qualifies as land with wilderness characteristics under BLM guidelines.

## Still to come

Now that the mapping portion of this year’s project is accomplished, mappers are completing reports with descriptions of each area and tying our written narratives to BLM regulations for the designation of lands with wilderness characteristics. Plans for 2014 include more mapping and visits to the other significant-sized tracts of BLM land in the Arkansas and South Platte region. Our ultimate aim is to provide comprehensive comments covering all BLM lands that will be included in their upcoming resource management plan and to update the Wild Connections Conservation Plan to reflect this new data.

☺



*The interior of Mitchell Falls roadless area looking south toward the Arkansas River. Photo Bruce Gordon, EcoFlight.*

# Browns Canyon: It's What's Inside That Counts

by John Stansfield

On the big map of Colorado wild lands, Browns Canyon is a little dot with a short river reach running through it. Despite its diminutive size, however, Brown Canyon is mighty in many ways, worthy of the waves of public attention recently pouring upon it.

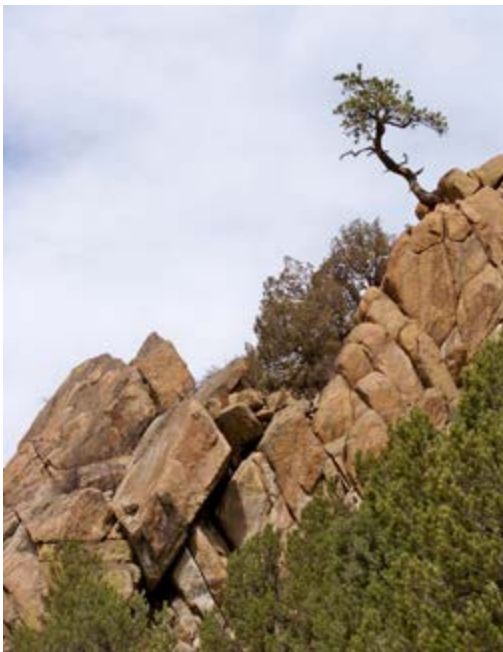
On December 3, 2013, Colorado Sen. Mark Udall will introduce national monument and wilderness legislation to permanently protect the canyon traversed by a world-renowned whitewater segment of the Arkansas River. Udall's bill deals not with the river, but with the rugged uplands mostly on the east side of the river. Lands, 22,000 acres total, managed for us all by the Bureau of Land Management and the US Forest Service.

So, what's so special about Browns? What's inside the area that makes it worth protecting? In a few words: canyons, wildlife, quiet, scenery, nature, forest, foot-and-oar-powered recreation. A lot of good things in a small package.

If you have not visited Browns Canyon, let me provide some specifics about what is inside, with help from our friends at Colorado Wilderness Network (CWN), [www.canyoncountrywilderness.org](http://www.canyoncountrywilderness.org).

## Canyons

More than a dozen rock-ribbed valleys, like crooked teeth on a giant comb, wind their way westward down from Aspen Ridge to the Arkansas. "Streams have cut steep gulches through the pinkish granite and metamorphic rock of the area," CWN states. Usually dry with rock-and-sand-bottoms, these canyons offer days of hiking or horseback exploration amidst fascinating geology.



Rock face in one of the many canyons. Photo John Stansfield.

History echoes in valley names like Railroad, Cat, Stafford, Green, Sawmill, Spring, Little Cottonwood, Middle Cottonwood, and plain old Cottonwood.

## Wildlife

The species list is long, as CWN indicates: "The area is an important wintering ground for deer and elk, according to Colorado Parks and Wildlife. It is estimated that there is currently a herd of 135 bighorns whose range includes Browns Canyon and portions of Aspen Ridge. Other mammals found

within the area include mountain lions, black bears, bobcats, foxes, coyotes, pine martens and many smaller animals. Eight species of raptors have been sighted in the area, including golden eagles, prairie falcons, and great-horned owls."

Several trout species thrive in the Arkansas and anglers consider it a prime fishing location.

## Outdoor Sounds and Solitude

Imagine the rush and roar of the river at full spring flood. The gentle movement of breeze through millions of pine needles. A distant gunshot during hunting season heightening the sense of the stillness that follows. Solitude, a rare and precious commodity.



Bighorn sheep. Photo by David Hannigan, CPW.

## Scenery

The scenery viewing experience here is a complex one. Within the twisting, tree-filled valleys, the views are short range and intimate. Climb an intermittent ridge and the viewshed becomes expansive,



View from Browns Canyon to the Mt. Princeton Chalk Cliffs. Photo by Friends of Browns Canyon.

affording magnificent scenes of the 13,000 and 14,000-foot peaks of the Sawatch Range to the west, the Sangre de Cristos to the south, and the Buffalo Peaks to the north.

## Naturalness

Characteristics of an area's wilderness quality include its naturalness and its well functioning ecosystems, attributes found throughout the proposed national monument and wilderness. As CWN describes it, "Pinyon-juniper forest dominates the arid lands in Browns Canyon along the Arkansas River. The vegetation changes dramatically as elevation increases, giving way to Douglas fir, ponderosa pine, and the stands of aspen for which Aspen Ridge is named." The diverse forest holds little commercial promise, but substantial scenic, wildlife, and ecosystem values.

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# Wilderness 50th Update

by Misi Ballard

In 2014, our nation will celebrate “50 Years of Wilderness”, in honor of the 50th anniversary of the signing of the Wilderness Act of 1964 and the creation of our national Wilderness system. Groups have organized across the country to plan local and national events of all kinds to raise awareness and appreciation of Wilderness and to connect communities with these critically important lands.



A [national website](#) serves as the clearinghouse for information on events, projects and programs being planned by the various land management agencies, non-profit organizations of all kinds and local community groups. An [interactive map](#) located on the website describes various events, including many being planned in Colorado.

For instance, educational outings for school children are being planned by local Ridgeway and Ouray organizations. The White River National Forest is hosting Wilderness events each weekend during the month of August in 2014. Steamboat Springs is planning a week of activities including movies, displays, stewardship project and a Wilderness Walks.

Closer to home, the [Friends of Mount Evans and Lost Creek Wildernesses](#) is planning a “Walk for Wilderness” at the Evergreen Lake House, in Evergreen, CO on Sept 5, 2014. In addition to a 5-mile wilderness educational walk beginning in Bergen Park and ending at the Evergreen Lake House, there will be lots of booths, a live band and children’s activities.

For the wilderness-loving fiber artists out there, the [Rocky Mountain Quilt Museum](#) will be hosting an on-line wilderness-themed quilt exhibit entitled “Go Wild!”. Wilderness has inspired artists and crafts women and men since the beginning of time. Quilters are invited to show their appreciation of wild places and things by submitting photos of their creations for display on the museum’s website beginning April 1, 2014.

The South Park Broadband of the Great Old Broads for Wilderness is working with its members and other interested folks to design a series of monthly “StoryWalks” to take place across the South Park area. These family-oriented short hikes use children’s books to encourage people of all ages to get out and hike while enjoying wonderful stories. If you would like to be involved in this fun and easy project, please contact [Misi Ballard](#).

While most events take place outside of actual Wilderness areas themselves, a fun individual challenge is being created by the National Great Old Broads for Wilderness. The Wilderness 50th 50-Mile Challenge will encourage you to

# Browns Canyon continued from page 3

## Recreation

The river through Browns Canyon is one of the most heavily rafted stretches in the country and tourism generates millions of dollars for the local and state economy. “Protection of the wild country surrounding the river canyon will be appreciated by river visitors and the tourist industry which they support. Hunting, hiking, fishing, and backpacking are among the other numerous recreational pursuits possible in the area, many year-round”, CWN states.



Exploring Browns Canyon on foot. Photo by Steve Valimaki.

Browns Canyon is surely a treasure box of wildness and Congress now has the opportunity to preserve these values for now and for future generations.



## Here’s what you can do.

Visit [www.markudall.senate.gov/browns canyon](http://www.markudall.senate.gov/browns canyon). Send Sen. Udall your comments and your thanks for introducing the legislation. Ask him to include not only the 22,000 acre national monument, but also include the full 20,000 acre wilderness designation within the monument supported by Friends of Browns Canyon, WC, CCWC, as well as statewide and national organizations.

And also, contact Rep. Doug Lamborn at <http://lamborn.house.gov>, urging him to introduce the Udall bill in the House.

accumulate 50+ miles hiking, snowshoeing and/or skiing in designated Wilderness areas across the country during the anniversary year of 2014. A web page is being developed to help you chart your wilderness miles and track your mileage, so start planning your wilderness outings and set a goal for yourself! More information will be available on the [Wilderness50th.org](http://Wilderness50th.org) website soon.

Many more events are still in planning stages, but as you can see, there will be many ways for us to celebrate Wilderness in 2014! Be sure to go to the national website and see for yourself all the exciting opportunities that will be available to learn about this uniquely American institution. Consider getting involved yourself and organizing a local event to connect your community with Wilderness.



# Geneva Basin continued from page 1

and volunteer labor to obliterate and restore two of the worst areas. In partnership with the Colorado Mountain Club, and with the Forest Service providing several staff members, chain saws and a back hoe loader for ripping and boulder moving, over 20 volunteers eagerly worked a Saturday in September on the project.

After ripping the damaged areas – approximately 200 yards of vehicle tracks – they were next scarified and raked. Native grasses were then planted and the area covered with selected timber felled by forest service chain saws. Large boulders were moved to block access and the areas posted as closed to motorized entry so the recovery process of the meadow could take place. Those locations are now designated walk-in campsites with road side parking.

## Wildlife habitat

FS 119 is highly significant because it divides two expansive designated roadless areas – Squaretop to the north and Burning Bear to the south. These roadless areas along with the adjoining Mt. Evans Wilderness area to the east across Guanella Pass road form a huge, albeit divided, wildlife habitat complex.

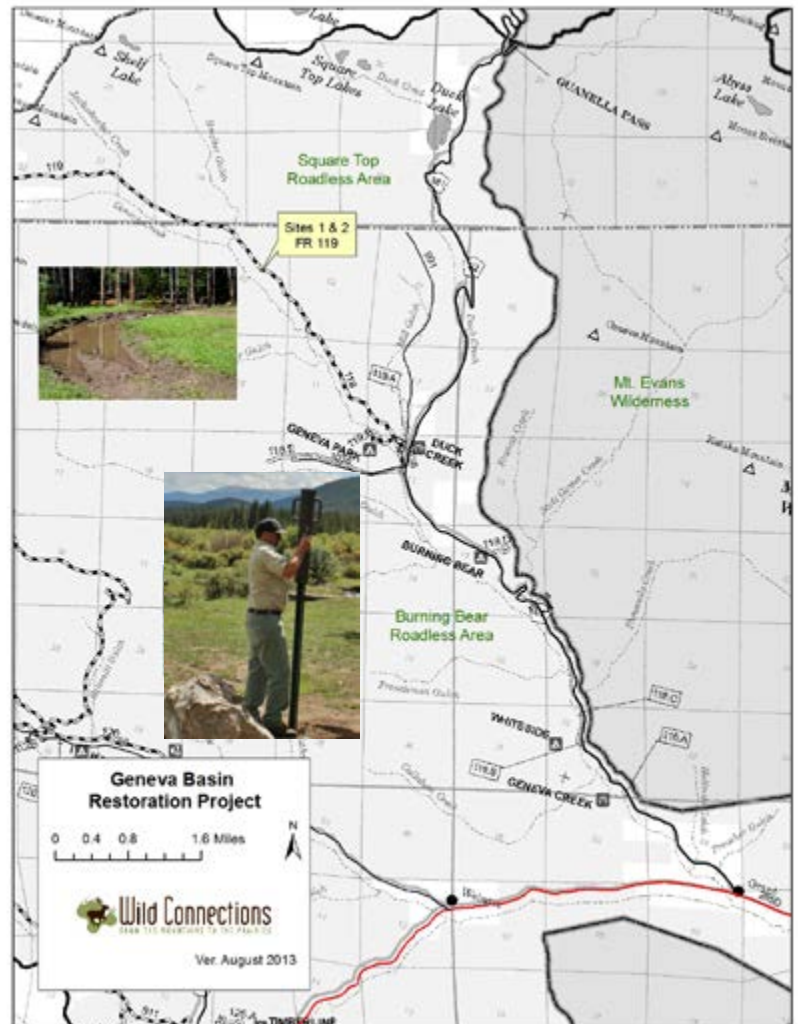
With its largely undisturbed openness, the south side of Guanella Pass truly is of great importance for wildlife to move and thrive. It is home to a diverse animal and plant population including an ancient bristlecone pine forest and the re-introduced lynx as well as Colorado's only recent sighting of the endangered wolverine.

## Better management

Repair of the meadows and riparian areas is the first step to better protection. The Forest Service is solidifying its plan for the up-coming years to better control recreation and ensure that camping will be at designated sites to limit abuse of the area as well as provide a better camping experience. As the plan is developed, Wild Connections will stay involved to help assure protection and ecologically sound management of South Guanella Pass roadless complex.



Looking down valley toward one of the creek-side campsites where an illegal OHV route was ripped and converted to a foot path to create a walk-in only site. Photo Deb Overn.



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# Green Mountain Restoration – Two Years Later

By Carol Stansfield

On October 5, four of us hiked for three miles into Green Mountain Roadless Area on former Forest Service Road 546. Three of us had been involved in the Wild Connections closure and restoration project here in 2011.

I had never participated in a Wild Connections monitoring trip before, and at first did not understand why we occasionally stopped to compare the present condition of the land to photos of the same spots taken last year. But I was almost as surprised and delighted as the rest of us to see how well the land is returning to a more wild condition. In some places it was actually difficult to locate the original road. The native seed is growing vigorously on most of the ex-road bed. We were especially pleased that there was no sign of recent OHV or four-wheel-drive activity.

We hiked to the end of the road at Pine Creek. Even on steep slopes, there appeared to be little new erosion from last summer's heavy rains, thanks to our revegetation efforts. It was a beautiful fall day, and all four of us ended the hike tired but renewed. More important, we had experienced a powerful reminder that, when left undisturbed, wild nature has astonishing power to renew itself.



Monitoring team. Photo Jim Lockhart



Prior to the restoration project the 5-acre wet meadow was badly damaged by mud bogging off-road vehicles. This meadow was officially closed to motorized vehicles, but many unauthorized tracks had been created over the years. Photo Jean C. Smith



The Forest Service ripped the 546 road-bed, and felled trees. Volunteers placed the logs and raked in native grass seeds. By the fall of 2013, the grass is well established and no motorized traffic has tried to come into the project area. Photo Jim Lockhart



In 2011, the illegal routes were ripped and volunteers sowed native grasses. (top) Two years later, the meadow has recovered to natural conditions and some of the deeper ruts remain as water holes for wildlife (bottom). Photos Jean C. Smith and Jim Lockhart

## Blanca Peak/Slide Mountain BLM Inventory Report: a small sample

By Jaime Reis

The on-foot inventory taken of Blanca Peak/Slide Mountain proposed LWC shows that the area meets the criteria set aside by the BLM. The area comprises 5,434 acres of roadless area that contiguous with BLM and national forest land.

The slowly disintegrating human impacts within the unit display that the area is primarily affected by the forces of nature. The log frames and trails within the area are substantially unnoticeable; many of which are decomposing and will soon be non-existent. Some non-motorized trails located on the western portion of the unit remain but are substantially unnoticeable.

The difficult access and remoteness of Blanca Peak/Slide Mountain offers outstanding opportunities for solitude. Hiking up to the ridge in the southwest portion of the unit or the open meadows scattered throughout presents amazing views of the surrounding wilderness and seclusion. The mixed dense forests in the area serve as vegetative barriers and provide a sense of isolation from the outside world. The unit offers exceptional opportunities for primitive recreation. Excellent hiking and horseback riding exists throughout the area with extraordinary views. Huerfano Creek on the western boundary offers fishing; the entire unit offers excellent hunting opportunities.

This inventory proposes suggested boundaries for the Blanca Peak/Slide Mountain area as well as the many wilderness characteristics located within the unit. Protecting Blanca Peak/Slide Mountain as LWC will create more contiguous wilderness as it is surrounded already by national forest and wilderness area. This will assist in maintaining ecological integrity of this beautiful area as well as allow individuals the opportunity to enjoy it for its many wilderness characteristics. It is essential that the BLM conduct a full inventory of this area so that it may be designated as lands with wilderness characteristics and its wilderness values protected.



*Its a challenging bike ride. Photo John Sztukowski*



*This short-horned lizard is nearly invisible. Photo John Sztukowski*



*The roadless area has several different ecosystems ranging from montane grasslands to dense forests. Photo John Sztukowski*

# Support Wild Connections

Each December Wild Connections invites you to make a year-end donation. Your partnership is vital to the future of protected wildlands in south central Colorado. Your gift now helps us continue to be a strong conservation presence with resources to carry out expanded mapping, advocate for Wilderness, restore wildlife habitat, promote responsible recreation, lead back country field trips and provide a full spectrum of activist opportunities that will ensure ecologically sound management of our public lands.

## Colorado Gives Day is the way to do it...

When you go on-line at [Colorado Gives](http://ColoradoGives.org), 100% of your gift comes to Wild Connections. In addition, FirstBank, a key partner in this state-wide effort, has set aside \$250,000 to be allocated proportionately across all donations, thus increasing the value of your donation. They also have 18 Luck-of-the-Draw prizes of \$5,000 each to be drawn in January.

Click the Donate Now button and go on-line now and preschedule your gift for December 10th. This will also automatically renew your membership for 2014.

Thank you in advance for your donation. Individuals like you make it happen.



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Mission: Wild Connections, a science-based advocacy 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. We focus on designing, implementing and defending the Wild Connections Conservation Plan – a vision for the future of this region that embodies the results of many years of roadless area mapping, citizen input and conservation science.

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