

aspensdailynews.com

Published on Aspen Daily News Online (<http://aspensdailynews.com>)

Key to wilderness is collaboration, veteran environmentalist says

Writer:

David Frey

Byline:

Aspen Daily News Correspondent

CARBONDALE - Longtime wilderness champion Doug Scott began his fight to protect public lands over 40 years ago. His advice for local wilderness advocates: collaborate, and look for partners in unexpected places.

The Carbondale-based Wilderness Workshop invited Scott and other wilderness leaders for a weekend brainstorming session as it builds its Hidden Gems campaign to preserve several pockets of the White River National Forest and nearby Bureau of Land Management lands.

"This is a very inspiring set of visions for the landscape," Scott, policy director for the Campaign for America's Wilderness, said on Monday. "This is a very exciting proposal. With all the further tweaking and consensus-building still to come, this is a big deal."

Local wilderness advocates are proposing federal wilderness protections for about 700,000 acres from Aspen to Rifle to Sweetwater. Unlike much existing wilderness land, which tends to be high-altitude, stark alpine terrain, most of the Hidden Gems landscapes are lower altitude, including critical winter range for species like deer and elk.

That's true in most new wilderness proposals across the West, Scott said, as Americans are more accustomed to thinking about things like habitat and not just nice places to play. Polls show support for more wilderness protection, he said, and the support crosses party lines and geographic boundaries. Outdoor groups, like hunting and fishing organizations, have increasingly been supportive of wilderness protection, he said. Scott said wilderness organizers should reach out to church groups, even to traditional foes like off-road vehicle groups. They should at least offer them a seat at the table, he said, even if that means pulling some potential wilderness areas out of the proposal.

"Our movement has tried to be - and these guys are the perfect example of this - both idealistic and pragmatic," he said.

The Wilderness Workshop's proposal includes places like Hunter Creek near Aspen, Treasure Mountain above Marble, the Clear Fork Divide south of Carbondale, Basalt Mountain and Red Table Mountain, and Grizzly and No Name creeks near Glenwood. Organizers say it will likely be years before their plans are honed and a proposal is put forward by a legislator.

Scott has been involved in wilderness protection since 1966, two years after the Wilderness Act was passed, when he was a lobbyist for The Wilderness Society. As a graduate school activist, lobbyist and Sierra Club Northwest representative, he worked on many wilderness campaigns and dozens of state campaigns.

"It looks like what I do is advocate for wilderness," Scott said. "But really what I think I do is advocate against cynicism in our political system."

Despite the Bush administration's bad rap among environmentalists, the last eight years have been good years for wilderness, he said. Bush has signed 12 wilderness bills preserving 2.4 million acres, Scott said, and several more bills pending in Congress are likely to pass this session. Many bills past and current were launched by grass-roots efforts, he said.

"Ordinary people from all walks of life can be heard," Scott said.

He urged local wilderness supporters to try to bring together as many different kinds of ordinary people as they can to build a consensus for protecting federal lands in their backyard.

"We know it works," he said. "It works to preserve wilderness all across the country, and millions of acres have been preserved."

Local wilderness supporters hope to harness that kind of public support as they move their Hidden Gems plan forward.

"There is a magic about it that draws people of every major political party," said Steve Smith, assistant regional director for The Wilderness Society.

"I think people are feeling more of these increasing pressures of population and urbanization and mechanization and settlement," said Sloan Shoemaker, executive director of Wilderness Workshop. "They want a pressure valve."

dfrey@aspendedailynews.com

Order Weight:

6

archive_date:

1 day

Source URL: <http://aspdailynews.com/section/home/key-wilderness-colla>