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Campbell Back Black Canyon

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Campbell backs Black Canyon

By Fred Brown

Denver Post Staff Writer

Colorado Sen. Ben Nighthorse Campbell on Thursday introduced a bill to make the Black Canyon in Gunnison County the state's third national park.

The canyon, carved by the Gunnison River, is designated as a national monument. Making it a full-fledged national park would give it the same status as Colorado's other national parks, Rocky Mountain and Mesa Verde.

"With its narrow opening, sheer walls and scenic depths, the Black Canyon is a jewel in North America," Campbell said in a statement accompanying his introduction of the bill.

Measure would confer national park status

"Everyone who has visited the site is struck by the breathtaking beauty of this 2,000-foot-deep, nearly impenetrable canyon. The canyon is also home to a vast assortment of wildlife that ranges from chipmunks to black bear, from bobcats to coyotes.

"Its unique combination of geologic features makes the Black Canyon deserving of national park status," Campbell said.

Campbell began working to redesignate the monument when he was a Democrat representing the state's 3rd Congressional District,

which includes the Black Canyon.

His new bill is endorsed by Gunnison County commissioners and the Montrose Chamber of Commerce.

Campbell conducted a field hearing on a similar proposal in 1996, during his first Senate term, and has called for a hearing later this year for more public comment on the legislation.

That legislation was opposed by the White House, and it failed. Campbell's new bill also includes a provision allowing grazing in the new park. A similar provision in the 1996 legislation was deemed objectionable and removed by a conference committee.

National Monuments Black Canyon