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Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park

Colorado National Parks

Parks Chief Rejects Black Canyon plan

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Parks chief rejects

Black Canyon plan

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By Adriel Bettelheim

Denver Post Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — An ongoing effort to designate the Black Canyon of the Gunnison a national park failed to win the endorsement of the head of the National Park Service yesterday.

Park Service Director Roger Kennedy called the celebrated canyon near Montrose “a national treasure” but voiced concerns about legislation proposed by Sen. Ben Nighthorse Campbell, D-Colo., to upgrade its status from a national monument and dictate some land-use issues.

Campbell in July introduced a bill that would confer national park status on the canyon but also establish a “national conservation area” on the canyon’s rims where ranching and hunting would be allowed.

Campbell’s effort is unusual because it advocates “multiple use” options on park lands that are normally off-limits to activities such as livestock grazing. Kennedy said he favors expanding the canyon’s

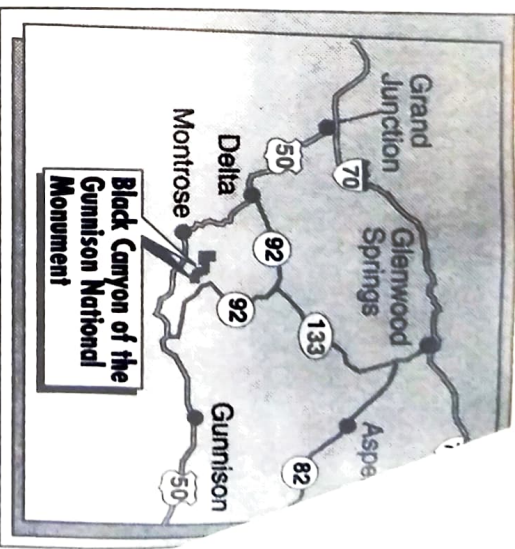
present boundaries but opposes Congress directing how the land will be used.

“If the Congress says ‘Thou shall call it a park and thou shall allow these activities to occur in it,’ then we oppose that,” Kennedy said. “We would say if it’s going to be a park, be a park. We would want to be clear about that.”

The National Park Service has several different designations for areas that are off-limits to development. The only national parks in Colorado are Rocky Mountain and Mesa Verde. Areas like the Dinosaur, Colorado and Great Sand Dunes national monuments are subject to more limited restrictions.

Campbell, in introducing the bill, said Congress has the final say in outlining how the land is to be used.

“Americans are demanding more — not less — protected resources for recreation and sight-seeing. But Congress decides what qualifies for national park status, and I believe that Black Canyon



The Denver Post

does.” His bill also would designate the lower Gunnison Gorge a wild and scenic river and encompass the upstream Curecanti system of reservoirs as a National Recreation Area.

A Campbell spokeswoman said yesterday the first-term senator introduced the bill in hopes of getting feedback from officials like Kennedy and Colorado residents. The bill isn’t expected to receive a hearing before Congress adjourns this year.

Separately, Kennedy said the Park Service is ready to undertake a previously reported reorganization that will cut 1,300 jobs department-wide and transfer much power from its Washington headquarters to park superintendents.

National monuments Black Canyon of the Gunnison