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GENERAL
NEWS

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WILDERNESS CENTER HAS YEAR
OF UNPRECEDENTED GROWTH

MOSCOW -- The University of Idaho Wilderness Research Center, conceived just two years after passage of the 1964 Wilderness Act, "experienced a year of unprecedented growth in 1975," according to its recently released annual report.

Major accomplishments of the year include formation of a Technical Board by Dr. John Ehrenreich, dean of the College of Forestry, Wildlife and Range Sciences, who assumed the added duties as director of the center. The board in turn established formal objectives, policies and responsibilities of the center.

Other key accomplishments include:

- Organization of research being conducted under the auspices of the center.
- Initiation of new research.
- Beginning an educational thrust.

As early as May of 1966, then head of the Cooperative Wildlife Unit, Dr. Paul Dalke, proposed a wilderness center that "would provide a major research fund solicitor, an intellectual resource pool, and a well equipped agency for broadly conceived research into the...nature of wilderness and man."

By 1969, the University of Idaho had acquired as a field station the Taylor Ranch in the heart of the Idaho Primitive Area, the largest remaining tract of roadless America. In 1970, the Wilderness Research Center became a reality.

In the formal guidelines established for the center during 1975, the purpose of the center is described: "to foster research and educational activities which will lead to a broader understanding of the structure and function of natural ecosystems, man's relationship to them, and their perpetual protection in the wilderness concept."

According to the report, the center's working definition of wilderness is taken from the Wilderness Act of 1964 but does not exclude from consideration areas which fit the criteria but are not set aside in the National Wilderness Preservation System.

The center aims to encourage interdisciplinary research on the wilderness resource and wilderness user. Its educational goals include promoting understanding of:

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- The dynamic processes of natural ecosystems.
- Man's social and ecological role as a member of the natural world.
- The proper use and management of wilderness.

At the end of 1975, there were 10 research projects underway pursuing new knowledge in the field of wilderness, according to the report. Among the study topics and project directors are the ecology of the wolverine headed by Dr. Maurice Hornocker, director of the University of Idaho Cooperative Wildlife Unit; movement and behavior of bighorn sheep in the Idaho Primitive Area under the direction of Dr. Jerran Flinders, associate professor of wildlife resources; factors affecting depredations on backcountry campgrounds by bears in Glacier National Park, under the direction of Dr. James Peek, associate professor of wildlife resources; and wilderness information sources and channels utilized by recreationists in the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness Area, under the direction of Dr. James Fazio, assistant professor of wildland recreation management.

While graduate students work on advanced degrees in conjunction with major research projects directed by faculty, undergraduate students have an opportunity to work at the Taylor Ranch in the summer on projects they propose. Studies on pocket gophers, native cutthroat trout and blue grouse were conducted last summer in the first year of this project.

Another successful education program was a summer backpack trip for wildland recreation management students, to acquaint them with the problems of wilderness management and human impact on the wilderness environment. The students crossed the Idaho Primitive Area on foot from the Bighorn Crags to the Big Creek Ranger Station with a stop at the Taylor Ranch.

Future plans for the center, according to the report, include hiring an assistant director to handle daily administration of center activities, creation of an advisory board of individuals from across the nation concerned about the future of wilderness, broadening of the Technical Board to include disciplines outside the College of Forestry, Wildlife and Range Sciences, and expansion of research and educational activities.