

WRA Statement on Hidden Gems – June 1, 2010

Western Resource Advocates thanks Congressman Polis for his leadership on wilderness and urges him to sponsor a bill to protect the lands in the Hidden Gems proposal. These spectacular and inspiring lands are deserving of wilderness protection. They enjoy overwhelming support across Colorado and the nation.

We hope that 2009 set a precedent for omnibus legislation protecting public lands and designating wilderness. The work of the 111th Congress will be incomplete until it passes another stewardship bill, and that national bill will be incomplete if Hidden Gems is pared back.

Habitat and wild places across Colorado and the West are lost each and every day to a depressing range of factors – ranging from residential subdivisions and associated strip malls; to motorized incursions and oil & gas infrastructure. Permanent wilderness protection is the best – and often the only – way of ensuring that future generations will be able to appreciate nature and live in a region with healthy intact ecosystems.

Colorado has been a wilderness leader since well before 1920, when forest ranger Arthur Carhart was instrumental in kicking off the modern wilderness protection movement by winning designation of Trapper’s Lake as a Primitive Area. Trapper’s Lake is now part of the 235,406 acre Flat Tops Wilderness on the White River National Forest – a wildlands complex of sufficient integrity to be deemed potentially suitable for wolf reintroduction.

Today, Congressman Polis and the supporters of Hidden Gems are continuing in Carhart’s tradition, making decisions today for the benefit of future generations. More of the same thinking needs to be applied to deserving lands across Colorado, including the urgent need to protect ecosystems below the alpine tundra and high-altitude forests dominating existing wilderness in Colorado. Hidden Gems is a positive step forward that includes several mid-elevation areas – to start us on the path of protecting all ecosystem types and a greater range of biodiversity in the wilderness system.

Diverse wilderness lands are also good for recreational opportunities and the economy. Designation ensures that these areas will remain available to escape our ever-growing cities; and to support diverse resources and uses including plants, animals, headwaters streams, air quality, hunting, fishing, and ecosystem resiliency. Wilderness is a sustainable building block for a healthy and diverse economy.

WRA is committed to work with stakeholders and the Congressional delegation to bring a brighter wilderness future to Colorado. Thoreau had it right: “In wildness is the preservation of the world.”