

THE MAVERICK CANYON WILDERNESS PROPOSAL

“If you can believe it’s possible, I almost didn’t notice the massive Juanita Arch the first time I came upon it. I was so absorbed in the canyon’s hanging gardens and the blossoming yucca, the plunge pools filled with canyon tree frog tadpoles, and the berry-filled bear scat. This is a wild place well worth protection!”

Kate Graham, Grand Junction



The northernmost portion of the WP is visible in the foreground. The La Sals are visible in the background. This image was taken from 6.3 rd. Photo © CEC



The western flank of the WP is visible to the left of the image. Photo © JoAnn Moon

A Wilderness Deserving Landscape – Located in Mesa County, eight miles south of Gateway, CO along the east side of the Dolores River is the Maverick Canyon Wilderness Proposal (WP). The area ranges in elevation from 5,000 to 7,500 ft and contains several side canyons off the Dolores River: Maverick, Larson, Blue, and Bull Canyons. These canyons slice into the flanks of the Uncompahgre Plateau and reveal multi-colored bands of slickrock.

Geology, Ecology, & Wildlife Habitat – The dramatic redrock cliffs of Maverick Canyon embrace river and stream canyons replete with rare plants and animals. For example, the globally rare Dolores River skeleton plant, Horseshoe milkvetch and New Mexico privet are found lining the Dolores River, while the extremely rare San Rafael milkvetch inhabits the rocky slopes surrounding Flat Top Mesa. Many other species with a keen sensitivity to habitat disturbance, like the peregrine falcon, the Canyon tree frog, and Bighorn Sheep, as well as other prized big game species like mule deer and elk, find refuge amongst the cliff walls, year round plunge pools, and verdant canyon floors; while the Dolores River itself supports important species such as river otter and roundtail chub. Punctuating Maverick Canyon is the significant geologic feature of Juanita Arch carved, quite uniquely, into the Wingate sandstone walls of Maverick Canyon.

Rich History & Iconic Western Landscape – While there are many paleontologic sites scattered throughout the area and numerous historic mining sites on the adjacent mesa tops, it is the experience of bearing witness to the landscape’s sincerely untouched character which is becoming its most significant historic feature.

Wilderness Recreation – A sense of wildness and adventure permeates these little-traveled canyons which house ample opportunities for hiking, backpacking, primitive hunting, nature study, photography, and connecting to the area’s rich human history. For example, a hike or horseback ride on the historic Picket Trail, reminds us of what life was like for early settlers who pushed mule trains up this route to gain access to the many mining camps that sprung up on Calamity, Tenderfoot, and Outlaw Mesas in the early 1900s.

Adjacent Backcountry Recreation - Of note is the opportunity to turn the plethora of uranium exploration routes on the mesa tops above and to the east of the WP into enjoyable and ecologically sustainable backcountry trails. These routes could cater to ATV riders, jeepers, and mountain bikers who are passionate about exploring these mesas and accessing the Wilderness Area overlooks, without diluting the remote experience currently available. Through thoughtful planning, these mesas could be home to a system of both well-marked trails - catering to first time visitors, and lesser-signed trails - catering to more adventurous explorers looking to get away from it all.

The **Maverick Canyon WP** contains 20,585 acres of federal land. This area is roadless, natural, and offers outstanding opportunities for solitude and primitive, unconfined recreation. The boundaries are landscape based and are drawn to aid in manageability.

