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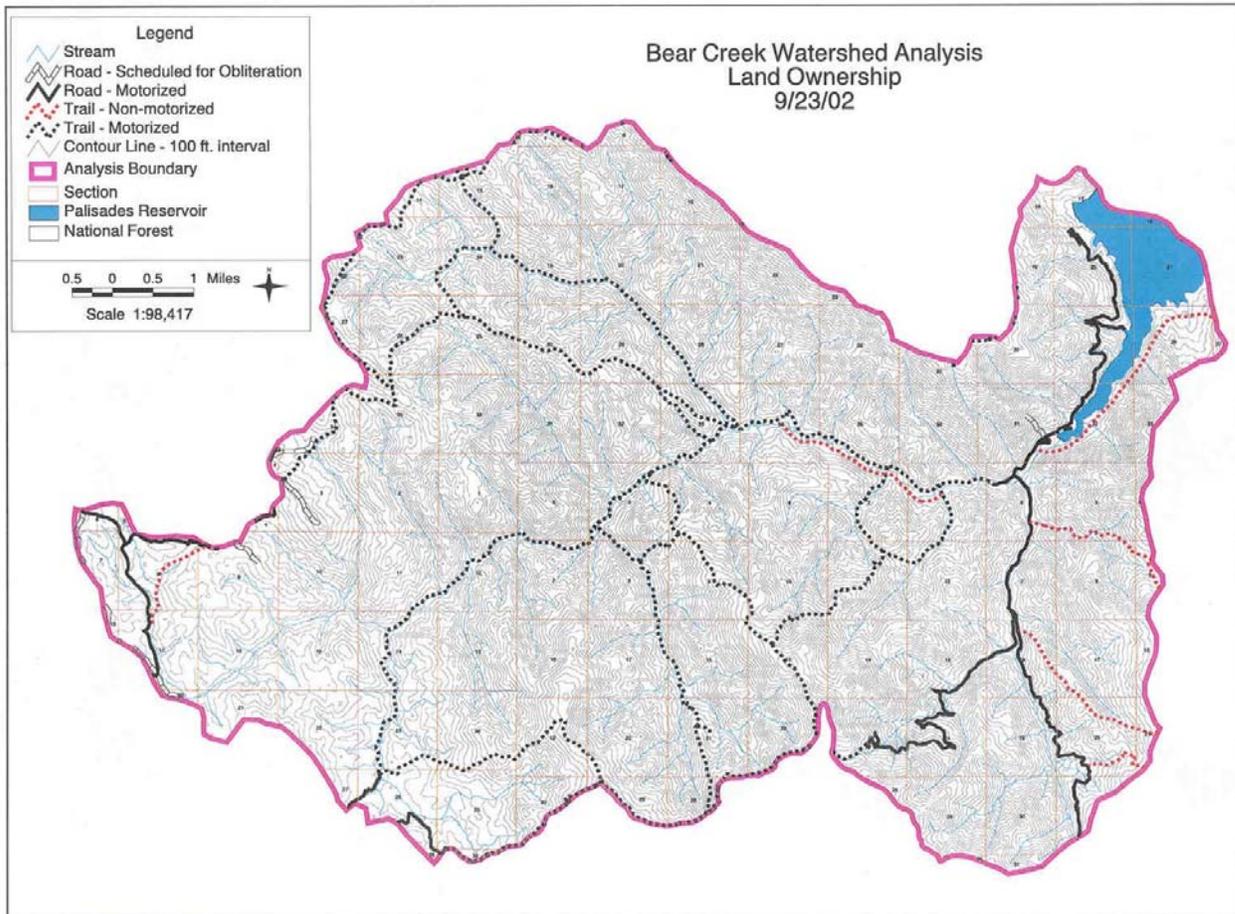
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General Vicinity Map



Bear Creek Watershed Analysis Area.

CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

BEAR CREEK WATERSHED ANALYSIS

The Multiple Use Sustained Yield Act of 1960 directs the USDA Forest Service to manage the renewable surface resources of the Forests for multiple uses and to provide those resources (products and services) at a conservative rate that is sustained over time. The Bear Creek Watershed Analysis Area features a diversity of resource uses. It is entirely on National Forest land. The competing uses of some resources in particular places within the analysis area have limited the decision space of Forest Officials, particularly in the east side of the watershed. The watershed analysis process allows decision-makers and their staffs an opportunity to step back and take a holistic, interdisciplinary watershed level look at an analysis area. It is a chance to assess the resource uses and ensure they occur at a sustainable level. The watershed analysis process culminates with a list of recommendations the Forest Officials can use to address resource management challenges and opportunities.

Project Area Description

The Bear Creek Watershed Analysis Area includes the main stem of Bear Creek and its tributaries. Elk Creek, South Fork of Bear, North Fork of Bear, Currant, Deadman, Warm Springs, Pine, Red Springs, Spring, Small, Camp, Milk, West Fork of Elk Creeks and Chaparral Hollow all feed into Bear Creek. Bear Creek then flows into Palisades Reservoir. This watershed area includes approximately 55,551 acres on the Caribou National Forest portion of the Palisades Ranger District, Caribou-Targhee National Forest with about 1079 acres withdrawn for the purpose of the Palisades Dam Project by the US Bureau of Reclamation (USDA 2002). Approximately 3 miles of Lower Bear Creek was inundated by Palisades Reservoir as it was filled when the power plant was completed in 1957 (USBR 2002). Much of the material used in the interior of the dam was excavated from along the banks of the old Bear Creek canal north of Van Point (Haderlie and Martin 2002). At the time of construction, this was the largest volume of material placed in a dam by Reclamation (USBR 2002). The eastern side of the watershed is much more developed for human uses and includes an urban interface area.

Primary resource uses on the National Forest include livestock grazing, summer home special use permits, utilities, big game winter range, motorized recreation, fishing, hunting, camping, mining, firewood collecting, some logging, and recreational outfitting permits for hunting, fishing, sightseeing and para-gliding. Management activities also include prescribed burning and fire suppression. Livestock grazing (domestic sheep) is a historic use of the analysis area that goes back to the earliest days of white settlers. While some areas are improving, other areas need more improvement from the historical grazing impact. The drainage is attractive to horseback recreationists, hikers, and the more hardy motorcycle users. The analysis area is a special place for fish and wildlife. Yellowstone cutthroat trout occur in the drainage and the analysis area is important habitat for Bald Eagles, elk, bear, lion, moose, and mule deer. An occasional wolverine is known to cross the watershed. Bear Creek features a special travertine mineral warm spring. Very limited firewood collecting and logging has occurred in the area in the past. There is increasing old age and late seral conifer trees on north slopes encroaching on aspen stands and increased ladder fuels created by multiple layer forests have attracted the attention of fire management and forestry specialists. A few prescribed burns have occurred in the analysis area. There is increasing concern for future wildfires in the urban interface zones around National Forest summer home permit areas and campgrounds. The Calamity Campground has recently been logged to reduce hazard trees in that area.

In 1997 the Revised Targhee Land Management Plan (RTFP; USDA 1997) designated prescription areas in the watershed. The 6.1b area (Range Management) emphasizes livestock grazing, big game seasonal range and watershed protection. Other Prescription Areas include 2.7a (Big Game Winter Range), 3.1.1a (Non-motorized Recreation), 2.4 (Eligible Scenic River for Bear Creek), 5.1.3b (Urban Fuels Management), 4.1/ 4.3 prescriptions for developed/dispersed camping, 4.2 for Special Use permit areas (summer homes and boat club), 8.1 (Concentrated Development Area), 5.1.4b (Timber mgmt, big game security emphasis) in southwest area of watershed and 2.8.3 (Aquatic Influence Zones) along all streams and water sources.

Watershed Analysis Process

The purpose of watershed analysis is to develop and document a scientifically based understanding of the processes and interactions occurring within a watershed. This document is our current understanding of the Bear Creek Watershed Analysis Area.

A watershed analysis is an interdisciplinary process that compares the past and current conditions of an analysis area to develop an understanding of resource trends. The report culminates with several recommendations developed to address the identified trends.

No decisions are made with this document. The findings represent a foundation on which to develop site-specific project proposals and base specific decisions.

The Bear Creek Watershed Analysis was conducted by a Forest Service interdisciplinary team, with data source assistance from neighboring citizens and agencies. Little new data was collected by those who wrote this document. Rather, they primarily used existing information, including surveys, documents, maps, photos, references, existing surveys and anecdotal information.

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