Cristina Harmon

Northwest Colorado Chapter of Great Old Broads for Wilderness

PO Box 771850

Steamboat Springs, CO 80477

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The Honorable Senator John Hickenlooper

Greetings Sir,

I am writing today on behalf of the Northwest Colorado Chapter of Great Old Broads for Wilderness in support of the proposed expansion of the Sarvis Creek Wilderness Area to include the Harrison and Green Creek watersheds. This 7200-acre area south of the current Sarvis Creek Wilderness and north of Highway 40 on the west side of Rabbit Ears Pass has the pristine wilderness characteristics that would have earned it inclusion in the original wilderness proposal in 1983. The US Forest Service set aside this area as recreational lands in anticipation of the proposed Catamount Ski Area and a proposal to bring the Olympics to Colorado, neither of which gained public support and was never built.

The Harrison/Green Creek drainages provides for abundant wildlife habitat, including crucial elk calving areas, a wildlife migration corridor, and elk winter range. Other wildlife either identified or potentially in the area are beaver, pine marten, pine squirrel, red-tailed hawk, and northern goshawk. The habitat is suitable for wolverine and lynx, both endangered and federally protected species. The drainage’s forests have abundant, healthy lodgepole pine, aspen, spruce, and subalpine fir. Recent plant surveys found a diversity of plants and there is currently no timber or grazing activity. The only human incursion is an irrigation headgate on the western border that provides Green Creek Ranch with seasonal irrigation. The headgate is only accessible on foot or horseback.

This wilderness expansion proposal protects the Harrison/Green Creek area for quiet use, wildlife habitat and land preservation. One of the important reasons to designate this as Wilderness is to counterbalance the pressure to expand motorized and mechanized recreation on public lands in Routt County. Expansion of recreation has the potential to degrade the quiet use experience and impact wildlife by creating habitat islands. In the recent Routt County Master Plan, conservation over recreation was a highly supported value for Routt County.

This pristine watershed supports the natural carbon sequestration of healthy forests, protects the water quality of the Yampa River watershed, and shades and slows spring runoff. Currently the drainage is used primarily by hikers, fishers, hunters, and backcountry skiers. These uses are all consistent with wilderness quality lands. The Routt Medicine Bow Forest Service plans to rehabilitate an illegal user created trail on the north edge of the drainage as part of the current iteration of the Mad-Rabbit Mountain bike trail proposal.

Protecting the Harrison/Green Creek Drainage will maintain this remarkably healthy and intact forested area that has been only minimally impacted by pine and spruce beetles. Studies show that undisturbed native forests adjacent to urban/developed areas are more resistant to wildfire than disturbed areas. The neighbors to the west, including Catamount homeowners and the Green Creek Ranch do not object to the wilderness designation. The pristine nature and beauty of the watershed makes preserving it as an expanded wilderness area paramount.

Great Old Broads for Wilderness is a national grassroots organization, led by women, that engages and inspires activism to preserve and protect wilderness and wildlands. Broads has 8500 members and supporters including nearly 30 members in the Northwest Colorado region. Our local group often partners with the Trappeurs Lake chapter of The Sierra Club, Rocky Mountain Wild, the Yampa Valley Sustainability Council and Keep Routt Wild on public lands preservation, wildlife, and mineral extraction issues. We also have several members on the Routt Recreation and Conservation Roundtable where we advocate for wildlife and wild lands protections and recreation consistent with these values.

Thank you for considering our comments and for your support of the Sarvis Creek Wilderness Expansion. This will be first major expansion of Wilderness in Northwest Colorado.

Sincerely,

Cristina Harmon

Leadership Team

Northwest Colorado Chapter of Great Old Broads for Wilderness