

Castle Peak

17,810 acres (23.7 square miles)

Setting

Castle Peak is a prominent peak with steep rugged slopes, and rolling hills, basins, and meadows. It is an outlier of volcanic rock similar in age and origin to expanses of volcanic strata underlying the Flat Tops. Nestled between the Flat Tops, Gore Range and Sawatch Range, Castle Peak provides sweeping vistas of dramatic mountain landscape. Many springs, small lakes and perennial streams are found in the area; some streams provide aquatic habitat and support trout.



Castle Peak's namesake rock formation

In parts of the proposed Castle Peak Wilderness, a network of trails wind through the often chest-high grasses and downed timber. Castle Peak itself is not only a visual reference point for the whole area, but interesting in its own right, as an outlier of volcanic rock similar in age and origin to that covering the Flat Tops. Elevations range from 8,400 feet to 11,275 feet on Castle Peak. The expanded boundaries of the proposed wilderness add additional biodiversity by reaching down the hillside to include the lower elevation sagebrush/grasslands habitats. Castle Peak's location four miles from I-70 at the Wolcott exit, places it within easy driving distance of the Front Range, an added bonus for tourism and recreation.

What's special about it

Ecology: Due to its mid level elevation and plentiful precipitation, Castle Peak supports a wide variety of plants and wildlife. In addition to beaver ponds, the area offers superb summer range for 400 elk and 1,000 deer. The area also has outstanding geologic, natural, scenic and recreational characteristics, including low elevation habitat for a variety of species.

Recreation: In parts of Castle Peak, a network of hiking trails wind through the often chest-high grasses and downed timber. Jeep touring on the roadways surrounding the area is also popular as it affords a virtually unencumbered view of 5 surrounding Wilderness Areas. The area's qualities — numerous pack trails, creeks, beaver ponds, unusual rock formation, diverse plant and animal life — offers outstanding opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation opportunities for hiking, backpacking, horseback riding, snowshoeing, photography, sightseeing, birdwatching and hunting.

Geology: Castle Peak itself is not only a visual reference point for the whole area, but interesting in its own right. It is a basalt dike, a column of volcanic rock left as the surrounding softer material has eroded away and is an outlier of volcanic rock similar in age and origin to that covering the Flat Tops.

Agency analysis

Bureau of Land Management Wilderness Suitability Analysis excerpt:

The diversity of ecosystems provides for a large variety of primitive and unconfined recreational activities including hiking, backpacking, hunting, horseback riding, photography, fishing, nature study and sight-seeing.

Special Features: The unusual basalt geological formation of Castle Peak (11,275 ft) is the most prominent geologic feature within the WSA and in the Eagle River Valley, being visible for a 10 mile radius. The diversity of topography and vegetation provides the WSA with outstanding scenic and ecological values. Most of the WSA has been rated as high quality (Class A) scenery in the Visual Resource Management analysis. The relatively unaltered ecosystems and scenery of the WSA contrast with the surroundings where man's influence is more noticeable and thus highlights the primeval character of the WSA. The vegetation also provides excellent habitat for deer and elk.

Outreach results

Several changes have been made to this proposal area's boundaries to accommodate continued access for backcountry outfitting businesses and agricultural operations, and to add new wilderness quality lands. The expanded boundaries of the proposed wilderness add additional biodiversity by reaching down the hillside to include the lower elevation sagebrush/grasslands habitats. See attachments for details.

(See map on following page)

