



- Summit Daily/Bob Berwyn

County Commissioners to hear wilderness plan

Hidden Gems proposal could add 30,000 wilderness acres in Summit

BY [BOB BERWYN](#)

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SUMMIT COUNTY — A plan to add up to 30,000 acres of new and expanded wilderness areas in Summit County will require local support, and this week, backers of the “Hidden Gems” proposal will meet with the county commissioners to provide a few details.

More info:

For site specific Summit County information on the wilderness proposal see www.whiteriverwild.org and choose the proposal pull-down menu.

“It’s a good opportunity to get everybody on the same page,” said Lisa Smith, who has been coordinating the wilderness plan for the past few years.

Smith’s presentation is set for 9 a.m. today at the County Courthouse in Breckenridge. If all goes well, she will ask the commissioners for formal support, potentially in the form of a resolution. She doesn’t expect the board to act on the request immediately, but hopes to at least get the ball rolling.

“I know the first questions will be related to fire and beetles and what a wilderness designation does in that area,” Smith said.

Existing laws and Forest Service regulations already address the issue of forest health and wildfire mitigation activities in wilderness areas, but in the past the county commissioners have been highly aware of the need to protect local neighborhoods from wildfire threats.

A proposal to protect inventoried roadless areas on Summit County’s national forest lands spurred an in-depth local analysis. Some of the proposed wilderness lands overlap with the roadless areas, so the data from the roadless effort could be used to help evaluate the wilderness proposal.

Smith said she thinks the Hidden Gems proposal adequately addresses the wildfire issue, but looks forward to questions from the commissioners.

Part of the plan

The Forest Service studied potential new wilderness designations as part of the White River forest plan update, completed in 2002. The forest plan identifies about 80,000 acres of land across the White River National Forest as suitable for wilderness designation, but wilderness advocates say there is much more land in the White River forest that qualifies for wilderness status.

Under the Hidden Gems proposal, Summit could get nearly 30,000 acres of new wilderness, including a huge 13,000-acre parcel spanning some of the most rugged high country in the Tenmile Range from Quandary Peak south to Copper Mountain.

Other areas eyed in Summit County include Corral Creek, near Vail Pass, Hoosier Ridge, south of Breckenridge, a Ptarmigan Peak wilderness expansion, and a northern addition to the Eagles Nest Wilderness on Eliot Ridge.

Some of the Summit County parcels included in the tentative proposals are currently open to motorized use, while others include popular mountain bike trails.

“We are talking to different stakeholders. In your neck of the woods, that means mountain bikers,” said wilderness advocate Sloan Shoemaker. Developing a wilderness proposal that gets support from the mountain bike community means getting to a nitty-gritty level, he said.

“It’s one of those things where we look at in detail, trail by trail,” Shoemaker said. As it stands now, the boundary of the proposed Tenmile wilderness was shifted to reflect mountain bike use on the Wheeler Trail.