

LANDSCAPES

NEWSLETTER



Wild Connections

FROM THE MOUNTAINS TO THE PRAIRIES



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Mapping BLM Lands with Wilderness Characteristics

Wild Connections' 2013 Mapping Project

by John Sztukowski

Wild Connections is taking advantage of a new federal protocol in our efforts to expand Central Colorado's "wildlands" network. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) recently updated their procedure for inventorying and assessing lands with wilderness characteristics (LWCs). Additionally, the BLM outlined the land management planning processes for managing these LWCs. These guidelines are publically available and allow for citizen input.

Essentially, all BLM land is available for public review of its LWCs. This is very important because it allows for qualified BLM land - often lower altitude and overlooked - to be designated as wilderness and thus given more protection in their upcoming land management plans.

After surveying BLM lands, Wild Connections will submit reports identifying land to be preserved as wilderness, in an attempt to expand habitat corridors for Colorado plants and animals. We have identified several priority roadless areas in the BLM's Royal Gorge region that may qualify for



Mapper training at Cooper Mountain. Photo Deb Overn

LWCs: Cooper Mountain, Beaver Creek, Table Mountain, Badger Creek, Grape Creek, McIntyre Hills, Browns Canyon, Blanca Peak and Slide Mountain, and Thirty-one Mile Mountain, all of which house important species habitats. We also need to correct outdated information, including discrepancies on the use of existing or closed roads.

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Browns Canyon: A Long Time Coming Now on the Move to Wilderness

by John Stansfield

Wild Connections (WC) has heartily supported the wilderness designation of Browns Canyon since the 1990s. Sister organization Central Colorado Wilderness Coalition (CCWC)

endorsed the wild lands on the Arkansas River at its founding in 2002.

But going back to the mid-1970s, some of our members have been working in numerous ways toward the protection of Browns Canyon. These people have hiked in the area, done field inventory and office research on wilderness values, mapped, photographed, written reports, consulted with land management agencies, hiked around Washington to testify before Congressional committees, attended umpteen public meetings, and hiked some more. So why has it taken so long for Colorado and the nation to recognize Browns Canyon's natural attributes?

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Arkansas River and Browns Canyon. Photo John Fielder

BLM Mapping, cont from page 1

Wild Connections is once again utilizing volunteer mappers to survey lands with wilderness characteristics. I am the mapping coordinator to lead this project and to train and coordinate with the volunteers. Wild Connections has already had two successful training sessions, training more than 20 volunteer mappers, with future trainings on the horizon. We have also recently signed up four volunteer mapping interns for the summer from Front Range universities to map BLM lands for wilderness characteristics and provide reports of their findings.

The BLM provides much guidance on how to assess lands for wilderness characteristics. Firstly, the area must be of sufficient size (minimum 5,000 acres) or contiguous with other federal land managed for wilderness characteristics. The area must also be roadless to be considered wilderness, though certain routes and trails are deemed acceptable by the BLM. The wilderness characteristics that the land or portions of the land must possess are defined for Naturalness, Outstanding Opportunity for Solitude, Outstanding Opportunity for Recreation (primitive or unconfined) and Supplemental Values.

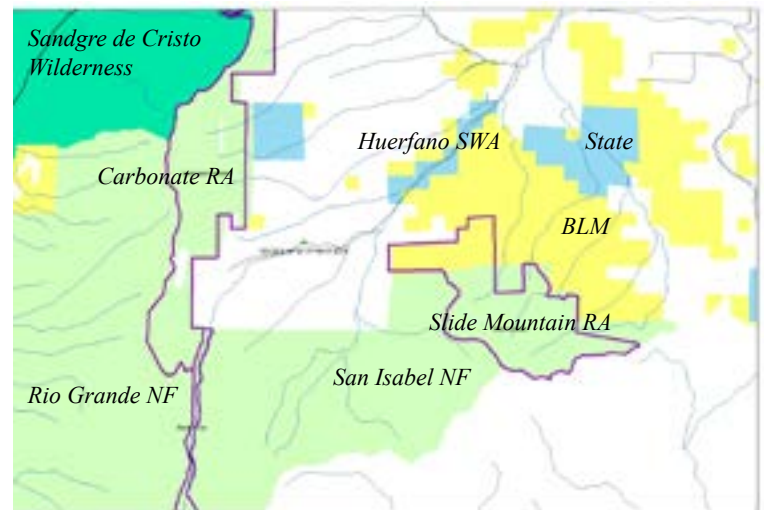
To be designated as an LWC must exhibit Naturalness and either Outstanding Opportunity for Solitude or Recreation. Supplemental values should be accounted for as well but are not necessary for LWCs. These would include notable geological or ecological features, an imperiled species habitat, or features that have educational, historical, or scenic value.

New technology is being implemented to map BLM LWCs. Wild Connections has invested in iPad Mini tablet devices and the mapping software application, GeoJot+, in order to meet all of the BLM data requirements much more easily, on-site, and digitally. Citizen wilderness inventories must provide a map of sufficient detail, a detailed narrative, and photographic documentation. Wild Connections' volunteer mappers can now achieve this in one program! When a photo is

Two views of Slide Mountain Potential BLM addition to the roadless area.



Slide Mountain roadless area taken from the road in the Huerfano State Wildlife Area. The area includes densely forested slopes, montane meadows and a substantial riparian zone along Heuerfano Creek. Photo Mike Dwyer.



There is an expanse of BLM land north of the USFS roadless area, as well a significant state lands. The mapping this summer will determine if these lands have wilderness qualities.

taken in GeoJot+, point data is automatically geotagged with latitude/longitude, altitude, and direction. Furthermore, Wild Connections' staff created customized lists to choose from when taking a photo, based on the BLM narrative guidelines for LWCs. Upon taking a photo, volunteers will be prompted with a list of questions associated with a particular wilderness characteristic. This enables all narrative data to be uniform and collected in the field, with no paperwork or photo logs on the back on. Once we return the tablet devices from the field and gain internet connection, all of the data will automatically be uploaded to a Wild Connections' data storage cloud to be reviewed and assembled into a report for the BLM.

We are very excited to be underway with our 2013 mapping project of BLM lands with wilderness characteristics. Now that many volunteers have been trained on how to use the tablet devices to map BLM LWCs, we are beginning to deploy teams to the identified priority areas. We look forward to sending our findings to the BLM and working towards expanding Colorado wilderness corridors. ☺



*Recording trail information with photo and database on iPad.
Photo Jim Lockhart*

Geneva Basin Project: Can you save a couple of weekend dates in late summer to do some high value rehabilitation work in the Pike National Forest?

By John Chapman

If all goes as planned, Wild Connections will be calling on you as volunteers to once again. We will perform the valuable task of rehabilitating areas the South Platte District plans to close to dispersed vehicle and camping use. As in past projects we are in contact with Scott Dollus, Outdoor Recreation Planner on the district. Scott is a good friend and has really helped Wild Connections to be involved in helping the Forest Service to complete restoration projects.

The project would be along Forest Road 119 as it runs into the high country of Geneva Basin, heading west off the Guanella Pass road. There are two potential project areas. One lies near timberline on FS 119 (Geneva Basin). Up near road's end (Iron Fens area) there is a spur running about 1 mile, from Geneva Lake south to Lake Josephine. Being in a sensitive area scarification would be done carefully as it takes so long to heal the ground. There would be some light seeding along with placement of rocks.

The other project is also on FS 119, a stretch of the road approximately 2.5 miles in length has numerous spurs to dispersed camping which the Forest Service wishes to close off and rehabilitate. This would involve scarification, seeding, and timber and rock placement. It would be similar to the Green Mountain project we did in fall of 2011.

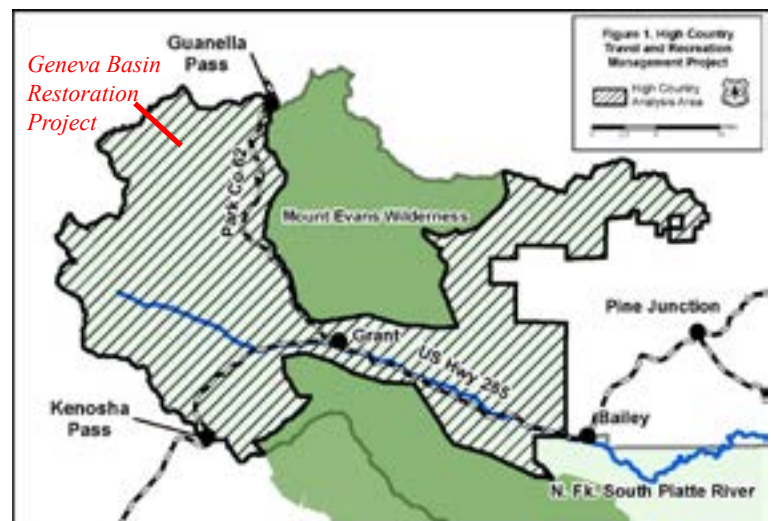


The high country in Geneva Basin where the restoration project is located.
Photo Tod Bacigalupi.

Both projects would probably be done in August, after the Forest District completes survey and categorical exclusion work. As you may know, the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires biological and cultural field surveys and other reviews before ground disturbing work can take place. The district is very favorable to seeing the restoration efforts done this year.

The big picture

The project area is within the larger study area of the High Country Travel and Recreation Analysis being done by the South Platte Ranger District. This includes generally all District lands west of Bailey, excluding Wilderness, that encompasses the Guanella Pass, Harris Park, and Kenosha Pass areas. The plan considers changes to travel management and the range of available recreation activities. It seeks to provide a variety of travel and recreation opportunities compatible with the subalpine and alpine environment of the analysis area. This is a complete NEPA analysis project with decision expected sometime this year, and initial actions selected in 2014, if possible. However, in the meantime, Wild Connections can undertake these two District project areas separately from the overall study.



The Geneva Basin project is located in the midst of several large roadless areas and near the Mt. Evans Wilderness. The hatched area is currently under review for improved travel and recreation management.

Partners

The projects may also include partner groups, working with us to get the job done. The Stay The Trail education program, part of the OHV community, has stated in interest in helping to spread the word to get some volunteers. This will provide a good chance to meet people from other recreational communities. Also, Claude Neumann, Wild Connections Board member and member representing the Colorado Mountain Club, has indicated CMC will be working alongside WC to complete the projects.

These projects should provide an excellent opportunity for Wild Connections to maintain its close relationship with the Pike National Forest and accomplish some valuable rehabilitation work.

Stay tuned to our newsletters for more information...and keep your work clothes and gloves handy!

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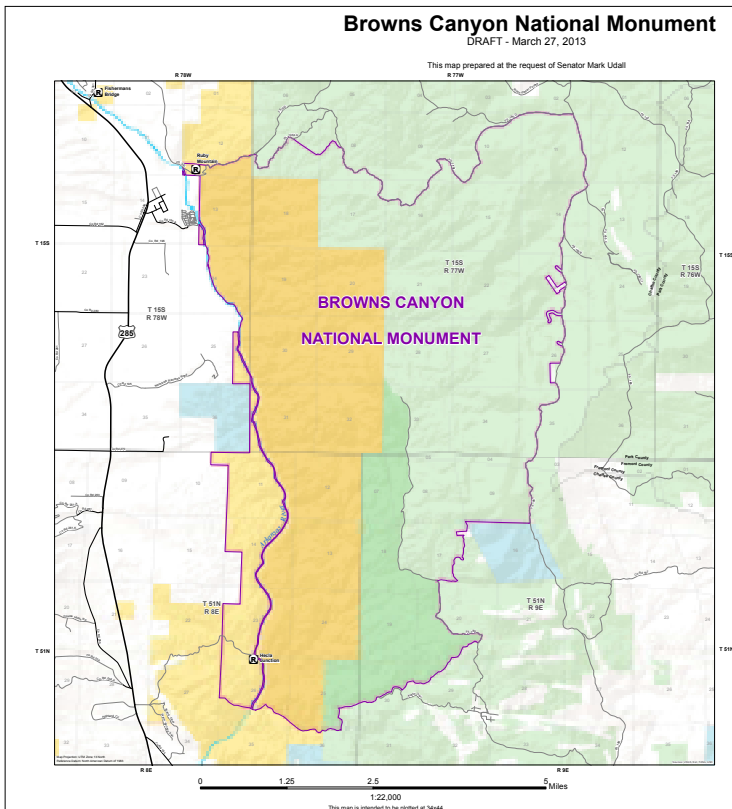
Our two organizations and many others believe that Browns Canyon shines like a small, but precious star in the firmament of Colorado wild lands. The supporters know that Browns Canyon warrants the protection of federal designations. In fact, surveys show that more than 70% of Coloradans statewide support such designations. And now the slow train to Browns Canyon wilderness protection is beginning to pick up speed.

Early in 2012, Colorado Senator Mark Udall posted for public comment on his website three protection scenarios for the roughly 20,000 roadless acres in Browns Canyon. Each scenario offered different levels of protection through national monument and wilderness designations. More than 3,000 citizens commented over a year's time, most in favor of protection. Recently, the senator and his staff posted for comment a draft bill for a 22,000-acre national monument including 10,500 acres of designated wilderness. Now is the time for wild land supporters to tell Sen. Udall to move forward with introducing Browns Canyon legislation.

So, what is good about the draft bill? It includes:

- Public lands on both sides of the Arkansas River, which enhances long term scenic and year-round recreational opportunities for river runners, anglers, and front country and back country campers. These visitors drive the twin economic benefits of wilderness and national monument designation—both as huge and undeniable as two grizzly bears (though some opponents of public lands try their best to ignore them).
- Lower to mid-elevation mountains and canyons, rare in Colorado designated wilderness, which offer plants and animals, large and small, life-sustaining habitats and benefit hunters and wildlife watchers alike.

There has been no new wilderness designated in wild-land-rich central Colorado in 20 years. There has not been a national



monument created in the region since Florissant Fossil Beds NM almost 45 years ago. It is not that there aren't numerous areas suitable for consideration, as illustrated by CCWC's Wild Twelve list and the Wild Connections Conservation Plan. To expand wilderness acreage at Brown's Canyon, we recommend that motorized use of the Turret Trail end at the wilderness boundary to prevent motorized incursions into wild lands, as has frequently occurred in the past. ☪

Nathrop public meeting

by Misi Ballard

After an early morning drive from Denver on Saturday, April 13, 2013, I arrived at Noah's Ark Whitewater Rafting Company in Nathrop to find the large parking lot completely filled and overflow parking on the shoulders of U.S. 285.

Pleasantly surprised at the public turnout for Senator Mark Udall's public comment session on his newly proposed legislation, I assumed there was broad local support for the legislation designating Brown's Canyon a National Monument and Wilderness and that the meeting would not be contentious. While there is certainly strong support for the proposed protection, I was taken by surprise by both the strength and variety of opinions opposing this bill.

The riverside pavilion was standing room only and many people signed-up to present their comments to Sen. Udall and Colorado Springs Representative Lamborn. Supporters talked



Representative Doug Lamborn and Senator Mark Udall listen to citizen's comments at the Nathrop public meeting. Photo by Mike Rosso.

about the local economic and wildlife benefits of Monument and Wilderness designation, the need for low-elevation wilderness areas east of the Divide, and the importance of preserving the wilderness character of the lands adjacent to the heavily-travelled Arkansas River and Brown's Canyon. Many comments addressed the fact that over the years the total proposed area has been whittled from 100,000 acres to just over 20,000 acres, and, as Bill Dvorak, the National Wildlife Federation's Colorado Public Lands Organizer stated, "the time for compromise has ended" and the time to protect Brown's Canyon for wildlife and for future generations is now. Opponents were both numerous and vocal, citing demands for greater public access, especially motorized, to all of Brown's

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Canyon, Federal budget concerns, aging populations being kept out of “private playgrounds,” and a general distrust of government regulation and “local meddling.”

We urge you to personally express your support for Sen. Udall’s bill and submit your comments using the form found on his website at www.markudall.senate.gov/brownscañon. Every comment matters, especially considering the vehemence of the opposition. Let’s not lose this opportunity, again! ☞

Golden public meeting *by John Stansfield*

On May 18, more than 100 people converged on the American Mountaineering Center auditorium in Golden for Sen. Mark Udall’s second listening session concerning his proposal for Browns Canyon national monument and wilderness legislation. Experts joining Sen. Udall and his staff member Jill Ozarski on the stage were rafting outfitter Joe Greiner, Arkansas Headwaters Recreation Area Manager Rob White, USFS Regional Wilderness Coordinator Ralph Swain, and Tom Heinlein, BLM Front Range Manager. In the audience were Wild Connections board members Jim Lockhart, John Stansfield and Lee Patton, as well as mapping coordinator John Sztukowski.

In the next two hours, at least 30 citizens stepped to the microphone to present their views on Browns Canyon legislation (and four who came to talk gun control and immigration issues). They were anglers and hikers, river guides and outfitters, present and former boatwomen and boatmen, hunters and birders, motorized and non-motorized recreationists, and a few who just love the place. Children

and their mentors from Environmental Learning for Kids (ELK) spoke of the value of Browns’ diverse beauty and open spaces. Rather surprisingly, not a single person spoke against permanent protection for the gem of the Arkansas. All expressed gratitude for Sen. Udall’s efforts.

At the end of the session, the senator expressed his thanks for the input received. Then he highlighted three special points he would take under consideration in preparing Browns legislation to be introduced, he hoped, this summer:

1. He will deliberate on expanding his proposed wilderness boundaries beyond the currently proposed 10,500 acres.
2. He will look into the legalities of including the Arkansas riverbed into the nation monument, thus linking the east and west uplands of the canyon.
3. He will consider revising his current proposal for the terminus of the Turret Trail.

What can you do?

Visit www.markudall.senate.gov/brownscañon before June 30. Sen. Udall needs your comments and your support for introducing his legislation. Ask him to include not only the 22,000 acre national monument, but also the full 20,000 acre wilderness designation proposed by Friends of Browns Canyon, WC, CCWC, as well as statewide and national organizations. Every comment matters, especially considering the vehemence of the opposition. Let’s not lose this opportunity! ☞

Wildlands Under Wilderness Summits

by Lee Patton

On my first hike in Browns Canyon, on the first ridge near the trailhead, I was bowled over by the views across the Arkansas River valley. The Collegiate Peaks, that spectacular, jagged horizon of snow-smothered summits, rose to the naked eye as if they were magnified in telephoto shots. Throughout the hike, whenever we rambled over ridges or dropped to the river, those peaks dominated the western sky.

With all its existing, intrinsic wilderness characteristics, Browns preserves a unique treasure unlike any other: its wildlands frame the choicest view of an unbroken series of other wilderness, the summits forming the very roof of the Rockies.

The Collegiates commanded attention at every turn. Mt. Yale was especially impressive with its sharply defined slopes, and Mt. Princeton breathtaking for its self-contained massiveness. The views were made more awe-inspiring by the contrast with the dominant habitat of Browns—generally dry and lower-lying. The disparity distilled the essence of Colorado high country: glacial giants, skirted by deep wet forests, towering over the arid pinyon, juniper, and prickly-pear country at the hiker’s feet.

Another unusual quality of Browns Canyon is its proximity to busy, growing Buena Vista and its tourist crossroads of recreation and leisure travel. Wilderness is not usually so accessible. A very short drive southeast of the U.S. 285/ U.S. 24 junction delivers visitors to trailheads for day hikes with myriad spurs to explore intermittent streams, grassy benches along the Arkansas rapids, refreshing cottonwood glens and piney uplands, and eagle and bighorn habitat. Combined with the awe-inspiring summits across the valley, the wildlands of Browns Canyon form an accessible anthology of Colorado’s scenic diversity. ☞



Kurt Kunkle’s iconic view of Mt. Princeton from the Turret Trail in Browns Canyon.

Wilderness profile: McIntyre Hills

by Steve Valimaki and Jean Smith

McIntyre Hills roadless area has long been of interest to Colorado conservationists. Wild Connections, Central Colorado Wilderness Coalition and Pikes Peak Sierra Club have co-sponsored many hikes into the area, and it has been included in Representative Diana DeGette's ongoing Wilderness legislation for several years.

Located south of the Arkansas River between Parkdale and Texas Creek, McIntyre Hills is typical of prime low elevation BLM lands. Pinyon-juniper, Gambel oak and dry land shrubs provide browse for deer and big horn sheep. Water is sparse in the seasonal drainages, and the northern boundary is separated from the Arkansas River by steep cliffs and busy Highway 50. From our experience, we know that it's rugged terrain and opportunities for primitive recreation, solitude and challenge make it a good Wilderness candidate. BLM has designated it as a Wilderness Study Area which gives some degree of protection.



Hiking up the canyon. Photo Steve Valimaki

There are no established trails, but if you're up for a little scrambling, you can go up the draws across Highway 50 at the various BLM recreation parking turnouts. Along Highway 50 some of the resident big horn sheep may come down to the roadside verge to browse or rest. ☪



Big horn sheep near Parkdale.
Photo Jean Smith



Its rugged country. Photo Steve Valimaki

We hiked up a semi-rugged semi-slot canon from Highway 50, east of Texas Creek. There were signs of wildlife, but no signs of human traces, said Steve Valimaki

Ice Cave Creek Trail Restoration near Palmer Lake

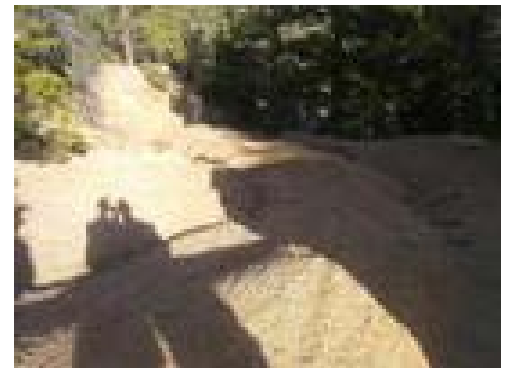
by Tom Mowle

Our colleagues, the Rampart Range Wildlands Project of the Colorado Mountain Club, are organizing this work project for Saturday June 8th. The restoration entails a 0.4 mile reroute of trail in the Ice Cave Creek drainage above Palmer Lake. This trail is one of the access points into the Rampart Range Wildlands Project area.

The existing trail up Ice Cave Creek is hazardous and eroding. It cannot be repaired in place, so we will be realigning the lower portion of the trail to position it higher on the ridge and connect it to the Palmer Reservoir trail between the reservoirs. This is a rare chance to build new trail, and a rare trail opportunity in northern El Paso County. It is also a BIG project, so we need lots of volunteers and crew leaders.

The result will be better access into the Ice Cave Creek drainage and opportunities for loop hikes from Palmer Lake.

Volunteers will have a short, but steep hike up to the work site. Volunteers must bring work clothes, gloves, water, snacks, sunscreen, and hat. This project will be completed through a partnership with Town of Palmer Lake, CMC Denver Group, CMC Pikes Peak Group, Friends of the Peak and Friends of Monument Preserve. Wild Connections members and friends are encouraged to participate. The Rampart East roadless area is one of the few remaining wild lands along the southern Front Range - restoration and trail work adds to its back country recreation and wildlife values



The route is badly eroded, Photo Rampart East Wildlands Project

You can register online at Colorado Mountain Club: <https://www.cmc.org/Calendar/EventDetails.aspx?ID=3075>

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Support Wild Connections

The seasons roll around, and every year at this time we ask for your contribution to Wild Connections. This year we are very excited about the new BLM mapping project.

Mapping is not new to us, of course. Many of you remember that we started with roadless areas on the Pike and San Isabel National Forest, completing more than 100 areas with 150 or so volunteers. One of the enduring results of that effort was when the Forest Service added 107,400 acres to the official Colorado Roadless Rule inventory.

And BLM lands are not entirely new because our volunteer teams from Wild Connections and Central Colorado Wilderness Coalition have spent hours in the large BLM roadless areas along the Arkansas Canyon between Buena Vista and Canon City. Another enduring result –soon to be – will be the Browns Canyon National Monument and Wilderness. Senator Mark Udall’s bill is nearing its final form and should make its way through Congress this year.

But here are some of the new aspects of the BLM mapping project:

- Areas that are in lower elevation foothills adjacent or near a forest roadless area
- Public involvement in BLM’s internal examination of Lands With Wilderness Characteristics
- BLM’s revision of their Land and Resource Management Plan
- Advanced technology using GeoJot mapping software and iPad tablets with all data entered in the field
- John Sztukowski on board as the mapping coordinator and four university interns
- More than 20 new trained volunteers.

However, there are still significant gaps in the resources needed to carry off this project to our accustomed science-based professional standards. We want you to help with your contribution and/or membership donation in June. Here are some things that your donations will cover, in addition to regular operating costs:

- \$ 500 - iPad
- \$ 375 - A Geo-Jot mapping software annual license
- \$ 125 - Gas and materials for two interns for a three-day trip
- \$ 100 - Write-up of one area report
- \$ 50 - Training and coordination costs, average per volunteer
- \$ 25 - Communications with public, average per email broadcast

The easiest, most efficient way to make your contribution is through Colorado Gives – just click on the Donate button below and fill out the form on the secure on-line site. Your gift is debited to your credit card and sent on to Wild Connections.

However, if you prefer to mail a check, please use the form below.

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

Sincerely,

Jean Smith
Board emeritus



Yes I want to help

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Make checks payable to Wild Connections and mail to 2168 Pheasant Pl., Colorado Springs CO 80909



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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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