First in a series of three
Stories and pictures begin on page B3
Is it time for a Boulder-White Clouds Wilderness?

Rep. Simpson tries to appease groups with wilderness, economic stimulus bill

First in a series of three

By GREG STAHL

Express Staff Writer

At 11,815 feet above sea level, Castle Peak in Idaho’s remote and rugged White Cloud Mountains stands over more than 500,000 acres of contiguous road-free wildlands that bridge two vastly different cultures.

This wild country, connecting the wealthy resort kingdom of Sun Valley with the rural and agrarian communities of Custer County, is a battle ground that has hosted land-use skirmishes for more than 40 years.

In the 1970s, the people of Idaho staved off a massive molybdenum mine planned for the lower flanks of Castle Peak, drawing the White Clouds into the political limelight for the first time and helping to effect congressional designation of the 756,000-acre Sawtooth National Recreation Area.

Now, 30 years later, with the region’s land-use concerns still partially unresolved, Rep. Mike Simpson, R-Idaho, is attempting to strike a chord of compromise among the Boulder and White Cloud Mountains’ diverse and numerous stakeholders.

Simpson’s pledge and the art of compromise

In 1999, near the shores of Redfish Lake, just 15 miles northwest of Castle Peak, Simpson stood before a baying crowd of environmentalists and announced that he would try to craft a wilderness bill for the Boulder and White Cloud Mountains.

Four years later, Simpson’s chief of staff, Lindsay Slater, said the congressman is nearly ready to release a plan for public review, perhaps in September.

Simpson’s proposal, an apparent study in the art of compromise, would designate about 250,000 acres of the White Cloud and Boulder Mountains as wilderness. The hybrid wilderness bill, to be called the “Central Idaho Economic Development and Recreation Act,” would also trade roughly 16,000 acres of public land to Custer County that it would sell to private interests, netting the county up to $10 million.

Half of the proceeds would be used to fund a new “Central Idaho Education Center,” and half would be retained by the county for economic development with very few strings attached.

“Because Challis is basically competing with 200 other communities like it in the West for economic development, we want to offer an opportunity for people to gain higher education, those kinds of things that would be very attractive to a business,” Slater said.

Concepts disclosed so far also include potential grazing permit buyouts and ranch purchases that would allow ranchers in environmentally sensitive areas to relocate.

As part of the compromise, and because motorized and mechanized uses are not allowed in wilderness areas, proposed wilderness area boundaries would not encompass areas of traditional snowmobile, motorcycle and off-road vehicle use.

In general, the wilderness would include areas east of the spine of the White Cloud Mountains and some, but not all, of the Boulder Mountains.

A significant portion of the wilderness area would include relatively low-elevation land in the eastern portions of the mountains to the east of the East Fork of the Salmon River and north of the North Fork of the Big Lost River. It would stretch east to Jerry Peak.

Areas specifically omitted from the proposal include the Boulder Basin near Boulder Peak; Champion, Watson and Fourth of July lakes basins; Warm Springs Meadow and parts of Warm Springs Creek; Rough and Casino creeks; and Railroad Ridge, Slater said.

Some of these areas are equally prized by environmentalists, mountain bikers, off-road vehicle riders and snowmobilers. Slater quickly acknowledged that in this art of compromise, no one group will get everything it wants.

“The Idaho Conservation League wants more than 500,000 acres. We’re at half of that, and the congressman is looking at boundaries that are similar to what the Forest Service recommended, with adjustments to protect traditional motorized and snowmobile use,” Slater said.

Some groups—like the ICL, which has been brokering the deal on behalf of environmentalists, and the Blue Ribbon Coalition, which has been working on behalf of motorized and bicycling interests—have acknowledged that compromise is part of the game. Nevertheless, nervous apprehension appears to be gnawing at key players on various sides of the issue as they await the release of Simpson’s official blueprint.

“In fairness to Congressman Simpson, maybe he’s got such a compelling case for what he’s going to do that maybe I’m going to turn tail,” said State Rep. Lenore Barrett, a conservative Republican from Challis and a wilderness opponent. “I want a little more ingenious information before I jump on this bandwagon. But I don’t want more wilderness, and that is basically where this is headed.”

LENORE BARRETT
Idaho state representative

“... maybe he’s got such a compelling case ... that maybe I’m going to turn tail. I want a little more ingenious information before I jump on this bandwagon. But I don’t want more wilderness, and that is basically where this is headed.”

REP. MIKE SIMPSON
R-Idaho

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See WILDERNESS on page B7
Wilderness Act set rules for wildland uses

By GREGORY FOLEY
Express Staff Writer

With Rep. Mike Simpson, R-
Idaho, preparing a proposal to designate 200,000 acres of wilderness in the Boulder and White Cloud mountains, north of Ketchum, many residents of Blaine and Custer counties are wondering how a federal wilderness designation might affect their use of the land.

Some revel in the possibility of seeing mechanized or natural-resource extraction uses being restricted in the largest, unprotected, national forest roadless area in the Lower 48 States. Others cringe at the notion of a potential increase in federal control over public lands in Idaho. And, at times, the debate is complicated by vastly varying opinions on what true “wilderness” is.

Still, the real implications of creating a designated wilderness area in the Boulder-White Clouds lie in the federal Wilderness Act of 1964, the guiding legislation that established the establishment of 106 million acres of protected wilderness in the United States.

The Wilderness Act describes wilderness as “an area of the earth and its community of life is untrammeled by human influence, which preserves their natural conditions, and is characterized by natural unrest and change.”

The original legislation established 9.1 million acres of wilderness in a new land-management system. Eventually, an additional 97 million acres of lands were designated as wilderness in areas managed by the U.S. Forest Service, National Park Service, Bureau of Land Management and Fish and Wildlife Service.

In the Lower 48 States, approximately 48 million acres of land have been designated as wilderness, or approximately 2 percent of the total land area. The balance of wilderness lands are in Alaska.

The Wilderness Act does restrict the use of land, but at the same time generally allows for a multiplicity of activities, including hiking, camping, horseback riding, hunting, fishing, and limited grazing.

Activities that are generally banned in wilderness include the use of all mechanized vehicles: motorcycles, all-terrain vehicles, snowmobiles, as well as all bicycles and mountain bikes.

The act states “there shall be no commercial enterprise and no permanent road, and, except as necessary, no temporary road, no use of motor vehicles, motorized equipment or motorboats, no landing of aircraft, no other form of mechanical transport, and no structure or installation within any such area.”

The rules include a provision to allow certain barred activities to ensure the health and safety of people, generally to accommodate the use of helicopters in emergencies.

The law also makes provisions for “the control of fires, insects and diseases” within wilderness areas.
Mountain bikers heading into the white cloud mountain foothills: At Fisher Creek could signify access conflicts to come. For years, mountain bikers, motorcyclists and snowmobilers have enjoyed unfettered access to the Boulder and White Cloud mountains. Wilderness Designation could end that, although Fisher Creek and several other key mechanized access areas are not proposed to be included in Rep. Mike Simpson's wilderness bill.

Wilderness
Continued from page B3
ed in the final document.
"It's very mysterious and nebulous," he said. "How can you comment when you don't know what's going on."

But support from people like Barrett and Churchwell is what the congressman needs, Slater said.
"Frankly, there needs to be a broad consensus for this, because there are any number of ways it can be killed.
"If we don't have a bill that has broad support, we won't take it to Congress."

The past and the present
In 1960, the American Smelting and Refining Co. announced plans to mine and process molybdenum at the base of Castle Peak, prompting a backlash from the state's budding environmental community and from the people of Idaho, who elected Gov. Cecil Andrus, in part, because of his pledges to protect the area. Andrus, who opposed the ASARCO mine, became Idaho's first Democratic governor in 25 years by defeating incumbent Don Samuelson, a mine supporter. Over the next two years, the debate continued on how to protect the White Cloud and nearby Sawtooth Mountains.

The Sawtooth National Recreation Area was established in 1972, along with the Sawtooth Wilderness Area, which encompasses 217,000 acres of staggering granite cirques, peaks and timbered moraines. In establishing the SNRA and Sawtooth Wilderness, Congress also instructed the U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management to establish a wilderness study area in the Boulder and White Cloud Mountains. The request resulted in a 253,100-acre safeguard, which is the only congressionally mandated wilderness study area in Idaho.

To this day, the 582,931-acre conterminous road-free area in the lower 48 states.

For some, the current effort represents a window of opportunity that may not return for at least a generation.
"Opportunities like this don't come around all that often," said Geoff Pampush, executive director of the White Cloud Wilderness Area. None succeeded.

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LINDSAY SLATER
Rep. Mike Simpson's chief of staff

Continued from page B3

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Wednesday, July 30 1:30pm – 3:30pm
Edibles from Perry’s Central Park West 140A & B, Bird Drive, Ketchum
2 homes are still available in this exclusive enclave of 15 spectacular paired homes just steps from Bald Mountain and River Run Lodge. 4BD, 4.5BA, sun decks and double-car heated garages. $1,360,000.

Thursday, July 31 11:30am – 2:00pm
Goodsie from Cristina’s 118 N. Hiawatha
Recently remodeled 4 bedroom, 4.5 bathroom home with 2 acres and a fabulous landscaped yard. $1,595,000.

Thursday, July 31 11:30am – 2:00pm
112 Coyote Bluff Drive, Mid-Valley
Remarkable quality in this 3BD, 2BA, 1,200 sq. ft. home. Chosen lot bordering common area. Panoramic views, extensive landscaping with pond and waterfall, covered patios, horse pasture, Artis- tico interior w/ warm colors, etched glass, cherry flooring, chef’s kitchen, master suite & many custom features.

Wednesday, July 30 11:30am – 2:00pm
Crestview Condos #4
Walk to River Run lifts! Adorable 1BD, 1BA re-modeled condo with new appliances, new wiring & heating. Hot tub on site. $225,000.

Saturday, August 2 10:00am-3:00pm
710 Kintail, Northridge
Beautiful, colorful, spa-cious—located on a corner lot adjacent to park, the bike path and a stream. This home touts a bright and cheery color scheme and offers a spacious 2,000 square feet on 1/3rd of an acre. $355,000.

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112 Coyote Bluff Drive, Mid-Valley

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The KIRK GROUP
Julie Evans 726-6560

Wednesday, July 30 11:30am – 2:00pm

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- Re-development of Sun Valley Village
- Investment in summer recreation facilities: golf, tennis, trail riding, mountain biking
- None of the above
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**Wilderness**

Continued from page B7

rector of The Nature Conservancy Idaho.

TNC-Idaho is working with Custer County ranchers and politicians to help effect the economic stimulus portion of the deal. However, it has not taken a position on wilderness designation.

“If the moment passes, it is passed for a long time. If it passes, both (Custer) county losses and the wilderness advocates lose,” Pampush said.

At the crux of the wilderness debate are the numerous stakeholders who must find common ground for legislation to become reality.

Throughout the last 30 years, recreational use in the Boulder-White Clouds by outdoors enthusiasts has steadily increased, and the skyrocketing popularity of off-road vehicles, mountain bikes and snowmobiles has hit home in the two mountain ranges. But, while use has increased, wild populations of certain plants and animals have been on the decline.

Although wilderness debates often center around human use and access issues, it is well documented that wildlife and wild plants are key beneficiaries of wilderness designations.

“For humans, wilderness areas are places of solace. But from a wildlife perspective, species don’t have the confrontation of mechanized human uses that impact them,” said Kaz Theo, of Hailey. A former U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service biologist, she is an advocate for the Northern Rockies Ecosystem Protection Act, a federal bill that would designate wilderness in road-free areas throughout the Northern Rockies.

“The importance is locking up large tracts of land, and that’s the beauty of wilderness, because you’re reducing intensive human uses like off-highway vehicle use,” Theo said. “Large blocks of unfragmented habitat with low human intervention are one of the key aspects of wilderness areas.”

In the Boulder and White Cloud mountains, a number of species share the land with people, including mountain goats, bighorn sheep, salmon, gray wolves and Canada lynx. Several species are listed under the Endangered Species Act, and several more—including a rare plant called White Clouds milkvetch, which is found only in the White Cloud Mountains—are considered sensitive species.

For Churchill, it’s a land of inspiring beauty as well as an important piece of Idaho’s habitat puzzle.

The first backpacking trip I did in this country was in the White Clouds, and I really loved it,” he said. “The thing that draws me, personally, to the White Clouds is the incredible beauty. The color of those vertical headwalls you really don’t find in other mountains like the Sawtooths or the Bighorn Crags. It’s so beautiful and so...Please Remember
WHITE CLOUD MILKVETCH
(Astragalus vexilliflexus)

Boulder-White Clouds a haven for rare plants

By GREGORY FOLEY
Express Staff Writer

The rugged Boulder and White Cloud Mountains contain a unique collection of alpine and sub-alpine plant communities, including one plant that is found nowhere else on the globe.

In fact, numerous species of plants listed as "sensitive" by the U.S. Forest Service occur in the White Cloud Mountains, while one rare plant that may occur in the area is protected under the federal Endangered Species Act.

- **White Cloud milkvetch (Astragalus vexilliflexus)** is a low-lying flowering plant that is endemic to the White Cloud Mountains. Only nine populations of the plant are known globally, all of which occur in the higher elevations of the northeast section of the White Clouds.

- **The slender moonwort (Botrychium lineare)** is a rare fern that occurs in alpine meadows, cliffs and grasslands. A species that is a candidate for protection under the ESA, the slender moonwort was discovered on Railroad Ridge in the White Cloud Mountains in 2002.

- **Northern sawgort (Artemisia campetris)** is a blooming perennial that ranges throughout North America, but is found in Idaho only in the White Cloud Mountains.

- **Ute ladies’ tresses (Spiranthes diluvialis)**, an orchid that grows in riparian streamsides and lakeside areas, is listed under the ESA as a "threatened" plant species. The White Cloud Mountains are considered excellent habitat for the plant.

- **Silver/Jones primrose (Primula inornata)**, a riparian flowering plant that prefers stream banks and moist meadows, has been documented nowhere in Idaho except near the East Fork of the Salmon River, in the White Clouds.

Other sensitive plant species that occur in the White Cloud Mountains include wedge-leaf milkvetch and Brewer’s sedge.

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By GREGORY FOLEY
Express Staff Writer

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The Boulder Mountains include a staggering string of 11,000-foot peaks north of Sun Valley and Ketchum. Some, but not all, of the Boulders will be included in Rep. Mike Simpson’s Boulder-White Cloud Wilderness proposal. Historical use, particularly in the Boulder Basin, and a recent winter use agreement among snowmobilers and skiers, will be honored, according to the congressman’s chief of staff.

“I’d like to see it left the way it is. I’ve seen so much stuff change here, and I’d like to see it stay the same.”

John Downing
14-year-old Stanley resident

But Idaho is growing, and as the demand for forest use rises, wildlife, fish, forests and motorized and mechanized access to them are all at risk.

“Our position is that we feel we should be able to preserve the current recreation access that our constituents have in the Boulder-White Clouds area,” said Clark Collins, executive director of the Blue Ribbon Coalition, an organization that represents a broad spectrum of backcountry recreation interests including horseback riders, mountain bikers, off-highway vehicle users and snowmobilers.

“In the past, all the wilderness proposals have only included lands proposed for wilderness, and everyone else be damned,” Collins said. “Simpson has made it clear that our interests will get something out of this, and that is designation of land for our use.”

An ongoing process

The balance between the conflicting interests involved in the wilderness discussion, as well as the proposed economic stimulus package for Custer County, could be precarious. Environmentalists are calling for more protection, while access groups are asking for assurances that their members will not be cut out of a myriad of historical use areas.

What’s more, the concept of giving 16,000 acres of public land to Custer County for economic stimulus has created quite a stir among grassroots environmentalists.

And this debate aside, Idaho still has more wild land than any state outside Alaska, with 4 million acres of designated wilderness and another 17 million acres of Forest Service and BLM land still open to roads and available for potential wilderness protection.

For now, the various interest groups are assuming a wait-and-see posture.

“Our process is going slow and methodical, keeping people informed when we can, and then going public with the concepts to find out what’s going to work and what’s not going to work,” Slater said. “Then we’re trying to find out where the wins are for each affected group.”

By GREGORY FOLEY
Express Staff Writer

With pristine forests, pure alpine lakes and lush meadows, the Boulder-White Cloud Mountains provide habitat to an array of sensitive fish and wildlife species, including five that are protected by the federal Endangered Species Act.

• Reintroduced to Idaho in 1995, the threatened gray wolf has found an abundance of suitable range in the White Cloud Mountains. At least one pack of wolves established itself in the western White Clouds this summer.

• The U.S. Forest Service has determined that thousands of acres of land in the region provide excellent habitat for the threatened Canada lynx, which occurs in small numbers in central Idaho.

• Canada lynx have historically been spotted in the White Clouds, while their prey species—such as snowshoe hare, grouse, and a variety of small mammals—occur in adequate numbers to support lynx.

• Bald eagles, also a threatened species in the Lower 48 States under the ESA, are known to occur in northern sections of the White Clouds, although much of the mountain range has been deemed unsuitable for the birds. Proposals are pending to remove the bald eagle from the federal list of endangered species.

• Peregrine falcons—removed from the ESA in 1999—are also found in the greater Sawtooth National Recreation Area. Parts of the White Clouds are considered suitable habitat for the once-endangered falcons.

• The threatened bull trout, a species of char native to Idaho, is known to inhabit specific streams and tributaries in the White Cloud Mountains.

• The native Chinook salmon, which migrates annually from the Pacific Ocean to spawn in freshwater systems in and around the White Clouds, is also listed a threatened species under the ESA.

In addition, two sensitive—and elusive—species of mammals that are rarely seen by humans, the wolverine and the fisher, have been sighted in or around the Boulder-White Clouds. The west-slope cutthroat, the native trout of central and northern Idaho, is managed as a “species of concern” by the Idaho Department of Fish and Game. The Boulder-White Clouds also provide habitat for populations of elk, mule deer, antelope, bighorn sheep, mountain goat, pine marten, coyote, mountain lion, and black bear.

Sensitive species inhabit Boulder-White Clouds

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