

Indications that the Forest Service is considering replanning of use of the controversial Magruder Corridor following the report of the Selke Committee prompt a review of the case history of this lively, and still alive, issue.

# The Magruder Corridor Controversy

BY WILLIAM P. CUNNINGHAM AND  
DOUGLAS W. SCOTT

MUCH OF THE WORK of preserving wilderness, undertaken by management agencies and cooperating citizens groups, focuses on defining wilderness values and locating zones and boundary lines to protect them. This is the all-important boundary work, drawing the line on adverse development and inconsistent uses, encircling the remaining American wilderness within the protective bounds of administrative policy and a strong new Wilderness Law.

Many case histories of these efforts might be cited to illustrate the difficulty of the task. Other cases are going forward now. One such case, of both historical interest and contemporaneous importance, focuses on the headwaters of Idaho's Selway River, in the Bitterroot National Forest. Here the Little Clearwater River, Magruder Creek, Deep Creek, and others flow into the Selway, gathering waters from thousands of acres of wildlands into the Columbia River system, one of the mightiest of the West.

The Selway River itself rises in the Salmon River Breaks Primitive Area and flows northward into the heart of the Nation's largest dedicated Wilderness, the 1,243,659-acre Selway-Bitterroot. Along the course of its headwaters, lying between the 217,185-acre Salmon River Breaks Primitive Area and the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness, is a narrow zone of wildland unprotected by any designation—the 173,366-acre Magruder Corridor. In this Corridor, severing the geographical continuity of protected wilderness in the upper Selway River country, centers a continuing controversy over proper balance between wilderness preservation and other land uses.

In July 1936, acting under the original L-20 "Primitive Area" policy, the Forest Service established the 1,875,306-acre Selway-Bitterroot Primitive Area. The L-20 Primitive Area policy was viewed by Forest Service officials as a temporary holding action; it did not, for example, prohibit timber harvest and road construction.

Because of dissatisfactions with the weak L-20 Primitive Area policy, both within the Forest Service and from the growing wilderness preservation movement, a new, stronger preservation policy was promulgated in 1939. The new U-1 regulation provided for designation of "Wilderness Areas" by the Secretary of Agriculture. Then existing Primitive

Areas were to be individually reviewed, with public hearings, prior to possible reclassification under the new, more protective policy.

In August 1955, members of the governing Council of The Wilderness Society conducted a five-day field study of the Selway-Bitterroot Primitive Area with Forest Service officials. They expressed an urgent need for reclassification of the area from Primitive to Wilderness designation. The Society announced its specific recommendations in June of 1956. These included the proposal that "the portion . . . south of the Magruder Road . . . be added to the present Idaho Primitive Area [lying immediately south of the Salmon River] and that this whole area be reclassified under Regulation U-1 as the River of No Return Wilderness Area." It was further recommended that the southern boundary of the proposed Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness Area ". . . be so drawn as not to exclude any of the present Primitive Area north of the Magruder Road except those portions that are now within a half-mile of roads."

The conservationist proposal was not carried out. Instead, the Forest Service proceeded with its review, and on August 29, 1960, made public its own reclassification proposal. Despite minor changes, this proposal established the basic pattern for subsequent discussion and action. The Service recommended that the old Selway-Bitterroot Primitive Area be reclassified under the U-1 policy, establishing a 1,163,555-acre Wilderness Area, and deleting nearly half a million acres of wildlands from protected status in the process.

The major deletion was to be the so-called "Area E" of 292,208 acres in the upper Selway drainage, including the Magruder Corridor area. The Forest Service recommendation stated that Area E "has many recreation values but does not qualify for inclusion in the proposed Wilderness Area." Therefore, this area was to be declassified and opened for full multiple use management, including timber harvest. Hearings on the Service's proposal were scheduled for March 1961.

TESTIMONY at the March 1961 Forest Service hearings focused on the question of optimum size for the Wilderness. The Wilderness Society pointed out that the *extensiveness* itself of the Selway-Bitterroot was a particularly precious value. To permit the existing road to serve as the basis for so great a deletion—27 per-cent of the original Primitive Area—said the Society, "would be a needless sacrifice of the quality of vastness which contributes so much to the unusual character of the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness." (THE LIVING WILDERNESS, Autumn-Winter 1960-61, p. 45.)

---

MR. CUNNINGHAM recently completed a thesis on the case history of the Magruder Corridor controversy at the University of Montana.

MR. SCOTT, a doctoral student in the Department of Forestry of the University of Michigan's School of Natural Resources, has been for the past two years a summer staff member with The Wilderness Society. He is currently preparing a dissertation on the history of the Wilderness Act.

quality for inclusion in the proposed Wilderness Area," wilderness advocates insisted this was "an extremely important part of the Wilderness." It was evident that the Forest Service recommendation and the views of wilderness proponents were thus premised on substantially different assessments of the values involved and substantially dissimilar definitions of the wilderness resource. These differences centered on the existence of the Magruder Road and its impact on the surrounding wildlands.

AS A RESULT of public testimony at the field hearings, the Forest Service subjected its proposal to further study. The result was some increase in the size of the proposed wilderness area, reflected in the amended proposal submitted to the Secretary of Agriculture for his action. On January 11, 1963, Secretary Orville Freeman approved this proposal, establishing a new 1,239,840-acre Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness Area, largest of the national forest wildernesses. A 216,870-acre Salmon River Breaks Primitive Area was established at the same time, comprised of part of the old Primitive Area immediately north of the Salmon River, with its northern boundary lying as much as 10 to 15 miles south of the Magruder Road.

At the same time a total of 411,646 acres, lying between the two new units and including almost all of the original Area E, was declassified. These excluded areas, the Secretary's order noted, "were either not suitable for wilderness or . . . their other resource values were more important than the wilderness values." (TLW, Winter-Spring 1962-63, p. 29.) An accompanying press release stated that these areas had been designated originally only under "the less exacting standards for primitive areas." (TLW, Winter-Spring 1962-63, p. 27.)

Though groups such as The Wilderness Society welcomed the reclassification action, they strenuously objected to these deletions.

IN SEPTEMBER 1964 two events pushed the Magruder Corridor issue into sharper focus. Ironically, passage of the Wilderness Act added a new complication, for, now, achieving wilderness protection for the Corridor lands would require Congressional action. In fact, the declassified status of the Corridor lands was reinforced, for the Wilderness Act requires review only of remaining Primitive Areas, though it leaves the door open for review of *de facto* lands as well. The 1963 declassification action had, in effect, moved this area from protected Primitive Area status to the far more tenuous position of *de facto* wilderness.

Also in September 1964, the use of heavy construction equipment in the Corridor prompted Montana conservationists to organize an *ad hoc* local citizens group, the "Save the Upper Selway Committee." This group joined with the "North Tāāhō Wilderness Committee" in the common objective of securing wilderness protection for the Corridor. The efforts of these effective grass-roots conservationists resulted in subsequent precedent-setting developments in this controversy.

celerated in late 1965 when the Forest Service let a contract for 8.5 miles of road reconstruction into the Corridor from Nez Percé Pass. This action, and the agency's unyielding position, served to unify conservationists, prompting them to press for specific wilderness legislation for the Corridor.

The issue at this point involved two major kinds of opposition to the Forest Service plans: those who were categorically opposed to any form of development in the Corridor, and those who were simply skeptical that the Forest Service plans could be carried out without serious damage to the Upper Selway watershed and fisheries resources. Both groups emphasized that these multiple use plans were not based on an appropriate choice of management objectives, reflecting the primary values within the Corridor. They recognized that development would be an irrevocable act, and hence should be delayed pending an exhaustive review of the ecology of the area and the Forest Service plans. The foremost thread of opposition was thus the lack of confidence that the plan was appropriate, that it was based on sufficient and correct biological and watershed evaluations, or that its execution anticipated the seriousness of threats to the area. On the basis of this concern, Senators Lee Metcalf of Montana and Frank Church of Idaho readily accepted the idea of using their influence to obtain an independent feasibility study of the Forest Service management plans.

#### Magruder Corridor Review Committee

ON MAY 24, 1966, Senator Metcalf presented the proposal for a review of the Forest Service plans for the Magruder Corridor to Agriculture Secretary Orville Freeman. The Secretary agreed to the study, but felt it should not focus specifically on the question of wilderness designation. On August 2, 1966, the decision to appoint a non-governmental committee was announced, with the purpose of reviewing the Forest Service plans and advising the Secretary whether "it is feasible to execute these plans or plans of this character," and, indeed, "whether it is in the public interest to manage the area in accordance with these plans." The committee was specifically told that it "was *not* created to repeat the studies upon which classification of the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness was based."

The Secretary announced on September 30 appointment of a four-man independent committee—in itself a precedent-setting action for the Department of Agriculture. The members were to be Dr. George A. Selke, Chairman, a special consultant to the Secretary and a former Montana educator; Dr. James Meiman, a Colorado State University professor of watershed management; Dr. Kenneth P. Davis, then professor of Forest Management at the University of Michigan's School of Natural Resources; and William L. Reavley, western field representative of the National Wildlife Federation.

A number of people felt that the Committee should be expanded. As a result, the team was increased to six members, with the addition of Daniel Poole, secretary of the Wildlife Management Institute, and Dr. Donald J. Obee, chairman

of the Division of Life Sciences at Boise College. The resulting group was not simply a citizens committee, but a panel of internationally recognized experts in land management fields pertaining to the Magruder Corridor issue.

The strongest arguments for the multiple use approach were economic. Timber was described by some as a crop which must be cut at the peak of maturity in order to obtain maximum dollar value and minimum resource waste. Proponents of preservation, on the other hand, emphasized the primitive, scenic, and historical values of the area and criticized the plans both for inadequate recognition of such values and for general inadequacy of basic management information, particularly on ecological effects of proposed developments. Much public concern focused on potential adverse effects on water quality and fish habitat. The issue was, essentially, one of increasing recreation and aesthetic values, and what conservationists claimed would be only short-term profits from a small amount of marginal timber, requiring Federally subsidized roads and tremendous damage to other public values. Approximately two-thirds of the more than 1,000 letters and statements received by the Study Committee opposed the Forest Service plans.

#### The Selke Committee's Report

THE SELKE COMMITTEE completed its report in April 1967, and after review within the Department of Agriculture, it was released to the public on June 1. The 58-page report included detailed review of factors affecting management of the Corridor, and set forth a series of recommendations to the Secretary. These the Secretary accepted and ordered implemented by the Forest Service.

The main body of the report consisted of detailed findings concerning the physiography, soils, ecology, and timber, game, and recreation resources of the Corridor, and the water and fisheries resources of the area, and their impact on these resources downstream in the Columbia River system.

In commenting on the Magruder Corridor management plan, the Committee pointed out that it had received a variety of views about multiple use philosophy, some saying that this was the answer to all questions, others suggesting that the basic question not settled by the multiple use doctrine was *which uses, on what lands, in what balance.* It found the Forest Service plans difficult to evaluate, as these were generalized in many respects, following set formulas taken from standard handbooks and manuals. Multiple use, the Committee concluded, is a constructive concept, but should be regarded only as "a framework for approaching the complex problems of forest land management. It is not a formula for specific land use allocation in a particular area." Misused, the multiple use approach can result in partitioning of an area into rather arbitrary zones, obscuring consideration of the area as an integrated, environmental whole.

The crux of the land management problem, said the Committee, is to "determine for a particular area which use or uses, where, in what proportion, and how applied" are most appropriate. In this sense, the Committee was critical of the Forest Service plan for the Magruder Corridor, which "gave a framework for use management but did not consti-

tute an integrated plan adequately recognizing primary values applicable to the area as a whole." The controversy over the plan, and the need for its review, the Committee emphasized, resulted when the Forest Service prepared to undertake land use action based only on this general multiple use zoning. ". . . The Forest Service was preparing to initiate timber road building and timber cutting in this area without clearly stated limitations or restrictions relating to this use or to other values in the area."

As an alternative to supersede the Forest Service plan, the Committee recommended that a new plan be prepared. As its basic recommendation concerning this new plan, the Committee urged that three primary values be recognized as governing management of the Corridor:

- (1) its value as a *strategic watershed*, involving both water supply and fish resources important to the entire Columbia River system;
- (2) its value as an *historic and natural connecting route* between Idaho and Montana;
- (3) its value as a *recreational area*, particularly in providing access to the surrounding wilderness and primitive areas.

The Committee urged that "as a guiding policy all land management within the Corridor, including all land use zones, should reflect and maintain wildland conditions consonant with these primary values."

The fisheries value of the Upper Selway River were emphasized, this being one of the very few clear-running streams in the entire Columbia River system, with excellent spawning conditions. The chinook salmon program is of particular importance, and the Selway River also spawns about 12 per cent of all steelhead trout that enter the Columbia. Heavy investments have been made in these fisheries programs.

The purity of the water and maintenance of the excellent natural gravel spawning beds require a healthy watershed to prevent siltation. The soils in this area of steep terrain are extremely fragile and susceptible to massive erosion. Road building and timber harvesting might lead to serious impact on the water and fish resources by producing siltation problems.

The Committee urged that all timber cutting and related road construction be deferred until it could be learned whether erosion could be prevented "at justifiable cost," and until a more thorough assessment could be made of timber values as well as of the impact of logging on scenic and recreational values, "as conditioned by high demands for aesthetics in the area."

While in gross terms the Corridor contains substantial timber, in both area and volume, "definitely optimistic estimates" on ponderosa pine, the most valuable species present, indicate timber-growing to be "marginal in financial terms" with the "average for the Corridor . . . indubitably much less." Even these optimistic estimates relied on heavy Federal subsidization in terms of road construction costs and supervision. The existing timber may, in parts, rank as commercially valuable, but this is because it has accumulated over time. Timber-growing potential is low, and regeneration after a first cutting might be difficult and expensive, if measures required to prevent erosion are taken into consideration. The

real costs, in the long run, would be in terms of adverse impact on other values, particularly recreation. "For these reasons," the Committee concluded, "a reduction or elimination of timber management activity on at least a substantial part of the area presently classified as general commercial forest area [85 per cent of the Corridor] seemed in order."

"The construction and maintenance of roads in the topography and soils of the Corridor is difficult, expensive, conducive to erosion and stream sedimentation, and in total, the most critical consideration in the development and management of the area," the Committee found. In this soil-sensitive area, costs for adequately preventing erosion and sedimentation as a result of road construction—if this is even feasible—are extremely high. Under Forest Service practice, this cost would be subsidized by the Government through reduced timber stumpage cost to the logging contractor who actually builds the roads. The Committee recommended that timber road-building be deferred pending further studies of these factors, and that any other road building be based on proper planning for the area as a whole in consonance with the primary values identified.

Finally, the Committee called for more thorough consideration of recreation uses and values, to be reflected in a new long-range recreation plan. The goal would be to maintain "high-quality primitive-type recreation for limited numbers of people." The Committee noted no need for mass recreation facilities in the region for many years to come, but called for access for hunting and some improvement of existing camping and picnicking facilities adjacent to the roadway.

SINCE the filing of the Selke report, the Forest Service has been working to inventory the Corridor resources more thoroughly, with new emphasis on recreational and aesthetic values. Information being gathered will provide for a new plan, which reportedly will include management alternatives to be discussed at public meetings in the region. The new plan is expected to be submitted to the Washington office of the Forest Service early in 1970.

For the moment, at least, the Forest Service has shown no appreciable interest in returning to special protective zoning for the Corridor as wilderness. Following instructions from Secretary Freeman, the Selke Committee did not specifically reopen this question, nor address itself to it in the report. The Committee did, however, express concern over the lack of confidence evident in the widespread opposition to the first Forest Service plan. The Service needs, the Committee concluded, to "strengthen public confidence that wildland areas can be managed for a primary use or uses without being specially designated." It is not clear why special designation, under law, is considered detrimental, unless it is simply viewed as foreclosing Forest Service discretion. The objective, however, is proper land management, and the Wilderness Act was adopted by Congress to assure the achievement of that objective.

With this in mind, local wilderness proponents have con-

sidered the Selke Committee report as a preliminary step in the accomplishment of the ultimate goal of wilderness designation in the Corridor.

In part the issue that remains is concern that, without strong protection under the Wilderness Act, a significant wilderness resource may be lost through incremental destruction of wilderness values. Conservationists feel that the legacy of this controversy has polarized the issue for the Forest Service as to whether or not the 1963 declassification decision was basically correct. The Selke Committee report did not treat this issue, limiting its inquiry to what kind of multiple use should be made of the Corridor once the declassification decision had been made. Nevertheless, conservationists could read the Committee report as an implicit mandate for wilderness protection. None of the report's findings of fact conflict with possible wilderness designation for most of the Corridor, and any discussion of timber harvest appears to be reaching far beyond usual bounds of planning feasibility simply to justify some production.

The central issue throughout the history of this case—and the issue which today remains to be decided—is whether, given the primary values of this area, it should receive protective classification within the regional wilderness and primitive area system. The extremes on this question remain: those who want to see two wilderness areas, north and south of the existing Magruder Road, with no development; and those who advocate open multiple use wherever possible, including new roading.

Today, the Magruder Corridor remains a fragile no-man's-land, tenuous and unprotected, yet deep within the heart of a natural wilderness region. This no-man's-land includes not only the defined Magruder Corridor of 173,000 acres, but also the balance of Area E, another 100,000 acres making up the area declassified in 1963.

In the absence, at this point, of a wilderness initiative of any kind from the Forest Service, local conservationists have now turned, with the Selke report in hand, to the idea of special legislation treating the Area E land as *de facto* wilderness, and seeking its inclusion under the Wilderness Act. Their proposal stands between the extremes.

They call for wilderness designations reaching to within a half mile to a mile of the Magruder Road on each side, adding the other Area E and Magruder Corridor lands to the nearby wilderness areas. This would leave a much narrower "Magruder Corridor," encompassing the road and sufficient land alongside for appropriate developments to insure against erosion, to provide hunter and recreationist access, and to provide facilities for picnicking and camping where needed. The North Idaho Wilderness Committee and cooperating local and national conservation organizations view this proposal, which they hope will be embodied soon in legislation, as a reasonable solution that can fulfill the primary values set forth by the Selke Committee and also assure secure wilderness preservation. It is, they believe, the right decision for wise land management of the Magruder Corridor.

*Give a gift membership in The Wilderness Society. This includes THE LIVING WILDERNESS.*