



We need nature to fight climate disruption

By Michael Brune

Guest Commentary

Last year, Coloradans suffered in the face of an exceptionally dry summer that birthed the worst fires in the state's history.

For millennia, natural wildfires have played a role in balancing the landscape, but climate change has created the conditions for more extreme, more dangerous blazes. A thousand Colorado families lost their homes, and the state was choked with smoke. State officials are already bracing for another brutal fire season this year. Unless we take rapid action to address climate change, these wildfires will only grow larger and more destructive.

We have the tools to keep the climate crisis from spiraling out of control — and one of the best lies beneath our feet. Trees, shrubs, and even the desert's living crust capture about half of the greenhouse gases humans release into the atmosphere, preventing the planet from warming even faster.

Preserving these natural carbon sinks can play a crucial role in limiting climate change, provided we do so at scale. Scientists tell us that we need to preserve at least 30% of our wild places by 2030 to have a chance of avoiding catastrophic climate change.

Today, just 12% of American lands and waters are protected.

But Colorado's senators have the chance to help bridge that gap.

The Colorado Wilderness Act would bring an additional 600,000 acres of wilderness under protection, including dramatic sections of the Dolores River Basin, the Arkansas River canyonlands, the Book Cliffs near Grand Junction, and three 14,000-foot peaks — Redcloud, Sunshine, and Handies.

If Colorado Sens. Michael Bennett and John Hickenlooper choose to support this bill, it would not only help mitigate the climate crisis; it would also protect water supplies and wildlife habitat, support Colorado's tourism economy, and increase access to nature and outdoor recreation.

As the climate warms, reliable sources of drinking water are coming under