

Horses and the Sky Lakes Wilderness

Rules for Horse Users

People with horses and other stock have been coming to Sky Lakes Wilderness for many years. As the number of visitors – whether hikers or horse users – increases, so does the potential damage to wilderness values. The following rules enable you to do your part to protect the special values of special places – the “sensitive areas” – in the Wilderness. For more details, be sure to read the “Special Rules” and “Caring for Sky Lakes” sections of the wilderness map.

“Sensitive Area” Rules:

Due to their fragile ground-cover vegetation, riparian zones, heavy use-patterns, and other concerns, **the following special rules apply in the “sensitive areas” of Seven Lakes Basin and Blue Canyon/Island Lake Basin** (boundaries of sensitive areas are shown on this publication and on maps at trailhead bulletin boards):

- When camping within the sensitive areas, **horse users must use the designated “horse camps”**; hikers are not to occupy these sites. (These sites, identified by “horse camp” signs, are also shown on

this publication and on maps posted at trailheads.)

- Each horse camp has a **stock-holding area**, indicated by a sign, **where animals must be tethered**. So that the camping area stays as clean and dust-free as possible, **animals must be unloaded and loaded only in the stock-holding areas**, not in the camping areas.
- In sensitive areas of the lake basins, as elsewhere the preferred watering spots at the trail-crossings of streams sometimes dry up. If this happens, lakeshore watering should be done only at “hardened” places that can stand the traffic. Designated lakeshore-watering places are shown on the sensitive-area maps.
- In the sensitive areas, meadows that are open to grazing after the normal August 1 date are identified with signs; other meadows in the sensitive areas remain closed to grazing. Because forage is so scarce in most parts of Sky Lakes, be sure to bring adequate feed (pellets or grain, not hay) for your animals.

Wilderness-Wide Rules:

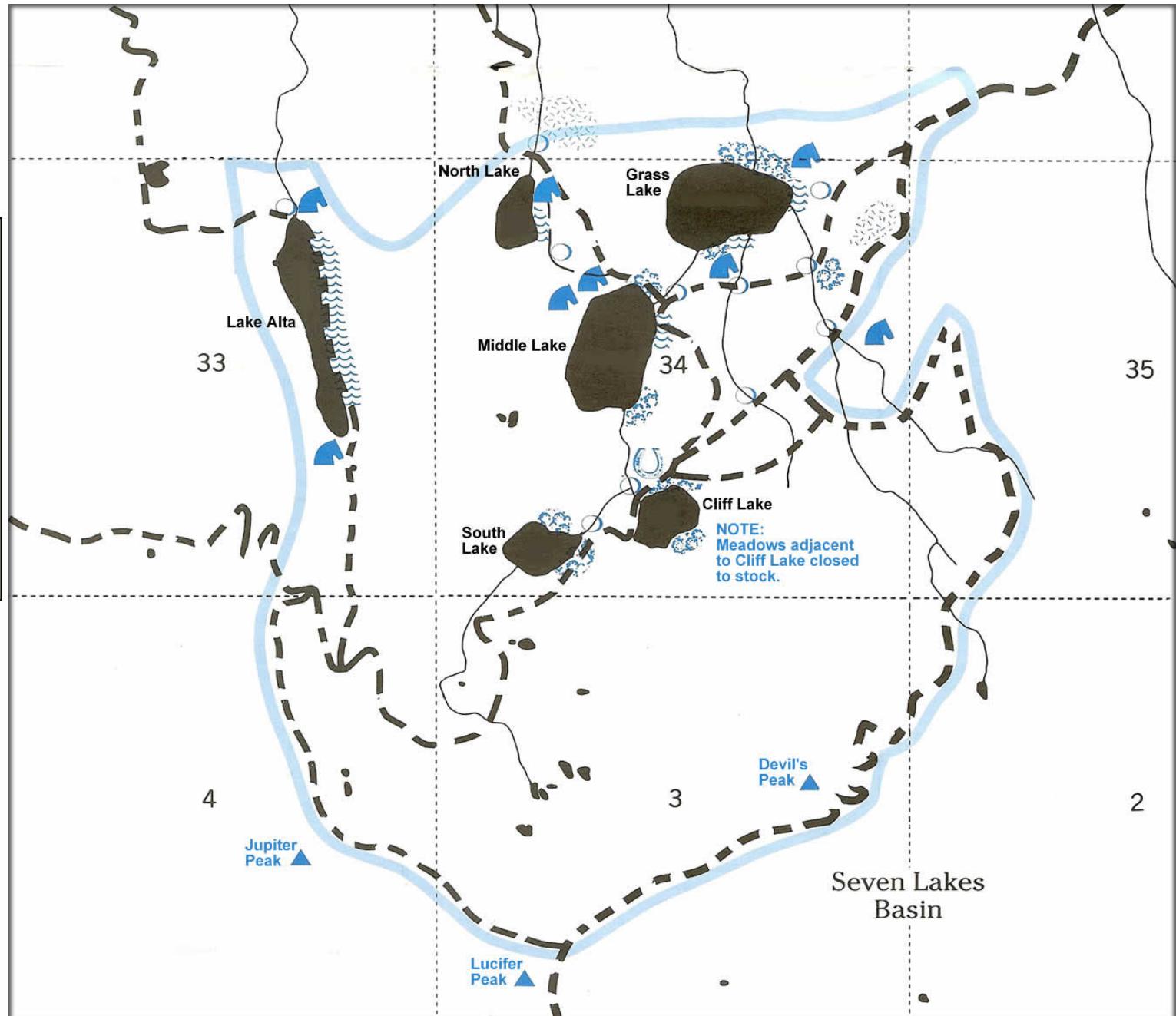
In addition to the special rules for “sensitive areas” in Sky Lakes Wilderness, given above, **these additional rules apply throughout the Wilderness:**

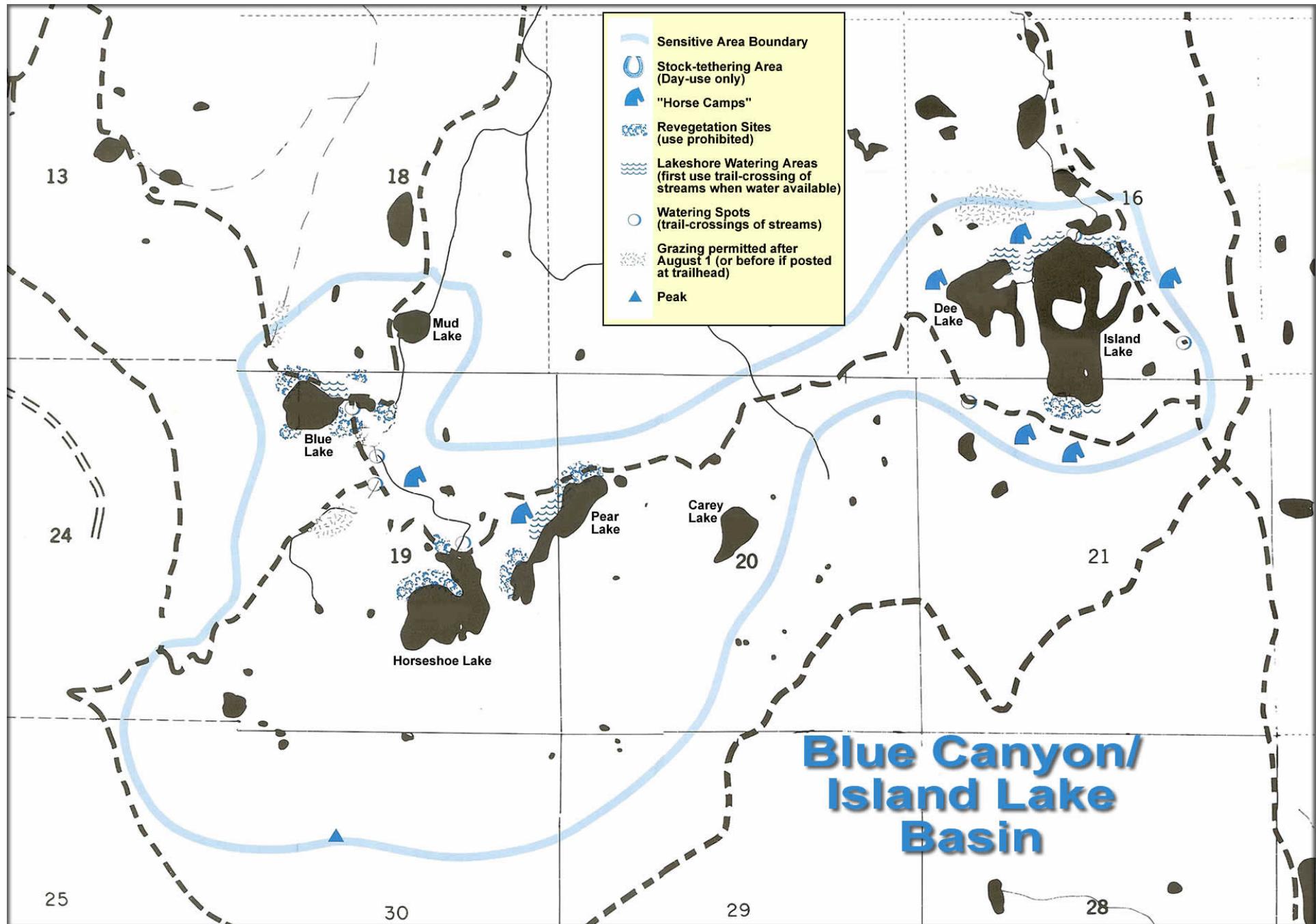
- As with hikers, horse users must **camp** at least 100 feet from lakeshores and 50 feet from streams. **Horses**, however, **must be kept at least 200 feet from lakeshores and 50 feet from streams**. (This distance rule also applies to grazing and to lunch stops or other brief trail-breaks along lakes or streams.)

- **While being ridden or led on a developed trail**, horses are permitted along lakeshores and streams.
- When a nearby trail-crossing watering spot is unavailable, it's acceptable to water horses briefly at lakeshores or streamsides. Protect water sources and preserve natural beauty: **never water animals at the outlet of a spring** and avoid moist areas surrounded by delicate mosses and other plant life. (Suggestion: Carry along a couple of **collapsible plastic buckets to bring water to your horse** in case a fragile shoreline or a spring is the only available water source. It is more work, but it's worth it; horses become used to this method with some training.)
- Some meadows are **closed to grazing** even after August 1 (the usual date when grazing is first allowed in Sky Lakes' other meadows); these closures are indicated by signs posted on nearby trees.
- In order to prevent damage to roots and bark, animals should not be tied to small live trees (seedling or saplings under 4" in diameter). They **can be tied to larger trees for up to one hour**, so long as the horses do not crib, chew, or paw at roots.
- Whenever possible, **tether animals over bare ground**, not over live vegetation. For overnight camping, **use a highline** stretched between two carefully selected trees.

THE ABOVE RULES HAVE BEEN ESTABLISHED TO PRESERVE WILDERNESS VALUES FOR ALL VISITORS – INCLUDING OUR FUTURE GENERATIONS – TO ENJOY.

Seven Lakes Basin





Sky Lakes and Horses: Some History

Historically, the rugged and densely forested terrain of southern Oregon's Cascade Range was never considered great horse country. In dramatic contrast to the broad, grassy ranges of northeastern Oregon and southeastern Washington – where the Nez Perce and other Indian groups became accomplished horse breeders by the late 1700s – horses did not come to southern Oregon until relatively late.

Many people know that the Nez Perce's horses were descended from animals captured by other Indian groups from Spanish herds in New Mexico and the southern Great Plains. It is likely that the *very first horses in southern Oregon*, a very few animals owned by the Klamath Indians in the 1820s, were taken from the herds of Nez Perce or other Snake River groups and then traded southwestward into the Klamath Basin. Harsh climate and lack of winter feed took a deadly toll on these early animals, however. The first white explorer in the region, fur trapper Peter Skene Ogden, visited the Klamath Indians in December 1826; he wrote that the Klamaths' last surviving horse had perished from starvation that winter.

To the west of the Cascades, in the Rogue River Valley, Ogden noted that the Shasta and Takelma Indians apparently had never seen horses before; they stared with amazement at the creatures. By the 1830s, however, Indian groups living on either side of the Cascades owned small herds of horses. Fur trappers had to be on guard when traveling through the region because stealthy native horsemen sometimes rode off with the trappers' mounts.

The present Sky Lakes Wilderness probably saw occasional horse travel by Indians along the "Rancheria Trail," on the north flank of Mt. McLoughlin. The heart of the wilderness (the high-lake basins) rarely, if ever, would have been reached by horses in the early days. Army soldiers rode the Rancheria Trail (also called the "Twin Ponds Trail") between the Rogue Valley and Fort Klamath in the 1860s and 1870s. A few local ranchers and hunters began riding into the high country during this time as well.

The lack of trails hindered horse travel up into the southern Cascades to all but the hardiest individuals. Among these was Judge John B. Waldo, a prominent conservationist and outdoorsman from Salem, Oregon. In 1888, Waldo and four companions traveled the length of the High Cascades' spine in Oregon, probably the first time such a feat had been done. During the group's descent into the rugged Middle Fork-Rogue Canyon, one pack horse became seriously ill and had to be killed. When crossing the summit of steep Lee Peak, another horse, "old Sampson," stumbled and rolled nearly 250 feet down the lava slope. (Amazingly, the animal survived the ordeal and completed the trip to Mt. Shasta and back to Salem.) Continuing south through what is now Sky Lakes Wilderness, Waldo and his friends camped at the southeast shore of Island Lake. There they carved their names and the date into the trunk of a fir tree. The "Waldo Tree" still stands today, a monument to this adventurous party of equestrians.

After 1900, Forest Service rangers built and widened trails into the high country. Originally constructed in order to fight fires, by the 1920s-30s many of them were popular routes for mounted recreationists who came each year to

enjoy the rugged scenery, to fish the high mountain lakes, and (particularly after elk herds began to expand in the 1960s) to hunt. Horses continue to bring visitors into Sky Lakes Wilderness. Through wise handling by owners who help protect the wilderness values we all cherish, horses and other stock will continue to play their rightful and important part in recreation use of Sky Lakes on into the future.

For More Information:

Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest
P.O. Box 520, 33 West 8th Street
Medford, OR 97501
(541) 858-220 or TTY 1-866-296-3823

Butte Falls Ranger District
P.O. Box 227, 730 Laurel Street
Butte Falls, OR 97522
(541) 865-2700

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