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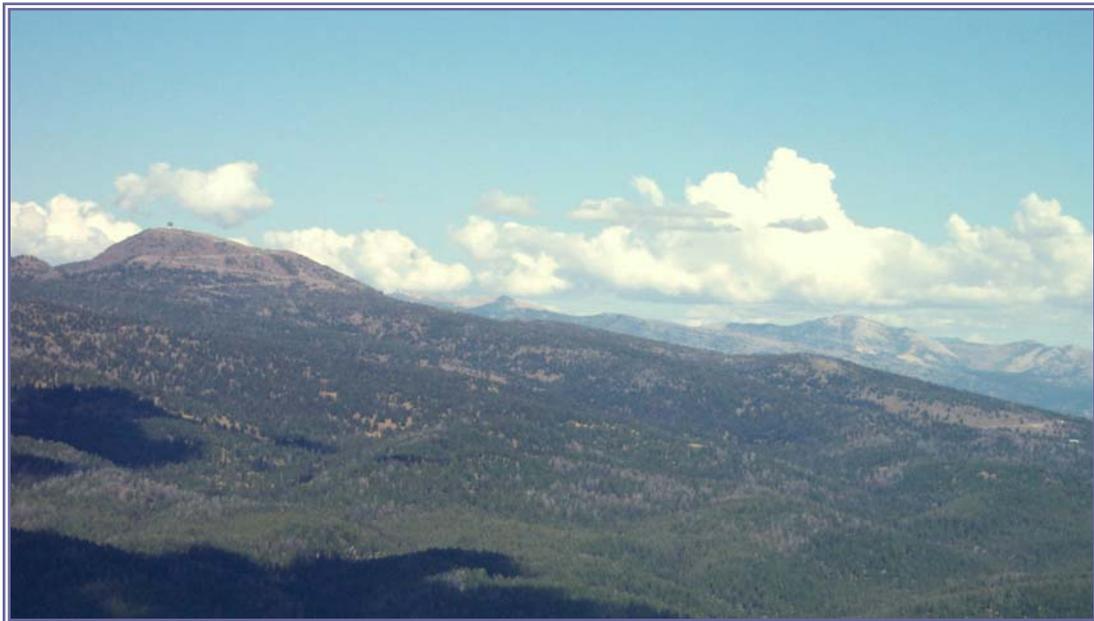


January
2008

Blue Creek Watershed Analysis

*Ashton/Island Park Ranger District, Caribou-Targhee National
Forest*

Fremont County, Idaho



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Executive Summary

Watershed Analysis Process

The purpose of this watershed analysis is to develop and document a scientifically based understanding of the ecological processes within the Blue Creek Watershed. In this document, an interdisciplinary team of Forest Service resource specialists characterized the natural resources of the watershed. A standard six-step process was used (USDA Forest Service, 1995). The steps include characterization, issues and key questions, current conditions, reference conditions, interpretation, and recommendations. It is a comparison of past and current resource conditions to develop an understanding of trends. The report culminates with several recommendations developed to address the identified trends.

Watershed analysis is not a decision-making process. The findings represent a foundation of information on which to develop site-specific project proposals and base future decisions.

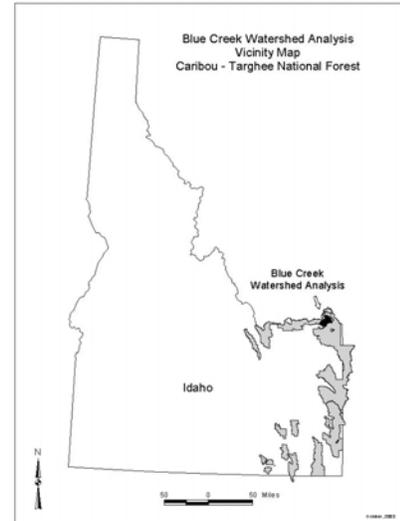
The Forest Service interdisciplinary team listed below conducted the Blue Creek Watershed Analysis, with data source assistance from neighboring citizens and agencies. Those who wrote this document primarily used existing data. They collected and synthesized the resource information in documents, maps, photos, references, existing surveys and anecdotal information.

Interdisciplinary Team

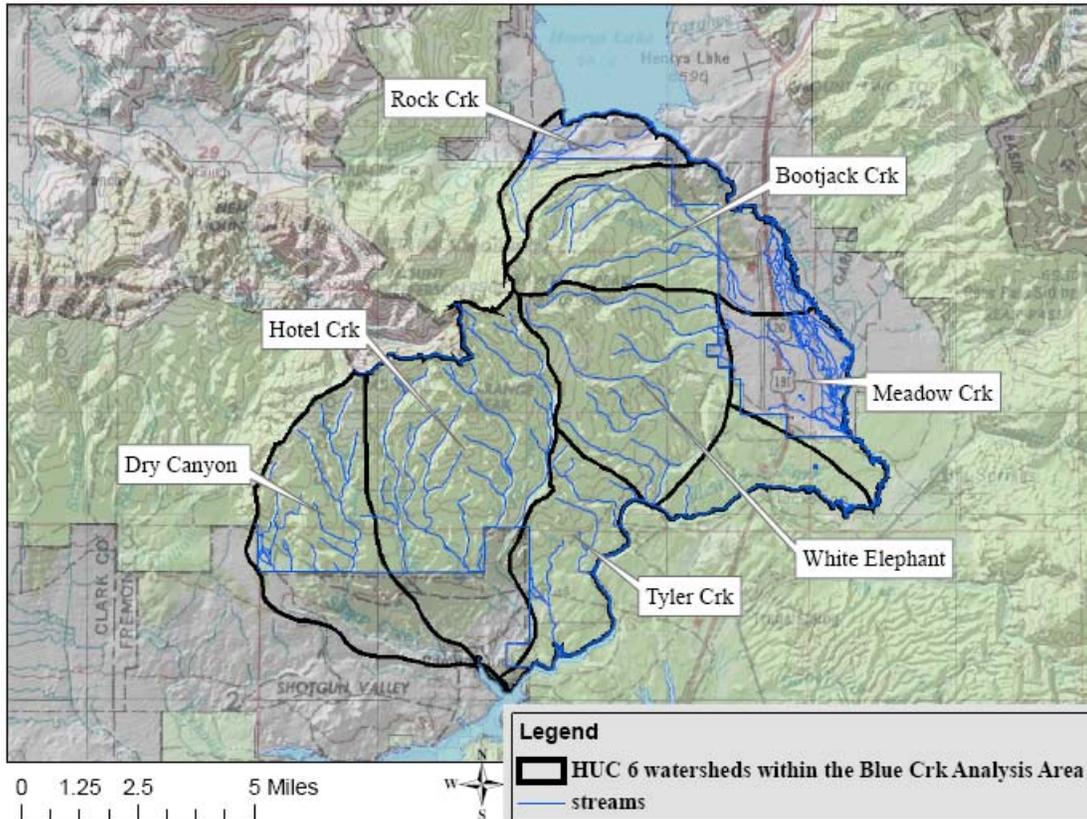
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Watershed Context

The Blue Creek Watershed is a 58,492-acre drainage located within the Henrys Fork basin, between Henrys Lake and Island Park Reservoir. Henrys Fork basin extends from the Idaho border to the Henrys Fork confluence with the South Fork Snake River, north of Idaho Falls, encompassing about 3220 square miles. Within the assessment area, there are seven 6th HUC watersheds. These are: 170402021202 – Rock Creek; 170402021002 – Bootjack Creek; 170402021001 – Meadow Creek; 170402020904 – Tyler Creek; 170402020903 – White Elephant; 170402020902 – Hotel Creek; and 170402020901 – Dry Canyon. These watersheds actually span two separate 5th HUC watersheds. However, this area has common characteristics and they all drain into Henrys Fork, either directly or through Henrys Lake. Further, it is managed by the District as a common unit or block. Therefore it makes sense to combine the two portions of the two larger watersheds into a single analysis area (Map 1, Map 2).



Map 1 Vicinity Map



Map 2 HUC6 watersheds within the Blue Creek analysis area.

Primary resource uses on the National Forest include semi-primitive non-motorized recreation, motorized recreation, livestock grazing, hunting, camping, firewood collecting, some logging, and recreational outfitting. Livestock grazing (domestic sheep) was a primary historic use of the analysis area, however, four of the five sheep allotments have been vacant since 2003. Cattle grazing activities continue to occur within the northern end of the watershed.

A diversity of wildlife and fish inhabit the watershed. Yellowstone cutthroat trout occur in the drainage and the analysis area is important habitat for bear, wolves, elk, moose, and mule deer. An occasional wolverine has been known to pass through the area. Firewood collecting and logging has also occurred in the area in the past. In the last three to five years, insect activity in the Centennial Mountains has increased and has resulted in substantial tree mortality, especially in Douglas-fir stands. There is increasing concern of future susceptibility of the forests to insects.

The 1997 Revised Targhee Land Management Plan (RFP; USDA 1997) designated prescription areas in the watershed. There are two primary management prescriptions. Management Prescription 5.3.5 area (Grizzly Bear Habitat) emphasizes a high degree of security and resource conditions which contribute toward the conservation and recovery of the grizzly bear, and benefits to other wildlife. Management Prescription 3.1.2 (Non-motorized) identifies areas where semi-primitive non-motorized recreation use, like hiking and horseback riding, will occur during the summer months.

Summary of Findings and Recommendations

In general, resources in the watershed are in good condition; however, opportunities for restoration and improved management were identified. The following recommendations are an overview. More specific recommendations can be found in Step 6 of this document.

- Manage motorized recreation, including closure and obliteration of non-system roads and trails.
- Monitor grazing effects on stream channels.
- Restore a diversity of structural stages consistent with the natural range of variability in forested habitats with mechanical and prescribed fire treatments.
- Manage forest vegetation to reduce insect induced mortality.
- Reduce fuel loading in the wildland/urban interface.
- Potentially re-introduce beaver and implement projects to help restore hydrologic connectivity and restore populations of Yellowstone cutthroat trout.