

NEWS from the Forest Service

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Secretary of Agriculture Recommends 293,571 Acres

For Great Bear Wilderness and 66,300-Acre

Addition to Bob Marshall Wilderness

WASHINGTON, D.C.--According to Northern Regional Forester Robert H. Torheim, Secretary of Agriculture Bob Bergland, on behalf of the President, has recommended to Congress that 359,871 acres in western Montana be added to the National Wilderness Preservation System. The recommendation would create a 293,571-acre Great Bear Wilderness in the Flathead National Forest, and would add 66,300 acres in the Lewis and Clark National Forest to the Bob Marshall Wilderness.

In a letter of recommendation to Congress, Bergland explained the proposal is based on Forest Service studies called for under Public Law 94-557 of October 19, 1976.

Bergland said that in the Department of Agriculture review as to the area's suitability or unsuitability for wilderness, public hearings were conducted in Montana. As directed by the legislation, potential utility corridors within or contiguous to the study area were also studied.

There were more than "400 responses from 561 individuals, organizations, and agencies," Bergland said. He sent a study report, a final environmental statement, and a draft bill reflecting the administration's recommendations to Congress.

The Great Bear Wilderness Study Area, as cited in the legislation, contained 371,160 acres. An additional 15,400 acres of contiguous, undeveloped area was also reviewed, making a total study area of 386,560 acres. The study area lies astride the Continental Divide, between the Bob Marshall Wilderness and Glacier National Park.

(MORE)

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"The Department concluded that in the absence of additional evidence of, immediate needs, it would be premature at this time to establish a utility corridor in the proposed wilderness," Bergland explained. "This view was strongly supported by public response and especially by the Montana Department of Natural Resources. Should further study and development confirm that a utility corridor through the Great Bear proposed wilderness is in the national interest, the President has the authority in Section 4(d) (4) of the Wilderness Act of 1964 to create the corridor."

"Wilderness designation is not recommended for 26,660 acres" because it was not found suitable for wilderness.

Bergland said that "All lands in the study area are Federally-owned except for 28.69 acres of private land existing in two patented mining claims no longer being mined."

Copies of the final environmental statement are available for review in the Offices of Chief of the Forest Service, Northern Regional headquarters, Missoula; and Flathead and Lewis and Clark National Forests headquarters. Copies will be available for distribution in 3 to 4 weeks, when received from the printers.

Concerning the Great Bear and Bob Marshall addition, Bergland concluded they "will be a valuable addition to the National Wilderness Preservation System."

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Summary of Comment on Roadless Areas Available Soon

WASHINGTON, D.C.--An analysis of more than 260,000 public comments on how 62 million acres of national forest roadless areas should be used can be examined soon in Forest Service offices across the country, Forest Service Chief John R. McGuire said today.

He said the comments will help the U.S. Department of Agriculture develop its recommendations on which areas should be wilderness, nonwilderness, or require further planning.

On June 15, the Forest Service issued a draft environmental statement containing alternative approaches for allocating use of more than 2,000 roadless and undeveloped areas in the 187-million-acre National Forest System. The Forest Service particularly sought comments on approaches decisionmakers should consider in allocating the total roadless area inventory, criteria to use in developing a proposed course of action, and reasons specific roadless areas should be either wilderness, nonwilderness, or subject to further planning. The period for submitting comments ended October 1.

McGuire said the 264,093 public comments received on the draft was the largest public response the Agency has ever received on an environmental statement. The Forest Service established a temporary center at Salt Lake City, Utah, where each comment was read and included in the analysis of public response. McGuire said the comments came from nearly 360,000 individuals, and included letters, reports, resolutions, petitions, form letters, and response forms. Comments were received from every State, with the largest number coming from Oregon, Idaho, and California, in that order.

(MORE)

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McGuire said the public may view a display of the public comment analysis at Forest Service headquarters in Washington, D.C., and in Regional and Forest Supervisor Offices throughout the country beginning next week. The display, on microfilm, consists of tables which show breakdowns of responses by States and types of responses in the categories of approaches, decision criteria, and site preferences. McGuire said every roadless area mentioned in the draft environmental statement received comments which recommended either wilderness or nonwilderness status. Very few people recommended further planning, he said. "High scenic beauty and wild values" was the most frequently given reason for recommending wilderness designation of specific areas. The most frequently given reason for recommending nonwilderness status for specific areas was "negative impact on the economy."

Another category on which the public was asked to comment related to approaches or methods decisionmakers should use in deciding allocation of the total roadless area inventory. "Scenery" and "preserving wildlife" were the most frequently cited reasons in the comments received favoring an approach which would emphasize wilderness designation. "Motorized access and recreation," "economics and jobs," and "timber values" were the most frequently identified reasons in the comments which favored an approach emphasizing allocation of areas to nonwilderness.

The draft statement suggested seven criteria which could be used in developing recommendations for allocating the roadless areas. McGuire said all seven suggested criteria were supported by public comments. The criterion most frequently supported was consideration of meeting the Forest Service targets established in the 1975 program required by the Renewable Resources Planning Act. In addition to the seven primary criteria, the public also suggested other criteria to be used, such as "manageable boundaries," and "adjacent to existing wilderness."

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McGuire said that USDA recommendations for use of the roadless areas will be set forth in a final environmental statement to be issued by the end of the year.

The administration's proposals for which of the areas should be designated wilderness will go early to the 96th Congress, he said. Congress usually holds hearings on the proposals before any areas are designated wilderness. McGuire said the Forest Service will hold hearings on those roadless areas which Congress has already designated as "wilderness study" areas. McGuire noted also that there will be additional opportunities for public comment on areas recommended for further study as they move through the regular land planning processes.

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Management Directions Implemented

For Mission Mountains Wilderness

MISSOULA, Montana--The implementation of management directions for the Mission Mountains Wilderness has been announced by Northern Regional Forester Robert H. Torheim.

The direction contained in the management plan provides for the protection and preservation of the 73,877-acre Mission Mountains Wilderness in the Flathead National Forest.

The primary approach to management of the Wilderness will be to inform and educate the user in low-impact camping techniques and in the development of a wilderness ethic, Torheim said. He noted that many of the restrictions originally proposed in the draft plan have been modified or eliminated. Wilderness use will be closely monitored and additional restrictions will be applied only if all other management methods fail to protect the wilderness resource, he said.

A registration system for users will be implemented by 1980 so that visitor capacity can be determined and public contact and education facilitated.

Forty miles of trails will be maintained annually with the help of the Youth Conservation Corps (YCC) based at Condon. Plans call for the printing of a new map showing the topography and access points of the area.

Hitchracks will be provided at Cedar, Piper, and Mollan Lakes. Glacier, Cold, and Frigid Lakes have been designated for day use only; over-used campsites at these lakes will be closed and rehabilitated.

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Copies of the management plan are available for inspection during business hours at Flathead National Forest offices in Kalispell and Northern Region headquarters, Federal Building, Missoula. Copies may also be obtained by writing Forest Supervisor J. L. Emerson, Flathead National Forest, P.O. Box 147, Kalispell, Montana 59901.

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Sheep Grazing To Continue

In Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness

BOZEMAN, Montana--Sheep grazing will continue in the newly classified Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness, according to Gallatin National Forest Supervisor Lewis E. "Gene" Hawkes.

Hawkes said management guidance, established in a 1976 environmental assessment report of the High Mountain-Absaroka sheep range, is now being implemented on the Forest, even though the area was not classified a wilderness until 1978.

Tentative plans call for three grazing allotments--Iron Mountain and Ash Mountain, northeast of Gardiner, and Haystack, south of Big Timber.

Permittees in 1978 and livestock numbers permitted were Boe Ranch, Inc., of McLeod with 1,100 ewes with lambs, Lawrence and Elaine Allestad of Big Timber with 1,100 ewes with lambs, and Theodore "Teddy" Thompson of Big Timber with 600 ewes with lambs. Term permits for sheep grazing have been held by the families of the present permittees for more than three generations, many years before the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness was created.

These wilderness grazing allotments are at elevations ranging from 7,200 to 10,000 feet. Sheep grazing in this area dates from the 1880's.

Hawkes said many people do not understand that sheep, cattle, and horses can be grazed in National Forest Wildernesses under paid permits. This is spelled out in the Wilderness Act of 1964 (Public Law 88-577) that established the National Wilderness Preservation System:

". . . the grazing of livestock, where established prior to the

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effective date of this Act, shall be permitted to continue subject to such reasonable regulations as are deemed necessary by the Secretary of Agriculture."

(WILDERNESS ACT, 1964)

"Forest Service wilderness policy permits existing livestock management improvements--such as fences, water tanks, etc.--to be maintained, reconstructed, or replaced when essential to proper management and/or protection of wilderness values," explained Ted Russell, Missoula, Montana, Director of Range Management in the National Forests of the Northern Region (Montana, North Dakota, northern Idaho, and western South Dakota).

"Management emphasizes grazing systems and practices that do not require structural improvements or feeding of supplements. Range improvements to facilitate wilderness livestock grazing must preserve the wilderness qualities.

"Some ranchers prefer extensive management over intensive management," Russell pointed out. "The difference between the two types of management is the amount of range improvements. Extensive management is accomplished using herding and salting to control livestock use. Minimal, if any, range improvements are used. Properly applied, either can be used to accomplish quality range management.

"Livestock producers who prefer extensive livestock grazing management would be the most desirable for managing livestock grazing in wildernesses. Exchange of grazing allotments may be worked out where the rancher's preference for a type of management is fitted to the needs of the land. By mutual consent, a rancher preferring extensive management could be moved to an allotment within a wilderness. Maintenance of a life-style as well as other factors may well benefit ranchers while obtaining better livestock management practices on National Forest range."

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Hawkes said, "We need to remember that wilderness and other National Forest lands belong to all the people. The Forest Service job is that of caretaker-manager. We are also host and interpreter to all who come to these public lands. It is the job of the Forest Service to promote understanding between different kinds of users and to help each.

"It must be remembered that some of the people who visit the National Forests don't know much about livestock. They will do things, unknowingly, that could disrupt livestock operations. The livestock producer and the Forest Service must help these Forest and wilderness visitors to know and understand the problems of the livestock operation. And the livestock operator has to understand the interests, desires, and needs of the recreationists and other users of the National Forests.

"I don't see a conflict between wilderness management and livestock grazing. If done properly, they compliment each other. For the wilderness visitors, the sheep, cattle, and horses can add much enjoyment to the visit. Rangelands in the wildernesses offer a valuable resource for the rancher-farmer. It just requires a different management style."

Russell says no one would deny that grazing in wildernesses has a high cost factor. "This is because the rancher-farmer must manage his livestock with special consideration for wilderness values.

"Motorized vehicle use will be considered on a case-by-case basis. Approval will be based upon urgency and need beyond that available by primitive means. It must be based on more than efficiency, convenience, or economy."

Structural range improvements must be designed and constructed of materials and in locations that are least conflicting with the wilderness resource.

Salting is encouraged to aid in livestock distribution. Supplemental feeding is permitted under emergency conditions, such as unexpected snowstorms or isolation from feed by flood or other natural disasters that might, otherwise, cause animal starvation.

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Wilderness designation does not carry additional requirements on the permittee for range improvement. Allotment management plans prepared jointly by the permittee and the Forest Service specify the grazing system and management practices to be used.

"Fences and water developments may be built to control livestock movement," Russell pointed out.

"We emphasize the use of natural materials, such as redwood for constructing a water trough, or wood rather than metal fenceposts, or painting a galvanized tank a natural color that blends with the surroundings. In this way range improvements can protect the wilderness by being esthetically pleasing while serving a function for livestock management."

Livestock grazing in the Northern Region's National Forest wildernesses amounts to more than 11,000 a.u.m.'s. This involves livestock grazing permits in the Bob Marshall, Anaconda Pintler, Gates of the Mountains, Scapegoat, Gospel Hump, and Selway-Bitterroot Wildernesses.

Livestock grazing in 150 Roadless Area Review and Evaluation (RARE II) areas involves about 185,000 a.u.m.'s.

(An animal unit month/a.u.m. is one mature, 1,000 pound animal or equivalent for 1 month; or the forage required to feed such an animal for 1 month, and is based on forage consumption of 26 pounds of dry matter per day.)

RARE II areas, Russell said, must be treated as if they were already Wilderness, until a decision is made as to whether or not they will be added to the National Wilderness System.

Russell said a few of the advantages to grazing livestock in a National Forest Wilderness are:

--less livestock harassment because there are no roads or off-road vehicle use.

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--less range improvements (fences, water tanks, corrals, etc.), therefore, less maintenance and chance for vandalism of the improvements.

--less danger of livestock thefts due to no motorized vehicle use.

The Northern Region has approximately 1,900 term grazing permits on its 15 National Forests and four National Grasslands. These permits involve 250,000 cattle, 18,000 horses, and 78,000 sheep for a total of 1.34 million a.u.m.'s. Actual use last year was 201,000 cattle, 17,000 horses, and 47,000 sheep, for a total of 1.24 million a.u.m.'s.