



SELWAY -- BITTERROOT WILDERNESS

PROPOSAL

The following is a brief summary of the major aspects of the proposal to classify the Selway-Bitterroot Primitive Area as a wilderness area.

The proposed plan is in accord with the U. S. Department of Agriculture's policy of reviewing all national forest primitive areas and establishing as wilderness those portions predominately valuable for that purpose.

The proposed wilderness boundaries for the Selway-Bitterroot area will eliminate weaknesses posed by existing roads and by the established use of motor vehicles on those roads. For the most part, the changes in boundaries are required because of roads which penetrate parts of the present primitive area or which cross it completely.

Under the proposal, a 1,163,555-acre wilderness area, encompassing the major features of the present primitive area, will be established from the existing 1,875,000-acre area heretofore classified as a primitive area.

FOREST SERVICE
U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
MISSOULA, MONTANA



The Forest Service proposal will establish boundaries which include the logical parts of a wilderness. For the most part these boundaries are placed on well defined topographic features which are easily identifiable on the ground. The proposed boundaries are also located to eliminate or minimize the threat of future conflict with other land uses.

The proposed Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness Area includes much of the Bitterroot Mountains, a 45-mile roadless section of the Selway River, and a portion of the Lochsa River drainage. It lies in four national forests: The Lolo, Bitterroot, Nezperce, and Clearwater in Idaho and the Lolo and Bitterroot in Montana. It averages nearly 50 miles long from north to south and 40 miles wide from east to west.

The purpose of the proposal may be better understood against a brief background of history. In 1929 the Secretary of Agriculture put into effect Regulation L-20. It provided for experimental forests and ranges and for a "series of areas to be known as primitive areas within which will be maintained primitive conditions of environment, transportation, habitation and subsistence with a view to conserving the value of such areas for purposes of public education and recreation." The regulation prohibited construction of permanent improvements other than for administrative needs and certain types of occupancy. It allowed continued use of roads and of improvements in place.

During the next ten years, 73 primitive areas totaling 13½ million acres were established under Regulation L-20. Many of these areas, including the Selway-Bitterroot, were selected with the idea that further study and possible changes would be necessary before some could be completely qualified as having true primitive conditions.

Boundaries were drawn to include all parts of an area which might qualify. The boundary lines were, of necessity, based on then existing general knowledge of the area rather than on thorough, on-the-ground surveys. Also, at that time, there was less activity near the borders; little thought was given to establishing boundary lines that would protect the primitive environment from nearby developments.

In 1939, after ten years of experience in administering primitive areas, the Secretary of Agriculture issued new regulations. These provided for studies of existing primitive areas and directed that portions which qualified and whose greatest values were as wilderness, be classified as either wilderness or wild areas under the new regulations, U-1 and U-2. These regulations defined "wilderness" more clearly and they require higher standards for wilderness areas. They also give added assurance of permanence.

In 1934, just two years before the primitive area was set aside, two fires burned nearly a quarter of a million acres. These fires had been preceded by huge burns in 1919 and 1910. Considering the fire history of the area at a time before aerial fire control had become effective, the Forest Service had planned a network of fire roads. When the area was set aside, it was decided that roads already in the area would be used and maintained. Roads under construction would be finished, at least to logical stopping places. This was done except for the roads in Running Creek and below Paradise along the Selway River which were never completed. Plans for additional fire control roads were cancelled in keeping with the new designation of the area.

Since the road over Nezperce Pass to the Magruder Ranger Station and Elk City, Idaho, completely traversed the head of the Selway drainage, it was considered by some to be the logical south boundary of the primitive area. But, because of the undeveloped country south of the road and the desire to keep that country undeveloped pending further studies, it was included in the primitive area.

When the primitive area was established in 1936, there were 46 irrigation reservoirs in use on the east face of the Bitterroot Mountains within the boundaries. Twenty-five are still under special use permits. However, history indicates that a number of those still in use, especially the very small ones high up in the inaccessible canyons, will be abandoned. Reservoir users are entitled to reasonable access. If a permanent road should be needed to service a reservoir, the part of the drainage affected by the road would be removed from the proposed wilderness area by boundary adjustment. Even though several drainages could be affected in this manner, the east face of the Bitterroot Range remains highly desirable as wilderness.

Much of the Selway River drainage is covered by power withdrawals. The only project included in the latest Corps of Engineers' recommendations is the Penny Cliffs dam. This would back water a short distance inside the proposed wilderness. A simple boundary adjustment could remove this part of the reservoir from the proposed wilderness area. This project is not considered serious in its possible impact on the proposed wilderness area.

One of the largest elk herds in the United States is found in the proposed wilderness. Large fires in 1910 and 1919 created large brush fields which were further increased by the fires in 1934. As a result of increased food supplies in the burns, the number of elk in the area increased considerably. Most of the old burns serve as summer range for the elk. There is a shortage of winter range, especially along the Selway River where heavy losses of elk occur during severe winters.

Increased harvest, limited now by inaccessibility, is needed in order to maintain a healthy and reproductive elk herd, to insure adequate winter forage, and to prevent soil damage and erosion. The proposed boundary adjustments should help make a more adequate harvest possible. The connecting links between the road at Paradise and the Running Creek road will provide areas for packer base camps and jumping off points for general public hunting in the wilderness area. A part of the present primitive area lying along the south side of the Lochsa is excluded from the proposed wilderness because of the proximity of the highway. This excluded land will provide access to additional hunting area. The Idaho Department of Fish and Game and the Forest Service are working together to manage and protect the elk range and the highly important herd which depends on it.

The proposed Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness Area is also the home for other big game such as moose, mountain goats, white tail deer, mule deer, and black bear.

The greatest recreation use in the proposed wilderness is hunting, largely for elk on the side drainages of the Selway and Lochsa rivers. While much of the area has light recreation use, fishing is increasing on the Selway River and in the high Bitterroot lakes. There are many miles of trout streams and numerous lakes which provide good fishing. There is a small but steady increase in the number of persons whose main purpose in visiting the area is simply to enjoy wilderness atmosphere, or to indulge in photography or other aesthetic or educational interests.

Visitors seeking a wilderness atmosphere can find numerous and varied opportunities among the variety of land forms in the proposed area. There is little similarity between a trip along the 45-mile roadless stretch of the Selway River and a trip along the backbone of the Bitterroot Range. Mountain climbers can find many challenging peaks, while the canyons on the east face of the Bitterroot Range are readily accessible in relatively short walks or rides. One-day trips into these canyons from Highway 93 can be enjoyable wilderness experiences. A three-day trip permits a full day at one of the high lakes, while visitors with more time can spend an interesting week in such drainages as Big Creek, Blodgett, Rock or Tin Cup creeks. Trails connecting some of these drainages make interesting loop trips possible. The Lewis and Clark highway down the Lochsa River will make more country accessible for short trips similar to those up the east face of the Bitterroots. The area is large enough that a year of exploration would still leave many parts of it unseen. Except during the elk hunting season, there are few encounters with other persons and few evidences of the presence of men.

Livestock grazing, except for the horses and mules of wilderness visitors, is confined to one permit for 100 head of cattle which graze only part-time in the proposed wilderness. Recreation users require horses for the most desirable enjoyment of the wilderness and horse feed for this use is a high priority need.

There are about $3\frac{1}{2}$ billion board feet of commercial timber which, if not reserved by wilderness classification, would eventually be merchantable. Because of the long distances to market, however, and the expensive logging roads needed for harvest, little of the timber can be considered marketable at present.

There are no known mining claims within the proposed wilderness area that might pose a threat to its classification. Seven tracts of private land totaling 1,161 acres lie along the Selway River and lower Moose Creek within the proposed wilderness. Two of these holdings are operated as guest ranches. Two are commercial camps which serve as bases for hunting. The operators of these four tracts depend on airplanes for most of their transportation and supply. While these holdings now serve an important place in facilitating the needed elk harvest, it is imperative that they be acquired in order to assure wilderness preservation.

Administrative facilities in the proposed wilderness consist of a ranger station and airfield at Moose Creek, a guard station, landing strips at Shearer, and Fish Lake, and trails, lookouts, telephone lines, and helicopter landing spots. These helicopter spots, used for fire control, are mostly on ridgetops and are inconspicuous and generally not noticeable.

Figure 1 shows the proposed wilderness area and other parts of the present primitive area:



PROPOSED SELWAY-BITTERROOT WILDERNESS AREA

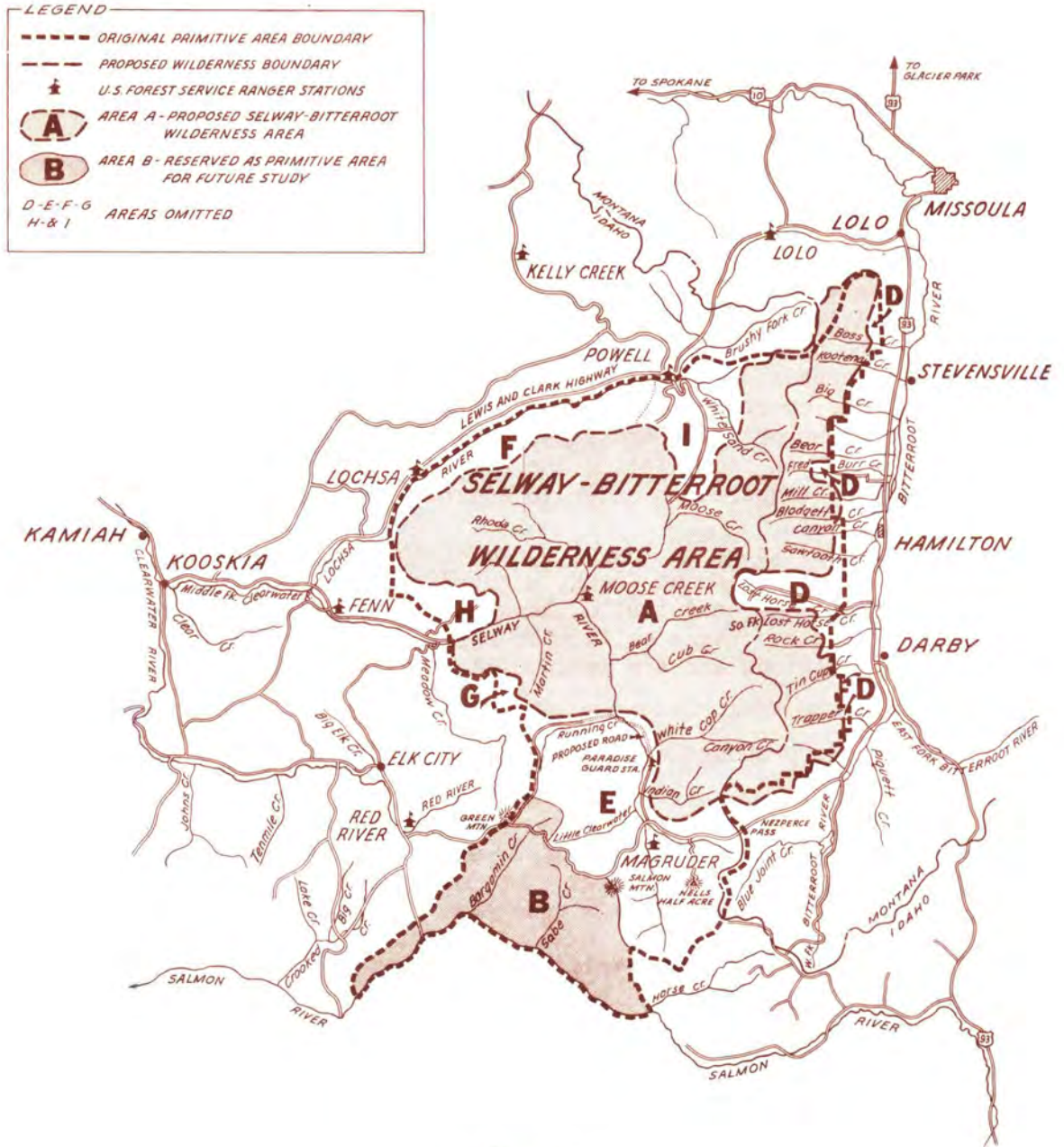


Figure 1

The following table gives the major boundary adjustments. The letter designations are those used in Figure 1.

	Acres	
<u>Selway-Bitterroot Primitive Area</u>		1,875,306
Primitive area to be classified as wilderness	1,137,295	
South Fork Lolo-Storm Creek addition	10,700	
East face Bitterroot additions	<u>15,560</u>	
Total of Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness Area (Area A)	1,163,555	
Area B-Salmon River face (retain as primitive area)	<u>188,796</u>	
Total to be managed as wilderness or primitive area	1,352,351	
<u>Areas Not Qualifying for Inclusion in the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness Area</u>		
Area E - Upper Selway	310,412	
Area D - East face Bitterroot	54,331	
Area F - Lochsa face	71,129	
Area G - Buck Lake Creek	7,424	
Area H - Fog Mountain	32,709	
Area I - White Sand-Hoodoo Creek	<u>73,210</u>	
TOTAL	<u>549,215</u>	
TOTAL AREA STUDIED	1,901,566	
Less additions listed above	<u>- 26,260</u>	
TOTAL		1,875,306

You will note that the table shows an addition of 10,700 acres in the South Fork Lolo-Storm Creek area and a total addition of 15,560 acres along the east face of the Bitterroot Range. The former contains 2,200 acres of Northern Pacific Railroad land which the company has indicated a willingness to exchange. If this proposal is adopted, action will be started to carry out this exchange. This will be a highly valuable addition to the wilderness.

The other additions are near the south end of the proposed area and are valuable additions uncomplicated by conflicts with established rights and uses. The largest part of this additional acreage is in the vicinity of Boulder Point and Watchtower Creek.

Figure 1 also shows the southern part of the present primitive area. The road from near Darby, Montana, to Elk City, Idaho, traverses this portion of the area and influences future plans for it. Management recommendations are as follows:

Area B - Salmon River Face - 188,796 Acres - This is the part of the primitive area which drains into the Salmon River. It is separated from the proposed wilderness by roads. It is a logical unit for study with the rest of the Salmon River drainage. The large Idaho primitive area lies across the river to the south. The Forest Service recommends that the undeveloped part of the Selway-Bitterroot Primitive Area in the Salmon drainage be held in primitive status pending a joint study with the adjoining forest region of both sides of the Salmon River.



Area E - Upper Selway - 310,412 Acres (See Figure 1) - Figure 1 illustrates how this area is separated from the proposed wilderness by existing roads and a much-needed and long-considered connecting link down Running Creek and up the Selway River to Paradise guard station. This area has many recreation values but does not qualify for inclusion in the proposed wilderness area. Multiple use plans for the area will recognize:

1. Recreation values including wilderness-type recreation.
2. Management of commercial forest lands for timber production.
3. Need for an access corridor through the Bitterroot Mountains for transmission lines and other possible uses.

Area D - East Face Bitterroot - 54,331 Acres - This includes the Lost Horse and Fred Burr drainages which have public roads. It also includes minor adjustments which place the boundary on topographic features where the wilderness is removed from the possibility of disturbing influences.

Area F - Lochsa Face - This area on the south side of the Lochsa River is adjacent to the new Lewis and Clark Highway. The strip of land along the south side of the river is nonwilderness in character because of the presence of a transcontinental highway in sight and hearing distance. There will also be a need for facilities for the traveling public and takeoff points for wilderness travel for which space is too limited on the north side of the river. There are advantages as far as administration goes but the main reason for moving the boundary back to the first easily identified ridge is that this area lacks wilderness qualification.

Area G - Buck Lake Creek - 7,424 Acres - The logical boundary of the proposed wilderness is the ridgetop separating the Selway River from Meadow Creek.

Area H - Fog Mountain - 32,709 Acres - This boundary adjustment would remove the Fog Mountain road and its influence from the proposed wilderness and place the boundary on a more logical and more easily identifiable location.

Area I - White Sand - Hoodoo Creek - 73,210 Acres - This area lies south of Powell Ranger Station. It is traversed by several roads which are heavily used by hunters and other recreation visitors. The area supports heavy stands of timber and includes 2,520 acres of Northern Pacific Railroad land, some of which was logged during the spruce bark beetle epidemic. This area has about 420 million board feet of merchantable timber, all within reasonable hauling distance to established mills. Because of the established roads and the benefits of timber production, the Forest Service recommends that this area be managed according to the multiple use plans that will be prepared for it.

Further specific information concerning the proposal to alter the boundaries and change the classification of the Selway-Bitterroot Primitive Area may be obtained from the following:

Forest Supervisor, Lolo National Forest, Missoula, Montana
Forest Supervisor, Bitterroot National Forest, Hamilton, Montana
Forest Supervisor, Clearwater National Forest, Orofino, Idaho
Forest Supervisor, Nezperce National Forest, Grangeville, Idaho
Regional Forester, Federal Building, Missoula, Montana

Persons wanting to submit oral or written views may do so in person at hearings at Missoula, Montana, on March 7, or at Lewiston, Idaho, on March 9, 1961. Written comments may be sent to the Regional Forester, Federal Building, Missoula, Montana, before March 27, 1961, with the request that they be included in the official hearing record.

