

Summary of San Juan Mountains Wilderness Act 2018

U.S. Senator Michael Bennet

The *San Juan Mountains Wilderness Act* would provide permanent protections for approximately 61,000 acres of land located in the heart of the San Juan Mountains in Southwest Colorado. The bill would designate some of the state's most iconic peaks as wilderness areas, including two fourteeners: Mount Sneffels and Wilson Peak.

This legislation is the result of years of collaboration among local officials and stakeholders in San Miguel, San Juan, and Ouray Counties. The towns of Telluride, Mountain Village, Silverton, Ophir, and Ridgway support the bill.

LEGISLATIVE HISTORY

In 2006, the San Miguel County Commission proposed new wilderness and other protective legislative designations for several areas in their county. Following suit, the Commissions of Ouray and San Juan requested acreage in their counties be included in legislation. After three years of work, then-Congressman John Salazar introduced the *San Juan Mountains Wilderness Act of 2009*. Senator Michael Bennet and then-Senator Mark Udall introduced companion legislation in the Senate.

The bill has since received bipartisan support in Congress, passing the House Natural Resources Committee unanimously in 2010, and passing the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee in 2013 with a bipartisan vote. Bennet cosponsored the bill again in 2013 and has continued working with local leaders to update and advance the legislation.

DESIGNATIONS & PROVISIONS

Wilderness Designations: The bill would designate 31,488 acres of new wilderness areas near Telluride, Norwood, Ouray, and Ridgway. Approximately 23,000 acres are additions to the existing Lizard Head and Mount Sneffels Wilderness Areas administered by the U.S. Forest Service. The bill also would designate 8,600 acres surrounding McKenna Peak, an existing Wilderness Study Area managed by the Bureau of Land Management, as a new wilderness area in San Miguel County.

Special Management Areas: The bill would designate 21,675 acres as the Sheep Mountain Special Management Area between the towns of Ophir and Silverton, which would include Hope Lake and Ice Lakes Basin. The bill also would create the 792-acre Liberty Bell East Special Management Area near Telluride.

Mineral Withdrawal Area: The bill would protect 6,590 areas of mineral withdrawal outside of Norwood at Naturita Canyon, prohibiting future mineral development in the canyon.