

Hayden Mountain Special Interest Area

Proposed Designated Area
Uncompahgre National Forest
Ouray Ranger District

10,400 acres



General Description

Hayden Mountain is an undeveloped range of seven high points including several 13,000-foot summits amidst one of Colorado's otherwise intensively mined landscapes. Hayden Mountain towers impressively above the west side of Highway 550 from Ouray to the summit of Red Mountain Pass. Hayden Mountain includes high snowcapped summits, quiet alpine basins, and sweeping aspen stands that erupt in riotous fall colors of orange, red and gold starting in autumn. At its base lies the unique Ironton Fen and the Uncompahgre Valley's largest wetland. The area's few steep trails are prized by the most enthusiastic hikers and wildlife watchers able to endure the ascent.

Hayden Mountain's roadless character and its associated ecological values have never been inventoried by the Forest Service. The area was omitted from the 1970s-era Roadless Area Review and Evaluations as it was located within the Uncompahgre Primitive Area at the time. It was also never subsequently inventoried for analysis during the Colorado Roadless Rule process in the early 2000s. The current forest plan revision process is an opportunity to finally designate this region for its unique qualities, critical wildlife values, sensitive plant species and scenic beauty.

Wildlife Values

Hayden Mountain sits squarely between the Uncompahgre Wilderness to the east and the Mount Sneffels Wilderness immediately to the west. It affords linkage between these two wilderness areas and with the San Juan National Forest to the south establishing a large landscape for wildlife migration and protection of an important summer concentration area for elk. Regularly, herds of elk numbering 60 cows or more with calves are encountered during the summer months across high basins and alpine meadows in this mostly unfragmented region. Furthermore, Hayden Mountain is located in the heart of lynx habitat in the northern



San Juan Mountains, and it offers seclusion away from the region's busier jeep trails in summer. During winter months, when the region's jeep roads are closed by snow, it is not unusual to witness lynx and quite common to see lynx tracks. In addition, raptors soar across Hayden's ridges while black bear and mule deer roam the landscape. An occasional moose has been witnessed in the Ironton wetlands.

Botanical Values

About one-half of the Colorado Natural Heritage Program's Mineral Basin Potential Conservation Area (PCA) is located within the Hayden Mountain area. The PCA's vegetation is a mosaic of rocky alpine tundra and wet alpine meadows with high floral diversity dominated by alpine avens. Late melting snowbanks provide the necessary habitat for San Juan whitlow-grass (*Draba graminea*). Two other drabas are found in small amounts in drier, rocky sites. This PCA is rated by CNHP as possessing B2-Very High Biodiversity Significance.

The portion of the Ironton Park PCA located west of Highway 550 is included in this proposed Hayden Mountain SIA. This Ironton Park PCA is valued for its uncommon iron fen and wetlands. Bog birch (*Betula glandulosa*) is the dominant shrub species (along with four other willow species) accompanied by a rich understory of predominantly beaked sedge with a diversity of other riparian species. CNHP rates the Iron Park PCA as possessing B2-Very High Biodiversity Significance. This broad park occupies a level area where Red Mountain Creek has spread out into several channels, creating the largest wetland in the Uncompahgre Basin.

Scenic Values

Hayden Mountain provides a breathtaking backdrop to the Million Dollar Highway, also known as the San Juan Skyway scenic byway. The area's elevation provides sweeping vistas across rugged peaks, alpine lakes, and plunging valleys taking in views of the iconic Abrams Mountain across the valley, the renowned 14ers Uncompahgre Peak and Wetterhorn Peak in the Uncompahgre Wilderness, and the Sneffels Range to the northwest. Lush alpine basins are as scenic as the summits with fields of wildflowers blooming in spectacular colors across the landscape during summer months. Aspen groves delight the visual senses in bursts of red, orange, and gold and attract residents as well visitors from across the country every autumn. It's a common sight in September to see Highway 550 lined by photographers and artists with easels attempting to capture the brilliant colors against an extraordinary backdrop. Hayden Mountain is equally stunning in winter blanketed in snow.

Size, Roadlessness & Access

The Hayden Mountain Special Interest Area encompasses 10,400 acres, and excludes open motorized routes that form its boundary. The area is generally bounded by Highway 550 to the east, Black Bear Pass jeep trail on the south, Imogene Pass jeep trail on the west, and the Canyon Creek road/CR 361 to the north. The motorized route up Commodore Gulch to the Barstow Mine and the jeep road to Greyhound Mine are also excluded from the proposed SIA as are the mine sites themselves. Locked gates at both access roads along highway 550 prevent motorized use by the public. The jeep road between these two mines and adjacent to Spirit Gulch is

abandoned and undergoing natural revegetation. It is a valued hiking route and included within the proposed SIA. The Mears Trail (a section of the old Mears Road) adjacent to the Iron Fen is within the SIA boundary and protected from motorized use by locked gates at Crystal Lake and north of Larson Brothers' Mine. Another locked gate precludes motorized travel on the historic jeep trail from Imogene Pass down to Ptarmigan Lake. The Forest Service has acquired numerous patented mining claims from Idarado Mining Company and others, which removes the majority of the most desirable historic mineral veins from future location under the 1872 Mining Law. A number of patented mining claims remain within the area, but these have no historic vehicular access. Ouray County has strict zoning regulations that limit development on mining claims such as these in the alpine zone above 9,480 feet in elevation. The Forest Service continues to pursue acquisitions via land exchanges and purchases.

Proposed Management

Specific management direction is proposed to ensure protection of wildlife habitat, botanical species, scenic values, and primitive recreation as follows:

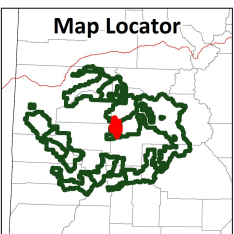
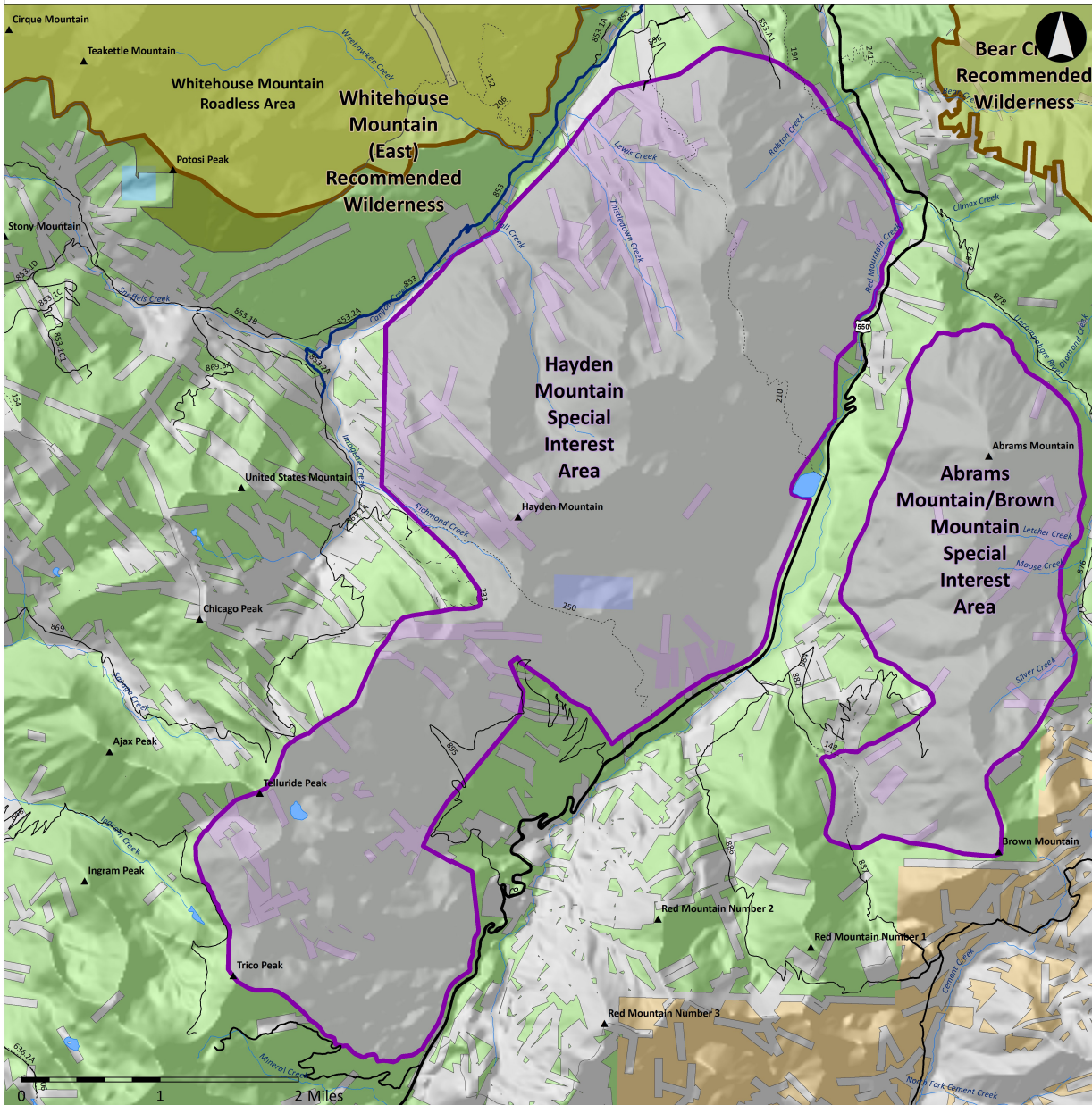
- The Hayden Mountain Special Interest Area should be proposed to be withdrawn from mineral entry. It should also be found unsuitable for oil and gas leasing, and made discretionary no-lease.
- Management direction must include prohibition on road construction and limitations on tree removal consistent with management prescribed by the Colorado Roadless Rule, 36 CFR Part 294.43(b), 294.42(b).
- Trails, as currently managed, will remain closed to motorized and mechanized uses year around. The exception is the Mears Trail which is open to bicycles. Best management practices are in place on all access routes and monitored regularly to ensure effectiveness.
- Management direction into the future must maintain or improve the resource values of the Hayden Mountain Special Interest Area.
- Existing permitted use for helitrax ski operations coupled with avalanche mitigation by CDOT will continue to operate within this SIA.


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
San Juan Skyway	San Juan Skyway Corridor Management Plan Progress Report, CDOT 2014
Wildlife 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
Lynx Potential Habitat	Colorado Parks and Wildlife Species Activity Mapping 2017
Elk Summer Concentration	Colorado Parks and Wildlife Species Activity Mapping October 2019
Botanical Values	
Imogene Pass Potential Conservation Area with Very High Biodiversity Significance	Colorado Natural Heritage Program Potential Conservation Areas 2017
Ironton Park Potential Conservation Area with Very High Biodiversity Significance	Colorado Natural Heritage Program Potential Conservation Areas 2017
Mineral Basin Potential Conservation Area with Very High Biodiversity Significance	Colorado Natural Heritage Program Potential Conservation Areas 2017
Ouray Canyons Potential Conservation Area with Very High Biodiversity Significance	Colorado Natural Heritage Program Potential Conservation Areas 2017

Hayden Mountain



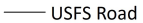
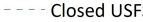
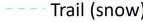
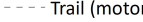
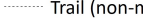

















ROCKY MOUNTAIN WILD

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

Map Prepared By: Alison Gallensky, Rocky Mountain Wild, 12/18/2019 19-168 v19 b

- 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