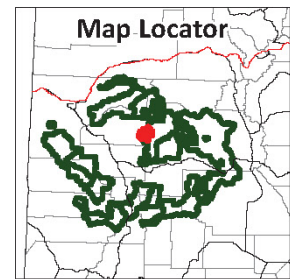


Coal Mountain Addition to West Elk Wilderness

Proposed Wilderness Designation
Gunnison National Forest
Paonia Ranger District

15,200 acres



General Description

The Coal Mountain wilderness addition encompasses the back side of Mount Lamborn near Paonia and Crawford, and incorporates the headwaters of several streams into the adjacent 176,412-acre West Elk Wilderness. Collectively, the roadless areas contiguous with the West Elk Wilderness amount to 125,000 acres and comprise the largest wilderness opportunity on the national forest system in Colorado. The 15,200 acres of Coal Mountain comprise the westernmost of these wilderness-adjacent roadless areas.

Coal Mountain contains extraordinary wildlife values that will be protected via wilderness designation, ensuring minimal conflicts between wildlife species and land users. The area is particularly notable as a wintering area for elk, and as a migration route for elk moving to and from the West Elk Wilderness. Bears concentrate in Little Coal Creek. Second Creek and the South Fork of Minnesota Creek were historically occupied by Colorado River cutthroat trout. Predominant ecosystem types include aspen woodlands and Gambel oak, both characteristic of lower elevations and lacking in representation within the existing wilderness system.

The proposed wilderness is remote with four low-use trails crossing the area, and with no trailheads in immediate proximity to the area. Trail use and visitation is very small at any time of year due to ruggedness and weather conditions, with the largest number of visitors occurring during the fall hunting seasons. Inter Ocean Pass Trail #890 and Trail #894 are currently open to mechanized use, however, these trails see little to no current use from mountain bikers.

Naturalness

Coal Mountain has a great degree of naturalness. The area is rugged and not easily accessible. None of its forest is considered suitable for timber production and thus has not experienced historic entry for logging.



Outstanding Opportunities for Solitude or Unconfined Primitive Recreation

Two of the primary drainages that comprise the area, Second Creek and South Fork of Minnesota Creek, lack trails paralleling the creeks as commonly occurs elsewhere. The absence of trail

infrastructure and frequent dense aspen creates a strong sense of seclusion and isolation, providing outstanding opportunities for solitude.

One trail cuts across the higher reaches of the roadless area. The Little Elk Basin trail contours across the headwaters of Second Creek from Little Coal Creek en route to the West Elk wilderness boundary. The area's abundance of wildlife and habitat security draws hunters in fall who are challenged by the remote, backcountry hunting opportunity the area provides. It also offers hikers, anglers and equestrians an out-of-way access route into the West Elk Wilderness.

Size and Roadlessness

The Coal Mountain proposed wilderness addition is 15,200 acres and is contiguous to the 176,412-acre West Elk Wilderness. There are no roads within the unit.

Supplemental Values

Coal Mountain includes portions of two Potential Conservation Area identified by the Colorado Natural Heritage Program. The South Fork at Beaver Reservoir PCA is located along the riparian zone of the South Fork of Minnesota Creek, below Coal Mountain. The PCA supports a good example of a globally vulnerable narrowleaf cottonwood/alder riparian forest (*Populus angustifolia/Alnus incana ssp. tenuifolia*). It is rated by CNHP as possessing B3-High Biodiversity Significance because it provides a high quality example of a common but usually degraded community. Wilderness designation would guard against degrading management activities upstream of the riparian corridor.

The Little Coal Creek PCA is rated B2-Very High Biodiversity Significance owing to an excellent example of the globally imperiled Rocky Mountain thistle (*Cirsium perplexans*). The site also includes good quality examples of two riparian forests, *Pseudotsuga menziesii/Cornus sericea* and *Populus tremuloides/ Pteridium aquilinum*.

A primary migration route for elk moving to and from the West Elk Wilderness overlays the Coal Mountain unit. Little Coal Creek is identified as a concentration area for black bear, along the western edge of the wilderness addition. Colorado River cutthroat trout have historically occupied Second Creek and the South Fork of Minnesota Creek, though these populations are not presently considered conservation populations owing to genetic introgression.

Coal Mountain's aspen woodlands and Gambel oak shrublands would significantly enhance ecosystem representation within the wilderness preservation system. The area includes several thousand acres of Rocky Mountain Aspen Forest and Woodland, an ecosystem type with less than 20% representation within wilderness on the forest. It also hosts several thousand acres of Rocky Mountain Gambel Oak-Mixed Montane Shrubland, which is sparsely represented within existing wilderness and only exists at less than 5% representation on the forest.

Manageability

The Coal Mountain wilderness addition is readily manageable as wilderness. The limited number of trails are non-motorized and lead directly into adjacent wilderness. The Inter-Ocean Pass Trail forms the western boundary until it meets the upper-tier roadless boundary. We recommend limitations on mechanized use within this unit. The western boundary follows the upper-tier roadless boundary to the south until it meets the Little Coal Creek Trail, which forms the remaining western boundary, after which it follows the roadless area boundary to the south and east. The northern boundary excludes the Lone Cabin Ditch. The area has low potential for oil and gas resources, no likelihood of hardrock minerals, and is considered unsuitable for timber harvest.

If new management prescriptions or designations significantly limit existing mechanized recreation use or access, specifically in regard to mechanized use of Inter-Ocean Pass Trail (890) as well as #894, then the Western Slope Conservation Center supports reasonable mitigation of access impacts by identifying alternative routes more appropriate for ongoing and future mechanized use within relative proximity to the area. We are actively communicating with mechanized user groups and the local recreation community through an ongoing, and productive, process to address potential conflicts.

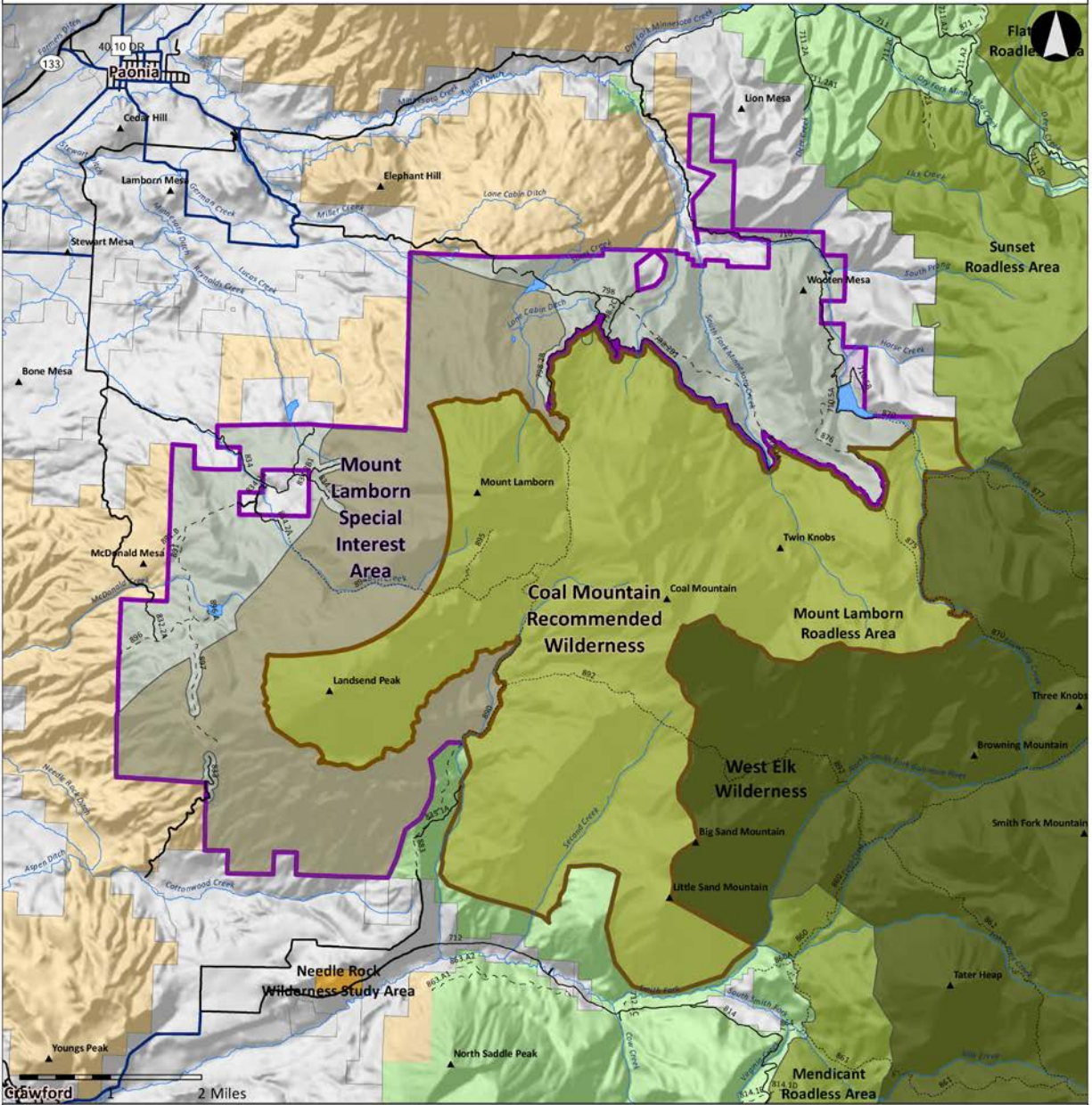
Historic and existing uses compatible including all grazing activities should be allowed to continue by future management or designations.

Information Resources

| Item | Data Source |
|---|--|
| Roadlessness | Colorado Roadless Rule at 36 CFR xx |
| | Forest Service inventory pursuant to FSH 1909.12,chapter 70, section 71 |
| Naturalness; Outstanding Opportunities for Solitude or Unconfined Primitive Recreation | Forest Service inventory pursuant to FSH 1909.12,chapter 70, section 72 |
| | USDA Forest Service, R2, Profiles of Colorado Roadless Areas 2008 |
| | GMUG Roadless Inventory & Evaluation for Potential Wilderness Areas, 2005 |
| Supplemental Values | |
| Connectivity | SREP Wildlands Network 2003, USDA Forest Service Southern Rockies Lynx Amendment, 2008 Aplet et al, Indicators of Wildness 2000, Belote et al, Identifying Corridors among Large Protected Areas in the United States, 2016 |

| | |
|--|---|
| Elk Severe Winter Range | Colorado Parks and Wildlife Species Activity Mapping 2017 |
| Elk Winter Concentration Area | Colorado Parks and Wildlife Species Activity Mapping 2017 |
| Gunnison Sage-grouse Historic Habitat | Colorado Parks and Wildlife Species Activity Mapping 2017 |
| Lynx Potential Habitat | Colorado Parks and Wildlife Species Activity Mapping 2017 |
| Little Coal Creek Potential Conservation Area with Very High Biodiversity Significance | Colorado Natural Heritage Program Potential Conservation Areas 2017 |
| South Fork at Beaver Reservoir Potential Conservation Area with High Biodiversity Significance | Colorado Natural Heritage Program Potential Conservation Areas 2017 |
| Land's End Peak Potential Conservation Area with Moderate Biodiversity Significance | Colorado Natural Heritage Program Potential Conservation Areas 2017 |
| Second Creek Potential Conservation Area with Moderate Biodiversity Significance | Colorado Natural Heritage Program Potential Conservation Areas 2017 |
| Occurrence of Colorado River Cutthroat Trout (<i>Oncorhynchus clarkii pleuriticus</i>) | Colorado Natural Heritage Program Element Occurrences 2017 |
| Ecosystem Representation | TWS Ecosystem Representation 2016 |

Mount Lamborn/Coal Mountain



ROCKY MOUNTAIN WILD

Data Sources: BLM, CDOT, COMaP v10, SRCA, USFS, USGS, wilderness.net

Map Prepared By: Alison Gallensky

 Rocky Mountain Wild

 4/13/2018 18-024 v12

- Legend**
- Major Road
 - CDNST
 - USFS Road
 - Closed USFS Road
 - Trail (snow)
 - Trail (motorized)
 - Trail (non-motorized)

- Recommended Wilderness
- Linkage Area
- Special Interest Area/Other
- Roadless Area (FS)
- Wilderness Study Area (BLM)
- Wilderness

- Land Ownership**
- USFS
 - BLM
 - NPS
 - State
 - Other Public
 - Tribe
 - Private