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Protect Adobe Town

The environmental community, which has a sharpened understanding of timing, has intensified the drumbeat for Adobe Town.

Letters are arriving, from the photographer Tom Mangelsen of Jackson, and from others outside the region. They believe the land of hoodoos and badlands southwest of Rawlins should be designated as wilderness, with no mechanized use, and no gas drilling.

They want those protections to cover the existing Adobe Town wilderness study area, of about 85,000 acres and including Skull Creek Rim. Further, they argue, wilderness designation should expand significantly beyond that core, to include the Haystacks to the north, and other lands east and south of the wilderness study area. The Biodiversity Conservation Alliance, whose Erik Molvar may have tromped across more of Adobe Town than anyone, is calling for protection of 180,910 acres of land.

While the sum of land can — and will — be argued, the conservationists are right about this one.

Adobe Town should become a protected wilderness area.

The Bureau of Land Management should put such designations into its resource management plan.

The Congress should approve it.

People in Rawlins have wide opinions about a wilderness designation for Adobe Town. They've hunted there, and ridden four-wheelers nearby. Some would leave it as it is. Others would protect it. The rest? Ask many people if Adobe Town should be wilderness and they say this: "Where's Adobe Town?"

It's southwest of Rawlins, west of Baggs, south and slightly west of Wamsutter, in Sweetwater County. You can hardly get there from here. But, after 2-1/2 hours of driving, and help finding it, Adobe Town is revealed as breathtakingly spectacular, relatively untouched, a hiker's maze through hoodoos and color and quiet. Writer and photographer Ron Marquart of Lincoln would argue it's on the scale of Canyonlands, or Bryce Canyon. Those comparisons are reaches, but not by much. Molvar labels Adobe Town the "crown jewel of Wyoming's high desert wilderness." He's right.

To support wilderness designation for Adobe Town is not to oppose oil and gas development. It's not a dichotomy. The natural gas resources below Atlantic Rim, at Wamsutter, in the Creston-Blue Gap plays should be developed — responsibly, with mitigations in place — but developed nonetheless. We need the gas, the jobs, the tax revenue, the economic activity.

Gas development should not be *everywhere*, though. West and southwest of Rawlins, the gas fields are expanding quickly, to the fringes of Adobe Town. Development should not be allowed to consume the wildest, most fascinating reaches of that landscape. It's too precious a place to allow exploitation.

Wouldn't it be refreshing to see Wyoming's Congressional delegation, ala Simpson, Cheney and Wallop with the Wyoming Wilderness Act in the 1980s, forge a compromise new wilderness bill on the Red Desert? We're not encouraged that will happen. Sen. Craig Thomas would listen to a wilderness proposal. Sen. Mike Enzi might, too. Rep. Barbara Cubin? No way. Yet their leadership is needed, now, to bring about some level of protection. Otherwise, uncertainty shall prevail, and the lawyers shall prosper.

We've suggested protection for Adobe Town and its environs in the past. Now, we say it with more conviction. Whatever its size, let's create the Adobe Town Wilderness Area.

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