

THE ASPEN TIMES

Poll shows support for wilderness

By [Scott Condon](#)

Aspen, CO Colorado

May 31, 2007

A coalition of environmental groups claimed Wednesday that Colorado residents stand behind its campaign to extend wilderness protection to additional public lands.

Environmentalists have often been labeled as extremists because they want to limit activities on the most pristine lands managed by the U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management, noted Sloan Shoemaker, executive director of Carbondale-based [Wilderness Workshop](#). But a poll of 617 Colorado voters commissioned by the environmental coalition showed support for expanding wilderness, he said.

Poll results showed that 71 percent of respondents said it is more important to protect wilderness-quality lands for recreation, tourism and wildlife than use it for energy development.

Shoemaker said the results showed that residents of the Western Slope were just as likely to support wilderness as Front Rangers. The poll was conducted in a way that gave the Western Slope representation that reflects its percentage of the state's population.

Results showed that 70 percent of Western Slope residents favor designation of wilderness-quality lands in or near their county.

The poll also proved that Colorado residents recognize the economic importance wilderness lands play in the state, Shoemaker said. Ninety percent of respondents said wilderness areas are important economically for the hunting, fishing and tourism opportunities they present.

Talmey-Drake Research and Strategy Inc. conducted the poll. The firm conducted 617 random telephone interviews with Colorado residents May 1-14. Wilderness Workshop, The Wilderness Society and the Colorado Environmental Coalition commissioned the survey.

The results should send a clear message to Colorado's congressional delegation, according to Shoemaker. "This shows we shouldn't tiptoe around the 'w' word," he said, referring to wilderness.

Wilderness Workshop is heading a campaign to add about 670,000 acres of wilderness to the White River National Forest. The organization's founders played a pivotal role in getting lands around Aspen designed as wilderness in the 1960s.

The 2.4 million-acre White River National Forest surrounds the Roaring Fork Valley and extends from Rifle to Summit County, and from south of Aspen to north of Glenwood Springs. Environmental organizations believe the federal government hasn't done enough yet to protect wilderness-quality lands in and around the forest. Their proposal would extend wilderness protection to lands in the Roaring Fork River basin, such as parts of Basalt Mountain, Red Table Mountain and between Thompson Creek and Coal Basin.

Wilderness Workshop will hold community meetings on its proposal throughout the summer, refine its plan based on citizen input, then try to convince a member of the state's congressional delegation to carry legislation by the end of the year.

Scott Condon's e-mail address is scondon@aspentimes.com.