



March 24, 2010

The Honorable Jared Polis  
United States House of Representatives  
501 Cannon House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Representative Polis:

The American Motorcyclist Association (AMA) is very disappointed to learn that you are considering sponsorship of a Wilderness bill within the coming weeks involving a proposal from the Hidden Gems Wilderness Campaign. According to press reports, the Hidden Gems Wilderness Campaign calls for the designation of 379,000 acres of public lands as Wilderness in the White River and Gunnison National Forests, such as Flattops, Basalt Mountain, Red Tables, Thompson Creek and other areas.

Founded in 1924, the AMA is the premier advocate of the motorcycle community, and it represents the interests of millions of on- and off-highway motorcyclists. Our mission is to promote the motorcycle lifestyle and protect the future of motorcycling.

The AMA and its sister organization the All-Terrain Vehicle Association (ATVA) strongly encourages you not to introduce this proposal as legislation and urge you to reach out to potential affected user groups, local and state elected officials and other Colorado members of Congress for input on how such a designation will displace recreation opportunities and endanger property and lives that will be more vulnerable to the threat of forest fires.

Public lands are for all Americans and not just for the able bodied. Our members represent the vast spectrum of individuals who enjoy our nation's public lands and are not just the nimble and fit but also families with small children who wish to recreate together as well as active senior citizens and handicapped who like the freedom to access the outdoors that off-highway vehicles and all-terrain vehicles provide.

The AMA opposes any process that does not allow full public debate on the disposition of public lands. Indeed, these designations deserve to be considered to allow time for thoughtful deliberation and input from affected user groups, local and state elected officials and Congress. However, the AMA, Colorado Off Highway Vehicle Coalition (COHVCO), Trails Preservation Alliance (TPA) nor any of their individual members or member clubs were contacted or asked for input from your office to avoid conflict with existing multiple use (including, but not limited to motorized) activities.

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While the AMA supports the appropriate designation of Wilderness areas as they apply to the definition of the 1964 Wilderness Act, many of the acres in the Hidden Gems Wilderness Campaign proposal do not meet the definition of Wilderness. Indeed, the Wilderness Act defines Wilderness, with a capital 'W', as those areas which are essentially in a natural state, where changes are produced by the environment itself—not by the hand of man. Much of the land in question is criss-crossed by roads, trails, power lines, bridges and structures. Surely this does not meet the definition of Wilderness.

Recently a statement issued by the Basalt Fire District's board of directors reinforced our members' concerns. On March 17, according to *The Aspen Times*, the board "voted 4-0 to oppose portions of the Hidden Gems Wilderness Campaign over concerns it will impede firefighters when battling blazes on Basalt Mountain."

When referring to the question about the ability to seek permission to battle fires in a Wilderness area, Bob Guion, a board member on the Basalt Fire District board of directors, according to *The Aspen Times* added: "The Forest Service is reluctant to approve use of motorized vehicles in Wilderness for fighting or fuel reduction." The newspaper said Guion's research indicated it has never been granted in Colorado.

Absent full participation from the public, a compelling argument could be made that this type of possible legislation does more to protect public lands *from* future generations rather than *for* future generations.

It is my sincere hope that you will engage the public by bringing all interested parties together to be part of your deliberations on the disposition of public lands and not relinquish it to a single special interest group that acts as a gatekeeper of public lands policy for Colorado. The AMA and its members stand ready to serve as a resource for you and your staff as you further consider responsible public access to America's public lands.

Thank you for your time and consideration of our request. We look forward to your timely response to this important matter. Should you have any questions or request additional information, please do not hesitate to contact Rick Podliska, Washington Representative, by phone at 202-742-4302 or by e-mail at [rpodliska@ama-cycle.org](mailto:rpodliska@ama-cycle.org).

Sincerely,



Edward Moreland

Vice President, Government Relations