

IDAHO PRIMITIVE AREA
STUDY OBJECTIVES

The Boise, Challis, Payette, and Salmon National Forests of the Intermountain Region are presently engaged in a study of the Idaho Primitive Area, as specified by the Wilderness Act (P.L. 88-577) of September 3, 1964.

The study objectives are:

1. Comply with provisions of the Wilderness Act (P.L. 88-577), which provides that all Primitive Areas existing on the date of the Act be studied and:
 - a. Reviewed as to their suitability or nonsuitability for preservation as Wilderness.
 - b. Reported to Congress not later than September 3, 1974, as to the findings of such review.
2. Study areas of land contiguous to the Primitive Area boundary that have been or may reasonably be considered by the Forest Service or others to have Wilderness qualities.
3. Collect, compile, and evaluate the basic information necessary for the development of the suitability report to Congress in conformity with the Act.
4. Provide for appropriate public, State, and Federal agency involvement in the study. Involve the foregoing in basic study and provide opportunities to receive inputs from them during the course of the study.
5. Hold public hearings as required by the Wilderness Act and prepare final reports and recommendations for submission to the President. These are tentatively set for the fall of 1973.

PUBLIC RESPONSE

Public participation in this study is encouraged. If you have questions or comments concerning the study, please write to:

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

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

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

Forest Supervisor
Payette National Forest
Forest Service Building
Post Office Box 1026
McCall, Idaho 83638

Forest Supervisor
Salmon National Forest
Forest Service Building
Post Office Box 1729
Salmon, Idaho 83467

Individuals are invited to examine the Idaho Primitive Area and send their recommendations or suggestions to the Regional Forester, Forest Supervisors, or District Rangers.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

The Idaho Primitive Area was established in 1931, then enlarged to 1,232,744 acres in 1937. It includes parts of four National Forests--Boise, Challis, Payette, and Salmon.

Most of the area is within the drainage of the Middle Fork of the Salmon River. The remainder drains directly into the Salmon River.

The Idaho Primitive Area is largely "back country" in character. The topography varies from the deep gorges of the Salmon and Middle Fork of the Salmon Rivers with a low annual precipitation to the rugged mountain peaks with an alpine climate. This $1\frac{1}{4}$ -million-acre Primitive Area is one of the largest in the Nation.

Fishing, wilderness camping, mountain climbing, and hunting are major attractions. White-water boating on the Middle Fork and main Salmon Rivers is a unique recreation activity. Parts of the area are truly spectacular. The Big Horn Crags contain over sixty alpine lakes and many scenic peaks. Mount McGuire, at 10,082 feet, is the highest. Other portions of the Idaho Primitive Area are characterized by continuous stands of lodgepole pine and other mixed species. It is easy to feel isolated in this vast area.

A colorful history dates back to the days of the mountain men of the Hudson's Bay Company. Captain Bernard and his troopers from Fort Boise traversed many of the twisting canyons and the alpine meadows of this area during the Sheepeater War of the 1870's. Discovery of gold in 1860 on the Salmon River and in 1904 on Monumental Creek touched off the Salmon River and Thunder Mountain gold rushes. The lure of gold brought an estimated 20,000 people into this back country.

With the influx of people, homesteads were staked on most level tracts of land, particularly along the main and Middle Fork of the Salmon Rivers. Many did not go to patent. However, there are 8,465 acres in State and private ownership within the Idaho Primitive Area.

Air travel first occurred within the Idaho Primitive Area in 1928, when aircraft began landing at such places as Chamberlain Meadows. This use preceded the establishment of the original Primitive Area. Because of the expanse of this back country, air travel became a common means of access. Mail runs and grocery flights are made weekly to service the isolated ranchers and settlers. Some 14 back-country strips, mostly on private land, are presently being used. These airfields provide access for hunters in the fall, as well as bases for fire control operations within the Primitive Area.

SPECIAL SITUATIONS AND FEATURES

The northern boundary of the Idaho Primitive Area is the main Salmon River, which is a mutual boundary between the Idaho and Salmon River Breaks Primitive Areas. The Salmon River Breaks Primitive Area, also under study, is located in the Bitterroot and Nezperce National Forests of the Northern Region, with regional headquarters in Missoula, Montana.

The Idaho Primitive Area has some special situations and features which need careful consideration in determining suitability or nonsuitability for Wilderness. Some of these are:

1. The Middle Fork of the Salmon River, which runs through the area, is designated as a Wild and Scenic River. It is becoming increasingly popular, and boat campsites are receiving heavy use.
2. The Salmon River is receiving increasing use by powerboats and float boats. This river is being studied as to its potential for a Wild and Scenic River as directed by the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act.
3. There are extensive stands of mature and overmature timber.
4. It is an important habitat for wildlife, including bear, elk, deer, big-horn sheep, mountain goat, cougar, and many other species. The deer and elk winter range is in poor condition from overuse.
5. The rivers and tributary streams have significant waters for salmon, steelhead, and other fish.
6. Fire control, in many places, is a serious problem because of fuel conditions, precipitous topography, and accessibility. Aircraft are used for fire control purposes.
7. Many acres are a high quality wilderness country.
8. Approximately 8,465 acres of State and private land are located within the boundary. Some of these are developed for summer homes and dude ranches. The owners use motorized equipment on these lands.
9. Mining roads to patented and unpatented mining claims penetrate the Primitive Area, and mineral prospecting activity is increasing.
10. In addition to powerboats, landing strips and the use of aircraft for access are established uses. Mechanical equipment is used to maintain some of these strips.
11. Guide and outfitter camps are located within the Idaho Primitive Area.