

My Turn

Columbine Hondo deserves lasting protection

Chris Ellis

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Sens. Tom Udall and Martin Heinrich and Congressman Ben Ray Luján deserve much credit for their commitment to protecting one of the last natural places in the “Land of Enchantment.”

Their reintroduction of a bill to protect the Columbine Hondo as wilderness will help ensure that this amazing place — along with the elk, mountain lion, bear, pine marten and Rio Grande cutthroat trout it is home to — will stay just as it is for future generations to enjoy.

Columbine Hondo is vitally important to people from all walks of life. Residents appreciate the quality it adds to our lives. Sportsmen want it protected for the opportunity to hunt and fish far from the noises of roads and motors. Outdoor enthusiasts appreciate the many opportunities it affords for hiking, camping and horseback riding.

Plus, business owners rely on the visitors this treasured public land attracts and the contributions they make to the local economy.

I live just a couple of miles from this pristine land, and shudder at the possibility of losing it to development. I hike its trails often, and nearly every time am rewarded with sightings of numerous wildlife.

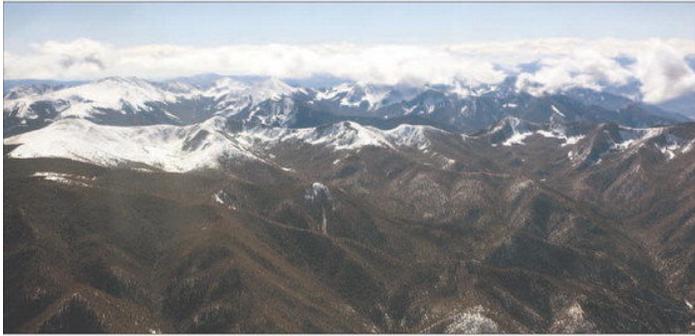
Encroachment of vehicles or development would ruin the existing delicate balance of that environment, severely impairing — if not breaking — the continuity of wildlife travel throughout the Sangre de Cristo range.

In addition, safeguarding the area is especially important as it provides invaluable water to our farmers, as well to all users of the Rio Grande and its tributaries. As we continue to suffer through an incredible drought, we must do all we can to preserve this precious resource.

More than a generation has passed since the Columbine Hondo was recognized for its natural values and set aside as a Wilderness Study Area. But without permanent protection as wilderness, there is no guarantee it will remain wild.

I commend the bill's sponsors for their vision and effort to see that this most special area will always be here for our grandchildren — and theirs.

Chris Ellis is a resident of Arroyo Seco.



Matthew van Buren

The Columbine-Wilderness Study Area's Lobo Ridge spans the foreground, with the 12,700 Gold Hill to the left.