

**Testimony of John Stansfield  
regarding H.R. 4289, the Colorado Wilderness Act of 2009  
presented to  
National Parks, Forests and Public Lands Subcommittee  
Committee on Natural Resources  
United States House of Representatives  
March 11, 2010**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee.

I am John Stansfield, Post Office Box 588, Monument, Colorado 80132. I represent Central Colorado Wilderness Coalition (CCWC). CCWC is a regional, all-volunteer organization founded in 2002 with the goal of working to secure designation of new wilderness areas in central Colorado, particularly in the Fifth Congressional District.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify for H.R. 4289, the Colorado Wilderness Act of 2009. CCWC is a member group of Colorado Wilderness Network and endorses the testimony of Steve Smith presented today. In addition, we would like to comment specifically on five areas in the bill, located in our region, about which we know a fair amount and for which we care greatly. These wild and natural parcels are Beaver Creek, Grape Creek, Table Mountain, McIntyre Hills, and Badger Creek. Our group has explored, inventoried, mapped, and continues to promote these areas, as well as Browns Canyon, for wilderness designation. We heartily endorse your legislative efforts to make these designations a reality in the near future.

As for myself, I have 40 years of experience as a volunteer in wild land inventory and assessment. With a master's degree in education, I have conducted hundreds of backcountry

educational, recreational, and service trips for people of all ages in Colorado, Wyoming, and Alaska.

My first wilderness inventory experience took place in Beaver Creek in spring 1971. My cohorts and I, all unfamiliar with the area, forced our way up the canyon bottom, fording the icy, thigh-deep water again and again, until we came to a seemingly impassable narrows, only 30 feet wide with vertical walls 100 feet high, and the creek falling in rapids through it. We baled out of the stream bed. After climbing hand-over-hand through a steep, brushy gulch, all of a sudden there was a trail. We were so pleased to walk the scenic path back to the trailhead, unaware of the cases of poison ivy we would soon be scratching. The surprises I had that day in 1971 were only the first of many I have had over the years in my wild land inventories.

In central Colorado's Fremont County, the ancient Arkansas River and its tributaries have bored their ways through tough igneous and metamorphic rock, creating countless canyons intermingled with steep-sided ridges and peaks. It is in this rugged terrain that the five islands of wildness, strung like jewels on the chain of river, flourish in close proximity to the rapidly urbanizing Front Range. We believe that as development takes place in the region, wild public lands become inherently more valuable--economically, ecologically, recreationally.

And we can back up that contention. Our sister organization, Wild Connections, recently released a professional paper ([http://www.wildconnections.org/images/Ecosystem\\_Services\\_Economic\\_Value\\_Land\\_Use\\_Planning\\_-\\_Wild\\_Connections\\_2010.pdf](http://www.wildconnections.org/images/Ecosystem_Services_Economic_Value_Land_Use_Planning_-_Wild_Connections_2010.pdf)) documenting substantial previously unquantified economic values provided by "ecosystem services", those goods, including fresh water, the regulation of wastes, the control of climate, the

formation of soil, and protection from natural hazards, which an ecosystem provides for human use.

Like many of the proposed wildernesses in H.R. 4289, the Fremont County areas are in the mid-elevation range of 6,000 to 10,000 feet. (Most Colorado wilderness being at 9,000 feet and up.) In terms of ecological diversity, the importance of permanent protection for lower elevation wild lands can not be understated. Beaver Creek, for example, is situated at a biological crossroads of plains, mountain, and New Mexican habitats, blending prairie rattlesnakes and big bluestem grass with bighorn, elk, and Engelmann spruce, along with roadrunners, Mexican spotted owls, pinon-juniper woodland, and ringtail. Quite a mix! While only a few air miles away, Grape Creek has its own blend of diverse plant and animal species.

Mid-elevation wilderness areas make for variety in primitive recreation, as well. CCWC has conducted hiking trips into each of the Arkansas River areas in every winter month. While higher streams are icebound, year-round fishing is common in Badger, Grape, and Beaver Creeks. Because some wildlife species, wild turkey, for instance, occur at lower elevation, so do varied hunting opportunities there. When I meet outdoor people who enjoy the sandstone canyonlands of southeast Utah, I encourage them to also visit the soaring granite canyonlands of Beaver Creek or the slot canyons and rain water pour-offs of McIntyre Hills for a new experience.

All five of the wilderness candidates have, pending congressional action, received some form of interim protection from their land management agencies, in recognition of the wild and roadless values they contain. Interim protections include:

Badger Creek--Forest Service roadless area designation

Beaver Creek--BLM Wilderness Study Area, Forest Service roadless area designation, Colorado Stewardship Trust Program (state trust inholdings only)

Grape Creek--BLM Wilderness Study Area and Area of Critical Environmental Concern designations, Forest Service roadless area designation, Colorado Stewardship Trust Program (state trust inholdings only)

McIntyre Hills--BLM Wilderness Study Area, Colorado Stewardship Trust Program (state trust inholdings only)

Table Mountain--BLM Area of Critical Environmental Concern and Research Natural Area designations for portions of the area

However, administrative interim protections can be lost. Water storage projects, or energy-related developments, or alterations in agency regulation, for example, can spell rapid alteration or elimination of wilderness-quality lands. Only congressionally-designated wilderness can effectively preserve values on BLM and Forest Service lands which the people deem important for our nation's longterm wellbeing.

There are resource issues in two of the areas of which the committee should be aware. There is use by motorcycles and ATVs in some of the Forest Service roadless area portion of the Grape Creek proposed wilderness. A draft federal energy corridor proposal on BLM land may impact the potential southern wilderness boundary of Badger Creek. We believe that both of these issues can be successfully mitigated via public and agency participation during the legislative process.

In closing, I would like to share a highlight, factual or personal, about each of the proposed wildernesses to give you something of the experience of being there:

The top-of-the-world view looking down from the expansive grass-covered mesa top of Table Mountain into Devil's Hole and the Arkansas River 3,000 feet below.

A high school biology class discovering a bighorn ram skeleton lying at the bottom of the 200-foot-high precipice that marks the confluence of East and West Beaver Creek.

Broad, parallel fingers of wan fall grass and bright yellow aspen reaching downslope more than a mile to touch Badger Creek.

History rising through boot soles treading the grassy roadbed of the short-lived railroad that once traversed Grape Creek valley.

The feeling, in McIntyre Hills, of being what Colorado conservation pioneer Enos Mills called "watched by wildlife", and then glimpsing on the ridge above a mountain lion in motion.

CCWC is extremely grateful for the de facto interim protections, albethey unofficial, provided by Rep. Diana DeGette's Colorado Wilderness Act legislative proposals during the past 11 years. The recurring bills have assisted us in keeping the areas we treasure in front of the public and enabled us to keep up hope on the long road to wilderness designation. And now, at last, we have a hearing.

