

Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness

OBJECTIVE: Review management activities and conditions in the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness.

DATA SOURCE: On-the-ground reviews.

FREQUENCY: Annually.

REPORTING PERIOD: 1999.

EVALUATION:

Problem areas on the Bitterroot NF portion of the Wilderness exist primarily because of campsite densities, large barren core areas, or scarred trees. Most of these conditions have existed since the standards were put in place in 1992. The standards are defined by "Opportunity Class" in the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness General Management Direction (Forest Plan Amendment 7). Wilderness rangers consistently naturalize new campsites and minimize the size of existing sites where possible. Proliferation of sites is minimal and site conditions are generally holding steady. In some compartments a few campsites have been completely naturalized and have not reappeared. In some areas new campsites have developed. Problem areas are visited by Wilderness rangers and if the area appears to have changed from previous campsite monitoring the sites are re-evaluated.

MONITORING RESULTS:

Extensive monitoring occurs in the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness (SBW) each year. Wilderness rangers, staff, and the public observe and report on how well natural conditions are being maintained.

Fire activity was moderate in 1999. Of a total of 23 fires, the Forest allowed 12 to follow their natural course, under carefully monitored conditions, as Wildland Fires Used for Resource Benefit (WFURB). The area burned as WFURBs totaled 1577 acres. Fire suppression activity involved 100 acres. Ninety-eight acres of that was a fire which was already out when it was discovered and so was never classified as a WFURB. Thus, there was very little suppression activity in the Bitterroot portion of the SBW. We did not need to construct any fire lines or helispots in the SBW.

Noxious weed surveys continued in drainages adjacent to and within the SBW. The surveys cover most of the west side trail corridors. A few drainages have fairly continuous coverage of spotted knapweed along the trails, but most have scattered patches of various weeds. The most common weeds are spotted knapweed, goatweed, and sulfur cinquefoil. In 1999 the Forest treated trails in the following canyons: Sweeney Creek, Kootenai Creek, Big Creek, Bear Creek, Sawtooth, Blodgett, Rock Creek, Tin Cup, Boulder Creek, Watchtower, Sheepshead, Chicken, Deer, Roaring Lion, and Sheafman Creek. Preliminary indications are the treatments were effective but follow-up monitoring and possible future treatments may be necessary.

Research continued on bird responses to wildfire. Lake surveys were conducted on two lakes on the Bitterroot portion of the SBW by Wilderness rangers. Researchers from several universities are studying linkages between fire, climate, and ecosystems in the SBW. This project is funded by the National Science Foundation.

Trail maintenance is always a major undertaking. The Forest accomplished level I maintenance on 238 miles of trail. The maintenance work was done by a combination of contractors, Forest Service crews, and volunteers. Level I maintenance involves minimal clearing and enough drainage to allow use.

The Forest finished major reconstruction on Scimitar Trail #36 and began reconstruction on Watchtower Trail #699. Miscellaneous reconstruction was undertaken on a number of other trails to correct small problem areas. Reconstruction work was done by both contractors and Forest Service crews.

The Forest completed a survey and project design for improvements on Canyon Creek Trail #2, and condition surveys on an additional 75 miles of trail in the Wilderness.

Education presentations on the Wilderness Skills Program included most sixth graders, nearly 500 students, in the Bitterroot Valley. Over a two week period in May, two classes per day attended the field program. A number of other education contacts took place at schools, at organizational meetings (such as Back Country Horsemen), and at public events (such as fairs). The outreach was done at District offices, and in the field by Wilderness rangers. The Forest Service completed a video for hunter education classes that distributed nationwide. Forest Service personnel were trained in Minimum Impact Suppression Tactics (MIST), to lessen Wilderness impacts from fire suppression activities.

Special Use Permits for 15 outfitter and guide operations in the Selway-Bitterroot were administered. This includes four outfitters on the Selway River.

The permit system for the Selway River is administered by the West Fork District. There were 2,785 applications for Selway floats during the permit season. Sixty-two permits were issued. This is a success ratio of 29:1.

Wilderness dam maintenance continues to be an important issue. Wilderness personnel and others spent a considerable amount of time inspecting dams and checking dam-related activities in the field. Of the 16 privately operated dams in the Selway Bitterroot Wilderness, the Forest completed eight inspections in 1998 and two in 1999. Work continues on dam management agreements and determining the nature of easements. The Forest continued to monitor the water quality affected by emergency work at Tin Cup Dam (for more information see Item 22).

Numerous campsites were naturalized by field personnel to remove signs of human use, such as fire rings.

Historic buildings are part of the Wilderness resource. Restoration of the Cooper's Flat cabin and St. Mary's Lookout have continued with help from volunteers. Heritage personnel completed inventories in the Nez Perce Pass area and in Boulder Creek. The Forest also completed surveys for planned trail projects.

Law enforcement activity included several tickets, warning notices, and numerous incident reports.

