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University of Idaho
College of Forestry,
Wildlife and Range Sciences
Moscow, Idaho 83843

31 December 1974

Hon. Cecil D. Andrus, Governor
Statehouse
Boise, Idaho 83720

Dear Governor Andrus:

In response to the proposal of the Secretary of Agriculture to eliminate the Chamberlain Basin from the Idaho Wilderness, I have prepared a few comments, herewith enclosed dealing only with wildlife, soils, and other pertinent wilderness values.

I am very much disturbed that the President of the United States has recommended to the Congress the exclusion of the Chamberlain Basin from the proposed Idaho Wilderness. No where in all of Idaho's wilderness country do such extraordinary values come together to form a gem of great price. The key, of course, is keeping logging out of Chamberlain Basin. The component parts will be forever lost with the advent of roads.

We must make every effort to get the Chamberlain Basin restored to wilderness status and my comments will not only go to the President, but to our Congressional delegation. My interest in the Idaho Primitive Area began shortly after I came to Idaho to become the Leader of the Idaho Cooperative Wildlife Research Unit at the University of Idaho in 1947. A number of my graduate students produced significant amounts of information on the ecology of wilderness big game species, both in the Idaho Primitive Area and the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness. I have drawn on these and related studies in my attached comments.

Sincerely yours,

Paul D. Dalke

Paul D. Dalke
Professor Wildlife Management,
Emeritus
University of Idaho

PDD:elb

Enclosure

Comments on: "A proposal, Salmon River Wilderness and Idaho Wilderness. United States Department of Agriculture, Forest Service"

This report approved for the Secretary of Agriculture, July 18, 1974, states that 435,465 acres within the Idaho Primitive Area are "unsuitable for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System." The Chamberlain Basin comprises 386,492 acres or 88.7 per cent of the proposed exclusions.

There are a number of compelling reasons why the Chamberlain Basin is eminently qualified to be included in the proposed Idaho Wilderness. Several major reasons are given to support this statement.

1. Chamberlain Basin has 30 named meadows and small unnamed meadows are common. They have developed along streams or in bog or seep areas. Over a long period of time there have developed the most unique system of pristine mountain meadows in any area in Idaho. This system of meadows is of key importance to the maintenance and production of a large herd of Rocky Mountain elk. The meadows and adjacent forest provide an ideal calving area. The meadows provide a maximum security for the cow-calf elk herds. The cow-calf ratios of elk herds using the Chamberlain Basin meadows are high. There is evidence that high quality summer forage is at least as important as that of winter foods in maintaining rigorous herbivore populations.

2. Because the Chamberlain Basin mountain meadows are still very largely in a pristine condition they can provide resource managers with comparative data useful to the production of livestock ranging on similar meadows outside the wilderness areas. An initial 3-year study (1966-69) by the Idaho Cooperative Wildlife Research Unit with the College of Forestry, Wildlife and Range Sciences, gave some insight on the role of the Chamberlain Basin meadows in the annual economy of elk that winter in the adjoining Big Creek drainage. The large number of plants native to these mountain meadows are selectively grazed by elk until such time as the meadows begin to dry out. From one half to two thirds of all forage produced comes from the wet meadow type. From dry to wet meadows the pounds of air-dried forage produced per acre varied from 2,000 to 4,500.¹

3. Chamberlain Basin is almost entirely within the Idaho Batholith. Soils are loose, disintegrated granite and are highly erosive whenever exposed by road building or logging which removes protective plant cover. One classic and devastating example of how the loose granitic soils are washed into major streams is seen in the Zena and Secesh Creeks logging area immediately west of the South Fork of the Salmon some 15 air line miles east of upper Payette Lake. Road building and logging were responsible for destruction of prime salmon spawning gravel and filling deep pools in the South Fork of the Salmon in addition the great soil loss from the steep

hillsides. A similar situation would result with logging in the Chamberlain Basin, though a report sponsored by the Idaho Resources Development Council ignores these very real dangers to a fragile environment.²

A recent study of mule deer winter range in the Idaho Primitive Area showed there is a definite movement of granitic soil down slopes varying from 22 to 86 per cent.³ Another study demonstrated that there needs to be a two-thirds plant coverage to keep these soils in place.⁴ A twenty-two percent plant coverage exists over some winter range areas within the Idaho Primitive Area and therefore need all the protection a wilderness status would provide.³

4. Wilderness species such as mountain goats and bighorn sheep are remnant populations within the Idaho Primitive Area, including the Chamberlain Basin. Opening the Basin for logging would further depress these populations, if not eliminate them. Two major studies in the early 1950's pointed out the continued existence of these species depends upon preservation of their habitat.^{5, 6}

¹Wing, L. D. 1969. Ecology and herbivore use of five mountain meadows in the Idaho Primitive Area. University of Idaho. Ph.D. Dissertation. 215pp.

²Frykman, Joel L. 1971. The Idaho Primitive Area. Idaho Resource Development Council.

³Presby, R. C. 1963. Ecology of mule deer winter range on the Middle Fork of the Salmon River, Idaho. University of Idaho. M.S. Thesis. 91pp.

⁴Packer, P. E. 1951. Status of research on watershed protection requirements for granitic mountain soils in southwestern Idaho. Inter-mountain Forest and Range Experiment Station. Research Paper 27.

⁵Smith, D. R. 1954. The bighorn sheep in Idaho, its status, life history and management. Idaho Dept. of Fish and Game. Wildlife Bulletin No. 1. 154pp.

⁶Brandborg, S. M. 1955. Life history and management of the mountain goat in Idaho. Idaho Dept. of Fish and Game. Wildlife Bulletin No. 2. 142pp.