

TRIP REPORT, OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Visit to Taylor Ranch/Wilderness Research Center

August 17-24 1986

John Hendee

Sunday, August 17 through Saturday, August 23, 1986, I visited the Taylor Ranch/Wilderness Research Center and vicinity. Following is a report on the trip, its pertinent events for information purposes and ideas, suggestions & recommendations for the Taylor Ranch operation.

In summary, the week progressed as follows. I addressed the McCall Chapter of the University of Idaho Alumni Association at a barbeque at the McCall Field Campus Saturday evening, August 16. The next day, Sunday, I left the field campus and drove the approximately 90 miles through Warren to Big Creek trailhead and hiked to the Taylor Ranch arriving Tuesday evening after camping out two nights enroute. Tuesday evening, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday were spent reviewing facilities and in extensive discussions with Holly and Jim Akenson. During this time I also hiked to the highest ridgetop point up Cliff Creek across from Taylor Ranch seeing ten elk on the back side of the ridge. Friday we hiked and rode to Rush Point Lookout visiting Con Hourihan's spike camp on top and traveling down to Cabin Creek where we camped overnight prior to catching a plane from McCall Air Taxi (piloted by Steve Passmore from Dusty, Washington) out to Big Creek.

Contacts and observations for the record are as follows:

The Trip:

At the town of Warren, we met an elderly gentleman named Herb McDowell who lives winters in Lewiston and summers in Warren. Herb has spent most of

his life in Warren and is dying to tell people about it. With him was Charlotte Coombs, owner of the Warren Hotel and a graduate of UI in geology and a resident of British Columbia except in the summers. Herb was very talkative and told many stories about the Chinese who worked in the mines near the turn of the century. Warren would make an excellent stop for an Elderhostel. When I returned home an unsolicited copy of "Warren, Idaho: Historical Sketches" by Cheryl Helmers was waiting for me.

At South Fork guard station we met the campground hosts. A lady from New Zealand via Portland who made jewelry during the winter and had resided at South Fork the last two summers. She had with her a son who lives with her and a daughter who lives in Houston plus a male companion. They were friendly and informative and reflected on the tranquility this summer compared to last year when there was a 300-person fire camp at South Fork and smoke from a large fire up Elk Creek.

At Big Creek guard station we met Russ Cross who said he was the attendant and Tina Alward, wife of Dave Alward, the guard. We also met two women volunteers, one from St. Lawrence College in New York and another from Beloit College in Wisconsin. The volunteers had new boots since all their equipment had burned up the day before in a fire that gutted the Big Creek Forest Service bunkhouse. They spoke familiarly and highly of Taylor Ranch.

On the trail we met Julian Allen, a veterinarian from the UI Caldwell Field Station who had hiked from Big Creek to the Middle Fork of the Salmon and back. We met six other persons on the trail, three at Big Ramey Creek who were fishing and three others in their party a mile downstream also fishing. We visited with the first three who were from Melba, Idaho, near Nampa and had apparently spent a lot of time with horses in Big Creek (the game warden expressed concern that they were catching and keeping fish or fishing for

salmon when we talked with him upon our return to Big Creek). We met one other person on the trail, an assessor who said he was having to return because the trail to Chamberlain Basin was closed due to the fires. He was camped at the Horse Camp just above Beaver Creek.

There was extensive air traffic as the outfitters were reportedly having 22 tons of horse feed flown to Cabin Creek. Later we saw outfitters packing the feed to their spike camps.

The air was very smoky until Wednesday when it rained and there was a fire closure against open fires. This was a problem in that we ran out of fuel for the Optimus stove and had to eat cold food and drink treated water until we reached the spring at Coxey Creek.

COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Taylor Ranch Facilities and Operations Are in Good Shape:

Taylor Ranch and the entire operation appeared in fine shape. Holly and Jim Akenson have done an outstanding job upgrading the facilities and operation (e.g., new hay shed, improvements and refurbishing in several buildings, gentle, healthy and responsive horses and mules, clean-cut haying operation, orderly pack room and well cared for equipment).

Local Relationships Are Good Which Reflects Great Effort and Accomplishment:

Beyond the above operational achievements, I am most impressed with the way Jim and Holly have established credibility and a positive relationship with the cooperators and neighbors in the Big Creek drainage. This was evident from people we met on the trip plus Tina Hourihan (Mrs. Con Hourihan, wife of the packer displaced from Taylor Ranch several years ago); the mail pilot, Ray Arnold; the McCall Air Taxi pilot, Steve Passmore who flew us out), the game warden at Big Creek; the wranglers of the outfitter Scott Farr that Jim

and I met on the trail. From what I understand about the background of the ranch, this reestablishment of good relations is a major achievement and certainly a prerequisite to expanded Wilderness Research at the ranch.

The Resident Managers Need Expanded Opportunities for Professional Growth and Income:

Jim and Holly have given their best efforts to Taylor Ranch for 4 years. It would be difficult to replace them considering their rare combination of social, professional and operational skills. As the operation has improved their professional interests, capabilities and needs have grown. My discussions with Jim and Holly over these several days revealed their intense pride in their accomplishments at Taylor Ranch and fierce commitment to seeing the ranch achieve its potential. On the other hand, they reflect some frustration that things are not moving fast enough nor are their personal aspirations for involvement in research and extra income-producing activity being realized. The situation is not critical nor are Jim and Holly complainers; they are hard working professionals who are ambitious for Taylor Ranch and impatient for progress. Jim and Holly's accomplishments and their desire for professional growth and program advancement at Taylor Ranch need to be honored. Rekindled efforts on the following items is needed although many of the actions are already in progress.

The dean will send Jim and Holly Personal Assessment and Career Planning forms and will carry out career planning interviews with each of them as is being done with all other faculty and professional staff.

Jim and Holly should both be evaluated against established criteria for promotion to professional staff status. Jim has his master's degree and Holly will earn hers within the year.

Holly and Jim job share the manager position at Taylor Ranch, although the past two years they both worked full time two months in the summer. But, when they were hired they apparently were led to believe there would be more opportunities for personal research and additional income from project work than has materialized. A copy of the university consulting regulations and college approval forms is being sent to them with assurance that the College takes a positive attitude toward appropriate outside consulting. For Jim and Holly such opportunities might include "outfitting" in emergency situations for the Forest Service or for research projects working out of the ranch--including use of university equipment and livestock under a negotiated fee as provided for in the policy. Other opportunities might include professional work on research projects above and beyond their 40 hour per week commitment to maintaining and operating Taylor Ranch and implementing its programs.

Jim and Holly's interest in doing research needs support to the extent possible. Based on the several days of discussion the primary research/professional interest of Jim seems to be remote sensing and developing a GIS data base for Lower Big Creek. Holly's main interest seems to be interspecies competition which she is now studying and perhaps its expansion through fecal analysis.

A Taylor Ranch Plan, Brochure and Descriptive Monograph on Lower Big Creek Should Be Completed Soon:

A Taylor Ranch/Wilderness Research Center plan was drafted six months ago and needs to be completed as soon as possible. This plan provides broad guidance by establishing objectives for different ranch functions; defines the current situation and assumptions about the future; and identifies basic policies toward the objectives. The plan also needs to explain budget approval

procedures, advisory committee membership criteria, terms and responsibilities, and established broad research priorities.

After completion of the plan, a brochure on the Taylor Ranch/Wilderness Research Center would be especially valuable to publicize the facility, its objectives and policies. Jim has already drafted a brochure.

Jim and Holly have suggested the possibility of a monograph on "The Natural and Human History of Lower Big Creek" to acquaint people with the setting of the Taylor Ranch/Wilderness Research Center. This past year they visited Sage Hen Creek Field Station of the University of California and the monograph for that facility serves as an excellent model. The monograph might contain an introduction describing the UI acquisition of Taylor Ranch and its development as part of the Wilderness Research Center; summary of geology, plants, mammals, birds and human history; checklist for flora and fauna; and an appendix listing research publications, theses and dissertations completed in the vicinity. These are only suggestions. While many persons might contribute to such a monograph, it would seem appropriate for Jim and Holly to take the initiative and be senior authors.

Implement a Fee System for Use of Taylor Ranch:

A fee structure for use of Taylor Ranch is needed to generate income from reasonable compensation for lodging and/or food when provided. This is the case with other FWR operated field facilities.

A Research Problem Analysis is Needed for Taylor Ranch Vicinity:

Jim, Holly and others associated with Taylor Ranch and the WRC have generated many good ideas for research and for expanding the capabilities of Taylor Ranch for wilderness research beyond the outstanding wildlife and archeology studies previously conducted and in progress. These ideas include the establishment of a GIS information base and studies of interspecies

competition in a natural setting as noted above. In addition, expanding the weather station (Jim has a proposal on file for this that should be evaluated by FWR experts); establishment of stream gauging stations on Pioneer Creek, Big Creek, Rush Creek and Cliff Creek along with other facilities with which to monitor natural events in these undisturbed watersheds; the station has been visited by Evelyn Bull, of the Forest Service Wildlife Habitat Laboratory at LaGrande, Oregon who is interested in a comparative study of grouse habitat and populations in Big Creek compared to managed habitats in the Blue Mountains of Oregon; there are excellent opportunities to follow up on previous range transects from 20 years or more in the past. (The wildlife conservation officer at Big Creek mentioned that a botanist accompanying him on a trip into Big Creek said the area had the best natural range vegetation he had seen.) The guided hunting clientele and their expenditures for wilderness hunting, river users on the Middle Fork of the Salmon and visitors to the Big Horn Crags could be studied from Taylor Ranch. Fire history and ecological baseline studies of the River of No Return would also yield valuable information about the undisturbed ecosystem.

The above are just a few of the research ideas, but a cursory problem analysis of research opportunities needs to be formally developed as a step toward establishing research priorities and pursuing feasible opportunities as soon as possible.

Establish and Publicize a Taylor Ranch/WRC Endowment:

The Taylor Ranch/Wilderness Research Center has the potential of being an internationally significant facility. An endowment and contribution fund is needed in order to solicit and receive contributions to supplement University funding. If such a fund exists it needs to be publicized.

Signed,

John C. Hendee

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