



REDEFINING WILDERNESS

Express photo by Willy Cook

SIMPSON PIECES WILDERNESS POLITICS PUZZLE

Third in a series of three

By **GREG STAHL**

Express Staff Writer

As the myriad of players in the Boulder-White Clouds wilderness chess match emerged the last four years, so, too, have the complications associated with 21st century wilderness designations.

Today's wilderness discussions are different animals from what they were 20 years ago and are increasingly being used by politicians as opportunities to legislate solutions to an array of social and political problems—in this case, the ailing economy of a rural Idaho county.

So far, a number of groups are still looking for middle ground. Many environmental groups have said they are opposed to proposed land sales that would support Custer County, while Custer County officials have said the sales are a cornerstone of their support for wilderness designation in the first place.

And that's only the tip of the iceberg.

"It's kind of like trying to put together an intricate puzzle with public opinion winds blowing in all directions. It's certainly a delicate effort, which requires special care, skill and tact," said Bart Koeler, director of The Wilderness Society's Wilderness Support Center and the organization's point

"We need as much private land in Custer County as we can get, but I'm not willing to trade the White Clouds for it. I want to know that a portion of the White Clouds would be available for some good farmland or something."

MILDRED FISHER

Challis

man on the Central Idaho wilderness issue. "But I still believe we'll get there. I have faith that a good bill will emerge."

Bones of contention

The politics of the Boulder-White Clouds wilderness discussion are as varied as the thousands of people who have laid claim to the federally owned land in the two rugged mountain ranges.

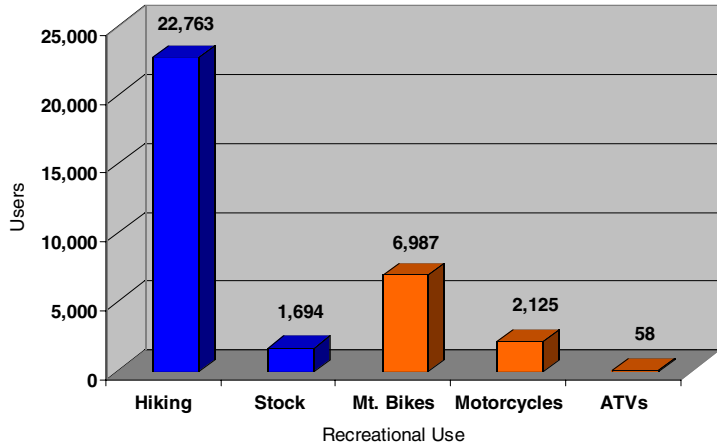
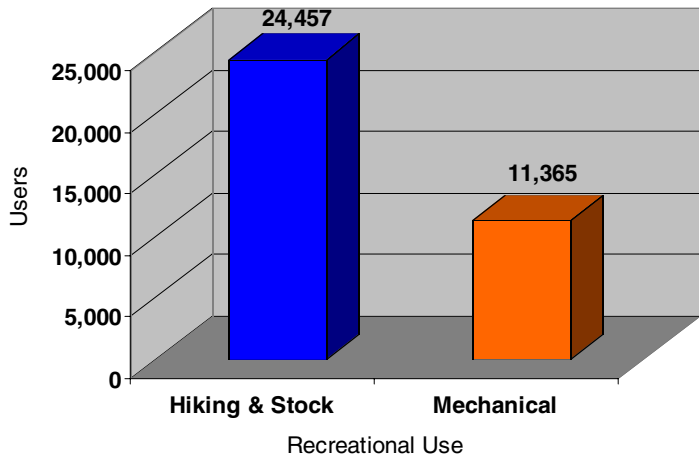
Motorcyclists, mountain bikers, environmentalists, ranchers, local officials and hikers, to name only a few, are staking out positions while awaiting the release of draft concepts—anticipated in September—from Rep. Mike Simpson, R-Idaho.

But Simpson's chief of staff, Lindsay Slater, has been careful to point out that the congressman is not looking for consensus, and he has been equally clear on who holds the majority of the bargaining chips. The Custer County commissioners will have to endorse the plan before it goes anywhere, Slater said.

"They're going to have to sign off on this," Slater said. "If they don't sign off, it doesn't move forward."

In rough terms, Simpson is considering designation of about 250,000 acres of wilderness in the
See WILD on page B6

Total number of users registered at the 20 B-WC trailhead registration stations (1999-2002)



Data courtesy U.S. Forest Service

CHARTED ABOVE is a general breakdown of the type of users in the B-WC Mountains. Mechanical users include mountain bikers, ATV enthusiasts and motorcyclists. Below the data is broken down into more specific categories.

TOWN HALL MEETING



HEAR YE, HEAR YE, HEAR YE!

*By order of David F. Wilson
Town Hall Meeting!*

Proclamation by Mayor David F. Wilson

WHEREAS, Mayor Wilson has requested to hear from the citizens of the City of Sun Valley; and

WHEREAS, Mayor Wilson and the City Council would like to introduce themselves and give an update of the present and future plans for the City of Sun Valley.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT PROCLAIMED BY MAYOR WILSON OF THE CITY OF SUN VALLEY, that on Wednesday, August 13, 2003, from 6:30 p.m. to 9:00 p.m., in the Lime-light Room of the Sun Valley Inn, there will be a

TOWN HALL MEETING

We will discuss matters of concern, both to the City and Community. Bring your ideas and suggestions. Snacks, coffee and soft drinks will be available.

TOWN HALL MEETING

Anti-wolf group wants its day in court

Some fear wolves decimate Idaho's big-game herds

By ASSOCIATED PRESS

The Idaho Anti-Wolf Coalition is trying to raise money to file a class-action lawsuit asking that the federal government be ordered to eliminate wolves from Idaho.

Coalition founder Ron Gillett of Stanley told a news conference in Boise on Sunday that increasing wolf populations across the state are putting stress on wildlife, outfitters and ranchers.

"I am afraid we are about to experience the biggest wildlife disaster in Idaho's history," Gillett said. "Something must be done immediately, because the Canadian gray wolf population has exploded to the point of decimating Idaho's big game herds."

Coalition member Bill Campbell of Nampa said many outfitters and hunting guides are having a hard time with game shortages.

"That's what brought this whole thing together," said Campbell. "There are outfitters who are literally going out of business because hunters come in from all over to hunt big game and don't see anything. Then they never come back."

Research indicates that wolf populations are decreasing in some areas because as packs grow the territorial animals roam into less desirable territory.

"The density of wolves in a given area is pretty much fixed. That is all the wolves you are going to have in an area," said Curt Mack, director of wolf recovery in Idaho for the Nez Perce Tribe.

up the rest. An average wolf pack probably eats 80 to 100 elk per year, said Mack. He guessed wolves kill about 2,500 to 5,000 elk per year.

"The pressure on elk is distributed over a larger geographic area, but the pressure and wolf predation on elk within an occupied territory remains the same," Mack said.

The lawsuit is meant to force federal officials to dispose of the animals through any means necessary.

"There's just no way that you can trap all those wolves. You can trap some, and that would be the humane thing to do. But the fact is they're a predator and you've got to deal with them one way or another," Campbell said.

Organizations in Montana and Wyoming share that sentiment, and the coalition hopes they will join in the lawsuit, said Campbell.

The Idaho group is gathering funds and plans to hold a dinner and auction Aug. 22 in Nampa. The coalition hopes to raise about \$100,000 for its legal efforts by spring. The latest estimates of Idaho's wolf population place it around 284, composed of about 19 packs. The numbers come from the 2002 gray wolf status report produced by the Nez Perce Tribe.

"I am afraid
we are
about to
experience the
biggest wildlife
disaster in
Idaho's history."

RON GILLETT

Founder of Idaho Anti-Wolf Coalition

Because the density of wolves in particular areas is not growing, predation of elk by wolves will likely increase across the state but won't increase in localized areas.

Researchers say that elk account for about 80 percent of the diet of wolves, while deer makes



PHOTO: ED CANNADY

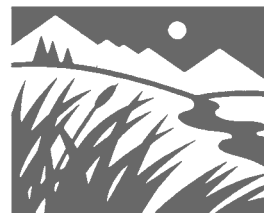
IT'S TIME TO DRAW THE BOUNDARIES AROUND SPECIAL PLACES IN THE BOULDER-WHITE CLOUDS...

...and make sure they are protected once and for all.

Representative Mike Simpson is in a critical phase of crafting his central Idaho wilderness proposal and we can make sure he includes many of the special places right in our backyard. Places like the North Fork of the Big Wood, Fourth of July/Champion Lakes, Warm Springs Meadows, Germania Creek and the West Fork of the East Fork need to be included.

Please call Congressman Simpson at 208-334-1953. Let him know the specific places you think should be protected and tell him there should be no motorized corridors through the wilderness.

For more information, visit the Idaho Conservation League's website at www.wildidaho.org or call 208-726-7485.



IDAHO CONSERVATION LEAGUE



Express photo by Willy Cook

KETCHUM RESIDENT JACK CORROCK measures his right hand against one of hundreds of wolf prints set in a muddy pond bed adjacent to Squaw Creek, in Custer County. The prints were left by members of the Buffalo Ridge Pack.

Wolves stake claims in White Clouds

By GREGORY FOLEY
Express Staff Writer

After a one-year hiatus, gray wolves have returned to the White Cloud Mountains, renewing a debate in central Idaho over how huge tracts of federal land in and around the region are managed.

Wolf advocates have applauded a federal ruling this year that prohibits federal officials from killing wolves that prey on livestock in the Sawtooth National Recreation Area, which includes the White Clouds. At the same time, many object to grazing permits that allow thousands of sheep and cattle to be placed in proximity of known wolf dens in the 756,000-acre SNRA.

Meanwhile, opponents of wolf reintroduction in Idaho have asserted that Idaho's wolves are negatively impacting livestock and elk populations, threatening the valued institutions of ranching and hunting.

Two new wolf packs moved into the White Clouds this year, filling a void left in 2002 by the erstwhile Wildhorse Pack, which disbanded, and the Whitehawk Pack, which was killed by federal officials after it was implicated in attacks on livestock.

The recently named "Galena Pack"—which resides in the western foothills of the White Clouds, near the Champion Creek drainage—was deemed a viable pack last spring after a litter of five pups was born to two adults.

In July, officials confirmed the viability of a second new pack in the northeastern White Clouds,

named the "Castle Peak Pack." That pack comprises two adults—including the former alpha male of the Wildhorse Pack—and four pups.

Carter Niemeyer, Idaho wolf recovery coordinator for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the agency currently charged with managing reintroduced wolf populations in Idaho, Montana, and Yellowstone National Park, said the new packs bring to 20 the number of wolf packs with litters in Idaho. An additional 20 known groups of wolves without a breeding pair reside in the state.

Niemeyer said the USFWS has seen ample evidence to believe that wolves are also residing near the Bench Lakes in the Sawtooth Mountains.

The region around the White Cloud Mountains is considered by biologists to be excellent wolf habitat, offering the far-ranging canines room to roam and abundant big game to feed on.

"It is very good wolf habitat," said Robin Garwood, wildlife biologist for the SNRA.

The SNRA wolves currently have an extra measure of protection over that provided by its status as a "threatened" species under the Endangered Species Act. In April, U.S. District Judge B. Lynn Winmill renewed a 2002 injunction that prohibits killing wolves in the SNRA—even those that prey on livestock.

Still, wolf advocates have opposed permits that allowed approximately 4,500 sheep and 2,500 cattle to graze in the SNRA this summer—some in pastures

immediately adjacent to the den of the Champion Creek wolves.

A third wolf pack residing just outside the SNRA boundaries is not protected by Judge Winmill's order. The Buffalo Ridge Pack, which in spring was established south of Clayton, has been a candidate for federal control actions this year because of previous suspected livestock kills.

The pack, however, relocated this summer into the mountains above Squaw Creek before any lethal control actions were deemed necessary.

Niemeyer said only a handful of suspected wolf predations on livestock have been reported this year. "We've had an extremely quiet summer all over Idaho," he said.

Niemeyer said a key to this year's success in keeping wolf-livestock interactions to a minimum has been a series of collaborative efforts by wolf managers and wolf advocates. Efforts have included installing electric fencing in some areas and delaying the installation of cows with calves in pastures near wolf dens.

"We certainly believe that if we can keep wolves and livestock apart, that would be the best solution," Niemeyer said.

Despite the newfound success of wolves in the White Clouds, their future is not certain. The wolves are scheduled to soon lose their federally protected status, and eventually will be managed by the state of Idaho. The state has an overall goal of maintaining at least 15 wolf packs in Idaho.

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Lani Mulick 726-1865



**Wednesday, Aug. 13
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Suz Cameron 726-9191



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Sunday, August 17
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Custer County faces down-and-out times

By GREG STAHL
Express Staff Writer

Mackay, located in southern Custer County, used to have four car dealerships, four grocery stores, five service stations, two drug stores, two farm machinery dealers, nine bars and a number of small feed stores.

The town is a shadow of its former self.

“What’s Mackay have now?” asked Lin Hintze, a 60-year resident of the town and a Custer County Commissioner. “The (federal government’s) Idaho National Environmental and Engineering Laboratory and the Forest Service,” he answered.

“We have one grocery store, and he’s having a hell of a time.

There are no car dealerships, two bars, no drug store, no feed store and no farm machinery dealer.

“Only one guy does seed potatoes, and the cattle industry is cut in half. Agriculture went down about 90 percent in Custer County since about the middle ’70s.”

Hintze is skeptical about what wilderness designation in the Boulder and White Cloud Mountains could do for his community. Outside visitors don’t bring much money, and second homeowners, which he believes wilderness would attract, don’t help much.

“It’s the things the ranches did that created the communi-

ty,” he said. “The folks who support the wilderness area do not spend any money in the community, and I’ll argue that fact.”

Hintze laments the large amount of public land within his county’s borders, but said the recent installation of a broadband fiber optic cable and Rep. Mike Simpson’s proposed land trade could help with the economic straits.

“Even though Custer County is the size of Connecticut, 96 percent of it is public land. That leaves us with 4 percent to haul the garbage and maintain public roads. As our people move off the ranches, who’s going to do that?” he asked.

Wilderness plan to honor 2000 winter-use pact

By GREGORY FOLEY
Express Staff Writer

A 2000 agreement that designated specific parts of the northern Wood River Valley for motorized and non-motorized uses in winter would likely be kept intact as part of any proposed legislation by Rep. Mike Simpson, R-Idaho, to establish a new wilderness area in the Boulder and White Cloud Mountains.

“We will honor the snowmobile agreement that was made,” said Lindsay Slater, Simpson’s

chief of staff, in addressing whether winter uses in the popular recreation area would be impacted by a new federal wilderness designation.

Slater said existing boundaries for winter motorized and nonmotorized uses—which were approved by the U.S. Forest Service in the fall of 2000—would be integrated into the wilderness plan to ensure that existing snowmobile use areas are not reduced.

The 2000 pact between snow-

mobilers and skiers established large areas reserved for each group. Both the motorized and nonmotorized areas include large portions of the Boulder Mountains, north of Ketchum.

The net result of the plan to honor the agreement, Slater said, is that portions of the Boulder Mountains near Galena Summit would be part of a new wilderness area, while the area encompassing Silver Creek, Easley Creek and Boulder Creek would be excluded.

WILD

Continued from page B1

Boulder and White Cloud Mountains and eastern White Cloud foothills. Areas of traditional motorized use—particularly among snowmobilers and motorcycle riders—will not be included, Slater said.

In an attempt to simultaneously aid the beleaguered economy of Custer County, Simpson also plans to attach to his wilderness bill a still-evolving plan to raise up to \$10 million for economic development in the rural county through the sale of approximately 16,000 acres of public land.

Though Slater said the land would probably be conveyed from the Challis National Forest, he hinted that small, highly valued parcels on the Sawtooth National Recreation Area could be sold in order to reduce the total acreage affected by the transaction. As an example, he said 1 acre fronting Pettit Lake could be worth as much as \$1 million, compared with 1 acre on the Challis National Forest that could value between \$30,000 and \$70,000.

“At this point, it’s not part of the plan, but we’re not taking it off the table right now, either,” he said.

Environmental and sportsman’s groups are smarting at the concept of a public lands sale, while at least one Custer County commissioner has said the proposal is the cornerstone of the deal.

“Nobody over there (in the Sun Valley area) will give me anything as an alternative,” said Custer County Commissioner and Lin Hintze, of Mackay. “What’s our alternative other than going broke and leaving?”

Conservationists have long pushed for a 500,000-acre wilderness, but Custer County Commissioner Wayne Butts told a Salt Lake City reporter in June

that he’ll agree to 120,000 acres and “I’ll fight the rest of it.”

“I think the wilderness is too big,” agreed Hintze, “and what they’re trying to give us is too small. In a county the size of Connecticut, 16,000 acres (of traded public land) is too small. It will do absolutely nothing for us. I would think I would want 160,000 acres at least, instead of 16,000.”

The Idaho Conservation League, meanwhile, said it is willing to accept less than 500,000 acres of wilderness, but 250,000 acres is too small. The proposed sale of public lands is another bone of contention altogether.

Uncommon insurgency

Environmentalists, who usually portray a united front, have not always agreed on some of the finer points of Simpson’s plan.

In a recent letter to the congressman, the ICL’s board of directors made clear the organization’s recently announced objections to the concept of a public land sale, as well as to proposed wilderness boundaries that would leave high mountain valleys and other prized areas open to snowmobilers and summertime motorized users.

The letter was an apparent response to uncommon insurgency among environmentalists charging that ICL was too narrowly focused on the Boulder-White Clouds and was compromising more significant environmental concerns.

“In the last month, many other organizations and individuals inside and outside of Idaho, representing conservation, recreation, fishing and hunting interests, have contacted us in opposition to this concept,” the board wrote. “We agree with them.”

ICL Executive Director Rick Johnson said that if the public land earmarked for Custer County does not sell, the resulting rev-

enues to be used for economic development would fall short.

“A direct appropriation from Congress would solve that problem,” he said, a sentiment expressed widely among environmental groups.

Hammering out wilderness boundaries to the satisfaction of conservationists and motorized groups is predicted to be another of the bill’s crux issues. ICL and other environmental groups have stressed that motorized corridors bisecting the potential wilderness area would be unacceptable.

“This issue has been front and center in debates on past wilderness initiatives and contributed greatly to their failure,” the board wrote in its letter.

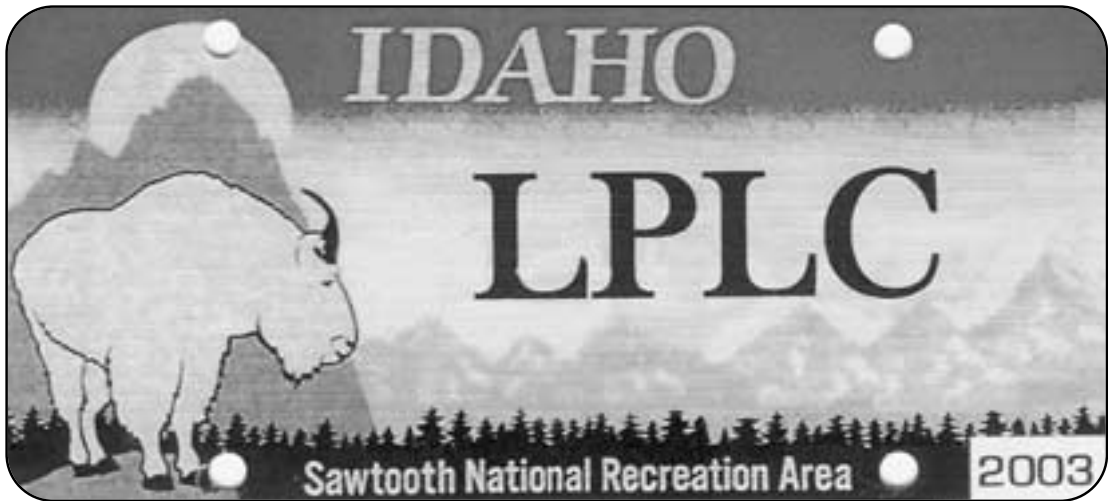
But motorized groups are pushing for more access to several areas, including Germania Creek, Grand Prize Gulch and Frog Lake, where there are “some of the really neatest trails for any experience of rider,” said Blue Ribbon Coalition Executive Director Clark Collins.

“There are some folks who just don’t trust the political process to treat us fairly,” Collins said. “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.”

But conservation groups also assert that motorized access should not have been allowed in many Boulder-White Cloud regions in the first place. When the area was set aside as a congressionally mandated wilderness study area in 1972, the Forest Service should have restricted access, some groups said.

“What we think is, the Forest Service has been violating its own wilderness recommendation by allowing motorized and snowmobile use to continue in there,” Koehler said. “Basically, our hope

See WILD on next page



IDAHO'S MOUNTAIN GOAT LICENSE PLATE recognizes it as the signature wildlife species of the Sawtooth, Boulder and White Cloud mountains. Sales of the plate benefit the Sawtooth Society's work for the Sawtooth National Recreation Area.

Mountain goats in decline

Forest Service says protection efforts in order

By GREGORY FOLEY

Express Staff Writer

The mountain goat population in the Boulder and White Cloud Mountains has fallen sharply, federal officials believe, prompting discussions about whether winter recreation should be restricted in areas favored by the animals.

Robin Garwood, wildlife biologist for the Sawtooth National Recreation Area, said an ongoing Idaho Fish and Game survey of mountain goats in the White Cloud Mountains has indicated that the population dropped by two-thirds in approximately the last 15 years. The state agency in 1988 estimated the population at 186 animals, compared to only 61 animals in 2002, Garwood said.

State Fish and Game numbers for both the Boulder and White Cloud mountain ranges—excluding the western slope of the Boulder Mountains—also indicate a sharp drop. In 1988, an estimated 278 goats roamed the area, but by 2002 the population dropped to 120 animals, Fish and Game reported.

Ed Cannady, backcountry recreation manager for the SNRA, said the U.S. Forest Ser-

vice has not conducted its own count of mountain goats in the Boulder-White Clouds. However, he said the Fish and Game numbers do accurately demonstrate a trend in the regional mountain goat population. "I see far fewer goats than I used to when I'm back there (in the White Clouds)," he said. "The empirical evidence is that there is a decline."

Garwood and Cannady said the Forest Service has not determined the cause of the decline, but is considering its options to protect the mountain goats from potentially stressful encounters with humans.

Cannady said travel restrictions might be necessary to protect the animals. "We're going to have to look at the best way to ensure that the goats have the best opportunity, not just to survive, but to bring their numbers back to where they were historically," he said. "If that includes travel restrictions, then we will definitely look at those."

Any future restrictions on travel in mountain goat ranges would include "any and all travel types, including skiers," Cannady added.

Garwood said mountain goats are particularly vulnerable in winter, when they are generally confined to lower elevations where they can successfully forage for food. With food sources already waning in winter, the animals must conserve their energy to stay healthy and cannot afford to repeatedly run from their home ranges, she noted.

"Any extra disturbance can be detrimental," Garwood said. "The less disturbance, the better."

Cannady said the Forest Service has not determined that any one type of encounter between mountain goats and humans is most detrimental to the animals. "Everyone assumes that motorized uses have the greatest impact, but it's a lot more complex than that, of course," he said. "It's very situational."

Despite a reluctance to enact land-use closures, Cannady said the SNRA does have an obligation to protect its signature species. "I think we would be hard pressed to sit idly by while the population is in decline."

the Blaine County Commission about his plans for the area.

"I think having a conversation with us would be in order," said Blaine County Commissioner Sarah Michael. "The whole focus has been on giving Custer County what it wants, but not giving any consideration for Blaine County's desires."

Similarly, voluntary U.S. Forest Service trail registries indicated that 74 percent of those who chose to sign in at 20 Boulder-White Cloud trailheads between 1999 and 2002 were hikers or horse packers who would continue to have access to the land if designated as wilderness. The registrations also indicated that 34 percent of those who signed in were mountain bikers, motorcyclists or all-terrain vehicle riders, user groups whose use would not be permitted beyond wilderness boundaries.

Of the motorized and mechanized users, mountain bikers constituted a clear majority, with 21 percent of the total sign-ins. However, roughly 85 percent of all mountain bikers signed in at Fisher Creek, which is not included in wilderness recommendations drafted by Simpson, the Forest Service or environmentalists.

"It's not completely based on

logic. It's political, and (ranchers and motorized groups) have a big seat at the political table in the West," said Linn Kincannon, ICL Central Idaho Director.

Resolute wishes

Support for wilderness designation in the Boulder and White Cloud mountain ranges has emerged resoundingly from Blaine County citizens and government leaders.

In the last two years, the cities of Sun Valley, Ketchum and Hailey; the Blaine County Commission; and the Sun Valley-Ketchum and Bellevue chambers of commerce have endorsed wilderness protection beyond the scope of Simpson's plan.

Each government body approved resolutions advocating a 500,000-acre Boulder-White Cloud wilderness, as well as calling for wilderness protection for the Pioneer and Smoky mountain ranges.

Ketchum Mayor Ed Simon said wilderness designation for his city is a no-brainer. The tourism economy on this side of the divide, would clearly benefit, he said.

"I think it clearly is an economic boon," he said. "I think See WILD on page B9

This Week's OPEN HOUSES



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WILD
Continued from page B7

we make our living based on the great outdoors, and being on the edge of a wilderness, as we are in Ketchum, I think does impact us positively, because wilderness gets a positive response from tourists. They want to see things stay in a pristine state somewhere in the country.”

Challis Mayor Cathy Becher, on the other hand, is more skeptical about what wilderness designation can do for her community. She suspects that most people who travel to wilderness areas are well-to-do financially, but may not travel when the national economy slumps.

At the same time, she said a wilderness designation could, in fact, discourage some travelers from visiting Challis.

“The 16,000 acres isn’t a whole lot of land,” said Becker in regard to Simpson’s proposed economic development package.

The “big if,” she added, will be the reaction from the Custer County Commission.

“There are just so many unknowns,” she said.

‘The art of the possible’

The complex relations between people in society—including the Boulder-White Clouds discussion—are something Koehler refers to as “the art of the possible.”

As a 30-year wilderness advocate, Koehler has worked on protections for 6 million acres in 12 states and has a good feel for the complexities of striking a successful deal.

“It seems very clear that this is Idaho’s time to shine in the sun,” he said. “When you have your time in the sun, you can’t be afraid of your own shadow.

“What that means is, you have to take some risks, but you can’t be reckless. In the end, all the groups involved need to do everything they possibly can to come up with a good piece of legislation.”

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