

Fremont County Public Lands Initiative

A Citizen's Guide to the Draft Management Recommendations

Since June 2016, a group of local citizens has met to negotiate the future of the eight Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs) and other lands in Fremont and Natrona Counties. These nine hardworking volunteers represent interests from agriculture, energy, recreation (both motorized and non-motorized), conservation, county commissions, sportsmen, and the general public. The advisory committee, appointed by the county commissioners, has held open meetings, reviewed scientific reports, hosted field trips, taken public comments, and analyzed maps and agency documents in order to fully understand the values of these places. This May, the committee finished draft management recommendations for our wildlands.

Why have we negotiated management for these areas? Our WSAs have been managed to maintain their wilderness qualities since 1991, and only Congress can change that management. Other areas were considered in these recommendations, where permanent management changes would benefit our communities. If our county commissioners approve these recommendations, Senator John Barrasso's office will turn the recommendations into federal legislation.

But first, the committee needs to hear from you! Sharing your perspective about how these lands should be managed will help ensure the committee has created the best long-term vision for these special places.

The Advisory Committee has created the following recommendations:

Sweetwater Rocks: The Rocks are the unique remnants of ancient mountains. These granite domes and grassy pockets create havens for wildlife, ideal family camping spots, and outstanding rock climbing opportunities. These recommendations apply to four wilderness study areas: Lankin Dome, Split Rock, Miller Springs, and Savage Peak:

- Hard rock mining is prohibited and oil and gas development cannot occur on the surface. Overhead transmission lines, renewable energy, and communications towers are not allowed.
- Motorized use will be allowed on existing roads (where that use is currently allowed).
- Underground pipelines are allowed in the Beef Gap corridor between Split Rock and Miller Springs.
- Grazing will continue.
- Land exchanges to improve public access will be explored.

Sweetwater Canyon: This one-of-a-kind river canyon, cutting through the rolling sagebrush hills of South Pass, offers unparalleled fishing, hunting, camping, and wildlife viewing. The committee has recommended designating ~6000 acres as the Sweetwater Canyon Wilderness. The wilderness boundary was drawn around existing motorized routes; within the wilderness, motorized recreation and mining will be off-limits but grazing and recreational uses (including hunting and fishing) will continue. The area

that won't be wilderness will be managed similarly to the surrounding landscape, with these additional recommendations:

- No hard rock mining or oil and gas leasing.

Dubois Badlands: These colorfully striped badlands, composed of highly erodible soils, create a picturesque backdrop for the town of Dubois and are well-loved by locals seeking afternoon hikes and weekend horseback rides. The committee recommends that a small piece on the west side of the WSA will be managed with adjacent land as a motorized recreation area. The remaining Badlands will be managed to protect its wild qualities:

- No hard rock mining or oil and gas leasing. Overhead transmission lines, renewable energy, pipelines, and communications towers are not allowed.
- Motorized recreation will not be allowed.
- Grazing will continue.

Whiskey Mountain: Whiskey Mountain is a 519-acre roadless area that provides important bighorn sheep habitat. Whiskey backs up against the Fitzpatrick Wilderness, and the surrounding lands are managed by the BLM, in cooperation with the Game and Fish and Forest Service, to protect bighorn habitat. The committee recommended this WSA be managed in accordance with the surrounding area, which would mean:

- The area would be off-limits to oil and gas leasing and mining. (However, the BLM could change this unless legislation makes the decision permanent.)
- Roads and motorized use are managed to protect bighorn habitat.

Copper Mountain: Copper Mountain is a rugged and exposed uplift on the western end of the Bridger Mountains. Overlooking Boysen Reservoir, it provides important wildlife habitat and a quiet quality of life for stockgrowers who live nearby. Recommendations for this area include:

- Oil and gas leasing and mining are allowed.
- Renewable energy and overhead transmission lines are prohibited.
- Grazing will continue.
- Motorized recreation will not be allowed in the northern portions of the area.

The Lander Front: Public lands in the Lander foothills—rising to the Wind River Mountains—are managed by the BLM to protect scenery, wildlife habitats, and recreational opportunities. However, state trust lands in these hills are vulnerable to mining, which could threaten local lifestyles, water quality, economic development, and wildlife. The committee proposes trading these state parcels to the BLM in exchange for BLM land elsewhere in Fremont County. This exchange would benefit the state and the Lander Front, ensuring the state can develop its lands and the foothills will be unchanged.

Motorized study: Because the committee decided against adding significant motorized areas within these wilderness study areas, they are recommending the BLM evaluate areas in Fremont County, including the southern slopes of Copper Mountain, for the feasibility of additional off-road motorized areas.