
Spraddle Creek

9,440 acres (14.8 square miles)

Setting

The proposed Spraddle Creek Wilderness Addition occupies half of Bald Mountain. It includes both creeks that drain the western slopes of Bald Mountain: Middle Creek and Spraddle Creek flow into the Gore Creek within the Vail town limits. The elevation ranges from 8,300 feet near Vail to 12,136 feet on Bald Mountain. Bald Mountain is part of the Gore Range and is a significant landform that is highly visible from Vail Ski Area. The terrain here mostly consists of large moderately-steep hillsides heavily-forested with Engelmann spruce and subalpine fir. Lodgepole pines and aspens are also present in the lower elevations.

What's special about it

Transition zone: This area has critical importance as a buffer between urban development in Vail and the Eagles Nest Wilderness Area. The landscape west of the proposal area has seen significant ecosystem modification from road construction and logging, making the intact nature of Spraddle Creek evermore important.

Ecology: Wildlife uses this area as a mid-elevation movement corridor between high peaks of the Gore Range and the Gore Creek valley. Mule deer and elk are abundant here in the summer and the area is used for elk calving. The ridge along the Area's eastern boundary is prime habitat for Canada lynx, a state-endangered and nationally-threatened species, as well as home to bighorn sheep and mountain goats.

Recreation: The proximity of this area to Vail makes it extremely valuable for recreational uses. It is a popular hunting and horseback riding destination. The Middle Creek and Son of Middle Creek Trails are very popular among mountain bikers, as they are easily accessible from town. The Eiseman Hut sits on a high ridge along the north edge of the proposal area, and provides access to excellent backcountry skiing terrain protected by the proposal. Spraddle Creek provides relatively easy access for quiet-use recreationists, opportunities that are increasingly rare and important as the hustle and bustle in the Vail Valley erodes many nearby quiet opportunities.

Potential threats

Motorized recreation: There has been some illegal motorized encroachment into this proposed Wilderness Addition from Spraddle Creek Road and Red Sandstone Road.

Logging: The area to the north of the unit was heavily logged during the 1940s. While the forest has regenerated well, the maze of closed and abandoned roads in the area may provide a launching point for illegal motorized use into the unit. As bark beetle-caused tree mortality increases in the area, there will



The lush understory of Spraddle Creek's aspen forest

be calls for more logging in an attempt to do something about this natural phenomenon. Any treatments intended to address beetle spread and tree mortality may cause more ecological harm than good and the landscape should be protected from the roads that would accompany potential beetle treatments.

Division of Wildlife habitat qualities, species of significance

Spraddle Creek has areas of rolling valleys to very steep slopes and high ridges containing spruce fir, aspen, lodgepole pine and grassland meadows. The area supports abundant wildlife; elk, deer, black bear, mountain lion, bighorn sheep, rocky mountain goat, blue grouse, pine martin, snowshoe hare and lynx. Rocky mountain goats use the area as overall habitat. Winter use of the area is limited to pine martin, blue grouse, snowshoe hare and lynx because of the high elevation. In the summer the area provides high quality habitat for both elk and deer; summer range, production areas and migration corridors. The area does contain potential lynx habitat. The area is significant for its lack of roads which provides excellent solitude and abundant wildlife.

Continuing discussions

Clarifying accommodations might be necessary to ensure efficient operation of municipal water delivery facilities. Conversations about details of this continue.

(See map on following page)

