

COLUMBINE HONDO WILDERNESS FACT SHEET

THE COLUMBINE HONDO WILDERNESS STUDY AREA was created by an act of Congress in 1980. Since then, it has essentially been managed as a designated wilderness area, which is described in detail below. The Columbine Hondo Wilderness Coalition is a collection of organizations that seeks to have this special area elevated to full wilderness designation making this protection permanent and more readily enforceable by the US Forest Service. There are no roads within the Wilderness Study Area open to the public so no motorized access would be lost if the area is designated as a wilderness area. Given that there are no roads, wood cutting does not generally occur in the area. Much of the adjacent land is heavily roaded and much more accessible for wood cutting.

WILDERNESS IS FOR PEOPLE: Lands that are designated as wilderness areas are preserved in a natural state in perpetuity. Hunting, fishing, horseback riding, hiking, camping, canoeing and other non-mechanized outdoor recreation are permitted in wilderness areas. Mining and livestock grazing are permitted to continue in wilderness areas if these practices existed prior to an area's designation. Wilderness areas are protected from future development such as roads, dams, or other permanent structures; from most timber cutting and the operation of motorized vehicles; and from new mining claims and mineral leasing.

WILDERNESS PROTECTS WATER: One of the most important benefits that wilderness designation for Columbine Hondo would achieve is the permanent protection important headwaters of the Rio Hondo and Red River. Communities adjacent to this area rely heavily on these water sources for drinking and agriculture. Heavy impact activities, such as road construction, timber harvests and grazing, have the potential to degrade water quality primarily through sedimentation. Mining also affects water has very serious impact on water quality

LIVESTOCK GRAZING IN WILDERNESS: Congressional direction on grazing in wilderness areas is very well established. The Wilderness Act permits grazing to continue in wilderness areas, and committee reports have established guidelines for managing grazing in wilderness. Today, most wilderness legislation includes language directing that grazing management should follow the Congressional guidelines.

Section 4(d)(4)(2) of the Wilderness Act states that "the grazing of livestock, where established prior to the effective date of this Act, shall be permitted to continue subject to such reasonable regulations as are deemed necessary by the Secretary of Agriculture." In the committee report accompanying 1980 legislation designating wilderness in several western states (PL 96-560), the House Interior and Insular Affairs Committee developed comprehensive guidance on grazing in national forest wilderness.¹ Identical guidance for Bureau of Land Management wilderness areas was included in the report accompanying the Arizona Desert Wilderness Act of 1990 (PL 101-628).²

In short, this guidance emphasizes that grazing should not be curtailed simply because an area is wilderness; facilities may be maintained (including, if necessary, by using motorized vehicles); new improvements and facilities should be focused on resource protection; and motorized equipment should be used sparingly, and mostly in emergency situations or where permitted prior to designation.

FIRE SUPPRESSION IS COMMONPLACE IN WILDERNESS AREAS: Over 30 years ago, the House Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs eliminated any lingering uncertainty over the Wilderness Act's effect on fire suppression in a report accompanying the Endangered American Wilderness Act:

Section 4(d)(1) of the Wilderness Act permits any measures necessary to control fire, insect outbreaks, and disease in wilderness areas. This includes the use of mechanized equipment, the building of fire roads, fire towers, fire breaks or fire pre-suppression facilities where necessary and other techniques for fire control. In short, anything necessary for the protection of public health or safety is clearly permissible.³

¹ H. Rep. 96-617.

² H. Rep. 101-405.

³ H. Rep. 95-540, accompanying the Endangered American Wilderness Act, PL 95-237. (emphasis added).