

THE UNAWEEP WILDERNESS PROPOSAL

"UnawEEP's magical canyon and rugged ridgeline feel far removed from nearby towns and cities. The area's hidden treasures reveal fascinating lessons in the history of humans and the earth."

Barbara Hawke, Montrose



An image of UnawEEP Canyon's granite walls from Hwy 141. The lands to the left of the highway run along the northern border of the Wilderness Proposal. Photo © Kate Graham



This photo, taken from atop 6.3 rd, shows the Ute Creek drainage literally slicing through the UnawEEP Wilderness Proposal. Photo © Kate Graham

A Wilderness Deserving Landscape – Located in Mesa County on the southern side of the UnawEEP-Tabeguache Scenic & Historic Byway, the UnawEEP Wilderness Proposal (WP) includes portions of both the iconic aspen groves of the Uncompahgre Plateau as well as the deepest and most dramatic portions of UnawEEP Canyon, reaching depths from 2,000 to 3,300 feet, which drain the northern and western flanks of the Uncompahgre Plateau revealing a geologic tapestry as they cut through the land. Resulting from the diversity of elevation and topography, this part of Colorado provides some of the most biologically, geologically, and recreationally diverse landscapes in Colorado. And as such, would permanently conserve a cross-section of Colorado's landscape not currently represented within Colorado's existing wilderness areas.

Geology, Ecology, & Wildlife Habitat – The dramatic cliffs rising from UnawEEP Canyon to the Uncompahgre Plateau form a significant geologic profile which hints at the mystery of the Uncompahgre Uplift while also supporting highly diverse ecology. The unique juxtaposition of metamorphic, igneous, and sedimentary rock provides a learning landscape with tangible evidence of the geologic uplift which resulted in one of western Colorado's most prized plateaus. At the top of the Uncompahgre Plateau are mixed forest woodlands and wet shrublands that provide important habitat for elk, deer, bear, mountain lion and other wildlife; and for many sensitive raptors such as peregrine falcon, golden eagle, and northern goshawk. The rugged cliffs and drainages linking the canyon floor and the Plateau provide the area's wildlife with important seasonal migration corridors, in addition to housing state-rare bats. This proposal provides important ecological linkages between the Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area to the east, the Uncompahgre Plateau, Pinion Mesa to the north, and rivers and streams to the west, extending to the La Sal mountains.

Rich History & Iconic Western Landscape – Visitors traveling along Hwy 141 are afforded breathtaking views of the northern portions of this proposal as they abut modern homesteads and working ranches alike. Scenic Byway placards provide travelers with a glimpse into the past bringing history to life in the present along this uniquely undeveloped canyon thoroughfare.

Wilderness Recreation – Hiking, primitive hunting, backpacking, horsepacking, and photography are popular recreational uses of the area. A horse trail into Ute Creek provides relatively easy public access into the heart of the roadless area, while Gateway Canyons Resort Stables are adjacent to the northern portions of the proposal providing easy access to equestrian trails into this wild landscape. The Rim Trail along the top of the plateau, traverses several of the vast aspen glades that characterize the area, and affords spectacular views of the La Sal Mountains, Lone Cone Peak, the Abajo Mountains, and UnawEEP Canyon. Exceptional opportunities for non-motorized hunting would be protected within the proposal as it overlaps with portions of CDOW's coveted big game hunting Unit 61.

Adjacent Backcountry Recreation – In addition to providing a quiet backdrop for the remainder of Unit 61, of note is the opportunity to turn the plethora of uranium exploration routes on the 'Mining Mesas' to the west of the proposal mesas into enjoyable and ecologically sustainable backcountry trails, accessible from both Divide Rd and 6.3 Rd. For more details see, *The Maverick Canyon Wilderness Proposal*.

The **Unaweep WP** contains 39,000 acres of federal land (10,000 BLM acres and 29,000 Forest Service acres). This area is roadless, natural, and offers outstanding opportunities for solitude and primitive, unconfined recreation.

