

Clearwater Defender

News of the Big Wild

Friends of the Clearwater

Spring 2005, Vol. 3 No. 1

Wonderful Weitas Creek—Without Motors

By Will Boyd

This past June was my first trip to the North Fork. The trail was sloppy with horse and elk prints as six of us made our way along Weitas Creek. The weather was warm enough for shorts, but cool in the shade, and the creek water was like ice. Perfect for drinking--lips to the stream, I pushed all thoughts of giardia out of my mind so I could thoroughly enjoy the experience. As for dipping, I tried and made it almost waist deep before the quick current and my stiff toes urged me back ashore.



The deep Lewis and Clark Trail Near Wendover Ridge, photo courtesy Gene Eastman

forest wetlands surprised me. There was standing water several yards in from the creek; it was full of spring growth. Just about that time, someone saw a cow elk. I then saw the brilliant red and yellow pulses of a western tanager flycatching atop the tallest trailside firs. I also saw a spot I'd love to set up for a week and fish for trout.

We followed elk signs all the way along the creek to our campsite, the old Weitas Creek Guard Station. A drizzle set in around sunset

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Wolves in the wild

By Larry McLaud

In April 2003, Idaho Gov. Kempthorne, Fish and Game Director Huffaker, and the Idaho Legislature negotiated and passed a bill into law that allows the state to participate in wolf management. The bill, H0294, allows IDFG to assist

the Governor's Office of Species Conservation in implementing Idaho's Wolf Conservation and Management Plan, as well as participate in wolf management with the USFWS and the Nez Perce Tribe.

Wolves are still listed as threatened and designated as an

“experimental non-essential population” in central Idaho, and therefore are under management authority of the federal government. Idaho cannot conduct management that is not coordinated with and under the authority of the USFWS while wolves are still federally listed. Federal management of wolves in Idaho remains essentially the same even though they have been reclassified. The only difference is that IDFG may now legally participate in management activities.

Reintroduced wolves in Idaho, and

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and stayed with us most of the evening. Fireside we listened to Larry and Rufus recite old radio skits from their more glorious days

Approximately a quarter of a million acres in size, the Weitas Creek Roadless Area is of primary concern to wilderness advocates. The Northern Rockies Ecosystem Protection Act (NREPA) proposes to designate it as Wilderness. It is the largest roadless area lying entirely within Clearwater National Forest. There are many reasons to keep this place wild: it is now home to an active wolf pack; the soils here are highly prone to erosion; its large size and rectangular shape effectively block out external noise and eyeball pollution.

We passed seven motorcyclists on our hike back. I'm from the East Coast, and grew up hiking Virginia's and North Carolina's portions of the Appalachian Trail. I have passed a four-wheeler only once while backpacking — in Wisconsin's Chequamegon National Forest.

Immediately Weitas Creek became infinitely smaller. It lost something. Had I known, I would have grabbed it up and held tight. Something mysterious and magical folded in on itself and quietly took to the air. Maybe it went over to Pot Mountain.

My immediate reaction was to jump off the trail and duck into the woods before I could be seen. My self-consciousness prohibited me from doing this and so I followed my companions to the edge of the trail to allow traffic through. Awkward does not describe the feeling that arrives after a night free of mechanized sound is abruptly interrupted. I could have been on Main Street in Moscow. I would prefer to be here on Weitas Creek, a place worth keeping the way it is, minus the motors.

The Clearwater Defender is a publication of:



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Friends of the Clearwater, a recognized non-profit organization since 1987, defends the Idaho Clearwater Bioregion's wild lands and biodiversity through a Forest Watch program, litigation, grassroots public involvement, outreach, and education. The Wild Clearwater Country, the northern half of central Idaho's Big Wild, contains many unprotected roadless areas and wild rivers, and provides crucial habitat for countless rare plant and animal species. Friends of the Clearwater strives to protect these areas, restore degraded habitats, preserve viable populations of native species, recognize national and international wildlife corridors, and to bring an end to commodity extraction and industrialization on our public lands.

Friends of the Clearwater is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. All contributions the Friends of the Clearwater are tax-deductible.

The Clearwater Defender welcomes artwork and articles pertaining to the protection of the Greater Salmon-Selway Ecosystem. Articles in the Clearwater Defender do not necessarily reflect the views of Friends of the Clearwater.

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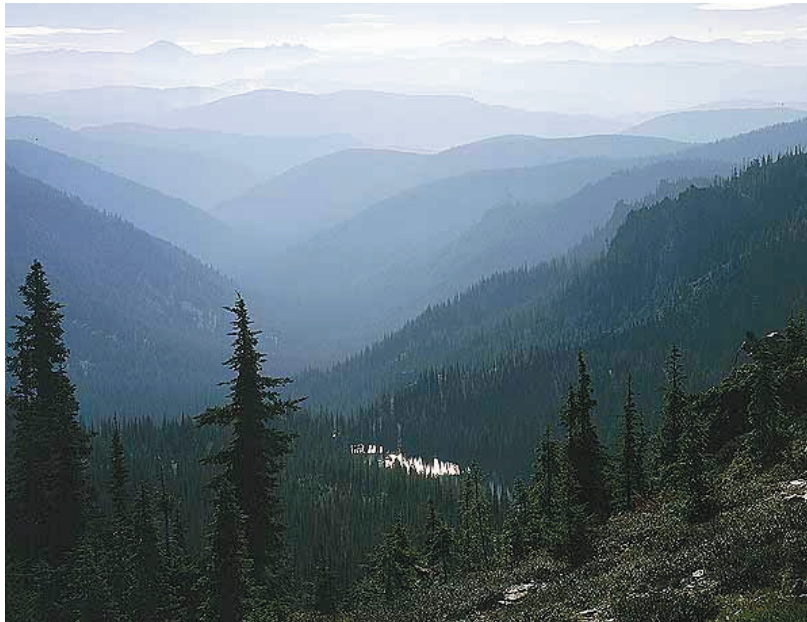


Sheep Creek in the River of No Return Wilderness

Wolves, from Page 1

their offspring, are called the 10(j) population – named after the Endangered Species Act provision that allows species reintroduction. Most wolves in the Northern Rockies are part of this population, which was not affected by a recent court ruling that broadened the law’s protection for gray wolf populations elsewhere in the US.

Ranchers are no longer required to exhaust non-lethal wolf management methods before killing 10(j) wolves. The rule also allows anyone – not just landowners – to harass wolves by scaring them into running away. Such harassment must be reported to FWS within seven days.



Like most of the Clearwater, Lower Williams Lake is Wolf Country

The new rule also permits states or tribes with approved wolf management plans to enter into agreements with FWS to manage wolves. Such management can include killing wolves that state or tribal managers can prove are threatening deer or elk populations. FWS estimates about 580 wolves to now be living in Idaho and Montana. Much misinformation about elk population dynamics has been spread

by “barbershop biologists,” particularly in the Clearwater region. Elk population dynamics is a complicated issue, with many factors playing a role, including wolves. Presently, Idaho State Game managers cannot prove wolves are keeping deer or elk herds from growing back to the levels of the 1980s.

Idaho Fish and Game does not have clear and unbiased data on elk and deer herds in the Clearwater Basin to demonstrate what the limiting factors for elk and deer actually are. A peer reviewed, unbiased study that thoroughly analyzes the whole ecosystem is needed to support

any action taken by USFWS.

The elk situation in the upper Clearwater is different from most elk ranges. There is no typical shrub-steppe winter range as is common elsewhere in the West. Winter range is ephemeral because the potential natural vegetation for these brush fields is actually conifer forest. Prior to large fires of the early 1900s, there were far fewer elk than even today.

Much of the Clearwater elk herd lives within designated wilderness or roadless areas. The purpose of wilderness/roadless designation is to allow natural processes shape the character of the area. Wilderness is where predators can play their role in the system. Allowing game-farming in wilderness/roadless, as it seems to be proposed by the Idaho Fish and Game, is contrary to both the spirit and the letter of the Wilderness Act.

CONSIDER GIVING MONTHLY

By giving monthly you stretch your gift dollars even further. This gives FOC staff more time to invest in ongoing projects to protect the Wild Clearwater and reduces costs and resources used in printing renewal letters. Set up a monthly giving program via our website at www.wildrockies.org/foe or by calling us at 882-9755.

Keeping the Clearwater Wild / Recent Victories / Disneyland on the Selway?

By Gary Macfarlane

In 2004 Friends of the Clearwater devoted a lot of energy to showing people the issues facing public lands. With our friends in the Palouse Group Sierra Club, we sponsored some fun hikes. We took a publicity tour up the Clearwater River with the press and students and faculty from Lewis-Clark State College, completed our cedars inventory with thanks Ashley Martens, sponsored a celebration for the 40th anniversary of the Wilderness Act (with thanks to Carina Christiani), and were a main sponsor of a conference in the Adirondacks about looking ahead to the future of Wilderness.

FOC celebrated some major victories this year. Thanks to the Western Mining Action Project and our partners in Idaho Rivers United, we successfully intervened in a court case that keeps suction dredging out of the South Fork of the Clearwater until water quality permits and studies are completed. We were joined by the Alliance for the Wild Rockies, Ecology Center, Idaho Sporting Congress and Idaho Conservation League in successfully keeping logging trucks out of roadless lands in the Slate Creek watershed.

We also made progress in keeping Wilderness wild, winning an appeal and forcing the Forest Service to reconsider their decision to use motorized equipment for a trail project on Bilk Mountain. Our allies Wilderness Watch, the Ecology Center and the Alliance for the Wild Rockies, joined us in this effort.

One staff member ended up in Washington D.C. twice for national strategy meetings, and we got the last word in a N.Y. Times article about the Clearwater National Forest.

Fundraising, though a chore, improved even if Uncle Ramon, of Cove/Mallard fame/infamy, caught a couple of errors in the end-of-the-year funding letter. Oops!

We have gone to court, when necessary.

As this newsletter was going to press, FOC received news of three additional court victories, two of these in the crucial South Fork drainage! Details will be announced in the next newsletter. Our attorneys from Advocates for the West and Western Environmental Law Center are to be commended for these wins.

On the national scene, the aptly named RAT (recreation access tax) passed as a rider tacked onto the spending bill. This is terrible legislation that seeks the commercialization and privatization of our public lands and national forests. Another rider rewards complicity between the Forest Service and rogue outfitters, allowing illegally built lodges inside the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness to remain on public land. These measures didn't go through the normal public process and likely would not have passed had they done so. If 2004 was a roller coaster, 2005 may be a roller coaster in the rain or in the dark – or both.

We expect legislation will be introduced soon to begin the process of privatizing public lands and facilities. Think Disneyland along the Selway. Keep posted for more information about things you can do to keep our public lands wild, free, and *public*.

We can turn aside this trend by talking to our friends, neighbors, and family (Uncle Ramon's already aboard the Selway raft) about the importance of keeping public lands and national forests in public ownership and managed for the public, as opposed to private, commercial interests. This can reinvigorate a vision for public lands! Get out this year, experience the wild Clearwater, and let your senators and representatives know the wonder of this great place.

Volunteer for Friends of the Clearwater! We have a diverse array of projects ongoing. Contact us at 882-9755 or foc@wildrockies.org and we will find a project that matches your skills and interests.

From Nepal to the Clearwater – Lewis-Clark State College student describes her experience ‘on tour’

By Pasang Sherpa

Pasang Sherpa, a journalism student from Nepal, joined FOC on our first education and publicity tour last fall.

Friends of Clearwater sponsored a tour to the Clearwater River Basin last October. This tour was called “Lands and Lives, Past and Present: An Education and Publicity Tour of the Clearwater River Basin.”

This tour aimed to provide a natural, historical, and cultural perspective of the Clearwater River Basin to a broad demographic of Lewis-Clark State College students along with local and regional media. Eric Martin and Chris Norden of LCSC, and FOC staff members Gary Macfarlane, Larry McLaud and Will Boyd led the fall tour.

I come from the lower lands of the Everest region in Nepal. I am interested in environmental issues and learning about the conservation and preservation of the environment. The tour made me aware of the similarities here and back in my home country.

Dworshak Dam. We have a resort in my village which is externally funded and very well maintained. During the construction period of this resort, the villagers supported it because of the immediate and the temporary employment opportunities and also because they had found someone who bought their woods, which is il-

legal to sell without permission from the village. Today, people have realized their mistake. They have not only destroyed their environment but also their socio-cultural lifestyle.

The river and the green forest refreshed my memory of the forest in Nepal. My village is inside Sagarmatha National Park. Therefore, I am inclined to finding out more on the national parks here in the United States. I want to visit Yellowstone National Park because it is the model from which the Sagarmatha National Park was established. Yellowstone is not

only the model for Nepal but for several other countries, too.

All in all, the one defining word for this trip would be “memorable.”



No See-Um Butte, courtesy Gene Eastman

‘Wild’ Radio Program Wednesdays on KRFP

It’s Wilderness on the airwaves. Join us for Wild Clearwater Country, a weekly radio show offering environmental perspective and natural history from around north-central Idaho. Tune in Wednesdays from 3:30-4:30 p.m. on 92.5 FM, KRFP Radio Free Moscow.

Hiking Above the Rapids

by Will Boyd

On May 21 Friends of the Clearwater and the Sierra Club co-sponsored a hike above Rapid River, a Wild & Scenic River just south of Riggins at the western edge of the Nez Perce National Forest. The hike began at the ranch of Scott and Holly Endersby. Scott serves as the Western Field Coordinator for Trout Unlimited. Holly helped me greatly with wildflower identification.

As we arrived at the ranch, we were greeted by Holly and Scott, a wind-buffed turkey vulture and a territorial say's phoebe who was eagerly working to claim the woodshed for himself.

We hiked up from the ranch to the trailhead on the ridge just east of Rapid River (White Bird Ridge). Ancient, decayed ponderosa pines marked our trail as we ascended the short distance. The seven devils met us, a huge reward for such a short hike.

Wildflowers graced our walk through the high altitude meadows, prairie smoke, larkspur, lupine, elegant cat's ears, yarrow, arnica, and Indian paintbrush. Lomatium and miner's waterleaf followed our path on the way up to the ridge.

Through our field glasses we could make out elk feeding in the open meadows facing us on the western ridge. They remained in close proximity to the sparse pine stands that dotted the otherwise grassy slope.



Rapid River Canyon, courtesy Chuck Pezeshki

A Townsend's warbler's white outer tail feathers and wing patches gave him away as an unidentified hummingbird whizzed by.

Sixteen hikers as well as our hosts enjoyed the brilliant early afternoon sun. We decided to leave much earlier from Moscow next time. The views and pleasant weather were very difficult to leave.

Several mule deer wandered through the brush below. The trail sloped steeply on its way down to the river. I sat just above the slope on an open grassy field flanked by giant ponderosas and filled with larkspur. Nine of our group continued to hike well below my perch. They nearly made it to the river, a 14 mile round trip. Due to the recent heavy rains, we had decided to stick to the high ground rather than taking the river trail.

Spotted towhees, Nashville warblers, western tanagers, and meadowlarks all claimed their own portions of the wooded slopes. A golden eagle rode the rising thermals.

The Rapid River roadless area is close to sixty thousand acres, directly adjacent to the Hells Canyon Wilderness Area. Though not designated wilderness, it is afforded some protection as a Wild & Scenic River. We hope it may one day make a precious addition on the eastern flank of the currently
protected wilderness.

Wolves, from Page 1

The Nez Perce Tribe has done a tremendous job managing wolves in Idaho after the State of Idaho refused to be part of the wolf re-introduction, mid-1990's. The Tribe deserves to be a part of future wolf management in Idaho on public lands for several reasons including their demonstrated success with reintroduction.

The so-called depressed elk population and lack of a rebound was predictable. Desirable effects include allowing plant succession to maintain better watershed health and give the range (forest) a needed rest. Elk numbers after the 1910 fire were probably at all-time abnormal highs since the retreat of the glaciers. If wolves and other factors are preventing elk numbers from climbing, it may be a good thing from the standpoint of other resources.

Species Spotlight: Coeur d'Alene Salamander (*Plethodon ida- hoensis*)

By Will Boyd

Found in the St. Joe and North Fork drainages of the Wild Clearwater Country, the Coeur d'Alene salamander is somewhat of an ecological marvel. It is the northern most *Plethodontid* or lungless salamander and one of only four salamander species known to occur in Idaho and Montana. Lungless salamanders do lack internal lungs, respiring rather through their thin moist skin.

P. idahoensis has adapted to the harsh winters of northern climes and therefore has a great reliance on the stability provided by moist habitats. Individuals may spend up to seven

months under the ground making use of the cool, moist interstitial spaces accessible from the falls, seeps, or streamsides it calls home. Adults mate above ground following an hour long courtship ritual during late summer or early fall. Females produce a mere six eggs and deposit them at nest sites which have never been found in the wild.

Throughout its range the Coeur d'Alene salamander is regarded as a sensitive species. It is protected by law and listed as a category 2 candidate for threatened or endangered status as of 1983.

This regional endemic's range extends from southeastern British Columbia, through northern Idaho, and into northwestern Montana. Idaho populations have been documented as far south as the Selway River.

Friends of the Clearwater (FOC) works to defend the wildlands of North-central Idaho so that species such as the Coeur d'Alene salamander may persist within the healthy diverse ecosystems they are found.

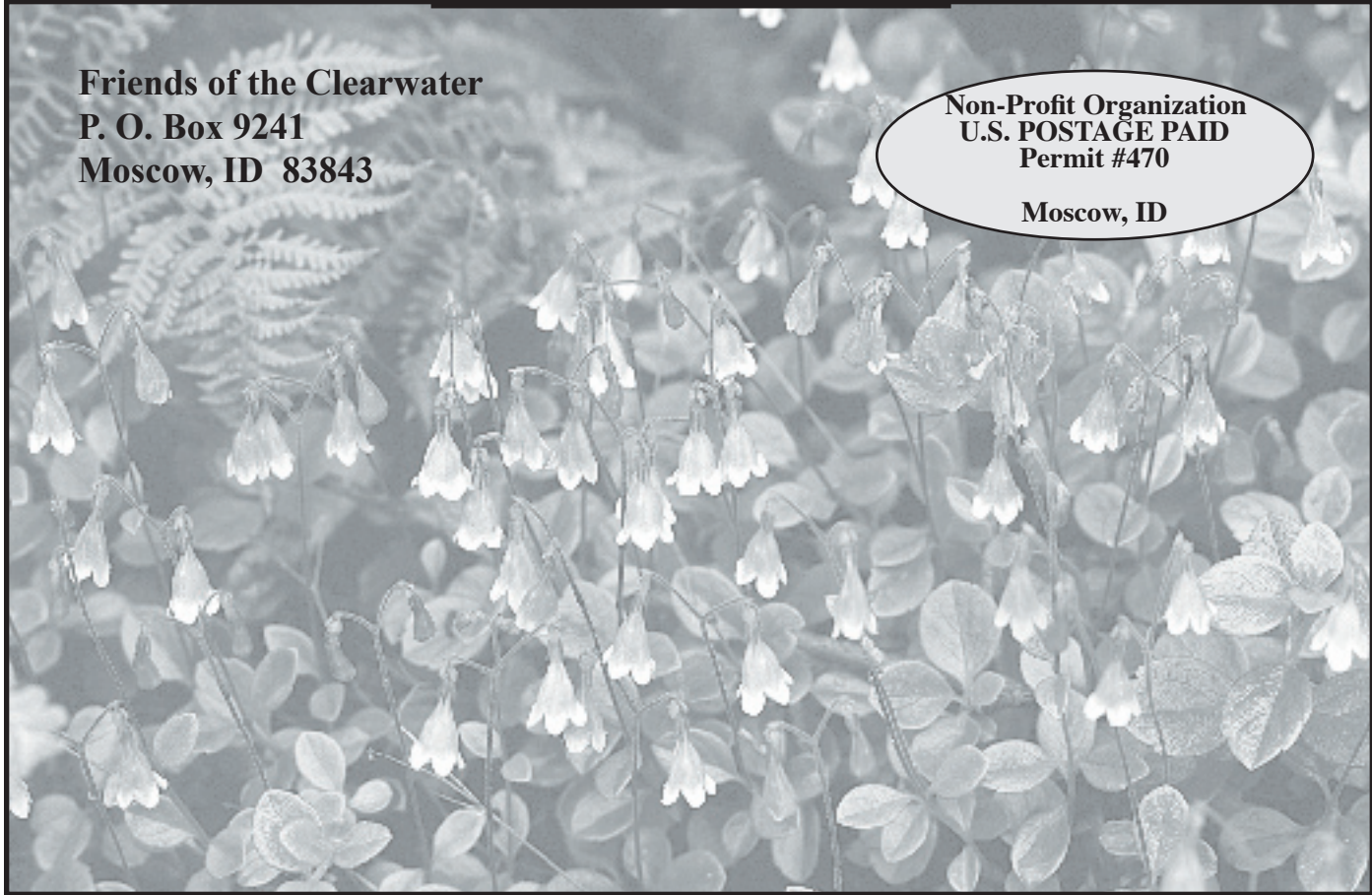


Information for this spotlight was taken from E.F. Cassirer, et al. Coeur d'Alene Salamander

(Plethodon idahoensis) Habitat Conservation Assessment and Conservation Strategy State of Idaho. 199R

Keep on top of the Big Wild.

Email Friends of the Clearwater at foc@wildrockies.org to receive weekly conservation updates as well as information about community events.



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For the Fridge ... FOC Calendar of Events

June 14 - FOC potluck East City Park

June 25—John's Creek day hike

July 22-24—Fish & Hungry Creek
backpack

August 20-21—Lolo Trail overnight
with Mollie & Gene Eastman, trail
historians

Be sure not to miss anything--join our e-
mail list: foc@wildrockies.org
(write "subscribe" on subject line)

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new office! We are located at 116
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