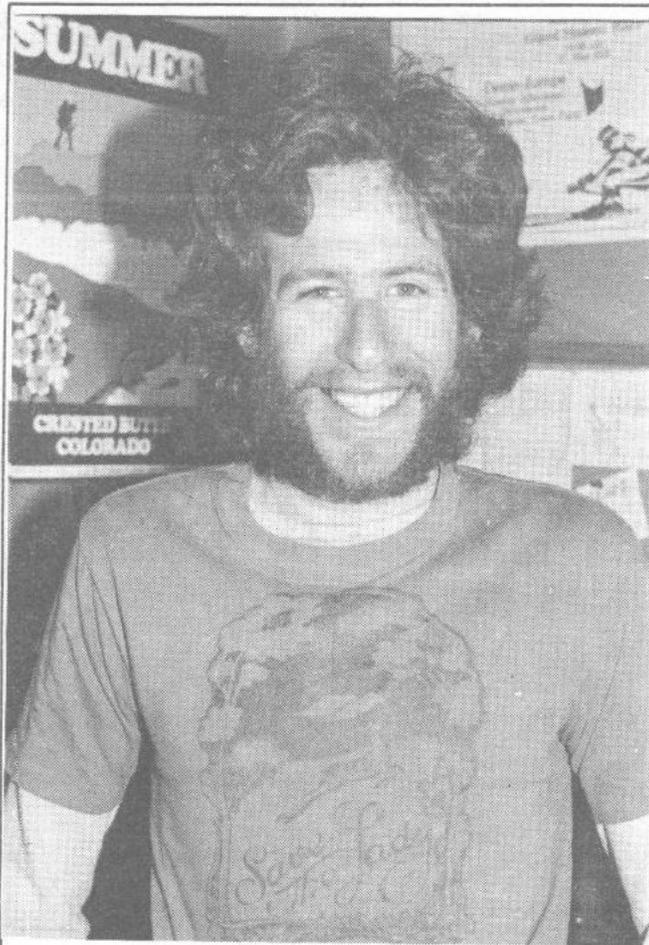


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Gary "Gnurps" Sprung, Gunnison County's representative for the Wilderness Network....photo by Paul Andersen

Wilderness Network Represented In Gunnison County

THE COLORADO WILDERNESS NETWORK, a coalition of environmental organizations throughout the State of Colorado, has taken a strong stand as champions of wilderness and has appointed Gary Sprung of Crested Butte as a coordinator for Gunnison County. Sprung, or "Gnurps," as he is referred to locally, has been active in environmental issues over the past five years but will now have an organizational banner to wave as a vocal supporter of wilderness preservation.

Today, Sprung and the Wilderness Network are knee deep in the issue of oil and gas exploration and leasing in wilderness areas throughout the State. Both Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management [BLM] lands are facing pressures from natural resource corporations intent upon finding energy sources through drilling and other exploration programs. A legislative battle is simultaneously being waged at the federal level to institute agreeable regulations for industrial activities in wilderness areas.

Sprung attended a Congressional hearing last week in Grand Junction for the purpose of providing input to the Federal government on the issue of wilderness values and gas and oil exploration. Two bills, the Burton Bill and the Lujan Bill, have been proposed as means of regulating activity in wilderness.

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Sprung, who favors the Burton Bill, said it could tie up wilderness exploration until 1983 when the commercial mineral entry deadline runs out, thereby cutting off the advance of mineral exploration and potentially destructive and conflicting activities. The other bill, supported by Secretary of Interior James Watt and introduced by Manuel Lujan, a New Mexico Democrat, would protect wilderness areas until the year 2000 when they would open for mineral entry based on further ongoing study.

Sprung claims the Lujan bill is little more than a stop gap measure that would not offer any real protection for wilderness and would serve to cancel some provisions of the 1980 Colorado Wilderness Bill which set aside large amounts of land throughout Colorado and the nation as wilderness areas.

Sprung said the purpose of his organization is to "protect existing wilderness while creating new wilderness" and a number of programs have been launched as a means to that end. The "Adopt a Wilderness" program is an effort to get people personally involved in a specific area of wilderness which has either been included into the wilderness system by Congress or is still undergoing study as a potential wilderness area. One of these areas is Fossil Ridge, northeast of Gunnison in the Taylor Park area which Sprung has adopted for his own crusade.

"I want to make people aware of Fossil Ridge and all wilderness. It is a place where you can see there is more to nature than man," said Sprung. "The preservation of wilderness is the future of life. It offers genetic diversity of plants and animals through which humans can extract potential cures and immunities to disease. Man cannot improve on nature and wilderness is the illustration of nature's perfection. Going into wilderness is not a retreat, not precivilized life, but more of a religious experience which open you to the universe."

Another region of wild lands Sprung has interest in is BLM administered Cannibal Plateau near Powderhorn south of Blue Mesa Reservoir. This area, named for the activity of notorious cannibal Alferd Packer, is included as a wilderness study area and is being recommended for inclusion as wilderness. Sprung said conflicts with snowmobiles are jeopardizing that classification,

something he is concerned about.

The West Elk Wilderness area, northwest of Gunnison, is also being jeopardized, said Sprung, by oil and gas leases. Of the total 194,000 acres, 101,000 acres have been applied for lease status by natural resource companies, he said. "It's hard to say how many leases are there now," he explained.

Anyone wishing to adopt a wilderness or work with Sprung on his campaign to preserve wilderness and the values it imparts, should call 349-6244 or write P O Box 1148, Crested Butte, CO 81224.

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