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HISTORY OF THE
COKEVILLE RANGER DISTRICT
BRIDGER NATIONAL FOREST

PREPARED BY: Marc D. Harris, Forester
1968

The Cokeville Ranger District is the southwesternmost district of the Bridger National Forest. The boundaries are the forest boundary on the east, south, and west; the North boundary is Smiths Fork Creek from the forest boundary north to Poker Hollow. The boundary then goes along the hydrographic divide of Hobble Creek to a point north of LaBarge Meadows Guard Station thence northeast to the hydrographic divide of LaBarge Creek. Thence southeast down this divide to the forest boundary.

Elevation on the District ranges from 6,900 feet at the forest boundary on Sawmill Creek to 10,343 feet at Bald Knoll on Deadline Ridge. The area is characterized by somewhat moderate slopes to steep and rock peaks. The profile, while not jagged or abrupt does have narrow drainages with steep sideslopes as a typical feature.

The majority of the soils have developed from sedimentary rock, principally sandstone, shale and limestone. In a few areas soils are residual, having developed from quartzite bedrock. Soils are young and generally shallow, probably as a result of fairly recent ecological changes.

Main drainages are the high watersheds of LaBarge Creek, Fontenelle Creek and portions of Hams Fork of the Green River, all a part of the Colorado River Basin: and Hobble Creek and the Smiths Fork of Bear River, which are part of the Great Basin drainage system.

Precipitation averages from 15-40 inches annually, 75 per cent of which comes in the form of snow. The frost free season is generally less than 50 days. The coldest temperature ever recorded in Cokeville was -52° and the hottest, +93°. Summers are characteristically dry with the greatest amount of rainfall during May and June.

The District is rich with history of local, regional and national origins. Early trappers arrived soon after the Lewis and Clark Expedition to the Pacific Coast in 1803 – 5. At the end of a trapping season the annual rendezvous was held where fur buyers purchased the seasons catch for transport to the east. While a rendezvous was not held on the District itself there are sources to indicate that the rendezvous of 1837 was held on some part of Hams Fork of the Green River. Bernard DeVoto in his book Across the Wide Missouri puts the location 50 miles SW of New Fork which is presumably New Fork Lakes on the Green River District. Fontenell Creek on the Cokeville District, is named for Lucien Fontenelle, a trapper for the American Fur Company. The Forest derives its name from Jim Bridger (Old Gabe[?], Blanket Chief) another trapper from the Rocky Mountain Fur Company.

The Lander Cut-Off of the Oregon Trail enters the District atop the Coyote Park Divide from the Big Piney District. Sixteen miles of this trail traverses the District and is today marked with concrete monuments by which the trail may still be followed. The trail was the first federal road west of the Mississippi, authorized by Congress in 1856. It was constructed to bypass the area know as the Dry Drive from Sublette's Trail south; to reduce the overall mileage of the Oregon Trail; and to avoid the hostilities and ill feelings connected with areas adjacent to Fort Bridger brought about by the Johnson's Army incident. The trail was used by wagons until 1912 and into the 1920's by automobiles. In traveling the trail today it is unbelievable

that autos could travel the route. There are two known graves on the Oregon Trail.

Included in the early history of the area is banditry, cattle drives, range wars between sheepmen and cattlemen and bootlegging during the prohibition years of the 1920's – 30's.

Range

The Cokeville Ranger District was founded in 1918. It has been primarily a District of livestock use although timber use has been on the increase in more recent years. Range use has maintained a fairly constant plateau. In 1966, there 29,482 sheep grazed of a permitted 32,977, and 1,231 cattle grazed of a permitted 1,366. Range allotment analysis is being performed with 11 of 30 allotments completed. When RAA is completed, the District will be better able to regulate stocking rates of the allotments to their capacities. With proper range management practices, many depleted ranges can be rehabilitated to productive use. Voluntary non-use by permittees indicates that there is an interest in good range management practices.

Timber

No known date can be found but there was an early sawmill operated by Kelley Hamilton at Kelley Guard Station named for him. Timber harvesting was characteristically light until more recent years. From 1930-1946 much of the LaBarge Creek Drainage was "tie-hacked". This is a term to denote logging for a specific product such as railroad ties and mine props. There is still evidence of the presences of these operations throughout the LaBarge Creek Drainage. Sawdust and slab piles mark the site of the portable saws used by the "Old Standard Tie-Hacks". There is a song sung to the tune of the "Wabash Cannonball" about these Standard tie-hacks. Crude work roads are still present and some are being reconstructed as part of new timber sales. They are still used to some extent by hunters.

In 1958, Basin Creek Sale at the head of Basin Creek was sold to Mills Lumber Company of Kemmerer, Wyoming. This marked the first large sale from the District strictly for lumber. Mills Lumber is now defunct and has been replaced as primary buyer of Bridger National Forest timber by Star Valley Lumber Company of Afton, Wyoming.

In 1963, the West Fork Timber Sale was purchased by Star Valley Lumber beginning the harvest of timber for stud products. In the year following Big Park was also sold to Star Valley Lumber. Both sales are north of Kelley Guard Station.

Again in 1966 and 1967 Star Valley Lumber Company purchased timber from the Cokeville District. Deadline and South LaBarge sales were sold to harvest mature and overmature lodgepole pine stands and secondarily to improve the areas that were tie-hacked earlier. Many of these tie-hacked areas are characterized by two-story stands of timber – an overstory of older trees and an understory underneath, of young trees which can be released by cutting the overstory to provide a new thrifty crop for the future. Species of trees sold are Lodgepole pine, Alpine fir, Douglas fir, and Englemann Spruce.

June 26, 1967 saw the first large contract to pile logging slash for burning on the Cokeville District. The slash to be piled, 519 acres was in the Big Park and West Fork Sales. In October of the same year a Forest wide crew burned nearly 700 acres of slash and a District crew burned an additional 101 acres plus approximately 20 miles of road slash. These operations prepared the area for seeding and planting operations to reforest the cut-over areas.

Watershed

The entire District has immense value as watershed. With the increasing demands of downstream users for water, concern for useable watershed will always maintain a high priority commodity from the storehouse of forest resources. Every facet of forest management has the watershed resource ranked at the top among the basic principles of coordination with each resources. The Viva Naughton Reservoir and Fontenelle Reservoir are located off of the District and the Forest but rely on the high watersheds of the District for all or part of their impounded supplies of water. Much of the watershed on the District has been abused in the past and management is being directed at the necessary rehabilitation and stabilization of watershed conditions for optimum yields.

Recreation

Outdoor Recreation is increasing at a tremendous rate over the entire nation with increased mobility and leisure time. The Cokeville District while not increasing as rapidly, is experiencing growing pains. There is only one developed campground on the District but dozens of roadside locations are suitable for camping. More campgrounds and better access are a crying need in most areas. A substantial drawback to an extensive recreation plan for the District is the substandard roads. Access has been a limiting factor but as new roads are constructed and existing ones improved, a greater amount of outdoor recreation can be expected.

Wildlife

An intimate part of outdoor recreation but yet a separate facet of forest management is wildlife management. According to Edwin Cazier, early resident and Forest Ranger, there were relatively few deer around 1915 and few elk – although some were known to winter on the steep north slope in Hobble Creek. Moose were unheard of at this time and few bear along with many coyotes. This contrasts sharply with the present picture of big game populations. There are approximately 1,200 elk, 6,000 – 7,000 male deer, and 300 – 400 moose. There are still few bear but considerably less coyote. The District also has populations of blue, ruffled, and sage grouse, beaver, mink, morten, muskrat, bobcat, and a very sparse population of mountain lion and Canadian lynx. Each year brings a great influx of hunters into the community contributing to the economy of Cokeville.

Big game winter range on the District has suffered from the increase in animal numbers over the years. Mountain Mahogany, a preferred winter browse species, has become high-lined (browsed off within reach) by big game animals. During 1967, a test project was begun in an attempt to find a means of inducing sprouting of the Mountain Mahogany stands for increased winter food supplies.

Fire

Although the District becomes very dry during the summer and is subject

to frequent lightning storms, there are surprisingly few forest fires. There is an average of 2.3 fires per year of which 78 per cent are less than one-tenth acre in size (Class A). There has been only one major fire recorded on the District, approximately 1280 acres burned near the present Scaler G.S. in 1944.

Some of the names of places on the District have colorful backgrounds. Previously mentioned were Fontenelle Creek and Kelley Guard Station. Lake Alice is reportedly named for a girl by that name who drowned in the lake. It is presumed that she was there during the days when there were mining operations in the area. Coppermine allotment is named for the copper mine near Hobble Creek above Lake Alice. Wagons owned by Wiley Marks hauled the ore into Cokeville for shipping. There were also oil wells on Lake Mountain and in the lower Fontenelle Creek drainage, although neither location produced any oil.

Jap Park is so named because a Japanese owner of a restaurant in Cokeville grubstaked some miners who sought mineral deposits in the area.

Nugent Park was named after Jim Nugent, an early day logger in the area. He had a cabin in the park but later moved to the old Kelley sawmill site. Deadline Ridge is assumed to have acquired its name because it represented a boundary between cattle and sheep range in the early days. Graham Peak, a location selected for a F.S. Radio repeater, was named after Fred Graham early Forest Ranger on the District.

Other names of places on the District undoubtedly have similar backgrounds but they are unknown to the writer at this time.

Facilities

The District office has been located on U.S. Highway 30N on the southern edge of Cokeville since 1964. Prior to that time, headquarters were at Kelley Ranger Station until 1941 and at two other sites in downtown Cokeville until 1964.

The old Ranger Station located at the present site of Kelley Guard Station was moved to Cokeville during the fall of 1947. It was used as a home for the District Ranger until 1967 when a second house was purchased. The District Forester lives in the old house now.

The District maintains three guard stations on the forest at : LaBarge Meadows, LaBarge Scaler Cabin and Kelley Guard Station. Previously there were stations at Elk Creek Guard Station and Fontenelle Guard Station. The station at Fontenelle Cr. has been torn down since it was abandoned. The old station at Elk Creek still stands. The three stations now in use are used mainly in the summer by seasonal employees and other District personnel on over nite stays away from Cokeville.

The District was managed solely by a District Ranger until 1962 when a full time Forester was added. Clerical help has been handled by Pat Waring of Star Valley until 1960. Keith Wray filled in until Joyce Netherly began in 1961. She works for both the Forest Service and the Soil Conservation Service, both housed in the same office building.

RANGERS

1. Fred Dunn - 1918 - 1923
2. Fred Graham - 1923 – 1926
3. Robert S. Dalley 1926 – 1928
4. Fred Graham 1928 – 1940
5. W. J. Lucas 1941
6. Kenneth D. Roberts 1942 – 1943 (Acting)
7. Garland M. Toland 1944 – 1945 (Acting)
8. Frederick R. Baugh 1946 – 1948
9. William O. Deshler 1949 – 1951 (Forest Supervisor)
1965 –
10. Dean C. Rowland 1952 – 1955
11. Vernon Brewer 1956 – 1957
12. Richard A. Wheeler 1958 – 1962
13. F. Glenn Osborn 1963 – 1966
14. Garth E. Baxter 1966 –

FORESTERS

1. Bruce J. Loewenberg - 1963
2. Darrel C. Hintze - 1964 – 1966
3. John R. Fink - 1966 – 1967
4. Marc D. Harris - 1967 – 1968

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DM to 1983

Bob Riddle 83-91

Jim Wickel 92-97

Meshit 98-00

Mankbouth 01-Pres