

## **Old-Growth Ponderosa Pine**

Industry's proposes to obliterate nearly every single stand of old-growth ponderosa pine in the HD Mountains with a road or gas well. Most old-growth stands are situated on level benches, ridgelines, or valleys — the very same locations favored by gas drillers and road builders.

Old-growth ponderosa pine is the most underrepresented ecosystem type among Forest Service wilderness areas in Colorado. The HD Mountains include some of the highest quality old-growth ponderosa pine left in the San Juan Mountains. Forest Service inventories have identified numerous stands of ponderosa pines older than 300 years old, and have dated some trees older than 500 years. This places the HDs among the very oldest stands of ponderosa pine in the entire Southern Rocky Mountains.

The 6,193-acre Ignacio Creek area of the HD Mountains has been proposed as a Research Natural Area. Ignacio Creek is one of the most pristine, ecological research sites in low elevation watersheds of the Southern Rockies. It contains abundant old-growth Ponderosa Pine, including one patch that covers more than a square mile. These trees range from 250 to 500 years of age, with many exceeding three feet in diameter. Additionally, because the Ignacio Creek area has never experienced any kind of development, there are no noxious weeds or other non-native plant species. Industry plans to cut roads up the floor of Ignacio Creek to access nine wells drilled directly in the stream valley, along with another fifteen wells and two compressor stations.

## **Proposed Wilderness**

The HD Mountains are the last, large intact roadless area at low elevation in the San Juan Mountains. The area would be an extraordinary addition to the National Wilderness Preservation System because of its uncommon old-growth ponderosa pine forests and low-elevation winter wildlife habitat. The area's primitive recreation opportunities coupled with archeological and other scientific values make this an outstanding candidate for wilderness protection.