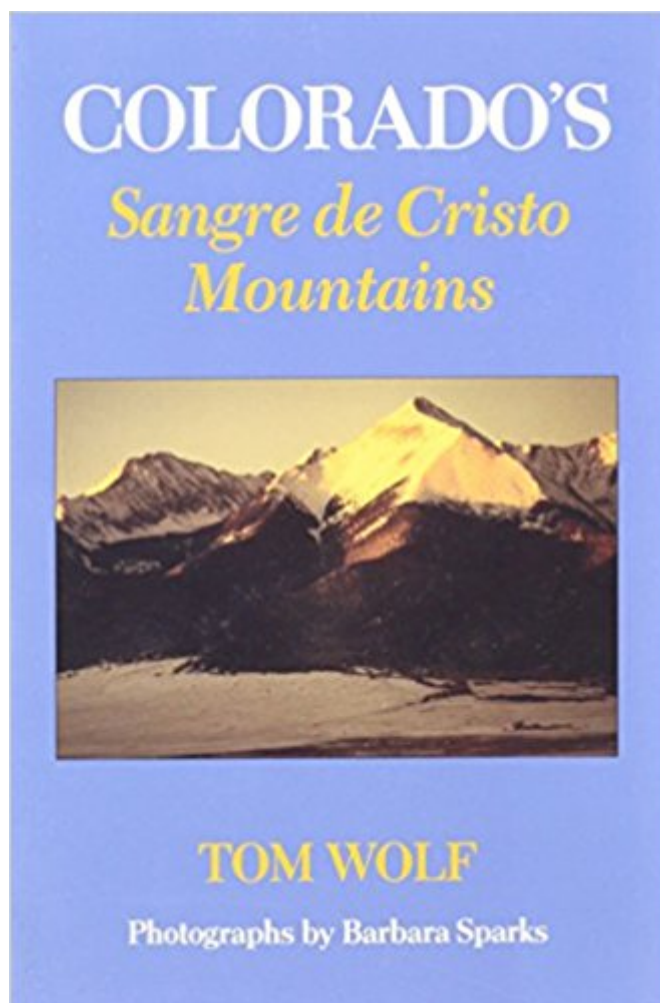


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Colorado's Sangre De Cristo Mountains



Synopsis

Colorado's Sangre de Cristo Mountains draws on the latest scientific findings to show that the battered, beautiful Sangres need us as much as we need them. Focusing on forest ecology, environmental writer Tom Wolf shows how fire, insects, disease, humans, and other disturbances have formed the magnificent, diverse forests we know today.

Book Information

Paperback: 339 pages

Publisher: University Press of Colorado (December 15, 1998)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0870815148

ISBN-13: 978-0870815140

Product Dimensions: 6 x 1 x 8.9 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.3 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.0 out of 5 stars 1 customer review

Best Sellers Rank: #720,507 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #150 in [Books > Science & Math > Nature & Ecology > Mountains](#) #689 in [Books > Science & Math > Earth Sciences > Geography > Regional](#) #692 in [Books > Science & Math > Nature & Ecology > Natural History](#)

Customer Reviews

Tom Wolf is the author of Colorado's Sangre de Cristo Mountains (UPC), Ice Crusaders, and In Fire's Way.

If there is a major error in Tom Wolf's deeply researched work on the Sangre de Cristo mountains, it must be the chronic overestimation of human potential. He makes a case for a new sort of "management" of the mountain range, one that places control among locals. However, having evolved over millions of years without human assistance into marvelous things, mountain don't need management. Perhaps what Wolf intends is to better manage the people who come to the mountains. That is a worthy goal, as long as the people to be managed are wielding destructive devices such as cars or chain saws. But if he means, as I think he does, that everybody who wants to take a walk in the mountains should pay five or ten dollars in "user fees", then I oppose him enthusiastically. Such a course seems to me to be needlessly commercial, taxing and selling activities which are as basic and essential as breathing. He has doubts about wilderness status for the Sangres, because of the lack of revenue from so-designated land. But what is this foregone

revenue to have been put toward? Management, in a word. He wants to take the levers of control out of the hands of what he calls the Iron Triangle (politicians, special interests, bureaucrats), and place them into the hands of a trust composed of local ranchers, community activists, forest rangers, shampoo tycoons, biologists, economists...some sort of Iron Polyhedron. This body would act sensibly when a crisis such as insect or disease epidemic arose. One can assume there would be controlled burns, controlled wood cutting (going under the euphemism "harvest"), controlled hunting (going under the euphemism "harvest"), and controlled entry into the controlled wilderness area. Now, I have nothing against hunting or lumbering or even wildfires. All are necessary or desirable in their time. But the notion of the sand dunes being ruined because of increased hikers, or of valleys being inundated in a sea of elk droppings, or of forests being denuded by out-of-control herds of deer are far fetched. Similarly, Wolf's assertion that at the end of the last Ice Age, primitive hunters, without the use of guns or horses or sport utility vehicles, indeed without anything but "new flint technology", were able to drive into extinction 32 genera of post-Ice Age mammals strains credibility. Just as we should cast a jaundiced eye on any of society's plans to "save" nature, we also should guard against giving mankind too much of the blame for the ebb and flow of natural cycles. Wilderness status for the highest reaches of the range simply protects it from the exploitation of the sort Wolf detail. If one can take any lesson from his account of the various follies visited on the range, it is that no plan can benefit the mountains as much as leaving them alone. And yes, I consider hordes of recreational users who are not shooting anything or cutting anything to be leaving the mountains alone. Crowds of people, if they ever do materialize in the roadless areas, will be as benign a presence as a herd of buffalo. And I'll gladly take 20 random flyovers by jet fighters in place of every No Trespassing sign put up by the so-called "Ranch for Wildlife" crowd. The former are thrilling and harmless, the latter oppressive. One must take the hat off to Wolf for his monumental effort, however. Who would have thought so much could be written about a backwater, and that it could be linked in so many ways to the mainstream? A greater effort should have been made in the way of editing so as to correct mistakes such as on p.80, where he states "The Sangres stretch from the 42nd to the 41st parallel." These coordinates would put them in Wyoming, giving the lie to the title's claim that they are Colorado's. Also, on p.265 Steve McNichols is mistakenly named as the governor of Colorado in 1975. Dick Lamm was governor at that time. But these are trifling errors...

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