

WYOMING WILDERNESS ASSOCIATION

ROCK CREEK PROPOSED WILDERNESS AREA--BIGHORN NATIONAL FOREST FACT SHEET

HISTORY

- If designated, Rock Creek would be the first Wilderness Area (of 34,000 acres) to be designated in 26 years since the 1984 Wilderness Act. Not one acre has been added to our Wyoming wilderness legacy.
- Rock Creek was the last area to be removed from congressional recommendation and was not added to the Cloud Peak Wilderness Area. Instead, 40,000 acres were added as the northeast and northwest side additions to Cloud Peak to compensate. The Wyoming Wilderness Act was passed and signed into law October 30, 1984. An interesting side note, Dick Cheney said that passing Wyoming's Wilderness Act in 1984 was the most meaningful act of his career. (2000 WY Public Television Interview)
- There were many local citizens who advocated strongly for its passage. The most prominent was Jack Horton of the HF Bar Ranch, then called Horton's Ranch. Jack, who received a Princeton scholarship and attended Oxford as a Rhodes Scholar, gained his love of mountain adventure growing up at the HF Bar. In the 1960's, he was recruited as the Executive Director of the Wyoming Republican Party and served as Assistant Secretary of the Interior under Presidents Nixon and Ford.
- Rock Creek was special to Jack and to his future wife, Margi Schroth, the present day owner of the HF Bar. He said, "We must do whatever we can to preserve this place. It's our responsibility to see that what we enjoy today will remain for future generations." Jack Horton's life tragically ended in 1982, two years before the Act's final passage, but his love for and dedication to Rock Creek is carried on by Margi and her children.
- One reason given for keeping Rock Creek out of the Wilderness Act was that it was leased for oil and gas and another reason was the potential for water storage.
- However, today there are no oil and gas leases held. In the 1990's Rock Creek and the HF Bar were explored for any oil and gas potential, a hole was drilled and abandoned. The Cloud Peak and Willow Park reservoirs are fully developed and are outside the proposed boundary.
- Rock Creek was recommended as the only roadless area for Wilderness management by the Bighorn National Forest in the 2005 Finalized Revised Forest Plan, although five areas were studied.
- Hundreds of citizens from Sheridan and Johnson County, plus four generations of HF Bar's guests advocated for Rock Creek by writing over 19,000 letters on the value of the Rock Creek roadless area for the Forest Planning process. Locally, over 550 local citizens have signed letters and 125 local businesses (77 in Johnson County alone) have endorsed the Rock Creek proposed wilderness to date.
- The Wyoming Wilderness Association has taken the lead on organizing tours, education programs and presentations, events, concerts, film festivals and tabling to educate the public about Rock Creek. Many letters to the editors and media stories have been generated about the intrinsic wilderness values of the area.



WILDERNESS VALUES



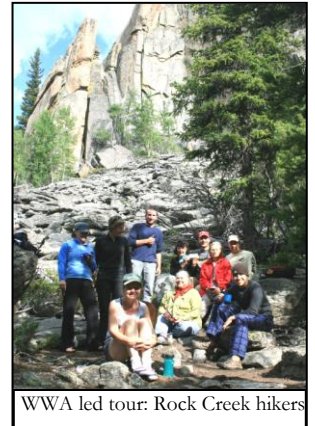
One of nearly 100 fantastic formations in Rock Creek..

- There are more than a hundred spectacular granite rock formations, buttes, spires, castles and towers found in the Rock Creek area.
- Rock Creek is extremely valuable to hunters as year-round elk range, important calving area, and serves as an elk corridor from the high country to the Bud Love Wildlife Habitat Unit for winter elk grounds.
- Rock Creek is one of the rare areas (outside of Wilderness) where it is necessary to hunt on horseback or foot--no motorized use has ever been allowed.
- The Rock Creek area provides excellent fishing opportunities in the South, Middle and North Fork corridors, of which two were analyzed for Wild and Scenic River status during the forest plan revision process in 2005 but were not selected due to the wilderness recommendation.

*For more info, please contact the Wyoming Wilderness Association, PO Box 6588, Sheridan, WY 82801
Phone: 307 672-2751 email: info@wildwyo.org Visit our Web site: www.wildwyo.org*

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- The BNF Forest Supervisor supports the protection of Rock Creek as wilderness, and the Governor Freudenthal signed the final plan agreements recommending Rock Creek for wilderness.
- The economic potential of protecting Rock Creek will provide a large gain to the Johnson and Sheridan communities from dollars spent on tourism, hunting and fishing. Protecting local landscapes retains our high quality of life while providing pristine places for tourism marketing and recreation.
- The Rock Creek addition would add much-needed lower elevation forestlands to the Cloud Peak WA, creating the only protected wilderness as a complete ecosystem from prairies (6,000 feet) to high peaks (10,000-13,000 feet). This area includes vegetative and topographic diversity and it will protect key watersheds and wildlife habitat.



Other Values and Issues:

- **NONMOTORIZED:** The Rock Creek roadless area has never been opened to motorized use either in the summer or the winter. It is simply too rugged for roads and has too little snow for snow machines. There are few conflicts in this area. The Wilderness Act clearly allows such nonconforming motorized uses where necessary to insure the health and safety of people.



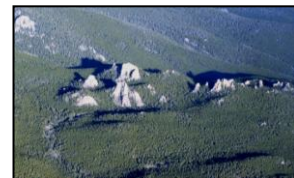
- **TIMBER:** The trees (pictured left) in the Rock Creek area are predominately small and dense lodgepole pine with a scattering of ponderosa on the edges, making great elk security cover. America's national forests produce less than five percent of the total U.S. timber supply. Timber in Rock Creek is less accessible, unmarketable size and less cost-efficient than in other government and private forestlands that are readily available in the area.

• **ACCESS:** The HF Bar has in good faith, opened legal public access from the ranch to the base of the mountain and canyon. It is an accessible and spectacular entrance up the South Fork Canyon of Rock Creek. There are six other public accesses into Rock Creek from the south via forest service roads, from the north on forest service trails, and through the Bud Love state lands May –Nov.

• **GRAZING:** Livestock grazing, where established prior to an area's designation as wilderness, is permitted to continue in the Wilderness Act language. "The legislative history is very clear in its intent that livestock grazing, and activities and the necessary facilities to support and livestock grazing program, will be permitted to continue in National Forest wilderness areas (House Report 96-617 on the Colorado Wilderness Act)." Rock Creek has permitted leases for livestock grazing which will be allowed to continue. There are cow camp cabins inside the Rock Creek recommended wilderness (Ginger's Cabin), and on the outside boundary of Rock Creek on the north (Hepp Cabins).

• **ECONOMICS:** According to the Act, the "multiple uses" of wilderness include the protection of watersheds, maintenance of soil and water quality, ecological diversity, plant and animal gene pool, and habitat for wildlife, as well as providing unsurpassed opportunities for outdoor recreation activities including hiking, horse-packing, backpacking, hunting and fishing—all critical aspects to providing natural capital that can help communities diversify economies by attracting and retaining new businesses, residents and a local workforce. Wilderness protects scenic backdrops that improve property values, thereby increasing county revenues.

• **FIRE, ACCESS ETC:** The Wilderness Act allows measures to be taken, as necessary, in wilderness areas to control issues such as fire, insects and diseases. (Section 4(d)(1)) And any emergency provisions for fire, search and rescue can be accommodated.



Rep Lummis Tour 09 Tom Allen Spire 1972. Jack Horton Tours RC 1970's. Spires of Rock Creek. Fly over 2007.

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