



Sloan Shoemaker

## HOMELAND SACRIFICE?

### *Helicopter training plan pits security against wilderness*

By Dave Reed

**Y**ou've heard of jobs vs. the environment. Get ready for national security vs. wilderness.

On Oct. 19, the Colorado Army National Guard released a draft Environmental Assessment on a proposal to increase its operations out of the Eagle County Airport in Gypsum.

Since 1985, the Guard has operated the High-Altitude Army Aviation Training Site (HAATS), which attracts military pilots from all over the country to practice flying in our area's thin air and rugged terrain. The Guard has a written agreement with the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management that allows it to conduct training maneuvers over some 444,000 acres of public lands both north and south of I-70.

Those lands include Red Table Mountain, Deep Creek and several other roadless areas that the Wilderness Workshop and partner groups are campaigning to have designated as wilderness (or, in the case of Deep Creek, as a wild and scenic river).

But while the existing HAATS agreement mentions only the "use of the airspace over the public lands," the Guard now wants permission to land choppers at more than 80 backcountry sites, as well as



to double the number of sorties and flight hours.

By any reading of the Wilderness Act, permitting helicopter landings in an area is tantamount to disqualifying it from wilderness consideration. Yet, to our chagrin, the Guard's EA dismisses this concern out of hand – it proposes to issue a "finding of no significant impact," which is government-speak for "case dismissed."

#### **There's a war on, you know**

Predictably, the Environmental Assessment invokes national security early and often.

"Given the ongoing war on terrorism, U.S. aircrews will be decisively and indefinitely engaged in mountainous regions of the world," it states. The canyons, cirques, plateaus and pinnacles surrounding Gypsum offer the best simulation any-

where in the country of flight conditions in Iraq and Afghanistan, it claims, noting that pilots who have received HAATS training have suffered far fewer accidents in those countries than those who haven't.

Naturally, this puts us conservationists in a difficult corner. We don't want to be portrayed as unpatriotic or uncaring about the safety of our troops, yet we can't allow

these potential wilderness areas to be written off just like that.

As WW executive director Sloan Shoemaker says, "How much of the homeland do you sacrifice to protect the homeland?"

Red Table is the flagship area of our wilderness campaign; the Forest Service has recommended 50,000 acres of it for inclusion as wilderness, and is currently managing it as such pending Congressional action. Three other areas targeted for landings by the Guard – Derby, Red Dirt and Dome Peak, all located along the eastern flank of the Flat Tops – likewise contain USFS-recommended wilderness areas, while Deep Creek is recommended for Wild and Scenic River status. Three other affected areas – Bull Gulch, Castle Peak

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and the BLM portion of Deep Creek – are being managed by the BLM as Wilderness Study Areas.

We and our partner organizations around the state are currently weighing how to respond to this draft EA. Perhaps there's a compromise solution that meets the needs of the military without sacrificing potential wilderness areas – for example, by eliminating a few landing sites in the deep backcountry and adjusting some roadless-area boundaries to accommodate other landing sites. Statements by a spokesman for Rep. Mark Udall, whose district includes much of the HAATS acreage, suggest that the Congressman will also urge the Guard to compromise. (The EA says such an approach was considered, but rejected.)

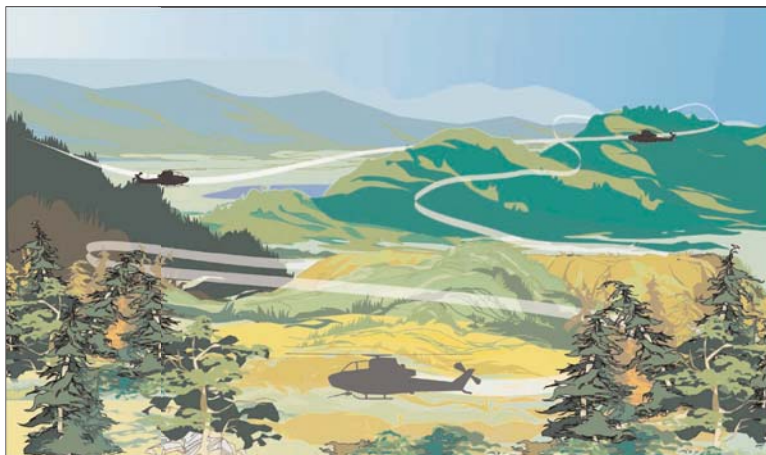
In the meantime, however, this proposal will make it politically difficult, if not impossible, to push for wilderness designation for any roadless areas within the HAATS training radius: members of Congress will likely be loathe to forward any legislation that looks like it's meant to foil the Guard's plans.

## Because we say so

Ironically, the Guard acknowledges that it's barred from taking any action that might jeopardize the eligibility of potential wilderness areas. But that's not a problem, according to the Guard,

because its operations would cause “no irreversible or irretrievable commitment of resources that would prevent future wilderness designation

obligatory “no action” alternative). And why were other alternatives not included in the draft EA? Well, they just didn't meet the Guard's needs.



*A representative HAATS training sortie.*

*“How much of the homeland do you sacrifice to protect the homeland?”*

– Sloan Shoemaker, WW executive director

by Congress” and “no impacts that would affect the eligibility, potential classification, or potential suitability of eligible wild and scenic rivers.”

The EA is strong on this kind of circular logic and because-we-say-so assertions, and weak on scientific backup. As such, it may be vulnerable to challenge.

Ignoring input from conservation groups, the public and the White River National Forest's recommended wilderness areas, the Guard has limited its assessment to just two alternatives: increasing HAATS operations, and continuing with present operations (the

Throughout, the document claims that expanded operations would have no significant effect on recreation, wildlife and wilderness values because they'd be “infrequent, random and short in duration.”

It even offers this reassuring analysis of the minimal impact its landings would have: “Given the area on the ground affected by contact with helicopter skids or wheels (estimated at 5 square feet maximum), each year up to about 0.83 to 1.66 acres of total ground surface would be contacted by landings.”

The Guard implicitly acknowledges that it has been

landing choppers all along without permission, and that it needs a new memorandum of understanding with the Forest Service and BLM to allow it to do so officially.

And here's the kicker: even if the “no action” alternative is selected, the Guard still wants that new MOU and legal landings. No action, indeed!

We live in interesting times. Military actions in distant lands (not to mention energy policies set in Washington) are having repercussions in the remotest corners of the Colorado Rockies. But by the same token, how we here in the Rockies choose to react to these incursions can have effects on a global scale.

What will we sacrifice? What will we refuse to sacrifice? Where will we draw the line?

## Please comment

The Colorado Army National Guard is taking public comments on its proposal until Dec. 23. Comments must be mailed to: Captain Robert Bell, Public Affairs Officer, Colorado National Guard, 6848 S. Revere Parkway, Centennial, CO 80112.

We'll send out more information on the HAATS draft EA via our email alert list in the next few weeks. If you aren't on the list and would like to join, please send an email to [info@wildernessworkshop.org](mailto:info@wildernessworkshop.org).

You can download the EA by going to [www.dmva.state.co.us](http://www.dmva.state.co.us) and following the “In the News” link.

# E. MAMM ROADED; GAS PIPELINE PROPOSED

In the previous newsletter, we reported that EnCana Oil & Gas was poised to build a road and exploratory well pad in East Mamm Creek – a major blow to the Mamm Creek Roadless Area, south of Rifle.

The road and pad were indeed built in August, and outfitter Jeff Mead reports that the effects on wildlife, and hunting, have been devastating.

“EnCana can say what they like, but I’m here to tell you, and so will my hunters, that it does affect the elk – in a big way,” he says.

In a normal year, according to Mead, the East Mamm drainage is his richest hunting area, typically yielding six or eight elk. This year, his clients took only one elk there, and had very few other sightings. In the three drainages that comprise his permit area, his clients’ kill ratio was below 40 percent, compared with 60-65 percent in other years.

EnCana has agreed to wait until after the hunting season

to drill the actual well. Mead says he has no idea what to expect after that – he’s just hoping against hope that the well doesn’t produce, because if it does, EnCana will push for another 15 wells throughout his permit area.

## Move it

Meanwhile, two natural-gas companies are proposing to build a pipeline that would cut across portions of four roadless areas west and southwest of Carbondale.

Motivated partly by our failure to stop the East Mamm drilling, we’ve pulled out all the stops to get the so-called Bull Mountain pipeline moved – and we’re hopeful we’ll get some traction on this one.

SG Interests I, Ltd. (SGI) and Gunnison Energy want to build a 25-mile-long pipeline to connect existing networks in the Paonia and Silt areas. The proposed straight-shot route would cut through the East Willow Roadless Area, just west of Thompson Creek, and

the Clear Creek Roadless Area, south of that. It would also skirt just inside the boundaries of two other roadless areas, Baldy Mountain and Reno Mountain.

SGI says a new 20-inch line is needed because the existing 6-incher can’t handle the gas volume expected from the huge increase in gas development expected before the boom plays out.

WW filed extensive scoping comments on the project in October, urging the Forest Service to choose an alternative route for the pipeline to leave the roadless areas intact. Further, we argued that the Forest Service has no business entertaining projects that impact roadless areas while the Colorado Roadless Task Force (see page 4) is deliberating on which roadless areas it wants to see protected, since to do so might preclude areas from consideration.

We also strongly argued that the Forest Service has the legal obligation to evaluate the cumulative impacts that the new pipeline might foreseeably have by facilitating further gas development in nearby roadless areas like Thompson Creek. (SGI holds most of the leases in Thompson Creek.) No agency has ever performed a cumulative air impacts analysis for the thousands of wells already drilled, and the tens of thousands expected, in the



SIOAN SHOEMAKER

*East Mamm Creek, showing the new road and well pad.*

Grand Valley portion of the Piceance gas field. Clearly, a pipeline designed to meet future capacity needs is facilitating the very development that will fill it. Approving this project is thus a threshold decision that would lead to greatly expanded gas development and its associated impacts.

Unlike an application for a permit to drill on an existing lease, the Bull Mountain pipeline will be handled under special-use permit authority that gives the Forest Service plenty of discretion to balance the “needs” of this project with the other values the BLM is charged with protecting. Thus, the agency should require the pipeline to be rerouted to avoid encroaching on roadless areas.

Separately, we’ve heard a tantalizing rumor that our scoping comments have caught the attention of some bigwigs in Washington. Stay tuned...

## VAIL WILDLIFE OVERPASS UPDATE

We’re expecting to hear by Thanksgiving whether our proposed vegetated wildlife overpass on I-70 west of Vail Pass has received earmarked funding in the 2006 federal transportation appropriation bill. The bill is currently being worked over by a House-Senate conference committee.

The overpass continues to gain enthusiastic support in the Vail Valley. With the Southern Rockies Ecosystem Project (our partner in this project), we conducted a highly successful overflight of the proposed site in August with elected and agency officials, Congressional staffers, media and a cadre of VIPs from Vail Resorts, including Vail CEO Adam Aron. Afterwards, Aron was quoted in the *Vail Daily* saying that he wants Vail Resorts to help fund the project.

# QUIET COMMOTION

*Editor's note: As those of you on our email alert list may recall, WW offered to pay the tuition of any members attending the Quiet Commotion, a forum on non-motorized recreation held Oct. 14-16 in Crestone. Andy Hanson of Aspen took us up on our offer, and filed this report.*

Back in the '60s, as a graduate student in geography at CU, I attended a trial in which several Colorado environmental groups were suing the Denver Water Board to protect what is now the Eagles Nest Wilderness near Vail. That experience was a rich initiation into environmental issues.

Last month I attended the Quiet Commotion in Crestone, and I have to say it was as eye-opening as my first involvement almost 40 years ago.

This year's Quiet Commotion focused on the need for "quiet" (non-motorized) uses to be better represented in travel management planning by the Forest Service and BLM. I

was struck by the fact that the well-organized motorized groups – the jeepers, snowmobilers, ATVers and dirt bikers – tend to have much more clout in these processes.

I was very impressed by the professionalism of the host group, the Colorado Mountain Club, and of the activists who attended from all over the state. We learned about several National Forests and BLM areas where quiet-use planning is successfully being implemented, and we did a field trip to a quiet-use rock climbing area called Penitentes that has been set aside on BLM land in the San Luis Valley.

Clearly this is the wave of the future if we can support the efforts of CMC, WW and other groups fighting for the preservation of quiet-use areas for those of us not inclined to be motorheads.

Thanks to that great weekend in Crestone and to the Wilderness Workshop, I am back in the movement!

## ROADLESS CAMPAIGN ROLLING

Momentum is building in the statewide campaign to urge Colorado Governor Bill Owens petition for 4.4 million acres to be protected under the revised Roadless Area Conservation Rule.

This is an extremely important issue, especially for mountain communities, because roadless areas are so valuable for wildlife habitat, wetlands, recreation and so on, yet their protection is generally taken for granted.

A state Roadless Task Force charged with making a recom-

mendation to Gov. Owens was empaneled in October and held its first public meeting in Delta on Nov. 3. The meeting drew an overflow crowd, with many speaking in support of roadless protection, but it was generally agreed that the roadless opponents did a better job turning out their folk. (A public meeting will be held in Glenwood Springs next June.)

Locally, WW and the Colorado Mountain Club are fortunate to have the tempo-

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## upcoming events

### “WILD FOR GOOD” SCREENINGS

Please join us for **free screenings** of this wonderful film that documents the importance of wilderness in America and celebrates the dedication and vision of our own “Maroon Belles” – Joy Caudill, Dottie Fox and Connie Harvey.

- ♦ *Wednesday, Nov. 30* – Eagle County Community Building, El Jebel, 7 p.m.
- ♦ *Tuesday, Dec. 6* – Dos Gringos, Hwy 133 (La Fontana Plaza), Carbondale, 7 p.m.
- ♦ *Wednesday, Dec. 7* – Glenwood Springs Library, 413 9th St., 6 p.m.

### CITIZENS' ROADLESS CAMPAIGN KICKOFF

This will be a strategy session for protecting roadless areas on the White River National Forest. Food will be provided!

- ♦ *Thursday, Dec. 1* – Carbondale Town Hall, 7 p.m.

### WINTER SPEAKER SERIES

#### Rob Edward: “Wolves in the New West”

Rob is the director of Sinapu's Carnivore Restoration Program.

- ♦ *Tuesday, Jan. 17* – Aspen Center for Environmental Studies (ACES), 100 Puppysmith Rd., 7 p.m.
- ♦ *Wednesday, Jan. 18* – Dos Gringos, Carbondale, 7 p.m.

#### Harvey Locke: “Large Landscape Conservation in the Rockies”

Two winters ago, Harvey delivered an inspiring slide show on the Yellowstone to Yukon Initiative. This time, he'll focus on the “Colorado island.” The following dates are tentative.

- ♦ *Monday, Jan. 30* – Dos Gringos, Carbondale, 7 p.m.
- ♦ *Tuesday, Jan. 31* – ACES, 7 p.m.

### ASPEN HALL OF FAME

Prepare to come honor our leading ladies, Connie Harvey and Dottie Fox, who will be inducted into Aspen Hall of Fame! The banquet is tentatively set for Thursday, Jan. 26 at the Hotel Jerome.

## ROADLESS

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rary services of Rebecca Van Damm, who is doing grassroots organizing for the roadless campaign in our area through early December.

Rebecca is employed by

Green Corps, a Boston-based environmental leadership training program. She's spending most of her time enlisting businesses and other diverse allies to come out in support of roadless protection; her efforts will culminate in a public meeting in Carbondale on December 1 (see page 4).

## WRNF MIS: MIA

Often the most fundamental rule changes are disguised by esoteric jargon and banal acronyms. So it is with the White River National Forest's proposal to revise its management indicator species (MIS) list.

National Forests are required to designate management indicator species as proxies for measuring the baseline health of ecosystems and the on-the-ground effects of management decisions. The WRNF has a list of 16 such species; it now wants to reduce that list to just seven. This is a big step backwards, and last month WW filed scoping comments urging the Forest to do better.

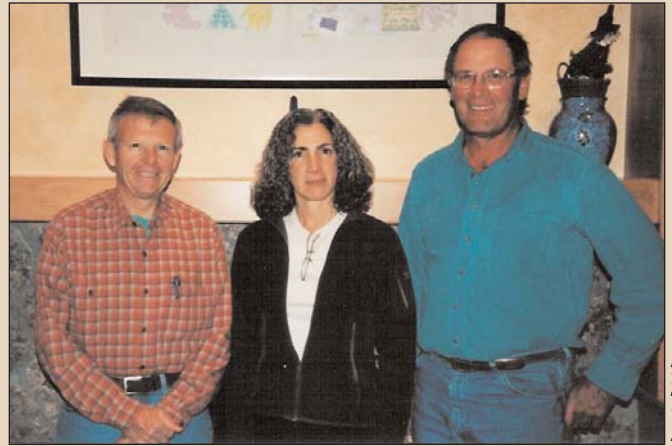
The current list is already inadequate, so to cut the number in half would make it practically meaningless. For one thing, there are at least 12 major vegetation types in the Forest – pinyon/juniper, aspen, etc. – which means there would be no basis for tracking the health of at least some of these types. (Ideally, there should be multiple MIS for each vegetation type.)

To make matters worse, several of the species are all but useless as indicators. MIS should be selected according to their sensitivity to impacts on their particular habitat type. Yet one of the seven species – elk – is a habitat generalist, so its numbers don't tell us anything about any particular habitat. And one of the two species proposed for aquatic habitats – macroinvertebrates – isn't a species at all.

Indicator species are supposed to be the proverbial canary in the coal mine: if their numbers decline, something's wrong and we need to find out what. A poorly chosen MIS list would not only fail to warn us of problems, it could well provide cover for letting the chainsaws rip.

The WRNF's move on MIS is not isolated – several other Forests in the region have taken similar action. Clearly, this is not driven by biological imperative; rather, it's on someone's political agenda to further eliminate any impediments to profiteering from public lands.

## NOW BOARDING



Meet the new WW board members (from left): businessman and former Tenth Mountain Division Hut Association director Peter Looram; Beth Cashdan, recently retired from the Aspen School District; and rancher and teacher Steve Child (who's rejoining the board after a several-year hiatus).

## WILDFIRE EFFORT LAUNCHED

On Nov. 9, WW's Sloan Shoemaker and Kevin O'Dea, wildland fire outreach coordinator for the Southern Rockies Conservation Alliance, hosted a meeting in Redstone aimed at kick-starting community wildfire planning in the Crystal Valley.

Turnout was disappointing, but those who attended were highly motivated to prepare for wildfire and, we hope, to take the message back to their homeowners' associations.

Apathy is all too common in this field, because most people still see wildfire as an inexorable force of nature that humans are helpless to stop. We're trying to spread the word that, while wildfire is indeed a natural and inevitable part of our ecosystem, there are many things we can do to reduce the risk of damage to our homes and neighborhoods.

With the ongoing drought and beetle infestations, citizens

and politicians frequently demand that government "do something" about wildfire. Typically, the solutions involve logging mature forests far away from communities. Yet the literature shows that such treatments do nothing to reduce the risk to life and property, and in an age of dwindling budgets, they only take money away from projects that are proven to make a difference where people actually live. Hence, we're promoting a more targeted approach that makes communities safer while at the same time leaving wildlands undisturbed.

Communities in fire-adapted ecosystems like ours must be equally fire-adapted. The next wildfire is not a matter of choice, but surviving it is. Contact us to bring our presentation to your subdivision or homeowners' association... we'd welcome the opportunity.

### FREE WW GIFT MEMBERSHIPS!

Give them as holiday presents to someone you think would appreciate WW's work! Limit one per member. Talk to Dave: 963-3977 or [dave@wildernessworkshop.org](mailto:dave@wildernessworkshop.org).

## SHORT TAKES...

Our warmest appreciation and best wishes to **Joy Caudill, Dottie Fox and Susy Ellison**. They are all stepping off the WW board after a combined total of over 90 years of service!

At its **annual retreat** in October, the board gave the go-ahead to a five-year plan

that will take us to 5 full-time staff and (fingers crossed) our own building. New board president **Tim McFlynn** and VP **Michael McVoy** are leading the fundraising charge. Further details in the next newsletter...

We're aiming to bring our long-awaited **Founders' Fellow** on staff in January.

WW's **Aspen Committee** is seeking more members to

help put on events. Please contact Mary Dominick, 925-7892 or marydom@rof.net.

Thank you to the fantastic **AHS Class of '06 prom committee** for their fundraising for WW, and to the many people who made donations in memory of **Matt Jankovsky**.

Farewell, **Richard and Beverly**, and may all your dreams come true in VT!

## DONOR HALL OF FAME

### \$5,000+

Maki Foundation  
New-Land Foundation

### \$1,000-4,999

Beth Fergus  
Mark Harvey

### \$500-999

Alpine Bank  
Balcomb & Green\*, *in memory of Matthew Jankovsky*  
Colorado Ski Country USA\*, *in memory of Matthew Jankovsky*  
Barbara Conviser/Michael Conviser  
Advised Fund of the Aspen  
Community Foundation\*  
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Bill Stirling  
Paula Zurcher

### \$250-499

Carol Duell  
Don and Susan Edmonds/  
Bristlecone Mountain Sports  
Ken and Emily Ransford  
Paula and Bob Starodoj\*

### \$100-249

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Steve and April Carver\*, *in memory of Matthew Jankovsky*  
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CVEPA  
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Steamboat Ski & Resort Corp.\*, *in memory of Matthew Jankovsky*  
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Lizzie Talenfeld, *in honor of JoAnne and Richard Rubinoff's birthdays*  
Craig and Becky Ward  
Susan Welsch  
Toni Zurcher and Chris Smith

### \$50-99

Daniel Alpert  
Alejandro de la Garza and Sharon Andersen\*, *in memory of Matthew Jankovsky*  
Thomas Brigham\*, *in memory of Matthew Jankovsky*  
Kathryn Buster  
Lee Cassin  
Anne Esson  
Mark Fox  
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Bernard and Donna Grauer  
Georgia and Andy Hanson  
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Dan Liston and Michele Seipp\*, *in memory of Matthew Jankovsky*  
George and Connie Madsen  
Owen McHaney

Martha Moran and Jim Kirschvink  
Warren and Karen Ohlrich  
Beth Schaefer  
Judith Schramm  
John and Diane Stine  
Sally and Bob Whiteneck and family\*, *in memory of Matthew Jankovsky*  
Louis Wille

### Up to \$49

Anonymous\*(2)  
Rory and Lucy Cerise  
Colorado West Broadcasting\*, *in memory of Matthew Jankovsky*  
Kristine Crandall  
Stuart Cruden\*, *in memory of Matthew Jankovsky*  
Gary DeFrance\*, *in memory of Matthew Jankovsky*  
Tania Dibbs  
Floyd and Lavonne Diemoz\*, *in memory of Matthew Jankovsky*  
Janice Estey  
Denison Levy  
Lisa and Jonathan Lowsky  
Nell and Henry Meador\*, *in memory of Matthew Jankovsky*  
Mary Millard  
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Bert Myrin  
Thomas and Elizabeth Penzel\*  
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Rachel Richards  
Sue and Peter Sharpe\*, *in memory of Matthew Jankovsky*  
Kathy Sovich\*  
Walter Ullrich\*, *in memory of Matthew Jankovsky*  
Crescenda Zuccaro\*, *in memory of Matthew Jankovsky*

\*Welcome, new members!



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The Wilderness Workshop's mission is to protect and conserve the wilderness and natural resources of the Roaring Fork Watershed, the White River National Forest, and adjacent lands.

WW is a nonprofit organization that engages in research, education, legal advocacy, and grassroots organizing to protect the ecological integrity of local landscapes and public lands with a focus on the monitoring and conservation of air and water quality, wildlife species and habitat, natural communities, and lands of wilderness quality.

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