

AN ENVIRONMENTAL STATEMENT ON A PROPOSAL
TO DESIGNATE THE SAWTOOTH WILDERNESS
AND ADD IT TO THE NATIONAL WILDERNESS PRESERVATION SYSTEM

Approval Recommended By:

Forest Supervisor, Boise National Forest

Date

Forest Supervisor, Challis National Forest

Date

Forest Supervisor, Challis National Forest

Date

Forest Supervisor, Sawtooth National Forest

Date

Approved _____
Regional Forester, Intermountain Region

Date

BOISE, CHALLIS, AND SAWTOOTH
NATIONAL FORESTS
INTERMOUNTAIN REGION, FOREST SERVICE
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
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I. Introduction

This environmental statement is prepared in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (P.L. 91-190).

The Forest Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, proposes that portions of the Sawtooth Primitive Area be designated as Wilderness and added to the National Wilderness Preservation System. It also proposes that certain areas of contiguous National Forest land be similarly designated, and added to the System, and that certain parts of the Sawtooth Primitive Area be declassified. Proposal is also made that, subject to existing valid rights, the Sawtooth Wilderness, upon the effective date of its inclusion in the System, be withdrawn from all forms of appropriation under the mining laws and from disposition under laws pertaining to mineral leasing and all amendments thereto.

This proposal involves the Wilderness classification of 199,270 acres within the Boise, Challis, and Sawtooth National Forests in Blaine, Boise, Custer, and Elmore Counties, in south-central Idaho.

The proposal brochure, attached, adequately describes the above-ground physical resources and properties and the environment of the area. The U.S. Geological Survey Bulletin No. 1319-D adequately describes the below-ground properties found in that agency's physical evaluation of mineral resources of the area. A copy of this Bulletin is not included herein. It is available for review in the offices of the Regional Forester and Forest Supervisors involved or may be purchased from the Superintendent of Documents, Washington, D.C.

A. Current Status of Area

The Sawtooth Primitive Area was classified administratively on October 12, 1937, under Regulation L-20 of the Secretary of Agriculture, to preserve the area in its natural state. The Primitive Area is subject to management provisions contained in the Secretary's Regulations in 36 CFR 251.70-251.86. Pursuant to direction in the Wilderness Act, the Forest Service has studied this area and contiguous lands. The Wilderness proposal of the Forest Service will be considered at public hearings in May 1971.

B. Forest Service Authority and Responsibility

Several laws and regulations pertinent to uses and management of the National Forests and, in some way, related to the proposed designation, include:

1. The Organic Administration Act of June 4, 1897, as amended, 16 U.S.C. 551.
2. The Multiple Use-Sustained Yield Act of 1960, 16 U.S.C. 528-531.
3. The Wilderness Act of 1964, 16 U.S.C. 1131-36.
4. Secretary's Regulations 36 CFR 251/70-251.86.

The Organic Administration Act authorizes the Secretary of Agriculture to make and enforce rules and regulations concerning the occupancy, use, and preservation of the National Forests. The Multiple Use-Sustained Yield Act recognizes that the establishment and maintenance of areas of Wilderness are consistent with the purposes and provisions of the Act. The Wilderness Act and appropriate Secretary's Regulations provide specific guidelines for study of each Primitive Area and contiguous lands, for possible designation as Wilderness and for its addition to the National Wilderness Preservation System.

Particularly germane is the language of the Wilderness Act, in Section 3(b) (copy attached), which states, in part, "The Secretary of Agriculture shall . . . review, as to its suitability or nonsuitability for preservation as Wilderness, each area in the National Forests classified . . . as 'primitive' and report his findings to the President." The Act further states in this same section ". . . nothing herein contained shall limit the President in proposing . . . the alteration of existing boundaries of primitive areas or recommending the addition of any contiguous area of National Forest lands predominantly of wilderness value."

The environmental statement examines the contemplated action in light of the subsequent related Executive Order 11514 and interim guidelines furnished by the Council on Environmental Quality.

II. Environmental Considerations

A. Environmental Impact

Congressional designation of the proposed area as Wilderness would result in no direct, tangible impact on its environment. About 185,368 acres of the proposal are already under Wilderness-type management as a part of the Sawtooth Primitive Area. Wilderness designation would perpetuate this kind of management and formally extend it to other contiguous lands possessing wilderness characteristics.

B. Favorable Environmental Effects

Natural ecological succession would be allowed to operate freely, to the extent feasible. The area would be available for human use, to the extent consistent with maintenance of the wilderness resources and primitive conditions. The area would be preserved as an enduring resource of wilderness for the American people of present and future generations.

C. Adverse Environmental Effects Which Cannot be Avoided

There is no foreseeable way that the environment would directly be adversely affected by designation of the proposed area as Wilderness. It is recognized that the area's designation as Wilderness would give it greater national prominence, thereby increasing the potential for human uses which, uncontrolled, could create adverse impacts on some segments. Such uses could and would be managed through appropriate regulations and controls.

D. Alternatives to the Proposed Action

Two alternatives are considered:

1. The Primitive Area might be formally declassified by Congress. Thereafter, Wilderness-type management would cease, and the area would be developed, managed, and used as other unclassified National Forest land, according to its need and availability.

Declassification would remove from Primitive Area status some 114,000 acres of forested land. Of this, about 11,500 acres (less than 6 percent of the proposed Wilderness) are classed as commercial forest land, which would be available for timber harvest if the area were not classified as a Wilderness or Primitive Area. The volume of live merchantable sawtimber on this commercial forest land is estimated to be about 85 million board feet, worth about \$165,000 under current market conditions. Tree species and estimated volumes for each are: Douglas-fir, 39 million board feet; lodgepole pine, 14 million board feet; alpine fir, 13 million board feet; Engelmann spruce, 10 million board feet; and ponderosa pine, 9 million board feet.

Range improvement could be accelerated somewhat, if the area were declassified. Restoration and revegetation of limited areas of depleted livestock ranges could be accomplished. Severe topography and delicate watershed conditions of much

of the area would impose limitations on such improvements. Range rehabilitation and improvement would not result in an increase in livestock use, but would make it possible to avoid decreasing such use.

Opportunities for watershed restoration projects are very limited. Because of the extremely steep, rough topography and delicate watershed conditions, attempts to increase water yield generally would unacceptably impair water quality.

Public recreation uses of portions of the area could be intensified by development of access roads and recreation facilities. The area could be developed to accommodate an estimated additional 187,000 visitor-days' use. It is recognized that such developments, unless carefully installed, could impair some aspects of the natural beauty. However, development would make the area and its scenic values more readily available to more people. Intensive development would result in a loss of much of the wilderness resource which could not be replaced for this or future generations.

If the Sawtooth Primitive Area were declassified, portions of the Sawtooth Range meet the criteria for classification as a Scenic Area or Geological Area and could be so designated under existing Forest Service regulations.

Valid mining operations would be permissible, subject to provisions of the U.S. Mining Laws and the mineral leasing laws, as amended.

2. The congress might take no action on this or subject proposals to reclassify the Primitive Area to Wilderness. Until Congress has determined otherwise, the Sawtooth Primitive Area will be administered under the rules and regulations affecting it on the effective date of the Wilderness Act.

E. Relationship Between Local Short-Term Uses of Man's Environment and the Maintenance of Long-Term Productivity

If the first alternative is selected and resource uses such as logging, roadbuilding, or range development were allowed, many of the area's existing wilderness qualities would be destroyed. On the other hand, the designation of the area in question as Wilderness would preserve both the area's tangible and intangible values (including wilderness values) for the future. The Wilderness Act gives Presidential prerogative for water project development at any time he deems it in the national interest. Congress retains the power to declassify all or portions of the area any time it sees fit. The long-term productivity

of the area as Wilderness would, however, be foregone, to some degree, if any short or long term commercial development were undertaken. Obviously, economic gains of resource development and consumption would be foregone by classification.

F. Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitment of Resources

Under the Wilderness classification proposed, all of the area's resources would be committed for preservation as Wilderness--at least until such time as the President or the Congress might determine that the national interest would be better served by declassification of the area (or a portion thereof) or by authorization of certain nonharmonizing but vitally needed uses therein.

If all or part of the area were to be committed to commodity production, the related wilderness resource would be impaired or sacrificed. Commodity uses such as logging, mining, water project development, recreational development, and road development, could adversely affect the area's environment, by physical pollution of the air and water. Noise pollution could result from the recovery or manufacture of the area's resources. The outstanding scenery and natural beauty would be marred by physical alternation of the landscape. Renewable and nonrenewable resources would be removed. Some of the effects would be very long term, perhaps requiring generations to recover.

These adverse effects would be offset somewhat by economic benefits from the employment, manufacturing, distribution, and sale of goods and services associated with resource development and from the increased opportunity for the viewing or using of the area by thousands who otherwise would never have the opportunity.

III. Analysis of Department and Agency Comments

The National Environmental Policy Act, subsequent related Executive Orders, and instructions from the Council on Environmental Quality give direction for the Forest Service to contact agencies having environmental responsibilities and to request pertinent comments. This analysis will be made after receiving comments.

IV. Conclusions

Note: This section is to be written after public hearings.

PUBLIC NOTICE

Sawtooth Wilderness Proposal and Hearing Announcement

Notice is hereby given in accordance with the provisions of the Wilderness Act of September 3, 1964 (78 Stat. 890-892; 16 U.S.C. 1131-1132), that public hearings will be held, beginning at 9:00 a.m. on May 3, 1971, in the Opera House, Sun Valley, Idaho, and 9:00 a.m. on May 4, 1971, in the Rodeway Inn, 29th Street and Chinden Boulevard, Boise, Idaho, on a proposal for a recommendation to be made by the Secretary of Agriculture to the President of the United States that a recommendation be submitted to the Congress for the establishment of the Sawtooth Wilderness, comprised of approximately 199,270 acres within and contiguous to the Sawtooth Primitive Area. The proposed Sawtooth Wilderness is located in the Boise, Challis, and Sawtooth National Forests in the counties of Blaine, Boise, Custer, and Elmore, in the State of Idaho.

A brochure containing a map and information about the proposed Wilderness may be obtained from the respective Forest Supervisors or the Regional Forester:

Forest Supervisor
Boise National Forest
1075 Park Boulevard
Boise, Idaho 83706

Forest Supervisor
Challis National Forest
Forest Service Building
Challis, Idaho 83226

Forest Supervisor
Sawtooth National Forest
1525 Addison Ave., East
Twin Falls, Idaho 83301

Regional Forester
Federal Building
324 25th Street
Ogden, Utah 84401

Individuals and organizations may express their views by appearing at these hearings or may submit written comments for inclusion in the official record to the Regional Forester, Federal Building, 324 25th Street, Ogden, Utah 84401, by June 3, 1971.

EDWARD P. CLIFF
Chief
U.S. Forest Service

Signed March 22, 1971

Posted on: _____
Date

Signature: _____
Date