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## Basalt Mountain

12,150 acres (19 square miles)

### Setting

The Proposed Basalt Mountain Wilderness covers Basalt Mountain and a heavily forested portion of the upper Cattle Creek drainage. It is a large area, separated from the even larger proposed Red Table Wilderness to the east by the soon to be commissioned 4WD Taylor Creek Road, and contiguous with adjacent BLM roadless land to the west. It ranges in elevation from 7,000 near the Fryingpan River to 11,000 feet near the Red Table Mountain crest, covering a wide variety of landforms and vegetation types. Some south-facing slopes are very steep, but much of the area is rolling terrain with mixed sagebrush/grasslands that yield to oak/piñon/juniper and aspen or dark timber, depending on elevation, with the top capped with a stand of old growth spruce-fir. Open boulder fields of eroded basalt rock are scattered throughout the area.



*Iconic cattle-scaps of Basalt Mountain*

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### What's special about it

**Geology:** Basalt Mountain is an ancient shield volcano, with south-facing basalt-rock cliffs. Farther east, dramatic amphitheaters and formations, like the Seven Castles, have been carved into the underlying sandstone, towering above the Fryingpan Valley.

**Ecology:** The Proposed Basalt Mountain Wilderness has a high degree of naturalness and provides critically important low-elevation habitat in the Roaring Fork Valley and a wildlife movement corridor between the Maroon Bells Wilderness and the Proposed Red Table Mountain Wilderness. Most of these lands are classified high habitat priority for the Colorado Division of Wildlife. Lower elevations are winter range for elk, deer and bighorn sheep. Dense old growth spruce-fir forest on top of the mountain provides important elk security habitat, some of the only available such habitat in the immediate region. The area safeguards sensitive elk calving and lynx habitat. Bighorn sheep and black bears can often be seen in the southern portion, with historical peregrine falcon sightings. Imperiled Colorado River cutthroat trout inhabit Cattle Creek. The globally rare Harrington's beardtongue penstemon is also found in the area. The area is also an underrepresented ecosystem in existing protected areas.

**Recreation:** Basalt Mountain is an important and easily-accessible elk hunting area. It is a popular destination for hikers, cross country skiers, and horseback riders, and provides the scenic backdrop for communities in the mid-Roaring Fork Valley.

### Potential threats

Old-growth logging has been proposed for the portion atop Basalt Mountain, and allowing new road construction could enable that dormant project to awake. Without protection, much of the area remains vulnerable to renegade, illegal motorized use. New roads, forest thinning/harvesting, and mechanized trail development through the old growth stand on top of mountain would eliminate the important elk security habitat it provides.

### **Division of Wildlife habitat qualities, species of significance**

Vegetation within the area includes sagebrush, open meadows, pinon-juniper, aspen, oak, lodgepole pine, Douglas fir and spruce-fir. The steep slopes and red sandstone buttes at Seven Castles provides protection and production areas for bighorn sheep. Mule deer and elk winter habitat, as well as transitional and summer range occurs for these species. Black bear summer and fall range, Merriam's turkey overall range and mountain lion overall range are contained in this area. Lynx have been documented travelling through this area.

### **Outreach results**

The boundaries for this proposal area have been modified to accommodate continued popular bicycling and outfitter opportunities. See attachments for details.

*(See map on following page)*



