

Chapter 5 – Complexes: Area-Specific Management Recommendations

This section contains our detailed, area-specific proposal utilizing the theme based approach to land management. As an organizational tool, this proposal divides the Pike-San Isabel National Forest into eleven separate **Complexes**, based on geo-physical characteristics of the land such as mountain ranges, parklands, or canyon systems. Each complex narrative provides details and justifications for our management recommendations for specific areas. In order to emphasize the larger landscape and connectivity of these lands with the ecoregion, commentary on relationships to adjacent non-Forest lands are also included.

Evaluations of ecological value across public and private lands are used throughout this chapter. The Colorado Natural Heritage Programs rates the biodiversity of Potential Conservation Areas (PCAs) as General Biodiversity, Moderate, High, Very High, and Outranking Significance. The Nature Conservancy assesses the conservation value of its Conservation Blueprint areas as Low, Moderately Low, Moderate, Moderately High and High. The Southern Rockies Ecosystem Project's Wildlands Network Vision recommends land use designations of Core Wilderness, Core Agency, Low and Moderate Compatible Use, and Wildlife Linkages. Detailed explanations are available from the respective organizations.

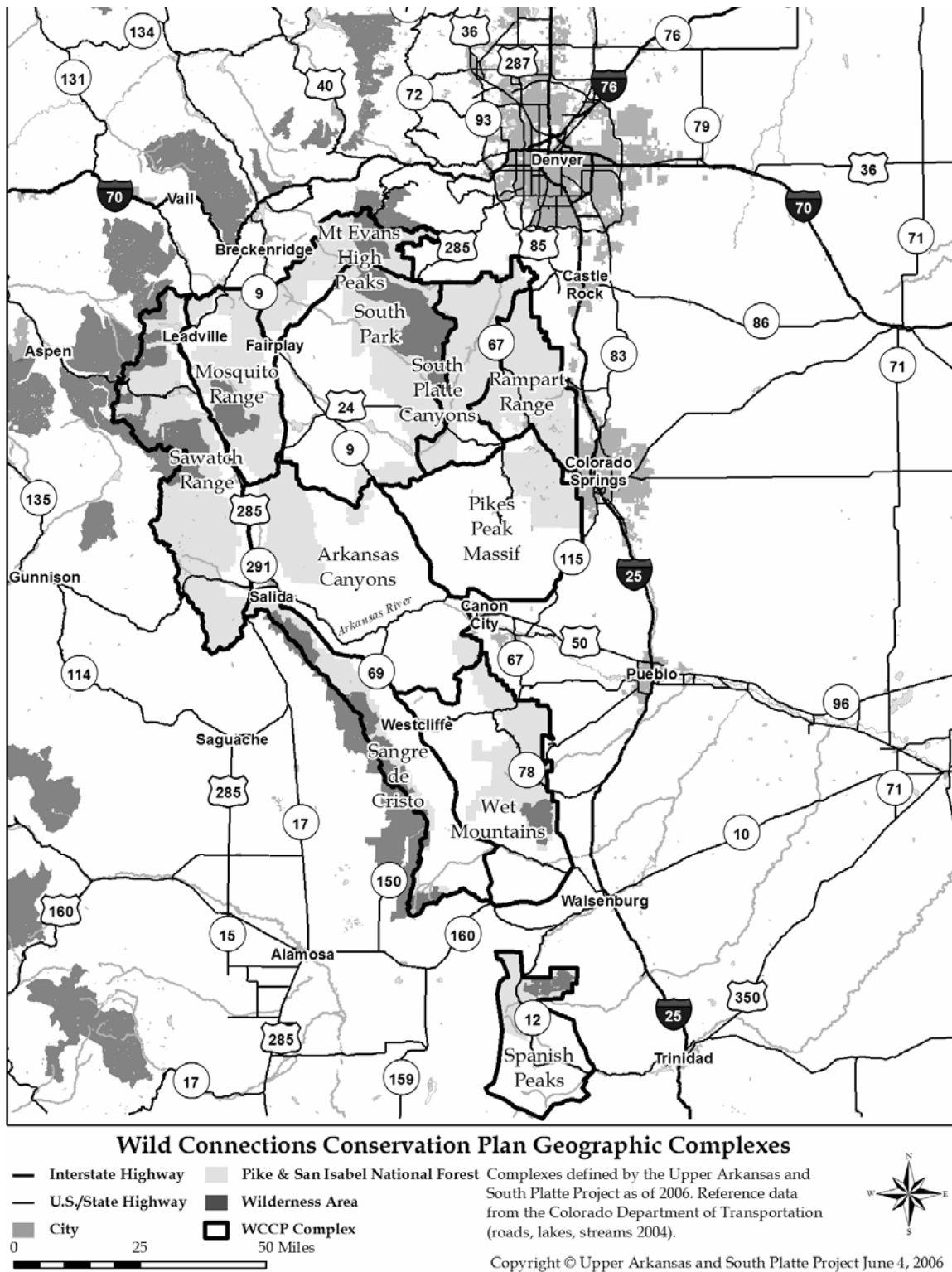
Complexes – Summary List by Watershed

Table 5.1: Summary of WCCP Complexes

Watershed	Complex	Ranger District
South Platte	Mount Evans High Peaks	South Platte & South Park
	South Park	South Platte & South Park
	South Platte Canyons	South Platte & South Park
South Platte and Arkansas	Mosquito Range	South Park, Leadville and Salida
	Pikes Peak Massif	Pikes Peak
	Rampart Range	South Platte & Pikes Peak
Arkansas	Sawatch	Leadville and Salida
	Arkansas Canyons	Salida, San Carlos & BLM Royal Gorge Resource Area
	Sangre de Cristo	Salida and San Carlos
	Wet Mountains	San Carlos
	Spanish Peaks	San Carlos

Complexes – Map Locater

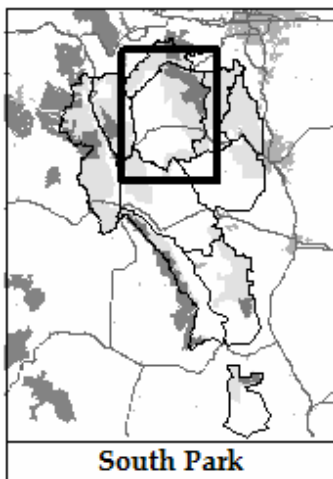
Map 5.1: Wild Connections Complexes



The South Park Complex



Thirtynine Mile roadless area



The South Park Complex includes the intermountain South Park and the Platte River, Kenosha, and Tarryall Mountains.

Eleven complexes centered on geographical features encompass sections of the Pike-San Isabel National Forest, adjacent BLM, state, and private lands. Fitting together like a mosaic, they cover the headwaters of the South Platte and Arkansas Rivers

Map 5.9: South Park Complex Proposed Management

Note: This map is located in the pocket at back of the document for usability.

Description

Overview

The South Park Complex includes South Park, the high intermountain grassland basin in Central Colorado, and the moderate mountain ridges and rolling hills to the east and southeast. The complex includes lands primarily in Park County with a small amount of land in Jefferson County. From Kenosha Pass the grassland basin lies below ringed by mountain ranges in all directions, with stunning views of the mountains along the Continental Divide to the north or the twin humps of Buffalo Peaks Wilderness far to the west.

A description of the landscape, vegetation, wildlife, and ecological values, including detailed descriptions of roadless areas, is followed by the recommendations for the complex organized according to the management themes. A discussion of connectivity within the complex and to adjacent complexes is found at the end.

The landscape and wildlife

The South Park complex includes the South Park basin and the hills and mountains on its northeastern boundary including the Puma Hills, Tarryall Mountains, Kenosha Mountains and the Platte River Mountains. Bison Peak, 12,431 feet, forms the high point of the Tarryall Mountains in the central eastern portion of the complex. North Cone Peak, 12,319 feet, Mount Blaine, 12,306 feet, and South Twin Cone Peak, 12,323 form the high points of the complex in the north. The South Park basin is around 9,000 to 10,000 feet. The low point of the complex is about 8,000 feet on the South Platte River near Lake George. The South Platte River and Tarryall Creek form the major waterways in the complex. Major tributaries of the South Platte River from northwest to southeast are Beaver Creek which flows into the Middle Fork of the South Platte River, Salt Creek and Fourmile Creek which flow into the South Fork of the South Platte River and Agate Creek and Buffalo Gulch which flow into the South Platte River as do the South and Middle Forks of the South Platte River. Major tributaries of Tarryall Creek from north to south are Park Gulch, Michigan Creek, Jefferson Creek, Rock Creek, Old House Creek, Ruby Gulch, and Marksby Gulch. On the north slopes of the Platte River Mountains and Kenosha Mountains, Kenosha Creek, Craig Creek, and Buffalo Creek flow north into the North Fork of the South Platte River. On the eastern slopes of the Tarryall Mountains, Wigwam Creek and Goose Creek flow from the South Park Complex to the South Platte River in the South Platte Canyons Complex.

The vegetation on the National Forest lands within the South Park complex is primarily ponderosa pine along the edges of South Park with Engelmann spruce and subalpine fir common on the higher areas. Smaller areas of bristlecone/limber pine and Douglas-fir are found in the forested areas, interspersed with mountain grassland and meadows. Much of the lower land within the complex is managed by the BLM and state of Colorado or is in private ownership. Mountain grassland and meadows is the most common vegetation type on those lands. There are extensive wetlands in the Craig Creek drainage between the South Platte River and Kenosha Mountains, as well as across South Park, where there are also notable extreme rich fens, such as the one at High Creek Fen, a Nature Conservancy Preserve. Agriculture occurs along the South Fork of the South Platte River, Fourmile Creek, and Beaver Creek with cattle grazing across most of the private land.

There is habitat for a large range of species including lynx, wolverine, mountain lion, bobcat, black

bear, mule deer, elk, bighorn sheep, pine marten, a variety of raptors and smaller mammals, among others. Ungulates abound in the South Park basin, eastern hills and mountains with pronghorn and mule deer at the lower elevations and elk and bighorn sheep at the higher elevations especially in the summer. A dozen locations of the rare mountain plover (*Charadrius montanus*) are found though the central South Park basin. Current and historical rare and sensitive species in the complex include wolverine, American peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus anatum*), American white pelican, bald eagle, mountain plover (*Charadrius montanus*) and ferruginous hawk. There are many rare plants and Porter’s feathergrass, which is found only in South Park, is especially notable. Numerous other rare plants and sensitive natural communities including wetland, fen, foothills and montane communities are also found in the South Park complex.

Ecological values of the complex

In addition to providing all the typical montane grasslands, foothills, and montane forest vegetation types to support a wide range of species, the South Park complex includes many rich and unique biological areas. High Creek Fen Preserve, although small, protects a remarkable variety of rare plants. According to The Nature Conservancy, it is the most ecologically diverse fen in the Southern Rocky Mountains and contains more rare plant species than any other Colorado wetland. Saddle Mountain in the southeastern portion of the complex is one of only three designated Research Natural Areas (RNA) in the Pike-San Isabel National Forest. Other proposed RNAs within the complex are Craig Park, McCurdy Mountain, and Thirtynine Mile Mountain. The Colorado Natural Areas Program has designated both the Saddle Mountain RNA and the High Creek Fen as Natural Areas. In addition, there are thirty-four Potential Conservation Areas (PCAs) in the complex with most having high, very high, or outstanding biodiversity significance.

There are seven State Wildlife Areas (SWA) in the Complex including the large roadless James Mark Jones and Tomahawk State Wildlife Areas. The Nature Conservancy’s Southern Rocky Mountains Conservation blueprint (TNC blueprint) includes much of the complex in units identified as having moderately low or moderate conservation value. The Southern Rockies Wildlands Network Vision (SREP Vision) proposes most of the National Forest lands in the complex to be protected as wilderness, wildlife linkages, or low use areas. In addition, the Southern Rockies Wildlands Network Vision proposes protecting much of the land along the South Fork of the South Platte River as low use compatible and recommends other land for study. Clearly various conservation approaches rate the South Park complex highly for its biological richness.

Wilderness and Roadless Areas

Much of the roadless lands within the South Park complex are in the low elevation foothills and montane life zones that are not well protected as wilderness in Colorado. Table 5.16 lists the roadless areas in the South Park complex.

Wilderness Areas

Lost Creek Wilderness

At 119,800 acres, Lost Creek Wilderness is the largest roadless area in the complex and is protected by Congressional designation. It lies on the mountain ranges above South Park on the eastern end of the complex, and includes a range of

Table 5.16: South Park Roadless Areas

Name	Acres (UASPP)	Roadless Under Roadless Rule
Farnum	19,200	Yes*
James Mark Jones SWA	19,100	n/a **
Lost Creek Wilderness	119,800	n/a
North Tarryall Peak	14,900	Yes*
Puma Hills	9,700	Yes
Thirtynine Mile	14,000	Yes
Weber Park	4,700	No

*Roadless rule area has significantly fewer areas than UASPP inventory.

**Area not managed by the US Forest Service (managed by the State of Colorado).

elevations from 8,000 feet near Tarryall Creek up to Bison Peak, 12,431 feet, that is the high point of the Tarryall Mountains. Lost Creek's countless polished granite domes and half-domes, knobs, spires, and buttresses make it one of the state's unique wilderness areas. Granite rock piles swallow Lost Creek no less than nine times, giving rise to the creek's name. Three mountain ranges run northwest to southeast across the Wilderness, the Tarryall Mountains along the edge of South Park, the Kenosha Mountains to the northeast, and the Platte River Mountains furthest northeast on the edge of the wilderness.

Like many Colorado Wildernesses, the Lost Creek Wilderness contains areas of alpine tundra especially within the Kenosha Mountains. However, large areas of Engelmann spruce-subalpine fir, lodgepole pine, Douglas-fir, aspen, and some ponderosa pine forests, give the wilderness a character of forest-ringed parks and clear streams. Lost Creek Wilderness has a number of rare plants and natural communities: yellow lady's-slipper (*Cypripedium calceolus ssp parviflorum*), livid and slender-flower sedges (*Carex livida* and *C. tenuiflora*), slender cotton grass (*Erioporum gracile*), Rocky Mountain columbine (*Aquilegia saximontana*), Rocky Mountain cinquefoil (*Potentilla rupicola*), green spleenwort (*Asplenium trichomanes-ramosum*), and Weber monkey-flower (*Mimulus gemmiparus*). Of particular importance are locations of Porter feathergrass (*Ptilagrostis porteri*) a highly imperiled plant found nowhere in the world but in Colorado's South Park. Natural communities include montane and subalpine riparian willow carrs: Rocky Mountain willow/mesic forb (*Salix monticola/mesic forb*) and Rocky Mountain willow/bluejoint reedgrass (*Salix monticola/Calamagrostis canadensis*), montane grasslands (*Danthonia parryi*) and Colorado blue spruce/water birch (*Picea pungens/Betula occidentalis*) montane riparian woodland.

One of the state's most productive bighorn sheep herds inhabits the Tarryall Mountains and there are several lambing locations. Mule deer and elk have summer range across the Wilderness, with winter range on the southwest side and elk calving areas on the southwest slopes of the Kenoshas. American peregrine falcons (*Falco peregrinus anatum*) have been observed in the Wilderness. Black bears, mountain lions, and bobcats share the region, and it provides denning and wintering habitat for lynx. There are wildlife linkages between Lost Creek and lands to the north – the Forest service identified a lynx linkage between Lost Creek and Mount Evans/Burning Bear roadless area and the Rockies Ecosystem Project identified a high priority wildlife linkage for lynx and elk between the Lost Creek Wilderness across Kenosha Pass and into the Jefferson roadless area in the Mount Evans High Peaks Complex. SREP also identified a high priority linkage for wide-ranging wolverine from the Lost Creek wilderness north across the Mount Evans Wilderness, the Arapaho-Roosevelt National Forests and towards the Wyoming border.

Two proposed RNAs are found within the wilderness: McCurdy Mountain and Craig Park. In addition to the proposed RNAs, Craig Meadows and Lost Park have many rare species including Porter feathergrass (*Ptilagrostis porteri*). Five PCAs of very high or high biodiversity significance are within the Lost Creek Wilderness. The Nature Conservancy's Conservation Vision identified all of Lost Creek Wilderness as having moderate or moderately low conservation value. SREP's Vision lists it as core wilderness.

Unprotected roadless areas

The Upper Arkansas and South Platte Project mapped six roadless areas in the South Park complex with four areas originally part of the Roadless Area Conservation Rule Inventoried Roadless Areas. Within the National Forest, one additional roadless area was found - Weber Park - that was not part of the Roadless Area Conservation Rule inventory. Outside the National Forest, the James Mark Jones State Wildlife Area is roadless. The roadless areas in the South Park Complex on National Forest Lands are described below from north to south.

North Tarryall Peak

The North Tarryall Peak roadless area of 14,900 acres includes its namesake at 11,902 feet and is in the northwestern end of the Tarryall Mountains. Topaz Mountain is also in the roadless area. On the north, the roadless area is separated from the Lost Creek Wilderness by Lost Park Road (County Road 39) through Long Gulch. The boundary of the roadless area is larger than the Roadless Area Conservation Rule Inventoried Roadless Area towards the west where some routes are cherrystemmed and to the east where many of the logging routes are revegetating. On the south the North Tarryall Peak roadless area is directly adjacent to the Lost Creek Wilderness.

The vegetation in the North Tarryall Peak roadless area is predominately Engelmann spruce and subalpine fir mixed with stands of bristlecone/limber pine and some areas of aspen and ponderosa pine mixed with Douglas-fir in the lower elevation areas to the southwest. Old House Creek and many other tributaries of Tarryall Creek have their headwaters in the North Tarryall Peak roadless area.

Pronghorn come up along the forest edge of the roadless area. Most of the area is potential habitat for lynx. Bighorn sheep are found in the roadless area with a large area of winter range in the north-central portions. The entire roadless area is mule deer summer range and the southwest third is mule deer winter range. Most of the roadless area is summer range for elk. Wolverine, an important top predator, was historically found in the North Tarryall Peak vicinity. Other rare and sensitive species found here include porter feathergrass (*Ptilagrostis porteri*).

Most of the roadless area is within The Nature Conservancy's Kenosha conservation portfolio area of moderately low conservation value, and the northeast corner is included in the Long Gulch area of moderately low conservation value. The northeast portion of the North Tarryall Creek roadless area barely intersects the Long Gulch at Platte River Mountains PCA of high biodiversity significance. The Southern Rockies Wildlands Network Vision proposes that the North Tarryall Creek roadless area be managed as core agency.

Farnum

Farnum Peak at 11,378 feet is in on the northern end of the Puma Hills. The Farnum roadless area is 19,200 acres and includes Schoolmarm Mountain, Martland Mountain, and Rishaberger Mountain to the south. County Road 77 along Tarryall Creek forms the northwestern boundary of the roadless area, and Tarryall Reservoir is just north of the roadless area. On the north the roadless area boundaries are similar to the Roadless Area Conservation Rule Inventoried Roadless Area boundaries. To the south the roadless area is significantly larger than the Forest Service's Inventoried Roadless Area, going west to forest road 237 and County Road 23, south to the National Forest boundary and west to forest roads 235, 231, 229 and 44.

The vegetation in the Farnum roadless area is ponderosa pine, Douglas-fir, bristlecone/limber pine with some aspen and lodgepole pine. Several tributaries of Tarryall Creek have their headwaters in the area.

The south and northwest corners of the Farnum roadless are on the edge of the larger South Park pronghorn winter range. Most of the area is summer and winter range for mule deer, with a winter concentration of deer on the northeast side, and winter range for elk. There is lynx denning and winter habitat across the northern two-thirds of the area, and SREP identified several low priority lynx linkages connecting Farnum to Lost Creek Wilderness, across South Park, and to Puma Hills to the south

The extreme southern corner of the Farnum roadless area is part of the South Park PCA of very high biodiversity significance and The Nature Conservancy's South Park portfolio area of moderate conservation value. The northeastern boundary is adjacent to the Lower Tarryall Creek PCA of very high biodiversity significance. The Tarryall Reservoir State Wildlife Area intersects the northern boundary of this roadless area. The Southern Rockies Wildlands Network Vision proposes that the Farnum roadless area be managed as core wilderness.

Weber Park

Weber Park is a mountain valley south of Tarryall Creek. The Weber Park roadless area of 4,700 acres is just east of the Farnum roadless area, separated from it by Allen Creek and forest road 235 and is bounded on the south by forest road 231. On the east it is bounded by forest roads 214 and 232 and by private inholdings. The Weber Park roadless area was not part of the Roadless Area Conservation Rule inventory.

The vegetation in the Weber Park roadless area is predominately ponderosa pine mixed with limber pine and Douglas-fir, with some aspen and Engelmann spruce-subalpine fir. In the roadless area there are rugged rock formations and steep gulches.

The entire roadless area is summer and winter range for mule deer and winter range for elk.

The northeastern boundary of the Weber Park roadless area is adjacent to the Lower Tarryall Creek PCA of very high biodiversity significance. The Southern Rockies Wildlands Network Vision proposes that the Weber Park roadless area be managed for low use.

Puma Hills

The 9,700 acre Puma Hills roadless area includes Pulver Mountain at 10,538 feet and Stoll Mountain at 10,863 feet and National Forest land from Wilkerson Pass south to County Road 92. The Puma Hills roadless area boundaries are similar to the Roadless Area Conservation Rule Inventoried Roadless Area boundaries, expanded out to private inholdings on the northeast. The western boundary of the roadless area corresponds to the National Forest boundary. Elevenmile and Spinney Mountain Reservoirs, part of Denver Water's system, are west and southwest of the roadless area respectively, providing excellent fishing, boating, and camping near the roadless area.

The vegetation in Puma Hills is predominately Douglas-fir mixed with some areas of Engelmann spruce-subalpine fir, aspen and ponderosa pine in the lower elevation areas and a small area of mountain grasslands and meadows in the west. Boyer Gulch and Caylor Gulch both originate in this area and drain to Elevenmile Canyon Reservoir.

The southwest corner of the Puma Hills roadless area is pronghorn winter range. Most of Puma Hills is an area of high summer activity for black bears with a large portion to the northeast of high fall bear activity. Bighorn sheep are found in most of the roadless area. Most of the area is summer and winter range for mule deer and for elk, with high winter concentrations of deer across the area. Sensitive species found in the area include American peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus anatum*).

The western boundary of the Puma Hills roadless area intersects the Colorado Natural Heritage Program's South Park PCA which is of very high biodiversity significance. The Spinney Mountain State Wildlife Area is less than three miles west of this roadless area. The west and southern third of this roadless area is included in The Nature Conservancy's South Park portfolio

area of moderate conservation value. The Southern Rockies Wildlands Network Vision proposes that the Puma Hills roadless area be managed as core wilderness.

Thirtynine Mile

Thirtynine Mile Mountain consists of a series of peaks (one at 11,549 and one at 10,841 feet) about 5 miles wide that is south of Elevenmile Reservoir on the southeastern edge of South Park. The 14,000 acre Thirtynine Mile roadless area encompasses those peaks, straddling the divide between the South Platte and Arkansas Rivers basins. The Thirtynine Mile roadless area boundaries are similar to the Roadless Area Conservation Rule Inventoried Roadless Area boundaries expanded to forest roads 270, 253, and 254 to the north, to Colorado Highway 9 on the west and County Road 59 on the east. The southern boundary of the roadless area is the National Forest Boundary. Elevenmile Canyon Reservoir is north of the roadless area.

The vegetation in the Thirtynine Mile roadless area is predominately Engelmann spruce-subalpine fir mixed with large stands of aspen with areas of ponderosa pine mixed with bristlecone/limber pine in the south and some mountain grasslands and meadows in the west. The rare pale blue-eyed grass (*Sisyrinchium pallidum*) and bristlecone pine/gooseberry-currant (*Pinus aristata/Ribes montigenum*) upper montane woodlands are found here.

The extreme western quarter of the Thirtynine Mile roadless area is overall range for pronghorn. Most of Thirtynine Mile is a fall high activity area for black bears. The entire roadless area is summer range for mule deer and the lower elevation areas are mule deer winter range, with winter concentrations on the north side. Thirtynine Mile is important elk habitat for both summer and winter range, and most of the area is a calving ground for elk.

The proposed Thirtynine Mile RNA is in the southern portion of the Thirtynine Mile roadless area. The Saddle Mountain designated RNA is just east of the roadless area. There is a PCA of moderate biodiversity significance on the south side of the area. An area of moderate biodiversity significance is just east of this roadless area. The Spinney Mountain State Wildlife Area is less than three miles west of this roadless area. The Southern Rockies Wildlands Network Vision proposes that the Thirtynine Mile roadless area be managed as core wilderness.

Historical and Cultural Features of South Park

Today, South Park is likely to bring to mind the comedy animated series created by Matt Stone and Trey Parker. However, more significant is the important role this region has played in the history of Colorado and the west. Some archeological, historical and cultural features of note include:

- South Park was inhabited by Utes before the arrival of white settlers in the middle 19th century.
- Just south of the Puma Hills roadless area, in December 1806, Capt. Zebulon Montgomery made an historic observation in his journal: “Found a river 40 yards wide, frozen over which after some investigation I found run northeast... Must it not be the headwaters of the river Platte? If so, the Missouri must run much more west than is generally represented.” [McTighe, 1989]
- South Park was explored by John C. Fremont with Kit Carson as his guide 1844.
- In the summer of 1859 a group of prospectors camping along Tarryall Creek decided to try their luck. One of the prospectors reported that the hole they dug produced gold “in scales nearly as large as watermelon seeds, smooth, and very bright yellow...” As a consequence, the party “made preparations to tarry-all.” Soon the gold-rush town of Tarryall was founded just east of Webber Park. Tarryall had over one thousand residents at its peak but by 1867 was nearly empty. [McTighe, 1989]

- The town of Fairplay was founded near another gold strike during this time and continued to be a center of gold mining up through the middle 20th century.
- South Park was connected to Denver by railroad with the extension of the Denver, South Park, and Pacific Railroad over Kenosha Pass in 1879.

Management Recommendations

Overview

Because of the value of permanent protection, the Wild Connections team recommends four of the six roadless areas in the South Park Complex for future Wilderness designation or Core management (Theme 1). There are three new RNAs proposed to supplement the one existing Research Natural Area (Theme 2). Several areas are proposed for connectivity areas (Theme 3) or active management for wildlife habitat (Theme 5). Grazing, sustainable logging/fuels reduction projects, mining or energy development, recreation on designated trails and roads, and dispersed camping is allowed throughout the complex, except for the statutory restrictions on activities in designated or proposed Wilderness areas. Table 5.17 lists the major management units by theme. Refer to the South Park Complex map for specific locations and refer to the roadless area descriptions above for more details on the unit.

Table 5.17: South Park Management Recommendations

Name	Acres	Recommended Management
Theme 1 – Natural Processes Dominate		
Lost Creek Wilderness	119,800	1.1 Existing Wilderness
Farnum	19,200	1.2 Recommended Wilderness
Puma Hills	9,700	1.2 Recommended Wilderness
Thirtynine Mile	14,100	1.2 Recommended Wilderness
North Tarryall Peak	14,900	1.3 Core Reserve
Theme 2 – Special Areas		
Craig Park RNA	10,800	2.1 Research Natural Areas
McCurdy Mountain RNA	13,600	2.1 Research Natural Areas
Saddle Mountain RNA	400	2.1 Research Natural Areas
Thirtynine Mile Mountain RNA	2,600	2.1 Research Natural Areas
South Platte Wild Scenic Recreation (also in South Platte Canyons)	21,100	2.3 Eligible Wild/Scenic/Recreational Rivers
Theme 3 – Natural Landscapes with Limited Management		
Lost Park	10,600	3.2 Connectivity Areas
Theme 5 – Active Management		
Buffalo Creek (also in South Platte Canyons)	37,600	5.1 Active Mgmt - Wildlife Habitat
Hall Valley (also in Mount Evans High Peaks)	18,700	5.1 Active Mgmt - Wildlife Habitat
North Fork South Platte	5,500	5.1 Active Mgmt - Wildlife Habitat
Tarryall	84,500	5.1 Active Mgmt - Wildlife Habitat
Tarryall Creek	45,400	5.1 Active Mgmt - Wildlife Habitat
Thirtynine-Thirtyone	27,900	5.1 Active Mgmt - Wildlife Habitat
Theme 9 – Significant Lands (Non-USFS)		
High Creek Fen	900	9.2 Significant Non-USFS Biological
James Mark Jones SWA	19,100	9.2 Significant Non-USFS Biological

Theme 1 – Natural Processes Dominate

Lands are managed to maintain highly natural conditions and management activities are virtually unnoticeable. They may include Wilderness as well as semi-primitive lands that provide user opportunities that are inconsistent with Wilderness such as mountain biking.

Theme 1.1 – Existing Wilderness

Wilderness Areas are designated by Congress and managed to protect and perpetuate their natural state, while offering opportunities for solitude and individual self-reliance.

- Lost Creek Wilderness is in this complex. It should be managed over the next decade to bring it up to the national standards reflected in the Wilderness Stewardship Challenge issued by the Forest Service in celebration of the 40th anniversary of The Wilderness Act. (http://natlforests.org/wilderness_stewardship_10year.html)

Theme 1.2 – Recommended Wilderness

Recommended Wilderness areas are those that stakeholders advocate for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System. All of the proposed wilderness areas meet the capability requirements of the Wilderness Act of 1964 for designation.

The Wild Connections Conservation Plan calls for Wilderness designation of (north to south) Farnum, Puma Hills, and Thirtynine Mile Mountain. They are each described in detail in the roadless area descriptions above. In general, the proposed Wilderness boundary is the same as the UASPP roadless boundary. The following benefits were considered in making these recommendations: permanent protection to enhance wildlife habitat and connectivity, protecting sources of domestic water, providing for native species and balancing motorized, high impact recreation in other parts of the complex with opportunities for quiet, challenging back country recreation. The recommendation to add a number of additional wildernesses is made in light of the heavy concentration of roads across the Pike-San Isabel National Forest in the lower elevations of the South Park Complex.

We believe that all of these areas meet the capability, availability and suitability criteria of the Wilderness Act and Forest Service Wilderness Handbook. These are discussed for the complex as whole below, with notations as to particular values or potential conflicts.

Capability

All of the proposed Wilderness areas meet the capability requirements of the Wilderness Act of 1964 for designation. They all provide opportunities for solitude, challenge and unconfined recreation once the trailheads are left behind. There are rugged canyons, steep ravines, and deep valleys without trails, mountain peaks with long undisturbed views and forested ridges. The imprints of humans are substantially unnoticeable, as care was taken to exclude areas of human impact. Historic mining operations are primarily outside of the proposed wildernesses. Logging was limited within the proposed wilderness and cuts are recovering, as are old access roads, bringing an end to signs of human use.

Availability

Likewise all the proposed areas are available for Wilderness with no known impediments. The proposed Wildernesses contain no active mines. The watersheds and streams are already allocated, and no new water projects are planned. Major highways are not anticipated to affect the areas.

The South Park Complex is not appropriate for timber harvest. The vegetation within the area is

largely intact with much of it tending toward mature and old growth characteristics. All or parts of grazing allotments 3 Mile, 39 Mile North, Badger, Craig Park, Eagle Rock, Farnum Peak, Geneva, Kenosha, Lost Park, Packer, Pulver, Puma, Rishaberger, Rocky, Shawnee, Tarryall, and Wigwam would be grandfathered in with Wilderness designation, although over time they should be retired where feasible. Overall, there are no known or anticipated threats to the proposed Wilderness areas that would preclude their designation.

Suitability

The main uses that would be forgone in newly designated Wilderness are motorized recreation on newly created or illegal roads and cross-country snowmobile use off currently designated routes. However, the very nature of these proposed Wilderness areas allows continued motorized access to the perimeter of the roadless areas, and in most cases between the areas. Dispersed camping and motorized recreation would still be permitted in and near the Weber Park roadless areas, the western slopes of the Tarryall Mountains, and the central Puma Hills.

There are numerous ecological values that support the designation of the proposed Wilderness areas in this complex:

- The areas add low elevation ecosystems and riparian zones to the National Wilderness System including lands along the edges of South Park.
- Farnum, Puma Hills, and Thirtynine Mile provide protective habitat on the eastern and southern slopes of South Park.
- Habitat for a host of rare and endangered plants, mammals, amphibians, insects and birds including mountain plover (*Charadrius montanus*), American peregrine falcon, Porter feather-grass and pale blue-eye-grass.
- Rare foothills, montane grassland, and montane riparian natural communities would be protected.
- Domestic and agricultural water supplies are best protected from erosion and pollution when they are located on roadless areas. The South Park complex includes many tributaries to the South Platte River that provides the water supply for metropolitan Denver and for many farming communities in northeastern Colorado and Nebraska. The South Platte River forms one of the two main tributaries for the Platte River, one of the most significant river systems in the watershed of the Missouri River.
- Rugged, steep areas, backcountry adventures, solitude and great vistas are present in these areas.
- Local economies will be enhanced by their proximity to Wilderness areas, as these are prime destinations for self-guiding and outfitter trips.

Theme 1.3 – Core Reserve

Core Reserves are areas of unroaded land which have been shaped primarily by natural forces but are not desirable for designation as wilderness. They emphasize the maintenance and sustainability of current biological diversity.

- North Tarryall Peak although roadless and meeting many of the requirements for wilderness, is recommended for core management. Logging roads and cuts on the perimeter reduce the chance for a wilderness experience and would make it difficult to define a wilderness boundary. Core areas have the strong protection appropriate for this rugged wild area. It is important to protect this area, which is important for wildlife and connects the Lost Creek Wilderness to South Park, from pressure for additional recreation.

Theme 2 – Special Areas

Theme 2 areas are managed to protect or enhance areas with unusual characteristics, including Research Natural Areas, special biological or geological areas, cultural/historical areas or other special designations.

Theme 2.1 – Research Natural Areas: Existing and Proposed

Research Natural Areas (RNAs) form a long-term network of ecological reserves designated for research, education, and the maintenance of biodiversity. Emphasis is on research, study, observations, monitoring, and educational activities that allow ecological processes to prevail with minimal human intervention.

To supplement the range of research opportunities and increase the ecosystem representation we recommend that Craig Park, McCurdy Mountain, and Thirtynine Mile Mountain be added to the RNA system and that Saddle Mountain be retained in the RNA system. Each has their unique combination of ecological values that will enhance the RNA system.

- The 400-acre Saddle Mountain area, just east of the Thirtynine Mile Mountain roadless area, has already been designated as RNA in part because of its large area of high quality montane grassland that has not been grazed by domestic livestock since 1951.
- The Craig Park proposed RNA, some 10,800 acres, lies within the existing Lost Creek Wilderness. The Craig Park proposed RNA includes four rare plant communities: Parry's oatgrass (*Danthonia parryi*); bristlecone pine/gooseberry-currant (*Pinus aristata/Ribes montigenum*); bristlecone pine/alpine clover (*Pinus aristata/Trifolium dasyphyllum*); and aspen/water birch (*Populus tremuloides/Betula occidentalis*), as well as a bristlecone-Engelmann forest unique to South Park. Craig Park includes a 930-acre complex of fens, willow carrs, and beaver dams; extensive, high-quality fen-wetland; and high-elevation mountain meadows, tundra, and old-growth forest. The Center for Native Ecosystems lists the proposed RNA as an area of high conservation significance.
- The McCurdy Mountain proposed RNA, some 13,600 acres, lies within the existing Lost Creek Wilderness. Peregrine falcon are documented in McCurdy Mountain together with a rare Colorado blue spruce/water birch (*Picea pungens/Betula occidentalis*) plant community. McCurdy Mountain has high-quality subalpine carrs and fens, excellent representation of upland, wetland ecosystems, and old-growth Engelmann spruce and bristlecone pine. The Center for Native Ecosystems lists the proposed RNA as an area of high conservation significance.
- The Thirtynine Mile Mountain proposed RNA, approximately 2,600 acres, is within the proposed Thirtynine Mile Mountain Wilderness. It is an intact ecosystem with excellent examples of bristlecone pine associations and one of the largest bristlecone pine stands in Colorado, as well as montane grassland communities in good condition. It also contains a rare bristlecone pine/gooseberry-currant (*Pinus aristata/Ribes montigenum*) plant community.

Theme 3 – Natural Landscapes with Limited Management

Theme 3 management maintains or restores the natural character of these areas while providing limited opportunities for recreation, including backcountry motorized and non-motorized settings.

Fuels treatment and prescribed fire are conducted primarily to maintain or restore natural ecological conditions. Livestock grazing is common.

Theme 3.2 – Connectivity Areas

Management emphasis is to facilitate daily, seasonal, and natal dispersal movements of native wildlife between larger blocks of suitable habitat.

The National Forest land connecting the Lost Creek Wilderness to North Tarryall Peak is an area requiring special attention to protect wildlife movement. This area, named Lost Park, includes and connects elk summer range and calving grounds and, historically, wolverine were sighted near this area. The designation protects wildlife movement while supporting compatible recreational uses.

Theme 5 – Active Management

These areas are managed to meet a variety of ecological and human needs with active management for a full spectrum of multiple use activities such as: wildlife habitat, energy development, timber harvest, livestock grazing, dispersed motorized recreation, prescribed fire, and vegetation treatments. This zone is where intensive timber management can occur for commercial production and fuels reduction objectives.

Theme 5.1 – Active Management for Wildlife Habitat

Management objective is to provide high quality, all-season habitat, forage, cover, escape terrain, solitude breeding habitat, and protection for a variety of wildlife species and associated plant communities.

The National Forest lands on the western slopes of the Tarryall Mountains (Tarryall Creek), in the central Puma Hills (Tarryall), and along the northern (Buffalo Creek and Hall Valley) and southern (Thirtynine-Thirtyone) boundaries of the complex are included in this theme. These lands connect the Lost Creek Wilderness, North Tarryall Creek, Farnum, and Puma Hills roadless areas to South Park on the west and the South Platte Canyons to the east, or are located along the forest boundary, with road densities ranging from low to high. The Weber Park roadless area falls within the Tarryall unit, and we strongly recommend that all roadless lands be managed under the provisions of the Roadless Area Conservation Rule with additional guidance from the management objectives and guidelines of this theme. The active management for wildlife habitat multiple use designation has provisions that will enhance wildlife considerations. Consideration should be given to the sensitive wildlife areas: deer fawning, elk calving, and bighorn sheep lambing areas; winter range for ungulates; locations of rare, endangered, or sensitive species; and accommodation of larger carnivores such as lynx.

Theme 9 – Significant Lands (Non-USFS)

Theme 9 management is used to highlight and acknowledge other lands critical to both habitat and connectivity such as adjacent BLM lands. It is critical that Forest management considers the greater ecosystem to which it is connected and that forest activities be compatible with management activities on these adjacent public lands.

Theme 9.2 – Significant Non-Forest Service Biological Areas

Wild Connections has explicitly included State Parks and State Wildlife Areas, especially in South Park, the Wet Mountain Valley, and the land between South Park and the Arkansas River due to their important biological values. These are beyond the management authority of the USFS, but as the Wild Connections Conservation Plan is focused on larger ecoregion sustainability, these lands are critical to acknowledge regardless of political ownership.

James Mark Jones SWA is located along Reinecker Ridge and adjacent grasslands, in the center of South Park, southeast of Fairplay and north of Hartsel. Our area includes the adjacent Tomahawk State Wildlife Area at the confluence of Trout Creek and the Middle Fork of the South Platte River on the extreme south. The SWA is essentially roadless as are much of the contiguous BLM lands. Mountain grasslands and meadows with some areas of bristlecone/limber pine, ponderosa pine, and aspen provide a variety of habitats. The entire area is overall range for pronghorn and a significant

amount of pronghorn winter range is located on the south end of Reinecker Ridge. There is summer and winter range for mule deer and elk, and the northwest corner is an area of high fall activity for black bears that extends toward Highway 285. Most of the James Mark Jones SWA roadless area is within the large South Park and Sevenmile PCAs of very high biodiversity significance and The Nature Conservancy's equally large South Park conservation portfolio area of moderate conservation value. The Southern Rockies Wildlands Network Vision proposes most of the James Mark Jones SWA as an area needing study.

High Creek Fen has been mentioned in the introduction to the South Park Complex. This Nature Conservancy Preserve protects a rich assemblage of rare plants that is unique both to Colorado and the Southern Rocky Mountains. "The preserve is the most ecologically diverse, floristically rich fen known to exist in the Southern Rocky Mountains. Indeed, it contains more rare plant species than any other wetland known in Colorado" (The Nature Conservancy 2005).

Connectivity

An important aspect of our conservation perspective is connections between protected core areas. The South Park complex is an example of the core reserve model with protected core areas connected by wildlife linkages. However the protected core areas proposed in the South Park complex may be smaller than is ideal for some species.

Connectivity within the complex is not ideal. The major barriers to animal movement are US Highway 24 and Colorado Highway 9. Numerous forest service and county roads within the complex may be barriers especially to smaller animals. Connectivity between the west side of Lost Creek Wilderness and North Tarryall Peak core reserve is interrupted by the island of logged and roaded land, and Colorado Highway 77 in the Tarryall Creek corridor likewise separates Lost Creek Wilderness from the Farnum proposed Wilderness. Puma Hills and Thirtynine Mile proposed Wilderness areas are disjunct because of intervening private or roaded public lands. However, the proposed management of some roaded areas for animal movement would provide an opportunity to study and address these issues.

There are major barriers to connectivity between the South Park and the Mount Evans High Peaks Complex to the north and the Mosquito Range to the west. US Highway 285 is a major barrier to animal movement, and the Colorado Division of Wildlife has recorded a number of highway segments where there are frequent wildlife-vehicle collisions. The Southern Rockies Ecosystem Project and the Forest Service have identified several linkages for lynx, elk and wolverine across US Highway 285, notably in the general Kenosha Pass area. Connectivity between South Park and the Arkansas Canyons area to the south and to the South Platte Canyons to the east is fairly good. County and other rural roads form barriers between the South Park Complex and the Arkansas Canyons Complex to the south but there is little human habitation. South Park and the South Platte Canyons are connected primarily across Forest Service land. Lost Creek Wilderness adjoins proposed wilderness and wildlife linkages in the South Platte Canyons Complex either directly or separated only by a Forest Service road.

Summary

While much of the South Park Complex is in private, state, or BLM hands, the forested areas around the edges are extremely valuable in their own right as wildlife habitat and to maintain connectivity across broader landscapes and for a variety of recreation pursuits. These National Forest lands are an important part of the network of core reserves and habitat linkages that will help preserve the biodiversity of the Pike-San Isabel National Forest far into the future.

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