

*Dean Ehrenreich*

My name is Maurice Hornocker. I am a wildlife biologist living in Moscow, Idaho. Since January 1968 I have served as Leader of the Idaho Cooperative Wildlife Research Unit, University of Idaho. Prior to 1968 I lived in McCall, Idaho for four years. From the time I moved to Idaho from Montana in 1964 I have been involved in intensive wildlife and ecological research in the Idaho Primitive Area. The purpose of this statement is to express my views on the reclassification of the Idaho and Salmon River Breaks Primitive Areas, and more expressly the Chamberlain Basin exclusion set forth in the Administration's proposal.

Chamberlain Basin is the largest of the proposed exclusions. Ecologically, it is the most important to the entire wilderness system for the following reasons:

1. Watershed. The 383,000 acre Chamberlain Basin is the geographical heart of the Salmon River wilderness complex. Soils throughout this region are granitic and quite unstable. Roads, logging activities, mining, and the host of other inevitable disturbances would result in erosion and siltation of dozens of streams. This would lower water quality in the major tributaries such as Big Creek, Chamberlain Creek, Cottonwood Creek, and others and adversely affect the Middle Fork and Main Salmon rivers. All aquatic life would be affected including the important native and anadromous fisheries.

2. Wildlife. Numerous species of big game occur in this area. The most important from the standpoint of recreation - and economics - is the elk population. The Chamberlain herd is the largest single herd south of the Salmon River. It is unique in Idaho, and perhaps in the West, in that both this entire herd's summer and winter range lie wholly within a roadless,

relatively pristine area. The complex of meadows and timber cover afford ideal summer range. Winter range is restricted to the canyons of the Salmon and Middle Fork and their major tributaries.

The undisturbed summer range is important to elk, but much more important are the more restricted winter ranges. If development is permitted on and adjacent to these winter ranges, it is likely elk will suffer serious effects. The Chamberlain exclusion would in effect open to development a very considerable portion of the herd's entire winter range on the south side of the Salmon River. A portion of upper Big Creek would be affected in the same manner. If these winter ranges are not protected from development and human disturbance, it is inevitable the elk population will decline.

Winter ranges for big game are in jeopardy throughout the West. These ranges have been and are presently the areas first developed and altered by man. Often human use and big game use is incompatible. Retaining the Chamberlain Basin within the wilderness system insures that such development - and subsequent loss - of these winter ranges will not happen.

Populations of other species could be adversely affected. Mule deer and white-tailed deer winter on the same ranges with elk. Bighorn sheep have been shown to be sensitive to human disturbances. Cougar and other predatory species depend on adequate numbers of big game and other prey species - if prey species decline, predators decline. Further, some of the more secretive species depend on relatively undisturbed habitats.

Perhaps equally as important to future generations are the Primitive Area's cultural and scientific values.

Its value as an area for scientific inquiry is incalculable. My own research on cougar could not have been initiated and carried out anywhere

else. No other area in the West offered the geographical isolation and the ecological conditions essential for such an endeavor. A host of other such projects, encompassing many scientific disciplines, could be carried out within this ecosystem. The opportunities to document factors responsible for the self-maintenance and health of an ecosystem which has sustained itself for centuries are becoming less and less as our population expands. These opportunities currently exist in the Chamberlain Basin and Idaho Primitive Area - they would be lost forever if roads and developments are permitted.

The Chamberlain Basin has for years exemplified the 'back country' to Idahoans and to others. The Primitive Area in its entirety gives central Idaho character no other state possesses. The very size of this back country and its complex of high country, canyons, and big rivers is unequalled anywhere in the contiguous 48 states. It is an interwoven wilderness ecosystem. Alter Chamberlain ecologically and the whole system is irreversibly altered.

It is my belief that Idahoans and all citizens of the United States, both in the present and future, will derive far more benefits if the Chamberlain Basin and Big Creek areas are reclassified as wilderness. This will provide for long-term benefits, both economic and cultural, as opposed to questionable short-term, purely economic gains.