

BEAR CREEK WATERSHED ANALYSIS

CULTURAL RESOURCES

CHARACTERIZATION

The Bear Creek watershed is mostly roadless and has changed little except for the modifications due to domestic sheep grazing and motorized trails. See the Human Uses map in the Appendix for the more developed east end by Palisades Reservoir.

ISSUES AND KEY QUESTIONS

A documented inventory is needed for cultural resources here.

CURRENT CONDITIONS

A lot of cultural resource information is not readily available on the watershed, but the main feature appears to be the Currant Creek Guard Station. It is reported by Hansen (2002) that the cabin was built by Buell Warner who lived in Swan Valley. He was not sure about the date, but it was probably built in about 1933 – 1934 according to J. Hansen (2002). A resource person on this may be his son, Spencer Warner, who is still in the area.



Figures 1 and 2. Currant Creek Guard Station in 2002. Showing old hand saw still in rafters.

The Sheep Bridge crossing the main channel of Bear Creek which is located below the North Fork confluence with Bear Creek was built in the 1980's. It is believed Dick Ward and Dusty Hincks built it in about 1985. They built a gabion in center of stream. There were two other bridges built before the current one which were washed out (Hansen 2002).

The Calamity Guard Station is also still standing and is still being used and improved as a Forest Service dwelling. The date of construction is not known.



Figures 3 and 4. Figure 3 shows the Sheep Bridge built below the North Fork in 1985 and in Figure 4 (right) the Calamity Guard Station (2002). Date built is not known.

PAST CONDITIONS

Information on the watershed in general is lacking at this time. A significant event in cultural history in the east end of the watershed was the construction of the Palisades Dam. As early as 1905 surveys were done by the Bureau of Reclamation in Grand Valley which was at the mouth of Bear Creek entering the South Fork of the Snake River, but the project was abandoned. In 1919 the study began again and abandoned. Again in 1932 the Bureau considered the site for a dam and in 1939 the site was picked. The war caused it to be abandoned again. Then in 1952 construction began and in 1953 the dam was excavated and 250,000 cubic yards of ground was removed. By 1953-54 the employment peaked at 1500 workers. Storage of water began in 1956 and in 1957 the first generator started. By 1958 the dam and power plant was completed and it was dedicated in 1959. The generators were upgraded in the 1990s. Refer to story by R. Thornberry (2002). The dam is for both power generation and farm water storage. Farms using water from Palisades produce 30 percent of the nations potatoes (Thornberry 2002).

In preparation for this analysis document a meeting was held on June 28, 2002 by the Forest Service to interview historians who had lived and worked in the Bear Creek watershed. They included: Vaughn Haderlie a retired big game outfitter in Bear Creek his whole life who also worked on the Palisades dam construction; Jerry Reese the current Forest Supervisor of the Caribou-Targhee National Forest who grew up as a youth in the area; Ron Dickemore the current District Ranger of Palisades RD for the past 17 years; Alex Martin, retired Forest Service employee; Jerry Hansen, retired FS recreation staff; Jim Capurso, current Forest Fisheries Biologist; Greg Hanson, current District Range Conservationist; Mike Philbin, current Forest Hydrologist; Randy Tepler, current Soil Scientist on Forest; and Bud Alford, District Wildlife Biologist for past 18 years. They would be future sources of cultural resource information.



Figure 5 (left) and 6 (right). Shows the upstream side of Palisades Dam in the watershed analysis area. This is the area by the intake where the Calamity Rapids once existed on the old channel of the South Fork of the Snake River. Note Calamity Boat Ramp in the foreground of Figure 5.

Information related to cultural history from the historian group included descriptions of pre-dam history. Logs for timber used to be rafted down the river all the way to Idaho Falls where the dam is now. They used to raft them over the rapids called Calamity. The rapids were located in the watershed where the intake on the dam is now on the southwest side of the reservoir. The US Bureau of Reclamation bought out the residents living in the lower Bear Creek watershed (Grand Valley). Some tried to go to court because the Bureau appraisals were cheap. Families located from Van Point to the Dam were the Hatfield's, Daniels, Vanderhorn, Edwards brothers, and Josie Bird. Josie's maiden name was Hoffman and it is believed she is currently (2003) still alive in her 90's. B. Alford (2002) knew her, and she and he tried to get the Bureau to trade her land up at the Hoffman bald eagle nest for Bureau ground below Palisades Dam in the late 1980s. Josie lived in a house near the town of Palisades below the dam (1980s) and she said she would trade the eagle property if she could get some Bureau ground below the dam. The Bureau was not interested at that time so the idea was dropped.

Prior to the flooding of the dam moonshining was big in the area. There used to be a still in Edwards Creek where the reservoir is now. This would be just upstream from the Bear Creek mouth. Refer also to documents by Whitfield (USDA 1985) and Webster (1968) for more cultural history of the area. The first documented historic account of Bear Creek comes from the journals of Robert Stuart in 1812. He and 6 other men explored southeast Idaho in a large route that included the Portneuf, Bear, Salt, and Snake Rivers. They fished along the way. On September 20, 1812, they camped at the confluence of Bear Creek and the South Fork of Snake River. They described their camp as a good fishing place (Webster 1972-74).

Bear Creek was named by Mike Yeaman (who settled on Sulphur Bar in 1886) and Thomas Hainline (first owner of the H. Hill Ranch), who killed a bear at the mouth of the stream in 1890. In 1906, Bear Creek was called Pyramid Creek on the original proclamation map but the new name did not stick (Webster 1972-74). During the construction of Palisades Dam, a haul road

built across Bear Creek near its mouth blocked cutthroat trout spawner access to the stream from 1951 to 1956 when construction was completed (IDFG 1981).



Figures 7 (left). Old photo shows pre-dam view up Bear Creek from the South Fork of the Snake River, Grand Valley and lower Bear Creek watershed where farm families lived prior to construction of Palisades Dam (USDA 1985).

Figure 8 (right). Showing a post-dam view (2002) of the north side of Van Point where large amounts of Bear Creek watershed earth were removed as fill material to build the dam (pers. comm. Haderlie, Martin, Hansen, Reese 2002).

TRENDS

Trend is not known.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Restoration and Protection for Improving Conditions

None

Inventory and Monitoring

1. Cultural resources need to be inventoried and documented.

LITERATURE CITED OR REFERENCES

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