



## COLORADO OUTDOOR RECREATION & ECONOMY ACT

Colorado U.S. Senators Michael Bennet and John Hickenlooper and U.S. Congressman Joe Neguse's *Colorado Outdoor Recreation & Economy (CORE) Act* protects over 420,000 acres of public land in Colorado, establishing new wilderness areas and safeguarding existing outdoor recreation opportunities to boost the economy for future generations.

Colorado counties, in close coordination with businesses, recreation groups, sportsmen, and conservationists, helped write each element of the CORE Act over the last decade.

Of the land protected, about 71,000 acres are new wilderness areas, and nearly 80,000 acres are new recreation and conservation management areas that preserve existing outdoor uses, such as hiking and mountain biking. The bill also prohibits new oil and gas development in areas important to ranchers and sportsmen.

The CORE Act unites and improves four previously introduced bills:

1. The Continental Divide Recreation, Wilderness, and Camp Hale Legacy Act
2. The San Juan Mountains Wilderness Act
3. The Thompson Divide Withdrawal and Protection Act
4. The Curecanti National Recreation Area Boundary Establishment Act.

In October 2022, President Biden established the [Camp Hale - Continental Divide National Monument](#) at the request of Senators Bennet and Hickenlooper, Representative Neguse, and [dozens](#) and [dozens](#) of Colorado organizations. The monument honors the legacy of the 10th Mountain Division, the Army's first and only mountain infantry division. The area also lies within the ancestral and spiritually significant homelands of the Ute Tribes and is home to treasured geological features, recreational opportunities, and rare wildlife and plants.

At the time of the monument designation, the United States Department of Agriculture and Department of Interior also proposed a 20-year administrative mineral withdrawal for the Thompson Divide.

The CORE Act builds on these conservation wins, protecting additional lands in the original four bills, designating the Sandy Treat Overlook and Tenmile Wilderness in the Camp Hale-Continental Divide National Monument, and establishing a permanent mineral withdrawal for the Thompson Divide.

## Continental Divide Recreation and Wilderness Act

*The Continental Divide Recreation and Wilderness Act* establishes permanent protections for nearly 53,000 acres of wilderness, recreation, and conservation areas in the White River National Forest along Colorado's Continental Divide.

This legislation was originally introduced in 2018 as the *Continental Divide Recreation, Wilderness, and Camp Hale Legacy Act*. In crafting the bill, Senator Bennet and then-Congressman Jared Polis collaborated with community leaders, veterans, and businesses in Eagle, Summit, and Grand Counties. In 2022, President Biden designated part of the lands in the original legislation as the Camp Hale - Continental Divide National Monument. The CORE Act has been updated to reflect the newly designated monument.

- **Wilderness Areas:** The bill creates three new wilderness areas in the Tenmile Range, Hoosier Ridge, and Williams Fork Mountains. It also adds additional lands to three existing wilderness areas by expanding Eagles Nest, Ptarmigan Peak, and Holy Cross wilderness areas. Together, these designations total 39,291 acres of new wilderness. Input and support from community leaders in Eagle and Summit Counties led to these designations.
- **Wildlife:** The bill creates three new wildlife conservation areas totaling 14,489 acres. The Porcupine Gulch Wildlife Conservation Area would protect Colorado's only migration corridor over Interstate 70 for elk, bear, mule deer, and other wildlife. The Williams Fork Wildlife Conservation Area would enhance wildlife habitat for the Greater Sage-grouse and other species. The Spraddle Creek Wildlife Conservation Area would protect critical winter range for bighorn sheep, elk, and deer north of I-70 near Vail.
- **Other Land Management:** The bill addresses a number of management issues in specific areas along the Continental Divide, including adjusting wilderness boundaries around the Trail River Ranch in Rocky Mountain National Park to ensure ongoing access to the property for youth and community education programs.

## San Juan Mountains Wilderness Act

*The San Juan Mountains Wilderness Act* provides permanent protections for nearly 61,000 acres of land located in the heart of the San Juan Mountains in Southwest Colorado. It designates some of the state's most iconic peaks as wilderness, including two fourteeners: Mount Sneffels and Wilson Peak. The bill is the result of more than 10 years of collaboration among local leaders, businesses, and ranchers in San Miguel, San Juan, and Ouray Counties. It has passed out of both Senate and House committees with bipartisan support.

- **Wilderness:** The bill designates 31,725 acres of new wilderness areas near Telluride, Norwood, Ouray, and Ridgway, and adds nearly 23,000 acres to the existing Lizard Head and Mount Sneffels Wilderness Areas. The bill also designates 8,884 acres surrounding McKenna Peak, an existing Wilderness Study Area, as a new wilderness area in San Miguel County.
- **Special Management:** The bill designates 21,663 acres as the Sheep Mountain Special Management Area between the towns of Ophir and Silverton, which includes Hope Lake and Ice Lakes Basin. The bill also creates the 792-acre Liberty Bell East Special Management Area near Telluride.
- **Mineral Withdrawal:** The bill protects 6,590 areas of mineral withdrawal outside of Norwood at Naturita Canyon, prohibiting future mineral development in the canyon.
- **Nordic Skier Safety:** The bill directs the Forest Service to study options to ensure safe access for Nordic skiing in the vicinity of the Sheep Mountain Special Management Area.

### **Thompson Divide Withdrawal and Protection Act**

*The Thompson Divide Withdrawal and Protection Act* protects the Thompson Divide – one of Colorado’s most treasured landscapes – by withdrawing over 252,000 acres from future oil and gas development while preserving existing private property rights for leaseholders and landowners. It also creates a pilot program to lease excess methane from nearby coal mines, supporting the local economy and addressing climate change, and permanently protects Mt. Emmons, resolving a long-standing community controversy. Since joining the Senate, Senator Bennet has worked with ranchers, sportsmen, local energy companies, and elected officials to ensure the bill reflects the wishes of Gunnison, Pitkin, and Garfield Counties.

In October 2022, Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland accepted a proposal from the Bureau of Land Management and the United States Forest Service to initiate a 20-year administrative withdrawal for the Thompson Divide. The CORE Act would upgrade this administrative withdrawal to a permanent withdrawal, ensuring the long term protection of the area.

- **Mineral Withdrawal:** The bill permanently withdraws the federal mineral estate covered by 252,000 surface acres in the Thompson Divide near Carbondale, Glenwood Springs, and Crested Butte from future oil and gas and mining development while preserving existing private property rights for leaseholders and landowners. The proposed mineral withdrawal does not affect any private minerals that may be located within the boundary. It also provides the option for leaseholders to exchange existing Thompson Divide leases for credits that could be used to bid on new leases elsewhere.

- **Methane Leasing:** Based on a request from Gunnison County, Garfield County, Delta County, and natural gas producers, the bill creates a pilot program to lease and generate energy from excess methane in existing or abandoned coal mines in the North Fork Valley—supporting the local economy and addressing climate change.

### **Curecanti National Recreation Area (NRA) Boundary Establishment Act**

*The Curecanti National Recreation Area (NRA) Boundary Establishment Act* formally establishes the boundary for the Curecanti NRA. Although created in 1965, the boundary has never been designated by Congress, limiting the ability of the National Park Service to effectively manage the area. The bill improves coordination among land management agencies and ensures the Bureau of Reclamation upholds its commitment to expand public fishing access in the basin. Since 2011, Senator Bennet has worked closely with counties, federal agencies, landowners, and sportsmen to craft the bill.

- **Boundary Establishment:** The bill formally establishes the boundary of the Curecanti National Recreation Area, currently one of only a handful of NPS units without a formal designation by Congress.
- **Land Management:** The bill improves the efficiency of public land management in the area by initiating a series of administrative jurisdiction changes—a step supported by all of the relevant land management agencies that will save taxpayer dollars. It also ensures Bureau of Reclamation jurisdiction over the three dams in the area that play an important role in the Colorado River. Lastly, the bill allows nearby landowners to voluntarily receive assistance from the NPS to conserve natural resources on their property.
- **Fishing Access:** The bill ensures that the Bureau of Reclamation upholds its commitment to expand public fishing access in the basin, which was lost when the Aspinall Unit was created.