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## Bill would protect Dominguez Canyons, other Colorado wilderness

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Protecting wilderness is not a partisan issue.

Former Republican Congressman Scott McClinnis and Doug Scott, who's been pegged "grandfather of the wilderness movement," shared the stage Friday night at the 2008 Colorado Wilderness Gathering: Wilderness for the New Century.

"They spoke together how wilderness can be a bipartisan issue," said Joe Neuhoif, Western Slope field director for the Colorado Environmental Coalition.

"McClinnis passed four wilderness bills while he was congressman from the third congressional district," Neuhoif said.

The three-day conference included hikes to proposed wilderness areas and presentations by Sen. Ken Salazar (D-Colo.) and Rep. Diana DeGette (D-Colo.), and various wilderness activists from around the state.

Held at Riverside School, the conference was attended by approximately 80 people from around Colorado, as well as Yellowstone National Park, San Francisco and Washington, D.C.

DeGette talked about the challenges she's faced over the years and her attempt to get a Colorado wilderness bill passed.

DeGette's bill would designate 62 areas in Colorado, covering 1.65 million acres of public land as congressionally protected wilderness.

Included in the proposal is 40,500 acres on and around the Roan Plateau. Existing oil and gas leases on the lands would be grandfathered into the legislation. No new leases would be issued on any protected lands however.

Grand Junction outdoors enthusiast Lee Gelatt signed up for the conference a month ago. He and his wife, Patty, and their two teenage children hike, mountain bike, raft, canoe and kayak through Colorado's wilderness.

"I wanted to see what the issues were and what I could do to help," Gelatt said. Gelatt said he was inspired by DeGette's speech.

Katey Buster and Bill Tembrock hike in Dominguez Canyon Friday for the 2008 Colorado Wilderness Gathering.  
Lee Gelatt



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“It’s been nine years (since she first introduced the wilderness bill) and she feels close. I’m encouraged by that,” Gelatt said.

“We’re working hard to support Diana DeGette,” Neuhoif said.

DeGette’s statewide package includes protection of the Greater Dominguez Canyons area, south of Grand Junction.

Members of Western Colorado Congress and Colorado Environmental Coalition attended the conference to “keep the discussion focused on matters important to us in western Colorado,” Neuhoif said.

A dozen conference participants hiked into the Dominguez Canyon area Friday with Hotchkiss guide Bill Tembrock, who shared history about the trail. Other less strenuous hikes in the area were offered Friday as well.

The conference continued Saturday with presentations about the wilderness movement — its history and different areas where protection is being sought in Colorado.

Sunday, participants discussed strategies for passing wilderness legislation in Colorado.

The conference was organized by a coalition of conservation groups from across the state working to protect wildlands.

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