

Chapter 5 – Complexes: Area-Specific Management Recommendations

This section contains our detailed, area-specific proposal utilizing the theme based approach to land management. As an organizational tool, this proposal divides the Pike-San Isabel National Forest into eleven separate **Complexes**, based on geo-physical characteristics of the land such as mountain ranges, parklands, or canyon systems. Each complex narrative provides details and justifications for our management recommendations for specific areas. In order to emphasize the larger landscape and connectivity of these lands with the ecoregion, commentary on relationships to adjacent non-Forest lands are also included.

Evaluations of ecological value across public and private lands are used throughout this chapter. The Colorado Natural Heritage Programs rates the biodiversity of Potential Conservation Areas (PCAs) as General Biodiversity, Moderate, High, Very High, and Outranking Significance. The Nature Conservancy assesses the conservation value of its Conservation Blueprint areas as Low, Moderately Low, Moderate, Moderately High and High. The Southern Rockies Ecosystem Project's Wildlands Network Vision recommends land use designations of Core Wilderness, Core Agency, Low and Moderate Compatible Use, and Wildlife Linkages. Detailed explanations are available from the respective organizations.

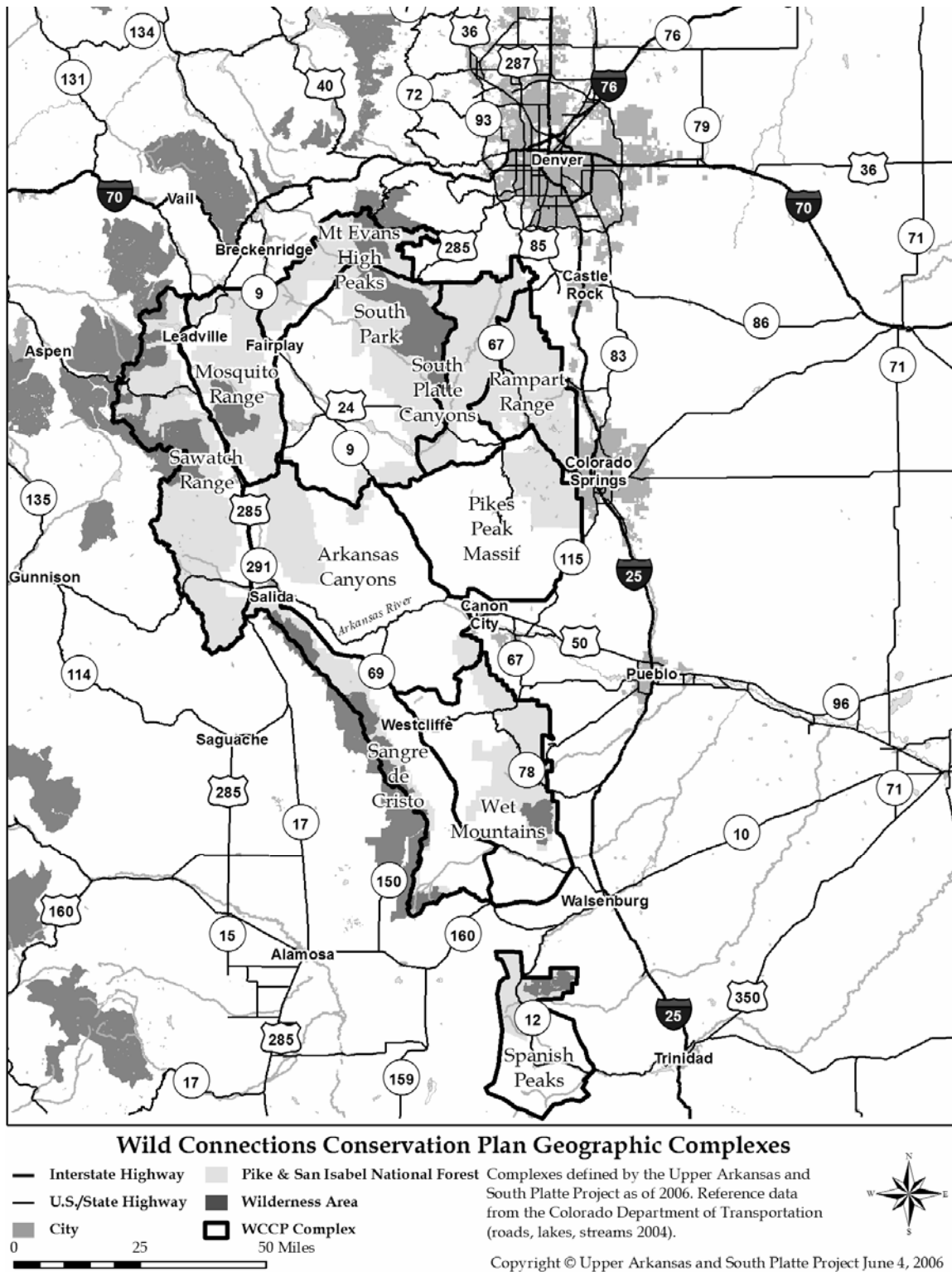
Complexes – Summary List by Watershed

Table 5.1: Summary of WCCP Complexes

Watershed	Complex	Ranger District
South Platte	Mount Evans High Peaks	South Platte & South Park
	South Park	South Platte & South Park
	South Platte Canyons	South Platte & South Park
South Platte and Arkansas	Mosquito Range	South Park, Leadville and Salida
	Pikes Peak Massif	Pikes Peak
	Rampart Range	South Platte & Pikes Peak
Arkansas	Sawatch	Leadville and Salida
	Arkansas Canyons	Salida, San Carlos & BLM Royal Gorge Resource Area
	Sangre de Cristo	Salida and San Carlos
	Wet Mountains	San Carlos
	Spanish Peaks	San Carlos

Complexes – Map Locater

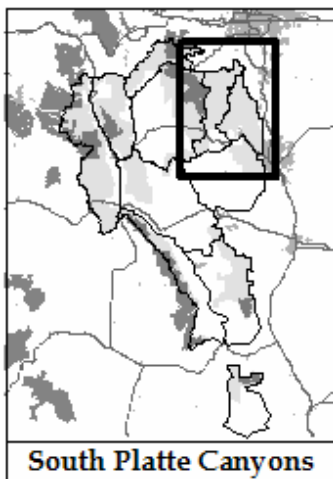
Map 5.1: Wild Connections Complexes



The South Platte Canyons Complex

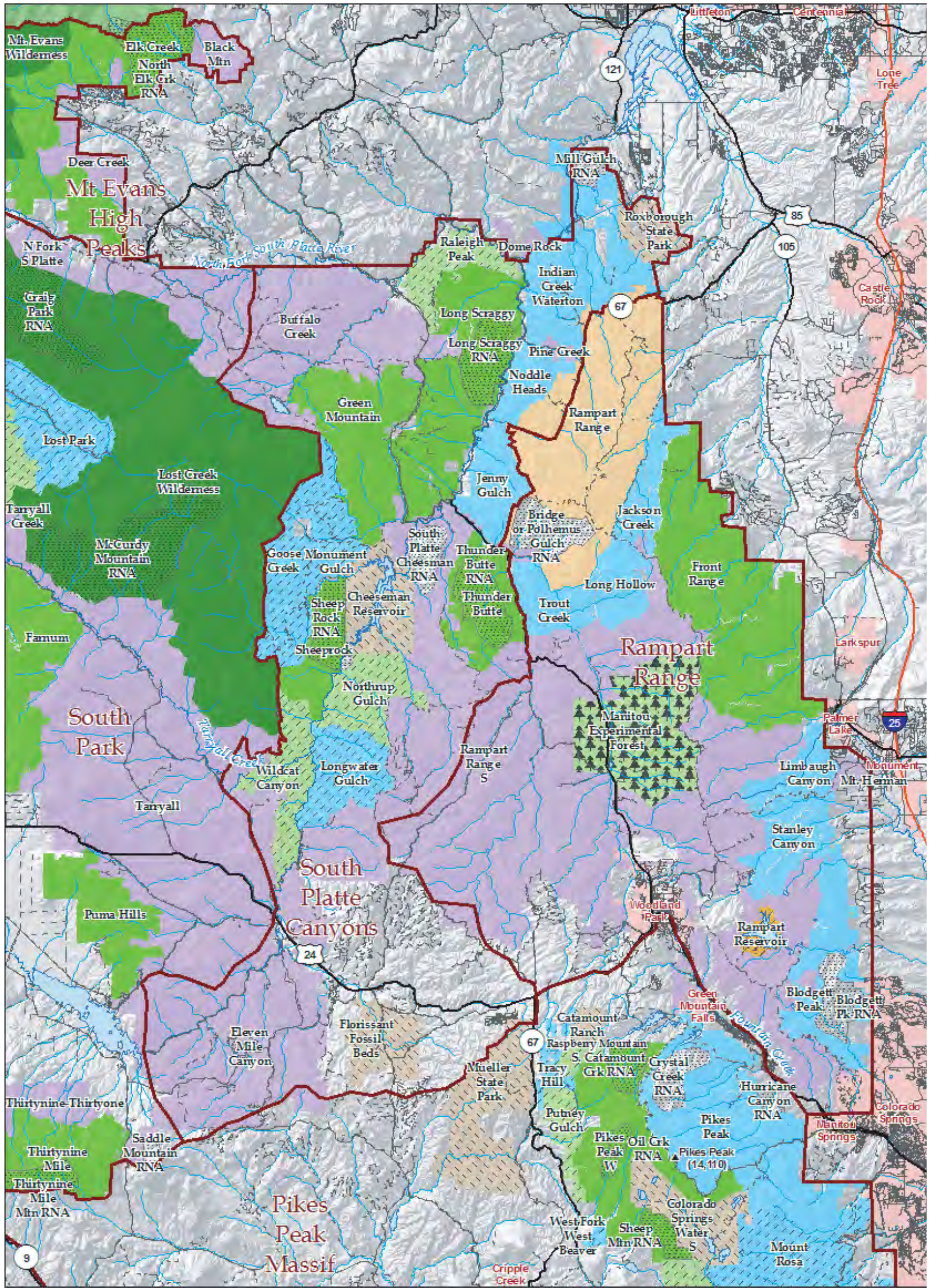


Sheeprock and Northrup Gulch roadless areas



The South Platte Canyons Complex lands are found along the South Platte River from Elevenmile to the foothills near Denver in the northeastern part of the National Forest

Eleven complexes centered on geographical features encompass sections of the Pike-San Isabel National Forest, adjacent BLM, state, and private lands. Fitting together like a mosaic, they cover the headwaters of the South Platte and Arkansas Rivers.



Wild Connections Conservation Plan - South Platte Canyons Complex

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interstate Highway U.S./State Highway Paved Road Improved Unpaved Railroad WCCP Complex City Wilderness Outside Pike/San Isabel 		<p>WCCP Proposed Management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1.1 Existing Wilderness 1.2 Recommended Wilderness 1.3 Core Reserve 2.1 Research Natural Areas 2.2 Experimental Forests 3.1 Quiet Use Areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3.2 Connectivity Areas 4.1 Motorized Recreation Areas 5.1 Active Mgmt - Wildlife Habitat 8.1 Ski Based Resorts 8.2 Permanently Developed Areas 9.1 Non-USFS Recommend Wilderness 9.2 Significant Non-USFS Biological 	<p>Wild Connections Conservation Plan as of May 2006. Reference data from the US Geological Survey (mountains, 1981) US Forest Service (forest routes, 2002) and the Colorado Department of Transportation (roads, lakes, streams 2004).</p> <p>Copyright © Upper Arkansas and South Platte Project May 21, 2006</p>
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Map 5.10: South Platte Complex Proposed Management

Note: This map is located in the pocket at back of the document for usability.

Description

Overview

The South Platte Canyons Complex encompasses the lands along the South Platte River from Elevenmile Canyon on the east side of South Park to the foothills near Denver in the northeastern part of the Pike National Forest. Steep and inaccessible canyons alternate with more open river stretches and the Cheesman and Strontia Springs reservoirs. The South Platte River flows into Strontia Springs Reservoir about two miles below the confluence of the mainstem and the North Fork of the South Platte River, and continues until it exits the foothills at Waterton.

The complex is located in Park, Teller, Douglas, and Jefferson Counties, and in the South Platte and South Park Ranger Districts. The river and reservoirs deliver approximately 60% of Denver's domestic water supply. Sometimes characterized as a giant plumbing system, it also has some of the best low elevation wildlands in Colorado and hosts an array of important plant communities and wildlife.

A description of the landscape, vegetation, wildlife, and ecological values, including detailed descriptions of roadless areas, is followed by the recommendations for the complex organized according to the management themes. A discussion of connectivity within the complex and to adjacent complexes is found at the end

The landscape and wildlife

The North Fork and mainstem of the South Platte River are the dominant features of the landscape. Flowing out of Elevenmile Reservoir through Elevenmile Canyon, the South Platte River has an adjacent road until after it crosses US Highway 24 and enters the remote and rugged Wildcat Canyon. Tarryall Creek joins the river in this canyon. The canyon was accessible by four-wheel drive vehicle in the Corral Creek area before the Hayman Fire. Below Corral Creek the South Platte again enters a rugged part of the canyon until it reaches Cheesman Reservoir. After tumbling through the step canyon downstream of the reservoir, the river is readily accessible by roadway between Deckers and the confluence with the North Fork of the South Platte. The North Fork of the South Platte River, originating high in Hall Valley in the Mount Evans High Peaks Complex, enters the South Platte Canyons Complex near the Park and Jefferson County Line, flowing through private and Forest Service land until it joins the mainstem at the South Platte historic townsite. From here to Strontia Springs Reservoir, the canyon is again inaccessible by motorized travel, but downstream from the Strontia Springs Dam, hikers, anglers, and mountain bikers enjoy the riparian corridor along the Denver Water Board's service road.

Elevations range from 10,421 feet on Green Mountain to 5,600 feet at Waterton, and the uplands are varied in topography. On the south, the end of the Puma Hills and lower ridges across Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument to Mueller State Park are moderate. US Highway 24 angles through the rolling hills between Divide and Lake George. North of US Highway 24, the topography becomes much more rugged as the river enters Wildcat Canyon and flows into Cheesman Reservoir more than 20 miles downstream. The slopes of Hackett Mountain, Cedar Mountain, Thunder Butte, and the Rampart Range on the east and the higher forested mountains of Lost Creek Wilderness, Long Scraggy, and Green Mountain to the west dominate the viewshed. This area is typically Pikes Peak granite with huge rock formations emerging from the land and erosive soils existing where the land is

exposed to the elements. On the north end, the complex is less rugged, with the boundary following the North Fork of the South Platte River and the National Forest boundary onward through Strontia Springs and to the foothills just north of Roxborough State Park.

South Platte Canyons forest cover is mostly ponderosa pine or Douglas-fir, with some smaller stands of aspen, lodgepole pine, and Gambel oak. Riparian species thrive along the river corridors and tributaries. The effects of the Hayman Fire, which burned across the mid section of this complex, are discussed below in “Ecological Values.”

There is habitat for a large range of species including elk, mule deer, black bear, mountain lion, and many others. On the south end of the complex, there is high black bear activity in both summer and fall and elk have winter concentrations. A band of bighorn sheep occupies the ridges along the South Platte in the Strontia Springs area. Wild brown and rainbow trout populations flourish in Wildcat Canyon and Cheesman Canyon rates as gold medal trout waters - both are popular with anglers. Current and historical rare and sensitive species include American peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus anatum*), Pawnee montane skipper (*Hesperia leonardus montana*), ovenbird (*Seiurus aurocapillus*), Preble’s meadow jumping mouse (*Zapus hudsonius preblei*), Mexican spotted owl (*Strix occidentalis lucida*), and bald eagles (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) that winter at Cheesman Reservoir and along the South Platte River.

Recreation is one of the primary uses throughout the complex, partly because of the lower elevations and proximity to Front Range cities. The entire river from Elevenmile to its exit from the foothills is popular for fishing, and some intrepid anglers fish the river even in winter. Rafters and kayakers navigate the river downstream from Deckers and on the North Fork of the South Platte River, and some kayakers will run the Strontia Springs section even though they have to carry their kayaks back out on an old access road. There are many developed campgrounds: six in Elevenmile Canyon; one off the Tarryall road near Lake George, two along the Matukat Road (currently closed due to Hayman damage); two between Deckers and the confluence plus two picnic areas, four on the perimeter of the Green Mountain Roadless Area, and finally the campground at Indian Creek that also has equestrian facilities and a designated horse trail. This complex provides access to the west side of Lost Creek Wilderness, and the Colorado Trail crosses the northern end of the complex. Dispersed camping can be found throughout the complex.

Ecological values of the complex

In addition to extended mid and low elevation forests, which provide valuable winter range and year round range for many species, the South Platte Canyons Complex includes a number of rich and unique biological areas. There are five potential Research Natural Areas (RNA), as well as two Potential conservation Areas (PCA) of high biodiversity significance in Bear Creek and around Cheesman Reservoir. The Nature Conservancy’s Southern Rocky Mountains Conservation blueprint (TNC blueprint) includes most of the complex as a moderately high priority. The Southern Rockies Ecosystem Project’s Wildlands Network Vision (SREP Vision) includes five roadless areas as core wilderness and several more as agency core areas. These designations illustrate the biological richness of the South Platte Canyons Complex.

The mid part of this complex was burned in the Hayman fire of June, 2002. Although the fire was ignited by human action on the afternoon of June 8, the real culprit was a period of very low humidity, very high temperatures, and strong winds from the southwest. By June 9 the fire had already burned about 40,000 acres. It continued to expand for several days with a major shift back to the southwest on June 16 and 17, and was only finally contained on June 27 after temperatures decreased and it ran into two previously burned areas. It burned all but about 25,000 acres inside a

140,000-acre area, destroyed 133 homes and 466 outbuildings, and left parts of four counties vulnerable to flash floods and mudslides.

While parts of the fire were very intensive, especially in the first few days, the severity map shows large areas that burned at moderate or low intensities and significant areas that were unburned, particularly on the perimeters and southeast side. Much of the forest and ground cover were consumed leading to massive erosion into all the tributaries, the South Platte River, and Cheesman Reservoir. However, with time the effects of the fire will be overcome by restoration projects and natural regeneration. Aspen are coming back in many areas, trees are being planted in some areas, and riparian areas, which were not burned as severely, are recovering. After the fire, several actions were taken: the BAER team designed a recovery and restoration plan, salvage timber sales were designed and initiated, erosion structures and mitigation measures were implemented, many areas were reseeded or replanted, volunteer work days were held with the help of Coalition for the Upper South Platte, and a travel management plan was approved. In addition to the work on National Forest lands, Denver Water Board implemented extensive restoration and mitigation on its land around Cheesman Reservoir. Implications for future management, particularly of the salvage logging and travel management plan, are discussed in descriptions of the affected roadless areas.

Wilderness and Roadless Areas

The roadless land in the South Platte Canyons contributes to ecological characteristics that are best found where the presence of people is minimized (See Table 5.18).

Wilderness Areas

There are no designated Wildernesses in the South Platte Canyons. However, Lost Creek Wilderness lies immediately to the west in the South Park complex.

Unprotected roadless areas

There are eleven unprotected large roadless areas in the South Platte Canyons Complex. Five were inventoried as roadless under the Forest Service’s Roadless Area Conservation Rule, and one other area (Northrup-Longwater Gulches) has a small portion of a Forest Service Inventoried Roadless Area within its boundary. Long Scraggy, Jenny Gulch, Sheeprock, and Thunder Butte were determined by UASPP inventories to be larger than the Roadless Area Conservation Rule boundaries. In addition to their value as roadless areas, four roadless areas also include lands recommended for RNAs, and the Roxborough State Park Colorado Natural Area is immediately adjacent to the Forest boundary. The roadless areas on National Forest lands are described in more detail below, in order from north to south.

Mill Gulch

The Mill Gulch roadless area of 1,500 acres is located at the extreme northeast corner of the Forest. It is bounded by the Forest boundary on the north and east, the South Platte River on the

Table 5.18: South Platte Canyons Roadless Areas

Name	Acres (UASPP)	Roadless Under Roadless Rule
Green Mountain	14,700	Yes
Indian Creek	13,300	No
Jenny Gulch	6,000	Yes*
Long Scraggy	20,500	Yes*
Mill Gulch	1,500	No
Noddle Heads	4,100	No
Northrup-Longwater Gulches	14,300	Yes*
Roxborough State Park	3,400	n/a**
Sheeprock	6,100	Yes
Thunder Butte	8,700	Yes

*Roadless rule area has significantly fewer areas than UASPP inventory.

**Area not managed by the US Forest Service (managed by the State of Colorado).

west, and an arbitrary boundary corresponding to the evaluation for potential RNA on the south. The area lies on a high ridge overlooking the South Platte Canyon and the spectacular red rock formations of Roxborough State Park to the east. It was not included in the Roadless Area Conservation Rule inventory.

Mule deer, bighorn sheep, and elk find summer range in the Mill Gulch roadless area, with a summer black bear high activity area and mule deer winter range. Mountain lions are found here. Preble's meadow jumping mouse (*Zapus hudsonius prebli*) and the Pawnee montane skipper butterfly (*Hesperia Leonardus montana*) have been recorded here. Rare plant associations include mountain mahogany/needle-and-thread grass (*Cercocarpus montanus/Stipa comata*) mixed foothill shrublands, Douglas-fir/Geyer's willow (*Pseudotsuga menziesii/Carex geyeri*) lower montane forests, Gambel oak/Geyer's willow (*Quercus gambelii/Carex geyeri*), mesic oak thickets, and needle-and-thread grass/blue grama (*Stipa comata/Bouteloua gracilis*) montane grasslands. SREP's Vision shows the roadless area as core agency.

In spite of its proximity to the recreational and Denver Water activities along the river and to housing developments to the east, this roadless area contributes to the overall biodiversity of the South Platte Canyons complex and provides relatively secure wildlife habitat because of its steep topography and lack of road access.

Indian Creek

The Indian Creek roadless area of 13,300 acres is located near the extreme northeast of the Pike National Forest. It is bounded by the National Forest boundary on the east, the Mill Gulch roadless area boundary on the north, the South Platte River Road (County Road 96) on the west, and Colorado Highway/County Road 67 and Pine Creek Road (County Road 40) on the south. While this area was not included in the Roadless Area Conservation Rule Inventory, due no doubt to several old routes that are now closed, it is prime low elevation habitat.

The Indian Creek roadless area is predominantly ponderosa pine and Douglas-fir, with some small pockets of aspen and mountain shrubland. The South Platte bighorn sheep band is primarily located north of the South Platte River and the Strontia Springs Reservoir where there is also a production area, but the sheep can be found on both sides of the South Platte River below the dam and may occasionally go into the northern portion of Indian Creek. Mule deer have summer and winter range here, with summer concentrations of bears across the area. Mountain lions roam here. Riparian areas throughout Indian Creek could support Preble's meadow jumping mouse (*Zapus hudsonius preblei*), and there is occupied habitat on the south central side near Colorado Highway 67. Other rare species identified in Indian Creek include Pawnee montane skipper (*Hesperia leonardus montana*), oven birds, and two rare plants – prairie violet (*Viola pedafida*) and a rare fern (*Onoclea sensibilis*). The area is also noted for its lower montane riparian shrublands and thinleaf alder/mesic forb (*Alnus incana/mesic forb*) riparian shrublands.

A portion of the southwest part of the Indian Creek roadless area is included in the fuels treatments of the Upper South Platte Restoration Project, currently underway.

Willow Creek, located on the southeast corner of the roadless area, includes ovenbirds and Preble's meadow jumping mice and (*Zapus hudsonius preblei*) is recommended by conservationists for further research and evaluation. Colorado Natural Heritage Program lists a Proposed Conservation Area of very high significance along the Bear Creek drainage. Approximately half of Indian Creek is listed by the TNC Blueprint as of moderate conservation value. The SREP Vision shows the roadless area as low use.

Noddle Heads

The Noddle Heads roadless area, at 4,100 acres, is located immediately south of the Indian Creek roadless area and west of the Rampart Range Recreation Area in a rectangle formed by Pine Creek Road (County Road 40) on the north, motorized trail 677, County Road 67 along Sugar Creek on the south, and County Road 97 along the South Platte River on the west. As its name implies, the large granite outcrops known as Noddle Heads are landmarks for the area. The Noddle Heads roadless area was not included in the Roadless Area Conservation Rule inventory. As the land drops down from the eastern ridge toward the river, the topography is quite steep and rough. Trail 677 that forms the eastern boundary is part of the extensive motorized system in the adjacent Rampart Recreation Area.

The Noddle Heads roadless area is a mixture of ponderosa pine and Douglas-fir forest. Most of the area is within the habitat range of Preble's meadow jumping mouse (*Zapus hudsonius preblei*), with four occupied drainages on the west side along the South Platte River. Black bear and mountain lion are found in the area, and mule deer and elk have both summer and winter range. Pawnee montane skipper butterfly (*Hesperia leonardus montana*), peregrine falcon, Mexican spotted owl (*Strix occidentalis lucida*), and bald eagles have been observed in the area. The bald eagles winter along the river and at Cheesman Reservoir.

A portion of the Noddle Heads roadless area is included in the fuels treatments of the Upper South Platte Restoration Project, currently underway

All of the Noddle Heads area is listed by the TNC Blueprint as of moderate conservation value. SREP's Vision shows the roadless area as low use.

Jenny Gulch

The Jenny Gulch roadless area of some 6,000 acres is located immediately south of the Noddle Heads roadless area on the south side of County Road 67 along Sugar Creek. Motorized trails 678, 677 and 672 form the eastern boundary, separating it from the Rampart Recreation Area and the Rampart West roadless area. The south and west boundary is County Road 67 along Horse Creek to Deckers and downstream along the South Platte River. A portion of the Jenny Gulch roadless area was part of the Rampart West Inventoried Roadless Area but we judged it to be a separate area.

As with the other areas in this part of the complex, the Jenny Gulch roadless area is a mixture of Douglas-fir and ponderosa pine. There is potential habitat for Preble's meadow jumping mouse (*Zapus hudsonius preblei*) in most of the riparian areas, with four occupied drainages on the west side along the South Platte River. Black bear and mountain lion are found in the area, and mule deer and elk have both summer and winter range here. Bald eagles, Mexican spotted owl (*Strix occidentalis lucida*), and Pawnee montane skipper butterfly (*Hesperia leonardus montana*) have been recorded here. The area also has thinleaf alder/mesic forb riparian shrubland.

The east side of the Jenny Gulch roadless area is included in the fuels treatments of the Upper South Platte Restoration Project, currently underway. Some of the completed work can be seen from County Road 67.

All of Jenny Gulch is listed by the TNC Blueprint as of moderate conservation value. SREP's Vision shows the roadless area as low use.

Recreation impacts are likely very low in this area as there are no internal trails and access is

blocked by private property on the west along most of the river and Horse Creek. The current non-motorized use in Indian Creek, Noddle Heads, and Jenny Gulch together form a relatively secure wildlife habitat that balances the intensive motorized use in the Rampart Range Recreation Area to the east. This also helps protect water quality in the tributaries and mainstem of the South Platte River.

Long Scraggy

The Long Scraggy and Green Mountain roadless areas, in terms of size and ecological values, are probably the most important roadless areas in the northern part of the South Platte Canyons Complex. The Long Scraggy roadless area encompasses 20,500 acres between the South Platte River on the east and south, County Road 126 on the west, and the Colorado Trail on the north. The huge rocky outcrop of Long Scraggy itself rises dramatically from the South Platte River and tops out at 8,800 feet, dominating the viewshed for miles around. Numerous small drainages – Brush Creek, Saloon Gulch, Gunbarrel Creek, Kelsy Creek, and Spring Creek – carve the land west to east. At the north end Raleigh Peak, more than 8,100 feet high, rises above the rolling hills. The area as inventoried by UASPP is larger than the Roadless Area Conservation Rule Inventoried Roadless Area.

The Long Scraggy roadless area is ponderosa pine with Douglas-fir and a few areas of piñon-juniper in areas not affected by the Buffalo Creek and Hayman fires. Some trees are very large, especially along Gunbarrel Creek where the extra moisture likely contributed to their size. There are water birch/western dogwood (*Betula occidentalis-Cornus sericea*) lower montane riparian shrublands here as well.

Habitat for Preble's meadow jumping mouse (*Zapus hudsonius preblei*) is found in riparian zones across the Long Scraggy roadless area, and there are two occupied drainages on the east side along the South Platte River and one on the south end. Black bear and mountain lion are found in the area, and mule deer and elk have both summer and winter range here. Mule deer also have good winter range over the whole area, with elk winter range located in the northern half. Records of rare species include peregrine falcon, bald eagles wintering along the river, Mexican spotted owl (*Strix occidentalis lucida*), and at least three colonies of Pawnee montane skipper (*Hesperia leonardus montana*) butterflies.

The proposed Long Scraggy RNA includes six plant associations not found in other proposed RNAs according to Center for Native Ecosystems. Long Scraggy Peak is of geological and scenic interest and the Raleigh Peak area has nesting prairie falcons. All of the Long Scraggy roadless area is listed in the TNC Blueprint as of moderate conservation value. SREP's Vision shows the roadless area as core wilderness.

Historically, mining and logging had consequences for the landscape. Quarries, now closed, west of Raleigh Creek attest to minerals found here, and at various places in the roadless areas there are old diggings of white quartz. Long ago, part of the area was logged with horses, but most of the remaining stumps are now disintegrated to the point of being invisible.

Today, there are two major alterations affecting the roadless area. In 1996, the Buffalo Creek fire burned into the northeastern part of the area. Several restoration efforts and natural recovery are slowly revegetating the land, but the arid and erosive soils are not conducive to fast regeneration. Likewise, in 2002, the Hayman fire reached its northernmost limit in the Kelsey Creek area. The central portion burned at high severity. The rest of the area was low severity with significant areas unburned, especially on the east side and along the perimeter of the fire. Some of the burned area can be seen from the overlook on County Road 126 or coming south on County Road 67

before reaching Deckers, but from the east side it is not visible. However, the erosion that followed the fire can be observed along County Road 67 north of Deckers, particularly at the egress of Saloon Gulch. This part of the roadless area will take many years to recover, likely, but there are vast seed banks in the unburned forest just to the north.

The second current impact is the Upper South Platte Restoration Project that encompasses the area on the perimeter of the USFS Inventoried Roadless Area. This multi-year project is designed to thin the rather dense forest in an ecologically sensitive manner to reduce risk of catastrophic fire without damaging the areas wilderness qualities. Major treatment areas are across the south portion along the administratively closed forest road 534 in Saloon Gulch, forest road 536 near Kelsey Creek, on the northwest side along forest road 530, with some smaller areas on the east side. The area along forest road 534 was impacted by the Hayman Fire and there is a small salvage logging site there at this time.

Green Mountain

The Green Mountain roadless area of 14,700 acres lies directly west of the south half of the Long Scraggy roadless area and is part of the continuous sweep of land from the South Platte River up to the higher elevations of Green Mountain and the Lost Creek Wilderness. Like the Long Scraggy roadless area, the north boundary is defined by the Colorado Trail as far as the Meadows Campground and then by forest road 543 to Wellington Lake. Forest roads 560 and 544 form the west boundary, with 560 and 211 on the south. The east side is along Deckers Road (County Road 126). Lost Creek Wilderness is not far to the west of this area, and at Stony Pass the Wilderness is just across the road. Rock outcroppings known as Little Scraggy Peak are near Kelsey Campground on the east side, Green Mountain at 10,421 feet in the central area, and Sugarloaf Peak at 8,501 feet are notable landmarks. Green Mountain Creek, Cabin Creek, Pine Creek, and Wigwam Creek drain the west and south sides of the area.

The Green Mountain roadless area is predominantly ponderosa pine and Douglas-fir, but being higher than other areas in the complex, it also has scattered stands of lodgepole pine, aspen and some Engelmann spruce-subalpine fir in the highest areas. Black bears and mountain lions roam the area with a small area of high summer bear activity on the northeast. Mule deer have summer range and elk have both summer and winter range here. There is habitat for Preble's meadow jumping mouse (*Zapus hudsonius preblei*) on the southern end of the area with two occupied drainages, and Pawnee montane skippers (*Hesperia leonardus montana*) have been observed here. Other notable species include peregrine falcons, as well as water birch/mesic forb (*Betula occidentalis*/mesic forb) foothills riparian shrubland, Rocky Mountain willow/mesic forb (*Salix monticola*/mesic forb) montane riparian willow carr and Colorado blue spruce/water birch (*Picea pungens*/*Betula occidentalis*) riparian woodland plant communities.

The Hayman fire burned into the southern third of the Green Mountain roadless area, mostly at high severity, with low and unburned areas on the north perimeter. Some of the burned area can be seen from Deckers Road (County Road 126).

The central portion of Green Mountain is considered important by the Center for Native Ecosystems. It includes areas favored by elk, and the Little Scraggy and Green Mountain rock outcrops are of interest. This central portion hosts a rare plant white adder's-mouth orchid (*Malaxis monophyllos ssp. Brachypoda*) and wild turkeys, among other species. Approximately half of Green Mountain is listed by the TNC Blueprint as of moderate conservation value. SREP's Vision lists the roadless area as core wilderness.

Thunder Butte

Located between State Highway 67 and Cheesman Reservoir, the Thunder Butte roadless area of 8,700 acres is dominated by its namesake – 9,836 foot Thunder Butte. Colorado Highway 67 along with West Creek and Horse Creek defines the eastern boundary, a power transmission line marks the northwest boundary, forest road 523 is on the west side, and an arbitrary line drawn to exclude various roads define the south side. Going north on Colorado Highway 67 toward Deckers, Thunder Butte is prominent above the West Creek Canyon. The area as inventoried by UASPP is larger than the Forest Service’s Roadless Area Conservation Rule Inventoried Roadless Area.

The Thunder Butte roadless area is primarily Douglas-fir and ponderosa pine, with a few areas of aspen, as well as unforested rocky slopes. Somewhat less than half of the area on the northwest side was in the Hayman fire severe burn area, with pockets of moderate burn severity. The rest is a mixture of various burn severities including moderate, low, and unburned areas. Significant parts on the north and east slopes of Thunder Butte were not burned. Some of the planned fuels treatments of the Upper South Platte Restoration Project on the north side of the roadless area were in the high severity burned area, which has likely affected that project. A very small area in Shrewsbury Gulch is part of the Hayman Salvage Logging Project.

The Thunder Butte roadless area includes habitat for Mexican spotted owl (*Strix occidentalis lucida*) and Pawnee montane skipper (*Hesperia leonardus montana*), and has occurrences of thinleaf alder/mesic forb riparian community (*Alnus incana*/mesic forb). Bear and mountain lion are found here. Elk have both summer and winter range and mule deer have summer range across the area. There is Preble’s meadow jumping mouse (*Zapus hudsonius preblei*) habitat in the West Creek/Horse Creek area.

A sizeable Colorado Natural Heritage PCA of moderate significance is located in the south central part of the Thunder Butte roadless area, and the Thunder Butte proposed RNA covers nearly half the area. Thunder Butte is indicated to be of moderate conservation value in the TNC Blueprint. The SREP Vision lists the roadless area as core wilderness.

Northrup-Longwater Gulches

The Northrup-Longwater Gulches roadless area is some 14,300 acres located between the South Platte River on the west, Denver Water Board land on the north, and on the east and south the boundary is defined by forest roads 360/525 near Turkey Creek and forest road 897. The land here is well above the South Platte River on the east side of the area and then drops sharply into the canyon on the west side. Prior to the Hayman Fire, there were several motorized routes in the area used by four-wheelers, ATVs, and motorcycles. These are all currently closed because of safety concerns and resource damage, including massive erosion into the South Platte River. Most of the area was burned in the Hayman Fire with low severity in the northwest central section and intermixed high, moderate and unburned severity on the other sides. There are units of the Hayman Salvage project along the east side. The recently completed Hayman Travel Management Plan will reopen forest road 221, among others, which gives access to the river ford near Corral Creek, when conditions permit. Several areas along the east side are part of the Hayman Salvage Logging Project.

Prior to the fire, the Northrup-Longwater Gulches roadless area was about equally ponderosa pine and Douglas-fir, with a few aspen groves and mountain shrublands. The fire burned with low severity north of Metberry Gulch and along Northrup Gulch, so possibly the habitat here was less affected. The area harbors mountain lion, mule deer, elk, and black bear, with a small area of

high summer bear activity along the river. Elk and mule deer also have winter range in the south half and on the east along the river, respectively. Pawnee montane skippers (*Hesperia leonardus montana*) have been observed here, and the area has good examples of Douglas-fir/water birch (*Pseudotsuga menziesii/Betula occidentalis*) montane riparian forest.

All of the Northrup-Longwater Gulches roadless area is listed by the TNC Blueprint as of moderate conservation value. Colorado Natural Heritage's Cheesman PCA of very high significance spills into the extreme north end where the roadless area abuts Denver Water Board land. The SREP Vision shows the roadless area as core agency.

Sheeprock

The primary landmark of the 6,100-acre Sheeprock roadless area – the Sheeprock outcropping of granite on the north – is visible from many vantage points near the area. Equally impressive are the huge granite monoliths on the south along the South Platte River near Corral Creek. The area is bounded by Goose Creek on the north, private land and the Matukat Road (forest road 211) on the west, Corral Creek Road (forest road 540) on the south and the South Platte River and Denver Water Board property on the east. The land is rolling forest or open areas dropping from west to east. Along the South Platte River, there are many large rock formations and a precipitous drop into the river canyon. From the edge of the canyon there is a glimpse of Cheesman Reservoir to the northeast.

The majority of the Sheeprock roadless area was included in the Roadless Conservation Rule inventory. On the south end, UASPP has extended the roadless boundary, as the old logging roads have been closed, ripped, and seeded near Matukat Road. One is hard pressed to even locate the roads on the ground, although further east where they were not rehabilitated, they are still visible. Some of them are used for horseback rides from the dude ranch to the north, and an occasional hiker.

All of the Sheeprock roadless area is within the Hayman burn perimeter, and most of the burn was of high severity. Some areas of low to moderate severity are found on southeast side or east of the private dude ranch on the north side. Subsequently there was substantial erosion affecting water quality in both the South Platte River and Cheesman Reservoir. A small part of the Hayman Salvage logging project is located on the far southwest side. Pre-fire, the area was primarily ponderosa pine and Douglas-fir, with some open meadows, including grassy meadows on the south end recovering from the Wildcat Fire of 1963. In the lower reaches of Wildcat Creek the substantial grove of aspen was in the low severity fire area. The main riparian zone is along Goose Creek on the north boundary was in a high to moderate severity burn area. Goose Creek eventually flows into Cheesman Reservoir east of the roadless area. The area is excellent habitat for elk and mule deer in summer and winter. Mountain lion and black bear use the area, with a summer bear high activity area on the south end. Bighorn sheep occasionally come into the west side of the area from their more usual haunts in Lost Creek Wilderness. There is Preble's meadow jumping mouse (*Zapus hudsonius preblei*) habitat along the South Platte River, none of it known to be occupied now, and the area hosts Pawnee montane skipper butterflies (*Hesperia leonardus montana*).

Sheeprock has a proposed RNA of 3,400 acres across the whole north half of the roadless area. Sheeprock is included in the TNC Blueprint's Cheesman area of moderate conservation value, and a small portion on the east is included in Colorado Natural Heritage Program's PCA of very high significance. SREP's Vision shows the roadless area as a core wilderness.

Wildcat Canyon

The Wildcat Canyon roadless area of 7,100 acres lies between the South Platte River on the east, Matukat Road (forest road 211) on the west with logging roads in the vicinity of forest road 210 excluded, Corral Creek Road (forest road 540) on the north, and Tarryall Road (forest road 77) on the south. On the south end of the area, after passing the Happy Meadows campground, the river enters a wild and rugged canyon which is accessible only by a rough and seldom used foot trail along the river or via the rough foot trail near Tarryall Creek, a major tributary of the South Platte River. Flowing north past the confluence with the Tarryall River, the South Platte River enters a more open canyon with occasional grassy meadows interspersed with forest until it reaches the Corral Creek Roads (forest roads 540 and 211). Forest road 540, a moderate route on the west part of the roadless area, becomes highly eroded and requires a high clearance vehicle as it drops into the river corridor. At this location massive rock monoliths guard the river at the south boundaries of the Sheeprock and Northrup-Longwater Gulches roadless areas. The South Platte River harbors a population of wild brown and rainbow trout and is popular with anglers.

The inaccessible character of the South Platte River canyon is Wildcat Canyon's most distinguished feature, but the uplands are also quite inaccessible except for a few areas on the south end where there is road access around Tappan Mountain and Platte Springs above Tarryall Creek. In spite of the remote and roadless nature of Wildcat Canyon, it was not included in the Roadless Area Conservation Rule inventory. Before the Hayman Fire, the river stretch between Corral Creek and Tarryall Creek was popular with jeepers and ATV users. Dispersed camping on the river banks, several legal fords of the river connecting to the network of trails east of the river, and continual off-road trespass were serious problems both for habitat, water quality, and enforcement. This whole area is now closed to motorized use because of the fire, although, when conditions permit, the recent travel plan will open forest road 540 along Corral Creek again.

The Wildcat Canyon roadless area pre-fire was ponderosa pine and Douglas-fir, with a few aspen, and there are significant riparian species along the South Platte and Tarryall Creek. Mountain lion are found here and the whole area is a summer concentration location for black bear. Elk find summer and winter range across the north end and there is an elk calving area located just to the west of the roadless area. Mule deer have both summer and winter range over the whole area. Bighorn sheep may come into the area from the adjacent Lost Creek Wilderness. There is habitat for Preble's meadow jumping mouse (*Zapus hudsonius preblei*) on the north end along the South Platte River, although none of it is known to be occupied. Pale blue-eyed grass (*Sisyrinchium pallidum*) is a rare plant that is found here.

Approximately half of Wildcat Canyon is listed by the TNC Blueprint as of moderate conservation value. The SREP Vision lists the roadless area as core wilderness.

All but the southern end of Wildcat Canyon was burned in the Hayman Fire, with an intermix of high, moderate, low severities, and unburned areas. Riparian areas fared better, with some unburned areas along the river. In addition to the loss of forest cover, the highly erosive soils on steep slopes have continued to deposit massive amounts of sediment into the South Platte River.

Historical and Cultural Features of South Platte Canyons

Some archeological, historical and cultural features of note include:

- Much of the South Platte Canyons lies over the Pikes Peak batholith that resulted from the final intrusive phase of the Proterozoic time of 1.08 billion years ago. The coarse grained pink granite outcrops found through the complex are typical of this period. Particularly notable are the giant rocks along the North Fork of the South Platte, Noddle Heads, and

outcrops at Corral Creek along the South Platte. Elevenmile, Wildcat, and Cheesman Canyons are of geological and scenic interest as well.

- Ute Pass crosses the complex following US Highway 24 along the Ute Pass fault. The highway began as a bison trail that connected the eastern prairie with the intermountain park that we now call South Park. The Ute Indians followed the herds up and down the Pass. Later it became a wagon road and railway route for the Colorado Midland Railway that served mining operations in the mountains to the west. The Denver, South Park, and Pacific Railroad was built to transport the bountiful supply of timber in the Platte Canyon to Bailey.

Management Recommendations

Overview

The ecological value of protecting large roadless areas led the Wild Connections team to recommend new Wilderness designations or Core management (Theme 1) for seven areas in the South Platte Canyons Complex. In addition there are several proposed RNAs (Theme 2); quiet use and connectivity areas (Theme 3); and a number of areas recommended for Theme 5, active management. There are no existing designated Wildernesses or areas recommended for intensive recreation emphasis (Theme 4). In addition, grazing, sustainable logging/fuels reduction projects, mining or energy development, recreation on designated trails and roads, and dispersed camping is allowed throughout the complex, except for the statutory restrictions on activities in designated or proposed Wilderness areas, or where these activities would be inconsistent with providing wildlife habitat or connectivity. Table 5.19 below lists the major management units by theme. Refer to the South Platte Canyons Complex map for specific locations and roadless area descriptions for more details on the unit.

Table 5.19: South Platte Canyons Management Recommendations

Name	Acres	Recommended Management
Theme 1 – Natural Processes Dominate		
Green Mountain	14,700	1.2 Recommended Wilderness
Long Scraggy	20,500	1.2 Recommended Wilderness
Sheeprock	6,100	1.2 Recommended Wilderness
Thunder Butte	8,700	1.2 Recommended Wilderness
Northrup Gulch	6,600	1.3 Core Reserve
Raleigh Peak	5,100	1.3 Core Reserve
Wildcat Canyon	7,100	1.3 Core Reserve
Theme 2 – Special Areas		
Long Scraggy RNA	4,200	2.1 Research Natural Areas
Mill Gulch RNA	1,500	2.1 Research Natural Areas
Sheep Rock RNA	3,400	2.1 Research Natural Areas
South Platte Cheesman RNA	2,200	2.1 Research Natural Areas
Thunder Butte RNA	3,900	2.1 Research Natural Areas
South Platte Wild Scenic Recreation (also in South Park)	21,100	2.3 Eligible Wild/Scenic/Recreational Rivers
Theme 3 – Natural Landscapes with Limited Management		
Indian Creek Waterton	15,400	3.1 Quiet Use Areas
Jenny Gulch	6,000	3.1 Quiet Use Areas
Noddle Heads	4,100	3.1 Quiet Use Areas
Goose Creek	8,400	3.2 Connectivity Areas
Longwater Gulch	7,500	3.2 Connectivity Areas
Monument Gulch	5,700	3.2 Connectivity Areas

Name	Acres	Recommended Management
Theme 4 – Recreation Emphasis Areas		
Rampart Range (also in Rampart Range)	31,600	4.1 Motorized Recreation Areas
Gold Belt Tour Scenic and Historic Byway	100	4.2 Scenic Byways
Theme 5 – Active Management		
Buffalo Creek (also in South Park)	37,600	5.1 Active Mgmt - Wildlife Habitat
Dome Rock	1,000	5.1 Active Mgmt - Wildlife Habitat
Eleven Mile Canyon	29,600	5.1 Active Mgmt - Wildlife Habitat
Pine Creek	700	5.1 Active Mgmt - Wildlife Habitat
Rampart Range South (also in Rampart Range)	132,400	5.1 Active Mgmt - Wildlife Habitat
Theme 9 – Significant Lands (Non-USFS)		
Cheesman Reservoir	8,200	9.2 Significant Non-USFS Biological
Florissant Fossil Beds	5,900	9.2 Significant Non-USFS Biological
Roxborough State Park	3,400	9.2 Significant Non-USFS Biological

Theme 1 – Natural Processes Dominate

Lands in Theme 1 are managed to maintain highly natural conditions and management activities are virtually unnoticeable. They may include Wilderness and semi-primitive lands that provide user opportunities that are inconsistent with Wilderness such as mountain biking.

Theme 1.2 – Recommended Wilderness

Recommended Wilderness areas are those that stakeholders advocate for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System. All of the proposed wilderness areas meet the capability requirements of the Wilderness Act of 1964 for designation.

The Wild Connections Conservation Plan calls for designation of Long Scraggy, Green Mountain, Thunder Butte, and Sheepprock roadless areas as Wilderness. They are each described in detail in the roadless area descriptions above. In general, the proposed Wilderness boundary is the same as the UASPP roadless boundary. The availability of the following benefits were considered in making these recommendations: permanent protection to enhance wildlife habitat and connectivity, protect sources of domestic water, provide for native wildlife and plant species, and balance motorized, high impact recreation complexes with opportunities for quiet, challenging back country recreation.

We believe that all of these areas meet the capability, availability and suitability evaluation criteria of the Wilderness Act and Forest Service Wilderness Handbook. These are discussed for the complex as whole below, with notations as to particular values or potential conflicts.

Capability

All of the proposed Wildernesses meet the capability requirements of the Wilderness Act of 1964 for designation. They all provide opportunities for solitude, challenging, and unconfined recreation once the trailheads are left behind. There are rugged river canyons, open meadows, valleys and drainages without trails, and areas forested with ponderosa pine, Douglas-fir and aspen. The imprints of humans are substantially unnoticeable, although impacts in response to the Hayman Fire may be evident in portions of Long Scraggy, Green Mountain, and Sheepprock. Various mitigation and restoration measures following the fire will fade into the background as the vegetation recovers and impacts from the fire itself do not preclude wilderness designation. The Upper South Platte Restoration Project may be noticeable now during the active restoration phase, but in a few years the thinning operations will result in forest which more closely emulates the natural range of variability for ponderosa pine and Douglas-fir forests. (See further discussion in Availability section.)

Availability

Likewise all the proposed areas are available for Wilderness with no known impediments. The proposed Wildernesses contain no active mines or oil and gas leases. The South Platte Wild and Scenic corridor has been withdrawn from mineral entry. The watersheds and streams are already allocated, and no new water projects are planned. There is a 20 year moratorium on dam building in the South Platte River Protection Plan, discussed above.

The South Platte Canyons complex is not appropriate for general timber harvest. However, the South Platte Restoration Project and the Hayman Salvage Logging Project do affect some recommended Wilderness Areas. Much of the unburned portions of the complex have heavy fuels loading as a result of years of fire suppression. The understory is dense with small diameter trees and Douglas-fir is filling in among the ponderosa pine. The Upper South Platte Restoration Project was specifically designed to implement a fuels treatment regime that would restore much of the middle part of the complex to conditions that are considered closer to the range of natural variability and thereby reduce the chances for uncharacteristically hot and damaging fires. An extensive analysis of the area led to a draft plan, which after some modifications to protect future Wilderness values, was initiated in 2001. Some areas have been completed: one of the most noticeable is along the South Platte River downstream from Deckers where over several years the trees were thinned and slash was burned, resulting in a more open forest.

The South Platte Restoration Project impinges most heavily on the north end of Thunder Butte and the central and north portions of Long Scraggy. The proposed treatment area for Thunder Butte is north of the Butte and in a high severity burned area, and therefore cancelled or limited to light salvage logging. Long Scraggy's treatment areas are more extensive, with part of them in the Hayman burn area, and comprise perhaps one-third of the recommended Wilderness. However, the South Platte Restoration Project was designed in such a way as to not impair future wilderness values, and when the project is completed the effects should become unnoticeable over time.

Hayman Salvage Logging units are primarily located in areas not recommended for Wilderness. The exceptions are: 1) a small area south of Saloon Gulch in Long Scraggy; 2) small areas north and south of Wildcat Creek near the Matukat Road in Sheeprock; and 3) small areas along Fourmile Creek and Shrewsberry gulch in Thunder Butte. However, as the area recovers from the fire, the impacts from the salvage logging will also fade into the background.

Parts of Wigwam and Lost Creek grazing allotments would be grandfathered in with Wilderness designation, although over time they should be retired where feasible. These do not present a problem for Wilderness designation. Overall, there are no known or anticipated threats to the area that would preclude its designation as wilderness.

Suitability

The main uses that would be forgone in newly designated Wilderness are potential motorized recreation on currently closed routes in the Hayman fire area and administrative closures in Long Scraggy. Designation as Wilderness would preclude future mechanical maintenance of South Platte Restoration Project treatment areas, especially in Long Scraggy.

There are numerous values that support designation of the proposed Wildernesses and contribute to the National Wilderness System:

- Substantial portions of lower elevation wild lands would be added to the Wilderness System, which would ensure ecological representation and provide important areas for

- wildlife winter range.
- There are outstanding opportunities for solitude, quiet backcountry recreation and challenge throughout the area.
 - The rugged canyons exemplify the wildness that now brings recreationists, tourists, and new residents to Colorado. With increasing requests for additional developed and motorized recreation, maintaining the area's wild characteristics is crucial.
 - Riparian zones adjacent to the South Platte River will gain added protection.
 - This complex will protect a number of rare and imperiled species including Pawnee montane skipper (*Hesperia leonardus montana*), Mexican spotted owl (*Strix occidentalis lucida*), and Preble's meadow jumping mouse (*Zapus hudsonius preblei*).
 - Denver's water quality would not be degraded by additional roads where the South Platte River abuts the Wildernesses.
 - Historical access to the Wilderness Areas would be maintained on existing roads adjacent to the areas.
 - The Colorado Trail would be preserved as a non-motorized hiking and mountain biking trail
 - Designation of this complex would help ensure that fragmentation by roads, damage to riparian zones, loss of old-growth forests, and conversion to intensive recreation would not be exacerbated.
 - Local economies will be enhanced by their proximity to Wilderness areas, as these are prime destinations for self-guiding and outfitter trips.

Theme 1.3 – Core Reserve

Core Reserves are areas of unroaded land which have been shaped primarily by natural forces but are not desirable for designation as wilderness. They emphasize the maintenance and sustainability of current biological diversity.

Northrup Gulch, Raleigh Peak, and Wildcat Canyon, though essentially roadless, did not fully meet wilderness standards and so are recommended instead for Core designation.

- The Northrup-Longwater Gulches Roadless Area was split along forest road 221, with the northern section of Northrup Gulch being recommended for core reserve. Forest routes 221 and 205 are closed at this time because of the Hayman fire, but under the current travel management plan will be reopened when conditions permit. UASPP continues to recommend that route 205 be converted to a horse and foot trail. It will be essential that routes be reopened only after they are rehabilitated and rerouted as necessary to address the erosion problem that was present even before the Hayman fire. Enforcement of off-trail restrictions will be important so that these routes do not pose an unsustainable impact on the Core area.
- Raleigh Peak is similar in topography and vegetation to the Long Scraggy proposed Wilderness, which is immediately to the south, but has some remnants of old roads and includes the Colorado Trail. It was recommended for core reserve to continue the current uses on the Colorado Trail.
- Wildcat Canyon is the most wild of these three cores, except immediately along the west bank of the river where a road gives access for camping between the Corral Creek Road and the confluence with Tarryall Creek. It could well have been wilderness except for a power transmission line across the middle of the area. As a core area, it will be important to maintain or even reduce the current impacts from motorized recreation in the Corral Creek to Tarryall section and especially to enforce restrictions keeping use on designated trails for OHVs and in designated camping spots away from the river bank to protect water quality and riparian vegetation.

Theme 2 – Special Areas

Theme 2 areas are managed to protect or enhance areas with unusual characteristics, including Research Natural Areas, special biological or geological areas, cultural/historical areas or other special designations.

Theme 2.1 – Research Natural Areas: Existing and Proposed

Research Natural Areas form a long-term network of ecological reserves designated for research, education, and the maintenance of biodiversity. Emphasis is on research, study, observations, monitoring, and educational activities that allow ecological processes to prevail with minimal human intervention:

To supplement the range of research opportunities and increase the ecosystem representation five areas should be added to the RNA system. Each has its unique combination of ecological values which will enhance the system. Three are adjacent to or within proposed Wilderness.

- Mill Gulch proposed RNA is about 1,500 acres. The Mill Gulch RNA evaluation notes that it would provide excellent representation of Douglas-fir forest, oak thicket, and mixed mountain shrubland cover types. Mule deer, bighorn sheep, and elk find summer range here, with high summer black bear activities and mule deer winter range. Mountain lions are found in this area. Preble's meadow jumping mouse (*Zapus hudsonius prebli*) and the Pawnee montane skipper butterfly (*Hesperia leonardus montana*) have been recorded here. The Center for Native Ecosystems notes these plant associations not found in other RNAs: mountain mahogany/needle-and-thread grass (*Cercocarpus montanus/Stipa comata*) mixed foothill shrubland, Douglas-fir/Geyer's willow (*Pseudotsuga menziesii/Carex geyeri*) lower montane forests, Gambel oak/Geyer's willow (*Quercus gambelii/Carex geyeri*) mesic oak thickets, and needle-and-thread grass/blue grama (*Stipa comata/Bouteloua gracilis*) montane grasslands.
- Long Scraggy proposed RNA of some 4,300 acres is centered on Long Scraggy Peak within the Long Scraggy proposed Wilderness. It includes six plant associations not found in other proposed RNAs: Great Plains side-oats grama/little bluestem (*Bouteloua curtipendula-Schizachyrium scoparium*) mixed grass prairies, Rocky Mountain juniper/mountain mahogany (*Juniperus scopulorum/Cercocarpus montanus*) foothills woodlands, ponderosa pine/kinnikinnick (*Pinus ponderosa/Arctostaphylos adenotricha*) lower montane forests, ponderosa pine/side-oats grama (*Pinus ponderosa/Bouteloua curtipendula*) lower montane forests, and ponderosa/little bluestem (*Pinus ponderosa/Schizachyrium scoparium*) foothills pine savannas, according to Center for Native Ecosystems. It is included in The Nature Conservancy's large Cheesman area of moderate significance.
- South Platte Cheesman proposed RNA is approximately 2,200 acres located east of the Denver Water Board Cheesman private property and the South Platte River. Pawnee montane skipper (*Hesperia leonardus montana*) have been observed here, along with Mexican spotted owl (*Strix lucida occidentalis*), and bald eagles use the area in winter. It is included in The Nature Conservancy's large Cheesman area of moderate significance.
- Sheeprock proposed RNA of 3,400 acres lies across the whole north half of the Sheeprock proposed Wilderness. The RNA may have old-growth ponderosa pine, as it is immediately adjacent to the Denver Water Board land around Cheesman Reservoir where Merrill Kauffman conducted his definitive study of old growth and fire regimes. It is included in The Nature Conservancy's large Cheesman area of moderate significance.
- Thunder Butte proposed RNA of some 3,900 acres is in the center of the Thunder Butte proposed Wilderness. The proposed RNA has Pawnee montane skipper (*Hesperia leonardus montana*), Mexican spotted owl (*Strix lucida occidentalis*), and a natural community of note -

thinleaf alder/mesic forb (*Alnus incana*/mesic forb). Mexican spotted owl nested in the area in the mid-1990s and a Protected Activity Center is located here. It is included in The Nature Conservancy's large Cheesman area of moderate significance, and a PCA of moderate significance overlaps the proposed RNA.

Theme 2.3 – Eligible Wild, Scenic and Recreational Rivers

This theme is applied to river segments proposed for designation as wild, scenic, or recreational under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act

The mainstem of the South Platte River between Elevenmile Canyon and Strontia Springs Reservoir and the North Fork of the South Platte River between Insmont and the confluence with the mainstem have been ruled eligible for Wild and Scenic River status. However, in lieu of designation, the South Platte Protection Plan (SPPP) was developed by a core stakeholder group that included representatives from front-range water providers, county governments, state agencies, environmental groups, and recreation interests. The SPPP promotes a cooperative approach to protection of river-related resource values such as fisheries, geology, wildlife, scenery, recreation, and historic/cultural features, while recognizing that many Colorado communities depend on the South Platte River and its North Fork for municipal water supply and other uses that are critical to our economy and quality of life. The SPPP is to be implemented and monitored by the South Platte Enhancement Board (SPEB), which intends to work with numerous private, public, governmental, and quasi-governmental entities to achieve its goals for protection of resource values and water quality.

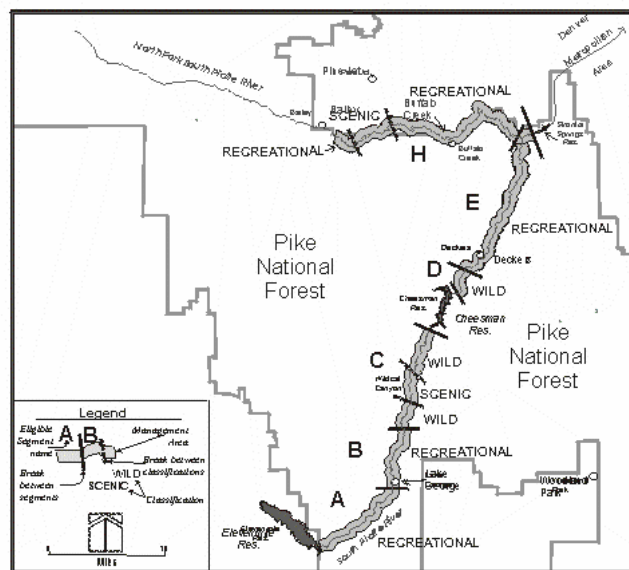
Guidelines for management of the various river segments on Forest Service lands are detailed in a Forest Plan Amendment created by the initial SPPP stakeholder group. The plan includes: a 20 year moratorium on dam building in the designated area; a one million dollar endowment for enhancement of river-related values; a stream flow management plan to enhance fisheries; recommendations for cooperative recreation and wildlife planning; and a commitment to protect the river and its resource values at a level equal to or greater than would be available through Wild and Scenic Designation. Should the SPPP ever become nonfunctional/noncomplying, it would trigger a re-opening of the Wild and Scenic suitability determination process.

It is important to keep the South Platte River Protection Plan and forest plan amendment intact in future management of this complex.

Theme 3 – Natural Landscapes with Limited Management

Theme 3 management maintains or restores the natural character of these areas while providing limited opportunities for recreation, including backcountry motorized and non-motorized settings. Fuels treatment and prescribed fire are conducted primarily to maintain or restore natural ecological conditions. Livestock grazing is common.

Eligible Segments with Classification



Theme 3.1 – Quiet Use Areas

Management emphasizes non-motorized recreation opportunities in a natural or natural-appearing landscape with little or no evidence of recent human-caused disturbance.

Three quiet use areas are proposed. Indian Creek Waterton, Noddle Heads, and Jenny Gulch are recommended for Quiet Use to preserve or restore the roadless and non motorized character and improve water quality of the area between the Rampart Recreation Area and the South Platte River. This designation would require converting a few motorized trails to foot, mountain bike and horse use. Indian Creek is particularly valuable as a quiet use area because of the equestrian trail and the Colorado Trail heavily used by hikers and mountain bikers who often make loop trips off the Colorado Trail. A new single track trail is planned in the Indian Creek area south of Russell Gulch under the Rampart TMP, which may require adjustments of the quiet use area boundary.

Theme 3.2 – Connectivity Areas

Management emphasis is to facilitate daily, seasonal, and natal dispersal movements of native wildlife between larger blocks of suitable habitat.

Two connectivity areas are proposed in the South Platte Canyons Complex. The Goose Creek-Monument Gulch area will serve as good connecting habitat between the Green Mountain and Sheeprock Roadless Areas and the Lost Creek Wilderness in the South Park complex to the west. Management emphasis will facilitate daily, seasonal and natal dispersal movements of native wildlife between larger blocks of suitable habitat. The Nature Conservancy shows this area to be of moderate conservation value and SREP shows it as a wildlife linkage. A second connectivity area is located in Longwater Gulch south of forest road 221. Longwater Gulch is currently closed to motorized use because of severe erosion of routes following the Hayman fire. The current travel management plan will reopen some routes when conditions permit, and rehabilitation and potential rerouting in order to reduce erosion and enhance connectivity should be undertaken. A broader discussion of connectivity is found below.

Theme 5 – Active Management

These areas are managed to meet a variety of ecological and human needs with active management for a full spectrum of multiple use activities such as: wildlife habitat, energy development, timber harvest, livestock grazing, dispersed motorized recreation, prescribed fire, and vegetation treatments. This zone is where intensive timber management can occur for commercial production and fuels reduction objectives.

Theme 5.1 – Active Management for Wildlife Habitat

Management objective is to provide high quality, all-season habitat, forage, cover, escape terrain, solitude breeding habitat, and protection for a variety of wildlife species and associated plant communities

Rampart South, covering much of the National Forest between Cheesman Reservoir and Thunder Butte, east of Northrup-Longwater Gulches, and south of Wildcat Canyon to US Highway 24, is in this theme. Buffalo Creek in the northwest, Elevenmile Canyon in the southwest, and the small Dome Rock and Pike Creek areas in the northeast are also recommended for this theme. These areas generally encompass areas of medium to high road densities. Management activities should consider best ways to protect sensitive wildlife areas: mule deer fawning areas; the elk calving area east of the South Platte River and south of Highway 24; winter range for ungulates; locations of rare, endangered or sensitive species, such as Preble's meadow jumping mouse (*Zapus hudsonius preblei*) and Pawnee

montane skipper butterfly (*Hesperia leonardus montana*), and accommodation of larger carnivores such as mountain lions and black bears.

Theme 9 – Significant Lands (Non-USFS)

Theme 9 management is used to highlight and acknowledge other lands critical to both habitat and connectivity, such as adjacent BLM lands. It is critical that Forest management consider the greater ecosystem to which it is connected and that forest activities be compatible with management activities on these adjacent public lands.

Theme 9.2 – Significant Non-Forest Service Biological Areas

Wild Connections has explicitly included State Parks, National Park administered areas, and natural areas managed for municipal water supply due to their important biological values. These are beyond the management authority of the USFS, but as the Wild Connections Conservation Plan is focused on larger ecoregion sustainability, these lands are critical to acknowledge regardless of political ownership.

Roxborough State Park, which is a designated Colorado Natural Area, is located at the northeast corner of this complex. It provides secure habitat for black bear, mountain lion, deer and elk, and nesting golden eagles, adjacent to the National Forest. The Park is managed for non-motorized recreation and visitor education, with use restricted to a limited number of trails. It has excellent examples of uplifted sedimentary rocks which rival Garden of the Gods or Red Rock Parks. Roxborough is very diverse as a result of its location in a transition zone between the plains and the mountains. The area's topography and geology has fostered microclimates with seven distinct plant communities in a unique mixture of prairie and mountain species.

Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument is located on the south end of this complex. Some thirty-five million years ago, volcanic eruptions in the Guffy Volcanic Region buried the valley and petrified the redwood trees that grew there. A lake formed in the valley and the fine-grained sediments at its bottom became the final resting-place for thousands of insects and plants. These sediments compacted into layers of shale and preserved the delicate details of these organisms as fossils. "When the mountains are overthrown and the seas uplifted, the universe at Florissant flings itself against a gnat and preserves it."-- Dr. Arthur C. Peale, Hayden Expedition Geologist, 1873. In addition to its paleontological values, the Fossil Beds provides a safe haven for part of the Pikes Peak elk herd that can be heard bugling in the fall and observed with their new born calves in the spring. The Monument is a stepping stone for connectivity between the Pike National Forest and Mueller State Park on the east and Elevenmile Canyon and South Platte River to the west.

Cheesman Reservoir, in the center of the South Platte Canyons Complex, is managed by Denver Water, including over 8,000 acres of land that surrounds the reservoir. It was the first reservoir of Denver's mountain facilities. It is named for water pioneer Walter Scott Cheesman. A century of fire suppression transformed the area surrounding the reservoir from a sparse open landscape when it was built in 1905 to a thick, combustible forest in 2000. Denver Water, in cooperation with forest agencies, undertook measures to reduce the risk of fire in the area. These measures reduced the impact of the Hayman fire on the reservoir and it is important for these cooperative efforts to continue in the future. Cheesman Reservoir is included in the TNC Blueprint's Cheesman area of moderate conservation value and the Colorado Natural Heritage Program's PCA of very high biodiversity significance.

Connectivity

An important aspect of our conservation perspective is connections between protected core areas. The South Platte Canyons complex has a relatively high degree of natural connectivity because of the proximity of roadless areas. However, for the most part, the roads that separate adjacent roadless areas, especially in the north end, tend to be high use travelways. This presents significant barriers to the free movement of animals between roadless areas. In the south end, the separating roads are of lower use, but the road density is in itself a barrier to wildlife movements. Also, Colorado Highway 24 is a major east-west travel route.

In some ways, the South Platte River which runs through the center of the complex is a barrier to many animals. From another perspective it is an aquatic corridor for fish, with several impassable barriers at Cheesman and Strontia Springs dams. The South Platte canyons may make east-west movements more difficult for some animals.

Connections between the complex and other nearby complexes vary. Connections to the Rampart Range complex to the east are dissected by many roads and motorized trails. The north is bounded primarily by private land which presents its own challenges to connectivity. The south and southeast links to Pikes Peak Massif and South Park are also heavily roaded, or have considerable private land. The best connection is on the west to South Park complex where Lost Creek Wilderness is immediately adjacent and separated only by a few low-use roads.

Summary

The South Platte Canyons complex has unusual scenic beauty and rugged wild country along parts of the South Platte River combined with high recreation use in other areas such as Elevenmile Canyon, Cheesman Canyon and downstream from Deckers. The lower elevations of the complex provide wildlife habitat for a range of important species including Pawnee montane skipper (*Hesperia leonardus montana*) and Mexican spotted owl (*Strix occidentalis lucida*). From an ecological and water quality standpoint, this complex is a key component of the wildlands network that will protect the resources of the Pike-San Isabel National Forest for many years to come.