

# THE ASPEN TIMES

## Hidden gems

By Paul Andersen  
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The conservation of wild lands is a gift to the future. It endures for as long as we have the foresight to protect it, which means restraint from expedient development and a vision for the values that only wild landscapes can provide.

Heroes of the conservation movement have become legend: Thoreau, John Muir, Teddy Roosevelt, Aldo Leopold, Robert Marshall, Howard Zanhiser, David Brower. These men form a pantheon of visionary thinkers credited with preserving wild lands from the taint of industrial society.

Locally, it was three women who took the initiative to preserve wilderness for those who would come after. They, too, have become legend: Connie Harvey, Joy Caudill, Dottie Fox. Inspired by their own deep appreciation for pristine nature, these women created the equivalent of a huge bank account for wild places surrounding the Roaring Fork Valley.

Many of us share the dividends from their work, enjoying wilderness as both playground and sacred ground. In wild lands exists a vibrant life force, an ethereal connection to something far older, far greater than man. Without conservationists, our nation would be poorer in its celebration of the source of the American spirit.

The opportunity exists today for a new generation of wilderness advocates. There are wild lands remaining, mostly in the West, that need visionaries with the foresight and conviction of the old guard. Vast tracts of those lands are within the White River National Forest, our own magnificent backyard.

Wilderness Workshop, based in Carbondale, calls these areas "Hidden Gems," and seeks committed individuals to save them as future gifts to all mankind. The newly launched Hidden Gems Wilderness Campaign has targeted hundreds of thousands of acres.

The Clear Fork Divide represents a 100,000-acre roadless area north and west of McClure Pass. It forms the headwaters of Thompson, Divide, Plateau and Clear creeks. The Wilderness Society labeled this wilderness candidate "too wild to drill" and has petitioned for its withdrawal as an oil and gas sacrifice zone.

The 57,000-acre proposed Red Table Wilderness straddles a high, timberline ridge that stretches from Crooked Creek Pass to Basalt Mountain, paralleling the Fryingpan. The Forest Service has recommended wilderness designation for a portion of this array of cirques, creeks, lakes and alpine meadows.

The Hidden Gems campaign seeks wilderness protection for a section of the Grand Hogback north of Rifle, and for Elk Creek, Canyon Creek, Grizzly Creek, Deep Creek and Sweetwater, which flank the Flat Tops Wilderness. North of Eagle, other candidates include Bull Gulch, Castle Peak, Pisgah Mountain, Crazy Horse Creek and Lower Piney.

The reasons to save wilderness are many, from biodiversity to clean air and clear water, but the most important motivation must become personal. That's why it's important to visit these areas, explore them, establish a physical relationship with the land, get a feel for what is at stake and what it could mean to your children and your grandchildren.

The Hidden Gems campaign has listed more than 600,000 acres of potential new wilderness, an ambitious goal to be sure, but one that inspires greatness and vision. The campaign can succeed

only with a groundswell of public support, especially from those of us who live here, who steward the land that gives us the high quality of life we enjoy.

If you care about wild lands, it's time to get involved and work for their protection. You don't have to be a Thoreau or a John Muir. Just be yourself. Fall in love with the land. Dedicate yourself to saving it. Appreciate it for what it gives you. For more information, contact Wilderness Workshop: 963-3977.

*Paul Andersen is a Wilderness Workshop board member. His column appears on Mondays - when he's not traipsing through the wilderness.*