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Commissioners support proposal process to expand Sarvis Creek Wilderness, neighbors still strongly oppose

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The proposed Sarvis Creek Wilderness Area Expansion Project received a letter of support from Routt County Commissioners on June 13. The proposal process would have halted if the commissioners did not indicate support for the process.

Kevin Gilman/Courtesy photo

Routt County Commissioners signed a letter of support for the Sarvis Creek Wilderness Area Expansion Project, which would add approximately 7,200 acres to the wilderness area. Commissioners did so during their Tuesday meeting amid a divided room, with both proponents and opposers of the expansion making their cases before the signing. Without a letter of support from the commissioners, the proposal process would halt entirely.

"It's not so much whether we're going to promote or create a new wilderness area," Commissioners' Tim Corrigan said to the room Tuesday. "The decision in front of us today is whether we're going to put a stop to this process, and I'm certainly not going to. I am very sympathetic to the concerns that the neighboring property owners have raised."

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Brad Iverson, a resident of the Catamount Metro District, voiced his opposition to the proposed expansion and noted how pushback in the 1990s — specifically from the Sierra Club, proponents of the expansion — terminated the Lake Catamount Ski Area proposal and gave him his beloved home.

He drew attention to the fact that when the Lake Catamount Ski Area was proposed, no one lived near Sarvis Creek as they do now. Fellow Catamount Metro District residents sang a similar tune, noting access to the area will be tricky given the private property its surrounded by and the need for wildfire mitigation.

"I would never buy my forever house up against the wilderness area, because of the inability to do the mitigation and fire firefighting," Catamount Metro District's Bruce Albright said.

On the flip side, Sierra Club, Keep Routt Wild and Routt County Riders all voiced support for the expansion.

"Wilderness protection has a lot to do with its economic value," noted Rich Levy, chair of the Routt County Sierra Club chapter. "It's shown everywhere that towns that have more wilderness have better economic standing than those without it."

Levy continued that these areas have unique protections for wildlife, and that Colorado Parks and Wildlife has already taken steps such as identifying all potential calving areas on the land.

Longtime local resident John Spezia — who approached county commissioners 40 years earlier promoting the same cause — highlighted that if passed, Sarvis Creek would be one of the only low-elevation wilderness areas in all of Colorado.

Commissioners stressed to the room that their approval on Tuesday would merely allow for the possibility of the Sarvis Creek Wilderness Area, not guarantee it.

"We are simply moving it forward to the beginning of what I suspect will be a very long process," Corrigan said.

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