

Colorado's Canyon Country Wilderness Proposal

Flat Tops Wilderness Addition

Wandering through the rich, varied forest along the Ute Trail is a magical experience. Small dark ponds, unique rock formations, splendid meadows, and sweeping views across the Colorado River Valley to Castle Peak and the Gore, Sawatch and Elk Mountain ranges make this area well worth protecting. This mid-elevation forest area with its easy hiking is an important addition to the Flat Tops Wilderness and our national wilderness system.

Richard Compton, Carbondale

Citizens Wilderness Proposal: 16,427 acres
BLM Wilderness Study Area: 3,360 acres
BLM Field Office: Glenwood Springs Field Office (Glenwood Springs)
Location: The Flat Tops Addition is located 20 miles northeast of Glenwood Springs, straddling the border of Garfield and Eagle Counties, on the edge of the Flat Tops Wilderness.

Wilderness Qualities

The Flat Tops Wilderness Addition includes the BLM's Hack Lake WSA and adjacent national forest lands. Hack Lake provides a dramatic access to the Flat Tops Wilderness area. From the trailhead at Sweetwater Lake Lodge, Ute Trail, and W Mountain Trail visitors pass through a fascinating succession of life zones up to the palisades of the White River Flat Tops.

The trail climbs from sage, oakbrush, juniper, and pinyon pines to moist swamp areas and aspen-fir forests in an ecologically significant transition. Hack Creek pours out of the hillside, draining underground from Hack Lake on the shelf above. The lake, which has no stream entering or leaving it, is situated in spruce-fir forest. Beyond, the forest rolls up to summit cliffs. With each gain in elevation, a greater panorama unfolds, taking in the Gore Range and the northern Sawatch Range to the east and the massive peaks of the Elk Range to the south.

The Flat Tops Addition has an abundance and diversity of wildlife, including large herds of deer and elk, mountain lion, coyote, badger, blue grouse, and beaver. The cliffs of the area provide excellent habitat for golden eagles. Other birds include Coopers and sharp-shinned hawks, goshawks, teal, and mallards.

The Colorado Division of Wildlife recently reintroduced a herd of 20 bighorn sheep in Derby Creek, north of Hack Lake. The bighorns prefer the canyons and valleys of the Hack Lake area as opposed to the high elevation

lands within the adjacent Flat Tops Wilderness. The Flat Tops Addition provides an important anchor for this bighorn herd by preserving the low-elevation habitat needed for the herd to prosper.

A fragment of the Ute Trail system, which only a century ago connected the whole state, adds a special historic aspect to the proposed wilderness addition. This trail segment was a major migration route between far western Colorado and the upper Colorado River valley.



Hack Lake. (John Fielder)

Resource Information

The only locatable mineral suspected within the area is gypsum, considered uneconomic compared to other more accessible deposits. Flat Tops Addition has low potential for oil and gas resources, and contains no mineral leases.

There are active grazing allotments in the area.

Parts of Flat Tops Addition are covered by spruce-fir forest which provides a potential base for timber harvest. However, due to the relatively small quantities and lack of access, this timber has low commercial value.

BLM recognizes the high recreation and wildlife values of the area and its management calls for no-surface-occupancy leasing of minerals, no timber harvesting, and a ban on off-road vehicles in order to preserve the area's natural character and opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation.

Wilderness designation will ensure the protection of these identified high value resources.

The proposed Forest Service additions in the north are mainly spruce-fir forests, while the lands to the west contain substantial amounts of aspen. They are managed by the White River National Forest for semi-primitive, non-motorized recreation. Wilderness designation of these lands clearly meshes with the identified management goals.

The Flat Tops Addition is a headwaters area, adjacent to and below the Flat Tops Wilderness. A small water diversion project is located on Turret Creek in the western Forest Service wilderness addition.



Hack Lake.

Boundary Issues

Citizens propose designation of the entire BLM Hack Lake WSA as well as an additional 10,000 acres of adjacent roadless Forest Service lands.

The Flat Tops Wilderness boundary already drops below the Flat Tops rim in the Turret Creek drainage and in numerous other locations. The proposed boundary extensions will simply align the new boundary along readily identifiable features such as ridge lines and valley bottoms, while providing for the addition of lovely Hack Lake and surrounding forests to the Flat Tops. The primary Forest Service addition encompasses the headwaters of Red Dirt Creek..

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