

## 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.

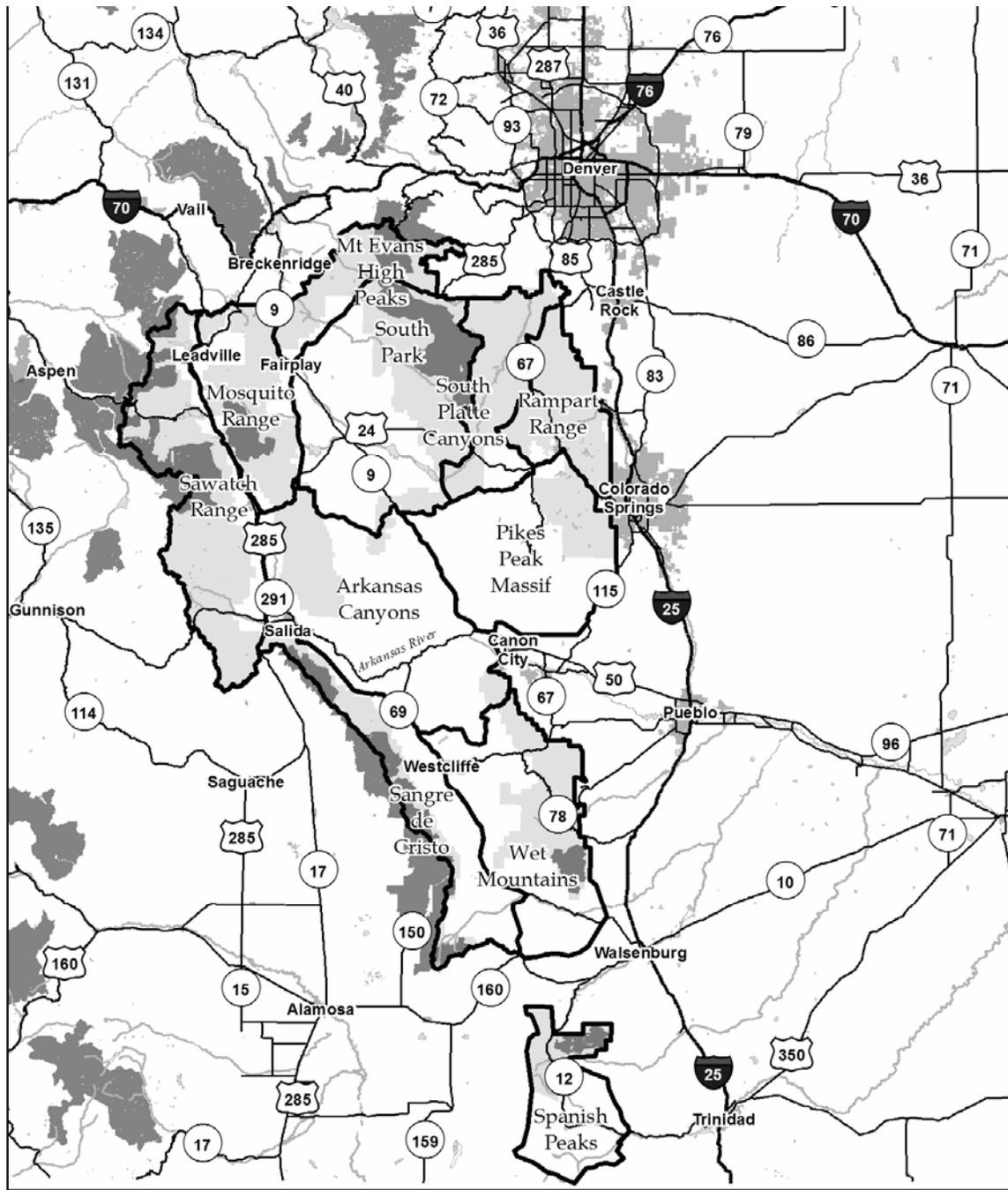
### Complexes – Summary List by Watershed

**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



### Wild Connections Conservation Plan Geographic Complexes

- Interstate Highway
- U.S./State Highway
- City
- Pike & San Isabel National Forest
- Wilderness Area
- WCCP Complex



Complexes defined by the Upper Arkansas and South Platte Project as of 2006. Reference data from the Colorado Department of Transportation (roads, lakes, streams 2004).

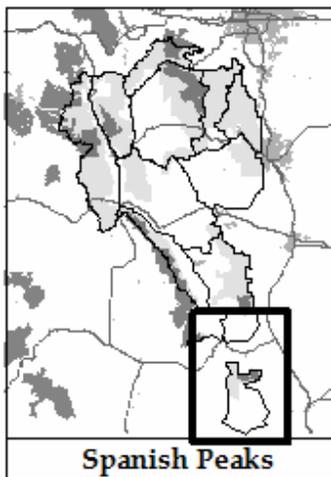


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## *The Spanish Peaks Complex*

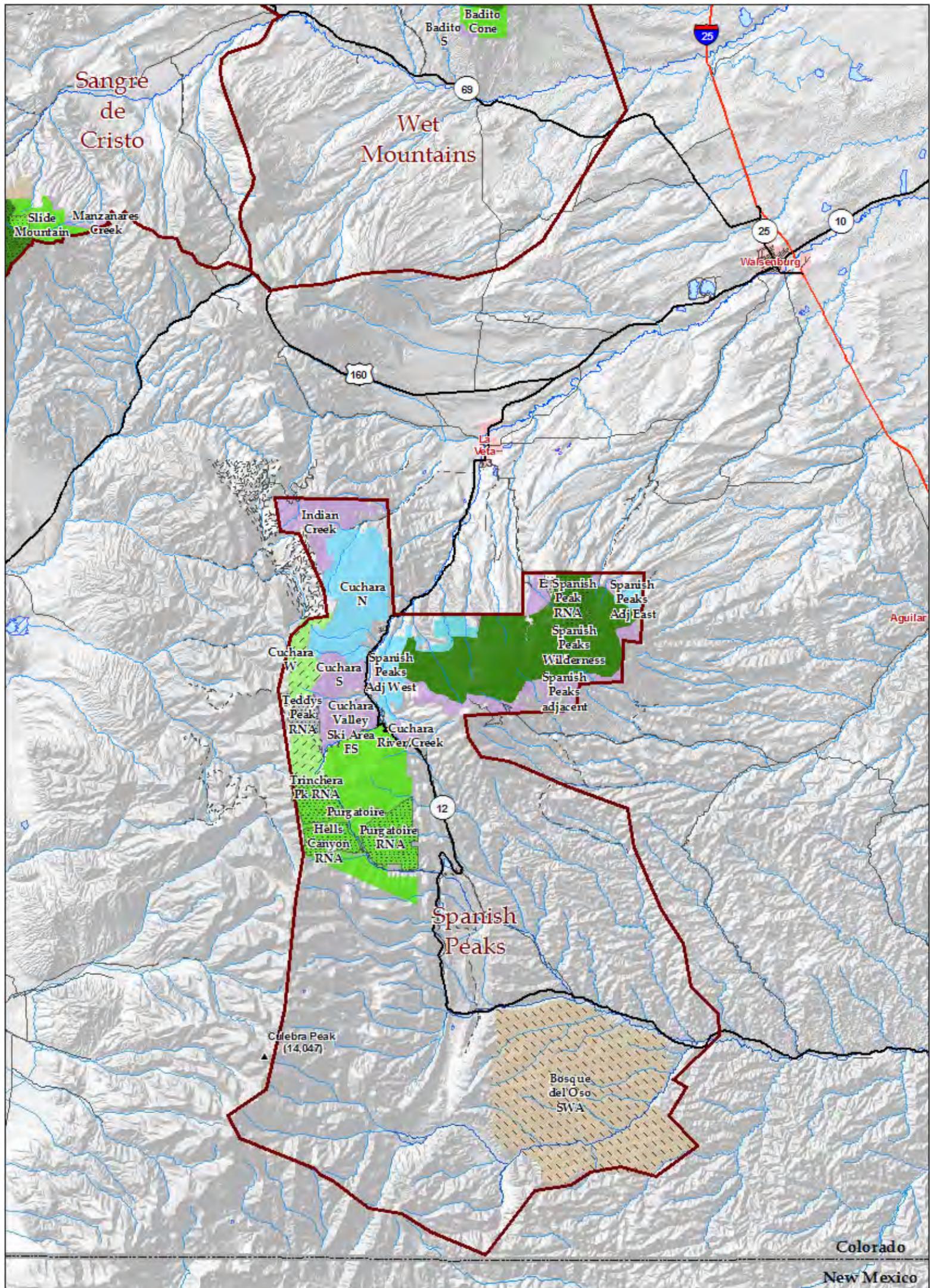


*Purgatoire roadless area*



*The Spanish Peaks Complex is located between the Culebra Range and the twin cones of Spanish Peaks from the Cucharas River basin to Bosque del Oso State Wildlife Area.*

*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**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> Interstate Highway</li> <li> U.S./State Highway</li> <li> Paved Road</li> <li> Improved Unpaved</li> <li> Railroad</li> <li> WCCP Complex</li> <li> City</li> <li> State Boundary</li> <li> Wilderness Outside Pike/San Isabel</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li></li> <li> 1.1 Existing Wilderness</li> <li> 1.2 Recommended Wilderness</li> <li> 1.3 Core Reserve</li> <li> 2.1 Research Natural Areas</li> <li> 2.2 Experimental Forests</li> <li> 3.1 Quiet Use Areas</li> <li> 3.2 Connectivity Areas</li> <li> 4.1 Motorized Recreation Areas</li> <li> 5.1 Active Mgmt - Wildlife Habitat</li> <li> 8.1 Ski Based Resorts</li> <li> 8.2 Permanently Developed Areas</li> <li> 9.1 Non-USFS Recommend Wilderness</li> <li> 9.2 Significant Non-USFS Biological</li> </ul>	<p>Wild Connections Conservation Plan as of May 2006. Reference data from the US Geological Survey (mountains, 1981), US Forest Service (forest routes, 2002), Environmental Protection Agency (streams 1996), and the Colorado Department of Transportation (roads, lakes, streams 2004).</p> <p>Copyright © Upper Arkansas and South Platte Project June 15, 2006</p>
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0 5 10 Miles

## Map 5.11: Spanish Peaks Complex Proposed Management

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

### Description

#### **Overview**

The Spanish Peaks complex is located at the extreme southern end of the San Isabel National Forest. It lies along the Culebra Range on the west, with the twin cones of East and West Spanish Peaks on the east. The San Isabel National Forest boundary in the north, near Copper King Canyon, and Bosque del Oso State Wildlife Area mark the northern and southern reaches of the complex. The Spanish Peaks are the dominant landmark, clearly visible from all directions. Most of the complex is in Huerfano and Las Animas Counties, with a very small portion on Trinchera Peak in Costilla County.

A description of the landscape, vegetation, wildlife, and ecological values, including detailed descriptions of roadless areas, is followed by management 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**

East and West Spanish Peaks rise dramatically 7,000 feet from the Great Plains along the eastern front of the southern Rocky Mountains southwest of Walsenburg, reaching a height of 12,683 feet and 13,626 feet respectively. Volcanic dikes radiate out from the cone-shaped peaks, exposed remnants of magma forced into fissures as the igneous domes rose up through the surrounding sedimentary rocks in Tertiary time. To the west, the Culebra Range of the Sangre de Cristos continues its march from La Veta Pass to New Mexico. Along the Culebra crest, Trinchera Peak (13,517 feet) and Cuatro Peak (13,487 feet) are prominent along the Forest and complex boundary. Most of the rest of the Culebra Range is private lands, with some BLM land to the north toward La Veta Pass. The west side of the Culebras, outside this complex, is the private Sangre de Cristo Land Grant in Costilla County. Culebra Peak (14,047 feet), the highest peak in the range, is west of the divide and is the only Colorado Fourteener entirely in private hands. Bosque del Oso State Wildlife Area, the largest in the state, provides important public access and wildlife habitat at the south end of the complex. The privately owned Bar NI Ranch between the National Forest land and Bosque del Oso SWA has conservation oriented management. A number of streams drain these slopes: the largest, north to south, are the Cucharas River, Santa Clara Creek, Apishapa River, and the headwater tributaries of the Purgatoire River: Wet Canyon, San Pablo Canyon, North Fork of the Purgatoire River, Duling Creek, Howlott Creek, and South Fork of the Purgatoire River. The lowest parts of the complex are along the Purgatoire at about 6,800 feet on the east side of Bosque del Oso SWA.

The Spanish Peaks complex vegetation is very diverse, ranging from piñon -juniper woodlands and ponderosa pine on the south to large areas of Douglas-fir, aspen, and Engelmann spruce-subalpine fir in the higher northern parts, with scattered stands of bristlecone/limber pine, lodgepole pine, and Gambel oak. Alpine tundra is found along the Culebra ridge and on the higher reaches of the Spanish Peaks. Mountain grasslands and wet lands are complimented by riparian species in the creek corridors. Rare plants include big rough fescue (*Festuca campestris*), mountain whitlow-grass (*Draba rectifracta*), pale moonwort (*Botrychium pallidum*), western moonwort (*Botrychium hesperium*), and Colorado larkspur (*Delphinium ramosum var alpestre*).

The complex has important black bear habitat, especially in the south around the Bosque del Oso SWA. Bighorn sheep have extensive summer and winter range in the moderate and higher elevations along the west side of the complex and on Spanish Peaks. Elk and mule deer are pervasive especially in the south part of the complex, with summer and winter range and concentrations and large elk production areas. Higher forested areas include winter and denning habitat for lynx, and the Forest Service Lynx Amendment has identified a large linkage connecting the Spanish Peaks Wilderness across to the Culebra Range.

**Ecological values of the complex**

Several Potential Conservation Areas (PCA) of high and moderate significance, and five proposed Research Natural Areas (RNA) illustrate the biodiversity of the complex. The Nature Conservancy’s Southern Rocky Mountains Conservation blueprint (TNC blueprint) includes all but the Spanish Peaks Wilderness in its units of moderately low, moderate, and moderately high categories of biodiversity. The Southern Rockies Ecosystem Project’s Wildlands Network Vision (SREP Vision) shows two core wildernesses, several low compatible use areas, and a private core area on the Bar NI Ranch south of Purgatoire roadless area.

In addition to these special areas of biological importance, the Spanish Peaks complex is both an island of important wildlife habitat and a stepping stone to other areas, including linkages for ungulates, bear, lynx, and gray wolf into adjacent complexes and to the Vermejo area in northern New Mexico.

**Wilderness and Roadless Areas**

Although the surrounding private lands on both sides of the Culebra divide are heavily roaded, the San Isabel National Forest lands are primarily roadless. They have retained many of their relatively pristine wild characteristics. The areas are listed in Table 5.20.

**Table 5.20: Spanish Peaks Roadless Areas**

Name	Acres (UASPP)	Roadless Under Roadless Rule
Bosque del Oso SWA	31,900	n/a*
Cuchara	13,300	Yes
Cuchara West	5,300	Yes
Purgatoire	17,700	Yes
Spanish Peaks Wilderness	17,900	n/a

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

**Wilderness Areas**

**Spanish Peaks Wilderness**

The Spanish Peaks Wilderness anchors the eastern side of the complex, and its twin cones can be seen from as far as 100 miles away, making it a landmark for travelers. Elevations range from about 10,500 feet in Wahatoya Creek to 13,626 feet on West Spanish Peak. The high peaks are alpine tundra and bare rocky slopes, surrounded by Engelmann spruce-subalpine fir and bristlecone/limber pine below tree line. There are large areas of Douglas-fir, with some aspen and ponderosa pine intermixed, as well as some very small areas of Gambel oak shrubland along the north boundary of the Wilderness.

Areas of high summer bear activity are found along the north side of the Spanish Peaks Wilderness. Bighorn sheep concentrate on the high peaks in summer, but move to the west for winter habitat. Although elk and mule deer are found in appropriate habitat across the Wilderness in summer, winter range for both and elk calving areas are outside the Wilderness to the north, east, and south. Lynx winter and denning habitat is found in the forest areas of the Wilderness, and the lynx linkage toward the west and the Culebra range is an important connection identified by both the Forest Service (Lynx amendment, 2004) and SREP (Linking Colorado’s Landscapes, 2005). SREP’s modeling for lynx also shows some lower priority potential linkages radiating

north and east from the Wilderness, although most of the documented radio collar signals of lynx are located more to the south (CDOW, 2005).

The proposed East Spanish Peak RNA is located on the northeast side of the Wilderness. It is valuable for the excellent condition of its mixed conifer, Engelmann spruce forests, and riparian natural communities. The rare plant, big rough fescue (*Festuca campestris*) is found in the Wilderness.

Hiking and backpacking into the Wilderness is accomplished via several trails, with a relative easy access to West Spanish Peak from Cordova Pass and a longer hike to the slopes of East Spanish Peak on the Wahatoya Trail. Spanish Peaks was proposed for Wilderness designation in what was to be the 1983 Colorado Wilderness bill, but disputes over an access road left it as a Study Area until it was designated in 2000.

### **Unprotected roadless areas**

There are three other roadless areas on National Forest land in the Spanish Peaks Complex: Cuchara, Cuchara West, and Purgatoire. They were included in the Roadless Area Conservation Rule, although the Inventoried Roadless Area boundaries of two are somewhat smaller than those identified by UASPP field inventories. They include recommendations for four RNAs, and are rich in wildlife, scenery, and recreation values. The areas are described from north to south below.

#### **Cuchara**

The Cuchara roadless area, some 13,300 acres, is bounded on the north by the National Forest boundary and forest road 421, on the west by motorized trail 1300, on the south by forest road 422, which is the main access route into this part of the forest, and on the east by the National Forest boundary with private land adjacent to State Highway 12 and the town of Cuchara. The UASPP boundaries are larger than the Forest Service's Roadless Area Conservation Rule inventory on the east side north of the Cuchara Valley Ski Area and on the south, where the UASPP boundary extends to forest road 422. The Cuchara Inventoried Roadless Area extends west to the crest of the mountain range, but UASPP split off Cuchara West at motorized trail 1300 to accommodate some anticipated management recommendations.

Vegetation is primarily Douglas-fir, with some stands of lodgepole pine on the west and north, aspen on the south, and Engelmann spruce-subalpine fir on the southwest and west. There is some ponderosa pine, bristlecone/limber pine, and Gambel oak in lower elevations. Rare plant species include mountain whitlow-grass (*Draba rectifruca*), and both the pale and western moonworts (*Botrychium pallidum* and *B. hesperium*).

High black bear summer activity is found across the Cuchara roadless area, with a section of high fall activity along the east and northeast sides. Mountain lion may be sighted here, and mule deer and elk use the roadless area in the summer, with some winter range for deer in the north central portion. Lynx winter and denning habitat is well distributed across the area, though denser in the north central part of the area, and the lynx linkages identified by the Forest Service and SREP are located across the southern half. There have been some radio-collar lynx signals in Cuchara, although most are farther south.

The northern portion of Cuchara is included in the TNC Blueprint's La Veta Link area of moderately low conservation value and the center is in the Culebra Range area of moderately high conservation value. SREP's Vision shows most of the roadless area as low use.

### **Cuchara West**

Lying between Raspberry Mountain on the north, the Culebra Range divide on the west, forest road 436 on the south, and trail 1300 on the east, the Cuchara West roadless area is a small but diverse area of 5,300 acres. As mentioned above, it was split off from the larger Cuchara Inventoried Roadless Area in anticipation of different management recommendations. The short spur forest route 413 is cherrystemmed into the area on the southeast.

Being higher than the Cuchara roadless area, Cuchara West is predominantly Engelmann spruce-subalpine fir, with some bristlecone/limber pine, and a small amount of aspen and lodgepole pine. The alpine area has a mixture of tundra forbs, alpine grasslands, wetlands, and some barren ground. There are two important natural communities in the area: lower montane woodlands of bristlecone pine and Thurber's fescue grass (*Pinus aristata/Festuca thurberi*) and montane woodlands of bristlecone pine and whortleberry (*Pinus aristata/Vaccinium myrtillus*). Pale and western moonworts (*Botrychium pallidum* and *B. hesperium*) and Colorado larkspur (*Delphinium ramosum* var *alpestre*) are also located here.

The TNC blueprint includes Cuchara West in its area of moderately high biodiversity significance. Teddys Peak PCA of high significance is located across the central part of the area and Teddys Peak is also recommended as RNA. SREP's vision shows the roadless area as low use.

### **Purgatoire**

The Purgatoire roadless area, 17,700 acres, is the most wild of these roadless areas along the Culebra Range. It is bounded on the north by forest road 422, which goes to Blue Lake and Bear Lake and their campgrounds, and forest road 436, an unimproved dirt route that goes high onto Trinchera Peak. The eastern boundary follows the National Forest boundary near State Highway 12 over Cucharas Pass. The southern extent lies along the Beaubien and Miranda Maxwell Land Grant and the west boundary is along the crest of the divide. The North Lake State Wildlife Area (SWA) is at the southeast corner of the roadless area. Forest road 34 gives access through the SWA to the Purgatoire campground and to forest road 437, which has been cherrystemmed to allow continued access to the scenic views. The interior of the roadless area, with the exception of forest road 437, has only one trail – the North Fork foot and horse trail (trail 1309) – which goes northwest from the Purgatoire Campground along the stream to the Trinchera Road. Other trails shown on various maps are blocked at the east by private property and have disappeared, leaving only the faintest traces. In addition to the peaceful backcountry found along the North Fork Trail, a hike up route 436 to Trinchera Peak provides excellent views into the rugged cliffs above the North Fork of the Purgatoire River headwaters, as well as across the area in general.

The Purgatoire roadless area is primarily a mixture of Engelmann spruce-subalpine fir and aspen stands, with alpine tundra, grasslands, and barren areas on the west along the rugged ridge south of Trinchera Peak, some montane meadows in the center of the area, and Douglas-fir and bristlecone/limber pine along the eastern side. Of particular interest is the persistent aspen forests natural community of aspen and common juniper (*Populus tremuloides/Juniperus communis*). Pale and western moonworts (*Botrychium pallidum* and *B. hesperium*) and Colorado larkspur (*Delphinium ramosum* var *alpestre*) are also found here.

High summer activity of bears is found on the east side of the Purgatoire roadless area, part of a large area of summer and fall activity running south and southwest into the headwaters of the Purgatoire River and across Bosque del Oso SWA. Purgatoire roadless area is also part of a very large bear core area, identified by the Southern Rockies Ecosystem Project that continues well

into New Mexico. Bighorn sheep frequent the high ridges above the North Fork of the Purgatoire River and on down the drainage in winter and for lambing. This is the only large lambing area in this part of the San Isabel National Forest. Elk have extensive summer and winter habitat with a large calving area across the southwestern portion. Mule deer use the area in summer, but their wintering habitat is found east in the lower elevations of the Purgatoire basin. Lynx have extensive denning and wintering habitat, except in the higher elevations and in the central part of the roadless area. SREP's modeling found a high priority lynx linkages from the southern Purgatoire roadless area, across the Bar NI Ranch and west into the Rio Grande National Forest. In addition, there is a cluster of lynx radio-collar signals in the south and adjacent to the Purgatoire roadless area. Further, should gray wolves recolonize or be reintroduced, Purgatoire is a critical stepping stone between wolf core areas in New Mexico, along the Sangre de Cristo Range and on to the western Colorado core areas identified by SREP.

The TNC blueprint includes Purgatoire in its area of moderately high biodiversity significance. Perhaps a third of the area is included in the Purgatoire, Trinchera Peak, and Hells Canyon proposed RNAs. The Potato Patch PCA of moderate significance overlaps the Hells Canyon RNA. The Bar NI PCA of high significance lies right at the southern boundary of the roadless area, extending across the large Bar NI Ranch which is adjacent to the southern boundary of the roadless area. SREP's vision shows the roadless area as core wilderness. Together, these remarkable ecological values provide habitat in their own right for important species, as well as important connections from the southern reaches of the San Isabel National Forest to non-federal lands to the south.

### **Historical and Cultural Features of Spanish Peaks Complex**

Some archeological, historical and cultural features of note include:

- The Spanish Peaks have been a landmark in southern Colorado for as long as humans have been here to view them. Los Cumbres Espanolos to the Spanish; Wahatoya, Huajatolla or Guajatoyah, roughly interpreted as "breasts of the earth" to Native Americans; and Twin Peaks, Dos Hermanos (Two Brothers), or Mexican Mountains to later travelers, they rise 7,000 feet above the surrounding land and can be seen from 100 miles away on a clear day.
- The Spanish Peaks have great traditional and religious significance to many peoples. The Tarahumare Indians believed they were the place where all of life emerged on the earth, and their prophet Grandote came to find water during a great drought. The Comanche, Apache, and Ute tribes held them in awe. Thunderstorms that form on the peaks in the summer were thought to be the work of gods.
- Various versions of the arrival of the earliest Spanish explorers carry this thread: the Spanish found gold and enslaved some Native Americans to dig it out. They then killed the Indians and left via Cucharas Pass south to the river. Somewhere near what is now Stonewall, they were attacked by a band of Native Americans and all were killed, leaving their gold buried somewhere in the vicinity. The river was named the "Rio de las Animas Perdido en Purgatorio", later to be changed by French trappers to "Purgatoire" and even later to "Picketwire" by English speaking settlers.
- The history of European and Spanish settlement focuses most heavily on the plains to the east where the Santa Fe Trail became a major trade route. In the early 1800's the Spanish Peaks were an important landmark for the Mountain and Taos branches of the Santa Fe Trail.
- Early travelers across the mountains used the Sangre de Cristo Pass, a relatively easy trip up the Huerfano River and into the headwaters of South Oak Creek, to the pass at 9,658 feet. Today US Highway 160 crosses North La Veta Pass a few miles to the south at 9,413 feet.
- The town of La Veta had its origins in 1862 when Col. John M. Francisco, and Judge Henry Daigle built Fort Francisco on land purchased from the Vigil-St. Vrain Land Grant. As

settlers moved into the Cucharas River valley, the town grew. By 1876 a narrow gauge railroad came through La Veta and on west across the newly surveyed La Veta Pass (now knows as Old La Veta or Veta Pass) to the Wagon Creek headwaters on the San Luis Valley side. The San Luis & Rio Grande Railroad plans to operate a daily excursion on this historic railroad between La Veta and Alamosa beginning in the summer of 2006. The railroad passes through the extreme northwest corner of the San Isabel National Forest north of forest road 421.

- Between 1876 and 1878 over 50 gold mines were staked out in the Spanish Peaks area with more around Silver Mountain to the north. The mines played out quickly, but then coal was discovered and became a growing industry, especially in the Purgatoire valley. A number of small communities there now serve tourists, local ranchers, and the gas production activities in Bosque del Oso SWA.
- Cuchara town is located on State Highway 12 surrounded by national forest on all sides, with Spanish Peaks Wilderness to the east and the roadless areas along the Culebra Range to the west. It is a center of tourism for the surrounding mountains.

### **Management Recommendations**

#### **Overview**

The Wild Connections Conservation Plan recommends protection as Wilderness for the large Purgatoire roadless area, with Cuchara West as a Core Reserve (Theme 1). Five RNAs are recommended (Theme 2). Quiet Use (Theme 3) and Active Management for Wildlife Habitat (Theme 5) units are proposed for the remaining National Forest lands. Although outside the jurisdiction of the Forest Service, the Bosque del Oso State Wildlife Area is a Theme 9 Significant Non-Forest Service Biological Area. The table below lists the major management units by theme. Refer to the Spanish Peak Complex map for specific locations and refer to the roadless area descriptions for more details on the unit.

**Table 5.21: Spanish Peaks Management Recommendations**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Acres</b>	<b>Recommended Management</b>
<b>Theme 1 – Natural Processes Dominate</b>		
Spanish Peaks Wilderness	19,300	1.1 Existing Wilderness
Purgatoire	17,700	1.2 Recommended Wilderness
Cuchara West	4,200	1.3 Core Reserve
<b>Theme 2 – Special Areas</b>		
East Spanish Peak RNA	2,700	2.1 Research Natural Areas
Hells Canyon RNA	1,700	2.1 Research Natural Areas
Purgatoire RNA	3,400	2.1 Research Natural Areas
Teddys Peak RNA	1,000	2.1 Research Natural Areas
Trinchera Peak RNA	2,100	2.1 Research Natural Areas
<b>Theme 3 – Natural Landscapes with Limited Management</b>		
Cuchara North	8,600	3.1 Quiet Use Areas
Spanish Peaks Adj East	500	3.1 Quiet Use Areas
Spanish Peaks Adj West	3,500	3.1 Quiet Use Areas
<b>Theme 4 – Recreation Emphasis Areas</b>		
Highway of Legends	100	4.2 Scenic Byways
<b>Theme 5 – Active Management</b>		
Cuchara River/Creek	700	5.1 Active Mgmt - Wildlife Habitat
Cuchara South	3,100	5.1 Active Mgmt - Wildlife Habitat

Name	Acres	Recommended Management
Cuchara Valley Ski Area FS	1,600	5.1 Active Mgmt - Wildlife Habitat
Indian Creek	4,200	5.1 Active Mgmt - Wildlife Habitat
Spanish Peaks adjacent	5,500	5.1 Active Mgmt - Wildlife Habitat
<b>Theme 9 – Significant Lands (Non-USFS)</b>		
Bosque del Oso SWA	32,900	9.2 Significant Non-USFS Biological

**Theme 1 – Natural Processes Dominate**

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

**Theme 1.1 – Existing Wilderness**

Wilderness Areas are designated by Congress and managed to protect and perpetuate their natural state, while offering opportunities for solitude and individual self-reliance.

- Spanish Peaks Wilderness is in this complex. It should be managed over the next decade to bring it up to the national standards reflected in the Wilderness Stewardship Challenge issued by the Forest Service in celebration of the 40th anniversary of the Wilderness Act. ([http://natlforests.org/wilderness\\_stewardship\\_10year.html](http://natlforests.org/wilderness_stewardship_10year.html))

**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 the Purgatoire roadless areas as Wilderness. It is described in detail in the roadless area descriptions above. The proposed Wilderness boundary is the same as the UASPP roadless boundary. The following benefits were considered in making this recommendation: permanent protection to enhance wildlife habitat and connectivity, protecting sources of domestic water, providing for native species, and balancing motorized, high impact recreation in other parts of the complex with opportunities for quiet, challenging back country recreation.

We believe that the Purgatoire area meets the capability, availability, and suitability criteria of the Wilderness Act and Forest Service Wilderness Handbook. These criteria are discussed below, with notations as to particular values or potential conflicts.

**Capability**

The proposed Wilderness meets the capability requirements of the Wilderness Act of 1964 for designation. It provides unparalleled opportunities for solitude, challenge, and unconfined recreation once the trailheads are left behind. The rugged mountains along the Culebra crest, cliffs of the North Fork of the Purgatoire River headwaters, deep valleys without trails, long alpine ridges covered in tundra and rock, and groves of aspen and spruce contribute to its wild character. The imprints of humans are substantially unnoticeable, and the few old prospects are subsiding into the landscape. The mine on Trinchera Peak and prospects at the end of forest road 437 have been excluded from the boundary. Logging was limited or nonexistent within this proposed wilderness.

### **Availability**

The private inholding in the south central part of Purgatoire may be perceived as an impediment, as it is not good policy to include private lands within a Wilderness boundary, although it has been done many times before. The inholding is accessible only by foot or horse. The proposed Wilderness contains no active mines. The watersheds and streams are already allocated, and no new water projects are planned. The proposed Wilderness boundary was drawn to exclude the Purgatoire campground and forest road 437 going toward Maxwell Mountain so that recreational access is maintained.

A part of the West Peak C&H grazing allotments, which barely overlaps into the extreme northeastern corner of Purgatoire, would be grandfathered in with Wilderness designation, although over time it should be retired if feasible. Overall, there are no known or anticipated threats to the area that would preclude its designation as Wilderness.

### **Suitability**

Uses forgone in the proposed Wildernesses might be some future expansion of the motorized recreation trails which are now located north of Purgatoire. Today there is adequate access by vehicle on the north and south sides on existing roads, and the east and west sides are blocked by private lands.

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

- The complex will add substantial riparian areas, wetlands, and old persistent aspen stands to the National Wilderness System.
- Habitat and areas for potential recolonization or reintroduction of large native carnivores, including lynx, would be protected.
- Domestic water supply sources are best protected from sediment and pollution when they are located on roadless areas. The Purgatoire proposed Wilderness includes the headwaters of the North Fork of the Purgatoire River which contributes to municipal water supplies downstream.
- There are outstanding opportunities for solitude, quiet backcountry recreation, and challenge throughout the area.
- Historical access to the forest in general is maintained on existing roads.
- Designation of additional Wilderness in this complex would help ensure that the impacts of fragmentation by roads, damage to riparian zones, loss of old-growth forests, and conversion to intensive recreation will not be exacerbated.
- The high mountain ridges and forest-covered lower slopes exemplify the wildness that now brings recreationists, tourists, and new residents to Colorado.
- Local economies will be enhanced by their proximity to this Wilderness area as prime destinations for self-guided 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.

- Cuchara West, although roadless and meeting many of the requirements for Wilderness, is recommended as a Core Reserve. Its long, narrow shape, bordered by roads and a motorized trail (trail 1300), makes it more suitable for core reserve than Wilderness. Cuchara West has

many values, including the large Teddys Peak proposed RNA, which will be best served by this designation.

## 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 (RNAs) 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, East Spanish Peak, Teddys Peak, Trinchera Peak (RNA), Hells Canyon, and Purgatoire (RNA) are recommended for addition to the RNA system. Each has its unique combination of ecological values which will enhance the system:

- The East Spanish Peak proposed RNA of approximately 2,700 acres, will preserve examples of mixed-conifer, riparian, and spruce-fir forest communities in excellent condition on the northeast side of the Spanish Peaks Wilderness. Eight plant associations contribute to the biodiversity of the proposed RNA, and one, the Douglas-fir/common juniper natural community (*Pseudotsuga menziesii/Juniperus communis*) would add significant acreage to the representation found in the RNA system. Upper Wahatoya Creek is located in the area, and the riparian zone is considered to be of high quality. Wood lily (*Lilium philadelphicum*), a state-rare plant, has been found here.
- Teddys Peak proposed RNA would preserve a nearly pristine area of 1,000 acres of spruce-fir and bristlecone pine forest and alpine tundra communities. The bristlecone pine cover large areas, and much of the spruce-fir has old growth characteristics, with the average age of cored trees being 470 years (CNAP, 1998) In addition, the bristlecone pine/curly sedge (*Pinus aristata/Carex rupestris*), bristlecone pine/whortleberry (*Pinus aristata/Vaccinium myrtillus*), curly sedge/minuartia (*Carex rupestris/Lidia biflora*), and Bellardi bog sedge (*Kobresia myosuroides*) alpine turf associations found here are not represented in any established RNA (CNAP, 1998).
- Trinchera Peak proposed RNA, 2,100 acres in extent, is located on the east slopes of the mountain in the Purgatoire proposed Wilderness. It is primarily Engelmann spruce-subalpine fir or tundra and bare slopes. It includes the rare Colorado larkspur (*Delphinium ramosum var. alpestre*) and good examples of aspen/common juniper natural communities (*Populus tremuloides/Juniperus communis*). It also intersects the Potato Patch PCA of moderate conservation significance and the Culebra Range TNC blueprint area of high uniqueness and moderate landscape integrity. The headwaters of the North Fork of the Purgatoire are partially located in the RNA.
- Hells Canyon RNA of 1,700 acres is on the east slopes of Cuatro Peak in the Purgatoire proposed Wilderness. Persistent aspen groves are one of the valuable characteristics of this area. The headwaters of the West Fork of the Purgatoire River are partially located in the RNA. It also intersects the Potato Patch PCA of moderate conservation significance and the Culebra Range TNC blueprint area of high uniqueness and moderate landscape integrity.
- Purgatoire proposed RNA of 3,400 acres is found in the southeast corner of the Purgatoire proposed Wilderness. Values for this RNA are described in the ecological evaluation (CNAP, 1998):

Aspect and elevation interact with periodic fires to produce a mosaic of cover types at Purgatoire. The high ridges support subalpine grassland, dominated by Thurber fescue (*Festuca thurberi*). These areas grade into open bristlecone pine stands, intermixed with aspen and other conifers. This RNA would protect these good condition examples of mixed-conifer, aspen and spruce-fir communities.

Most of the potential RNA is covered by spruce-fir, seral aspen, and mixed-conifer forest. Older stands of spruce-fir are characterized by a canopy of mature Engelmann spruce with younger trees occupying canopy gaps. These stands typically have a sparse understory of whortleberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*) and a variety of forbs. Younger stands, still recovering from fire, support a more mixed canopy of corkbark fir and Engelmann spruce, with a dense subcanopy of aspen and young spruce. Shrub and forb cover in these areas is typically denser than in older stands.

### **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.

#### **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.

The Cuchara North proposed quiet use area is bounded on the south by the Dodgton Trail (trail 1302), a motorized trail that connects upslope to motorized trail 1300. Drawing the boundary of the quiet use area in this way will continue all current motorized use on the system of designated trails (trails 1300, 1301, and 1302) in the area between Blue Lake and Bear Lake Campgrounds, Indian Creek on the north and from Cuchara town. At the same time it will protect important wildlife habitat from expansion of that system and provide opportunities for quiet back country use.

Spanish Peaks Adjacent East and West areas, located at the respective ends of Spanish Peaks Wilderness, are roadless, and are recommended for quiet use designation. There is no inherent need to extend any adjacent roads closer to the Wilderness boundary.

### **Theme 4 – Recreation Emphasis Areas**

Lands in Theme 4 are managed to emphasize recreation opportunities and scenery values. These areas are typically centered on recreational destinations, transportation corridors, winter snow play areas, and near bodies of water. Motorized uses are common and include trails and roads.

#### **Theme 4.2 – Scenic Byways**

These areas consist of designated scenic byways, scenic areas, vistas, and travel corridors, or other high-quality scenic areas in which outstanding features draw attention and to which people gravitate.

A small part of the Highway of Legends Scenic Byway, which follows State Highways 164 and 12 from Walsenburg through La Veta and on to Trinidad, is included where the route crosses forest land on Cucharas Pass. The Byway gives visitors a taste of historic coal mining operations, beautiful scenic views, and interesting geology at Stonewall and on the flanks of Spanish Peaks.

### **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.

The remaining lands around the Spanish Peaks Wilderness (Spanish Peaks adjacent and Cuchara River/Creek areas) not included in other management themes are recommended for active wildlife management. While they are rather fragmented in terms of land ownership and include various 4WD roads, they provide additional habitat and serve to connect the lower elevations out into the plains with the higher elevations of the Wilderness. This will be helpful for mule deer and elk that have extensive winter range, concentration areas, and elk calving grounds in the lower elevations outside the forest.

The Cuchara South area and the National Forest portion of the Cuchara Valley Ski Area are recommended to provide wildlife habitat between the Cuchara North quiet use area, the Cuchara West core reserve, and the Purgatoire proposed Wilderness. The ski area has been out of operation for a number of years, and the major activity on the east side is in the small subdivision that cuts into the forest in this location. The Cuchara roadless area includes the Cuchara South and Cuchara Valley Ski Area units, and we strongly recommend that all roadless lands be managed under the provisions of the Roadless Area Conservation Rule with additional guidance from the management objectives and guidelines of this theme.

The Indian Creek area recommended for active wildlife management to promote connectivity is north of Indian Creek to the forest boundary. There are a number of roads and some current logging, but the area still provides good wildlife areas for black bear, elk, and mule deer between the Cuchara North quiet use area and the adjoining private lands along the Culebra Range and toward La Veta Pass. The historical narrow gauge railroad that connected La Veta town to the San Luis Valley passes through the extreme northwest corner of the San Isabel National Forest north of forest road 421.

#### **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 National 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**

The Wild Connections Conservation Plan has explicitly included State Wildlife Areas 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.

The Bosque del Oso State Wildlife Area is located on a high ridge between the Purgatoire River and the South Fork of the Purgatoire River, with an extension across the South Fork of the Purgatoire

River drainage to Alamosa Canyon on the southeast. At more than 30,000 acres, it is the largest SWA in Colorado. Bosque del Oso is Spanish for “forest of the bear” and, along with black bear, this area and harbors one of the state’s large elk herds, as well as mountain lion, wild turkey, and a cold water fishery. The Colorado Division of Wildlife acquired the surface rights from the previous owner, a subsidiary of Montana Power Corporation, which retained the mineral rights. Virtually every canyon has a road far into the area for access to the many coal bed methane wells. The well pads, noise of compressors and large trucks detract from both the wildlife habitat and recreation, but in spite of this intrusion there are many areas where there is quiet and wildlife can go about their normal habits. Recreation is primarily hunting and fishing and many of the roads are open only to the gas company.

### **Connectivity**

An important aspect of our conservation perspective is the potential for wildlife linkages between protected areas. Internal connectivity in the Spanish Peaks Complex is facilitated because the areas are adjacent to each other, with the main barrier being Colorado Highway 12 and the communities along it which separate Spanish Peaks Wilderness from the proposed Purgatoire Wilderness and roadless areas to the west. Although the Bosque del Oso SWA is also disjunct from the forest areas, the Bar NI Ranch provides conservation oriented management between the SWA and the Purgatoire proposed Wilderness.

Connectivity to other complexes is quite limited, as this part of the forest is surrounded on all sides by private lands. While the private parcels are primarily agricultural, there are many roads and spots of concentrated human activity. The important lynx linkage across the area and west into the San Luis Valley illustrates the tenuous nature of wildlife linkages. Across the divide, the land along the range that was part of the Spanish Land Grant is highly roaded in some areas, and has been the scene of long disputes between successive land owners and the people of the San Luis Valley who have historically been allowed to hunt, graze, and cut fuelwood on what were considered “common lands.”

The Spanish Peaks complex might be best thought of as a stepping stone along the path between the southern Wet Mountains and the Sangre de Cristos to the north and other lands adjacent on the east, west, and south.

### **Summary**

The Spanish Peaks complex is rich in historical, scenic, and ecological values. Its elevation gradients from the Culebra Range, along the heights of the Spanish Peaks Wilderness and down to the lower foothills and river corridors to the east and south contribute to a diversity of wildlife habitat. Anyone who has traveled along I-25 knows of this area, and it is an important link in the network of wildlands that will sustain the integrity of the Pike-San Isabel National Forest, both now and in the foreseeable future.

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