

Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness

OBJECTIVE: Review management activities and conditions in the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness.

DATA SOURCE: On-the-ground reviews.

FREQUENCY: Annually

REPORTING PERIOD: 1998

EVALUATION:

Currently, there are 43 problem areas on the Bitterroot NF portion of the wilderness, which are close to or do not meet Forest Plan standards. The standards are defined by "Opportunity Class" in the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness General Management Direction (Forest Plan Amendment 7). Monitoring occurred on approximately 40 percent of the identified problem areas. Future planning efforts will determine the appropriate management and priorities for bringing these areas up to standard. We are treating the problems as funds become available.

MONITORING RESULTS:

Extensive monitoring occurs in the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness (SBW) each year as wilderness rangers, staff, and the public track and report on the maintenance of natural conditions within the wilderness.

Fire activity was high in 1998, resulting in a complex of fires, many of which were allowed to take their natural course with careful monitoring. Fire suppression activity was minimal, and for the most part did not result in long term impacts on the wilderness, since suppression tactics seldom included fire line construction. No helispots were constructed.

Noxious weed surveys continued in drainages adjacent to and within the SBW. The surveys cover most of the west side trail corridors. A few drainages have fairly continuous coverage of spotted knapweed along the trails, but most have scattered patches of various weeds. The most common weeds found are spotted knapweed, goatweed, and sulfur cinquefoil.

Research continues on bird responses to wildfire. Lake surveys were conducted on two lakes on the Bitterroot portion of the SBW by wilderness rangers. Researchers from several universities are studying linkages between fire, climate, and ecosystems in the SBW. This project is funded by the National Science Foundation.

Level I maintenance was accomplished on 380 miles of trail. Maintenance was accomplished by a combination of contract, Forest Service crews, and volunteers. Level I includes minimal clearing and enough drainage to allow use. Construction contracts were begun on Watchtower Trail #699, nearly finished for Scimitar Trail #36, and completed on Rock Creek Trail #580. These contracts were undertaken to correct safety and resource problems. Reconstruction was done by contract and by Forest Service crews. Survey and design was completed for improvements on Watchtower Trail #699.

Education presentations on the Wilderness Skills Program included most sixth graders in the Bitterroot Valley. Two classes per day attend a field program held for two weeks in May. A number of other education contacts took place at schools, for organizations such as Back Country Horsemen, at public events such as fairs, by outreach from District offices, and in the field by wilderness rangers. A video to target hunter education classes is being developed. Forest Service personnel were educated in Minimum Impact Suppression Tactics (MIST), to prevent impacts related to fire suppression.

Wilderness employees administered 13 outfitter and guide permits in the Selway-Bitterroot. The permit system for the Selway River was administered by the West Fork District. This included ongoing discussion of the lottery system.

Wilderness dam maintenance and repair continue to be important issues. Wilderness personnel and others spent a considerable amount of time inspecting dams and checking dam-related activities in the field. Extensive emergency measures relating to Tin Cup Dam were undertaken in 1998. This resulted in motorized activity for access to the dam site and for stabilizing work. A considerable amount of site disturbance took place in the vicinity of the dam.

Numerous sites were naturalized by field personnel to remove signs of human use, such as fire rings. Law enforcement activity included several tickets, warning notices, and numerous incident reports.

