



Daily Editorial: Make wildlands wilderness

Vail Daily Editorial Board
Vail CO, Colorado
September 28, 2007

We hope the “Hidden Gems” campaign to expand the wilderness areas around the Vail Valley succeeds.

A coalition of conservation groups wants official wilderness designation — one of the highest levels of protection — for stretches of the Gore Range, land around Spraddle Creek in Vail, 20,000 acres along the Piney River northeast of Wolcott, a swath between West Lake Creek and Bellyache Ridge, and land between Camp Hale and Shrine Mountain.

The 670,000-acre campaign also covers Castle Peak north of Eagle and more than 14,000 acres stretching from the Polar Star Inn south of Eagle to the north fork of the Fryingpan River.

The group is still finalizing its plan, which will need Congress’s approval before any land is protecting. The group says it wants to seize the opportunity of a Democratic Congress that may be more likely to protect more land.

The U.S. Forest Service is pushing for far less new wilderness, concerned about extending pristine wilderness too close to towns and urbanized areas where it may be more likely to be abused.

But why not hem ourselves with wilderness, and restrain the construction and development to the valley floor? It’s just a matter of time before developers start looking to the empty hillsides for the next Cordillera.

Snowmobiles, ATVs, logging and even mountain bikes would be barred from the new wilderness areas. As traffic increases on I-70 and Highway 6, as more condos are built and filled up, we need more places where we can leave the urban sounds of our mountain towns behind.

— Matt Zalaznick for the Editorial Board