

Hidden Gems FAQs

What is the spirit behind Hidden Gems?

The Hidden Gems Wilderness Proposal would protect 342,000 acres of ecologically critical lands in central Colorado. The effort is a direct response to the loss of and increasing threat to wildlands and the vital ecologies and mountain cultures they sustain. Over use and an increasing demand for natural resources threaten our wildlife populations, healthy ecosystems and clean water on unprotected lands. Wilderness designation ensures what little of the wild that still exists will remain for future generations of humans and non-humans alike.

Where are the Hidden Gems?

The Hidden Gems are located on public lands all around us. There are proposed Hidden Gems Wilderness areas in Pitkin, Gunnison, Eagle and Summit Counties. They are all located on federal public lands managed by the U.S. Forest Service or the Bureau of Land Management. Many of the Hidden Gems would add to existing wilderness areas like Snowmass Maroon Bells and Hunter Fryingpan.

Who's developed the Hidden Gems Wilderness Proposal?

The short answer is your neighbors. More than 100 locals in the four counties mentioned above have worked in one capacity or another on shaping this proposal, from volunteers in the Inventory Corps who helped identify wilderness-appropriate lands and hike leaders who led walks into the proposal areas with interested citizens to organizers who met with the people and groups affected by the proposal and mapping and wilderness experts who helped hone the proposal into its current form.

What criteria were used to develop the Wilderness Proposal?

The science of conservation biology and well accepted ecological principals guided our initial proposal and the boundaries have since been refined through extensive stakeholder outreach. Seventy percent of Colorado's designated wilderness is the spectacular but less biologically rich rock and ice landscape above 10,000 ft. The predominately low-elevation lands and roadless areas of the Hidden Gems provide far more important habitat for wildlife and contain much greater biodiversity. The Hidden Gems lands would dramatically improve the diversity and ecological value of wilderness in central Colorado. Acting now to protect the last remaining wildness in our valley is an act of tremendous foresight and humility and will leave a legacy of healthy wildlife, clean water and wildlands for children and grandchildren in perpetuity.

How far has the Hidden Gems Wilderness Proposal come?

A long way. When the idea of Hidden Gems was first introduced to the community in 2007, we had 612,000 acres in mind for protection. Through extensive community outreach and our own work, we have made **166 adjustments** and reworked the proposal to its current size of 342,000 acres. In the course of our outreach we have talked with hundreds of people and received feedback from over **140 different groups**, organizations and business.

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Where did all that land go?

It's still there, but it's no longer part of our wilderness proposal. We removed the acreage to accommodate ranchers with grazing rights in areas we wanted to protect but they were reluctant to get behind. We carved out areas that contain popular climbing areas and mountain bike routes. We have removed areas to address the concerns of water districts, fire fighters and land managers. We have worked with subdivisions to adjust boundaries to suit their needs. All of these changes were made after talking with the folks who were affected.

Has anyone asked you to add lands?

Yes. Most recently, three local ranching families asked Hidden Gems to include 5,000 acres in the Hay Park area at the base of Mt. Sopris in the wilderness proposal. Additionally, ranchers endorse 20,000 acres in the proposal to the west of Carbondale. There have been a few other instances where folks have asked us to expand the proposal in specific areas, and we've done our best to accommodate them.

Who else supports Hidden Gems?

100 local businesses and organizations have endorsed the Hidden Gems, and more than 4,200 people have signed an open letter of support.

Who impact would the Hidden Gems have on mountain biking and motorized recreation?

Very little. The Hidden Gems would close only five miles of mountain bike routes located either on abandoned and overgrown logging roads or short spur routes. The Hidden Gems would close less than four miles of designated dirt bike trails, only seven miles open to full-size vehicles, and only fifteen miles open to ATVs. These 25 miles of motorized routes are located in some of the most ecologically important areas in our region and many of them see very little use. Over 1,000 miles of roads and trails are available on federal lands for bikers and over 6,900 miles are open to motorized users. Similarly, the Hidden Gems would minimally affect snowmobiling. Less than 1% of Forest Service designated play areas in the White River National Forest would be closed, leaving over 319,000 acres open.

How have concerns of mountain bikers and motorized recreationalists been met?

Our most thorough and extensive negotiations have been with the motorized and mechanized recreation communities. Far more acres have been removed for recreation than any other reason (163,000) and nearly half (72) of all adjustments to the proposal have been at the request of motorized and mechanized users.

Have any environmental organizations been involved?

Yes. The ongoing work on Hidden Gems has been made possible by three Colorado based environmental groups – Wilderness Workshop, Colorado Mountain Club and Colorado Environmental Coalition – and the Colorado office of The Wilderness Society.

How can I learn more?

Checking out our website at www.whitriverwild.org, or call the Wilderness Workshop at (970) 963-7421.