

## Wilderness Vs. Multiple Use

# Storm Clouds Swirl Over Upper Selway

By FERRIS WEDDLE

The Upper Selway has become the new battleground in the old conflict over wilderness versus multiple-use.

Thousands of plain and prominent citizens have become involved in the controversy. Dozens of regional and national conservation organizations have entered the picture — including The Wilderness Society, The Sierra Club, The National Wildlife Federation, and The Federation of Western Outdoor Clubs. The Upper Selway is not merely an Idaho - Montana problem, but a national problem which touches upon a major public resource—wilderness.

This case also has become a test, in the view of some wilderness supporters, of the integrity of the U.S. Forest Service in the management of wilderness areas.

Geographically, the Upper Selway (including Upper Bargamin Creek) is 260,000 acres of semi - primitive country in the Bitterroot National Forest lying between the Selway - Bitterroot Wilderness Area and the Salmon River Breaks Primitive Area. It is also known as the Magruder Corridor and as Area "E" on Forest Service maps.

From 1936 until Jan. 11, 1963, the Upper Selway was a protected part of the Selway - Bitterroot Primitive Area. On Jan. 11, using the authority of a Department of Agriculture regulation, Secretary Orville L. Freeman reclassified the primitive area as a wilderness area.

In the reclassification, over 400,000 acres, including the Upper Selway, were deleted from the original primitive area. The final boundary changes had not been made public by the secretary or the Forest Service. Although many of the recommendations of the conservation groups given in public meetings in 1961 had been heeded, the inclusion of the Upper Selway had not.

Wilderness supporters felt that they had been betrayed and that Secretary Freeman had acted hastily to forestall further discussion of the Upper Selway and other changes in the Selway-Bitterroot boundaries. Thus the stage was set for the controversy.

Why had the Upper Selway been declassified? Neal M. Rahm, regional forester for the Northern Region at Missoula, explains it this way: "The presence of a road system in Area 'E' strongly influenced the secretary's final decision. Wilderness standards do not permit such road development."

The road system Rahm refers to is the Magruder Road, extending from Darby, Mont., to Elk City, Idaho, bisecting the disputed area. The road and three short spur roads were built in the 1930s by the CCC for fire protection and administrative purposes. They are slow - speed, poor quality roads, suitable for wilderness travel only. They have provided access to parts of the larger wilderness area.

Wilderness supporters have not accepted the presence of this road system as sufficient reason to leave the Magruder Corridor unprotected. They had earlier proposed another solution: Use the Magruder Road as a boundary between the wilderness area on the north and the newly created Salmon River Breaks Primitive Area on the south. Exclusions from wilderness status could be set up on each side of the spur roads. Primitive camp and picnic spots could be built along the Magruder Road without impairing the wilderness values of the Upper Selway.

It became apparent to conservationists that the Forest Service had many plans for the Upper Selway, and that the road system was only one reason for the exclusion of the area.

"Other information available indicated that Area 'E' was more logically suited for general multiple use," according to Rahm. "The multiple use plan will provide for the protection of the streams and it will also include road betterment and

of course, some road construction. Timber harvesting is planned on only part of the area. The Forest Service believes that recreation has a very important value in the Upper Selway and the management program fully recognizes this."

Road improvement has already begun on the Montana side of the Upper Selway. A contract for a 6½-mile stretch, to the Nez Perce Pass, has been let with \$350,000 estimated as the cost.

Planned for improvement is the section from the pass to the Magruder Ranger Station, and eventually to Elk City. This road will also serve as the main route for logging operations. Other roads will be required to reach the timber harvest areas.

## A Jewel Of A River

Because the Upper Selway holds the headwaters of the Selway River, the region represents to many people the heartbeat of the wilderness area. Of all the rivers now under consideration for a national wild rivers system, the Selway is the jewel — one of the few true wilderness streams remaining in the U.S. outside of Alaska. It is increasingly used by white - water enthusiasts, by fishermen and wilderness campers.

At the moment, only about 45 miles of the Selway is protected. The Forest Service has said the Selway and other streams will be protected. How will this be done? According to Harold E. Andersen, supervisor of the Bitterroot National Forest, a riverbreak zone, averaging a mile in width, will be set up on each side of the river and along important feeder streams.

This looks good on paper, but will it keep the Selway safe from the effects of erosion? Conservationists do not think so.

Stock grazing and mining are not factors in the multiple - use plans, according to Rahm. The recreational potential of the Upper Selway will be utilized in a number of ways. Road improvement is the most important, but semi - primitive picnic and camping sites will be set up as well as outlying hunter camps. Identification signs for scenic views and some historical, interpretative signs will be erected. Roadside, streamside, and lakeside viewing areas will be provided.

These plans have considerable appeal to a great many people, but not to those who dislike overcrowded managed areas with "canned" recreation features.

"Must we have super - highways leading into our wilderness areas?" asks Mrs. Doris Milner, chairman of the Save - The Upper Selway Committee, at Hamilton, Mont. "The present road system is ideal for edge - of - wilderness travel. Forest Service plans, if carried out, will make the Upper Selway a carbon copy of other over - managed recreation areas. We need such areas; but even more, we need the unique qualities found only in wilderness areas."

Mrs. Milner points out that travel in the Selway - Bitterroot and other wilderness areas is increasing each year. This travel is by foot, by horseback, and by canoe — wilderness travel.

Mrs. Milner's committee is only one of several regional groups organized to counteract Forest Service plans for the Upper Selway. Another is the North Idaho Wilderness Committee at Lewiston, with Morton R. Brigham as chairman.

"It's the logging and the road building which has us really worried," says Brigham. "The Upper Selway has soft, thin soil and steep hillsides — so you can't escape erosion. At best, logging in the area will be costly and a marginal operation. The Forest Service has said the allowable annual cut will be 12 - million board feet. This would keep a small sawmill busy only a fraction of a year."

According to Rahm, from 117,600 to 173,000 acres has commercial timber totaling a possible one - billion board feet. He maintains that most of the logging will be some distance from the Selway River

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and that cutting units will conform to soil and watershed needs.

A Forest Service brochure explains, "Travelers on the Magruder Road, fishermen and floating parties will be remote from timber harvests."

The brochure does not mention that logs must be hauled out over the Magruder Road.

In an editorial in The Western News of Hamilton, Mont., Publisher Miles Romney said: "If this unreasonable project would provide a crutch to an ailing lumber industry it might be understood and condoned. . . . Such a timber cut would not pay for the construction of the road already built. . . . It is unbelievable that the rank and file of forestry people approve. . . ."

"Siltation caused by logging and road building will certainly affect efforts to restore salmon runs in the Selway," Brigham said.

One of the most eagerly observed fishery projects in the Northwest is the attempt of the Idaho Fish & Game Department, with federal assistance, to re-establish chinook salmon runs in the Clearwater River and its tributaries.

The program has been in progress for five years, and to date more than \$1-million dollars has been spent or allocated. A large share of this amount has gone to build the Selway Falls tunnel, which will provide a safer, easier passage for spawning salmon and steelhead.

The department has not made an official stand on the Upper Selway, but department fishery biologists have been kept closely informed of Forest Service plans. This is natural, since the Selway River is the most important link in the success of the project.

James Keating, area fishery biologist, has observed that "logging, primarily the road building associated with logging, can and has had in other areas a substantial, harmful effect on stream trout habitat. Effects can range from minor to catastrophic."

He said logging roads have caused severe damage in the South Fork of the Clearwater, where the department has been trying to re-establish the steelhead run. Crowding of streams by logging waste often create migration blocks, preventing fish from reaching spawning areas. Fish pools are filled in or destroyed through flooding.

Said Keating: "Erosion of silt from logging roads, and other sources, results in highly turbid water. Silt particles settle out in the calm-water spaces beneath the surface of the streambed. Eggs deposited by salmon and steelhead trout are buried in the gravel of riffle areas and silt deposits prevent the development of eggs and/or the emergence of fry — if they survive to that stage.

"The overall effect of these roads on the steelhead, salmon and trout production will be a matter of degree, related to just how well the Forest Service can plan their roads and control erosion."

The Upper Selway and the million-acre-plus wilderness area is a wildlife paradise. One of the nation's largest elk herds roams this immense and diverse country. Mule deer and whitetail are plentiful, and there are mountain goats, bighorn sheep, bears, and increasing numbers of moose. Abundant, too, are small game, furbearers, and predators such as the cougar and the bobcat.

The Selway is a sportsman's dream—a place to try real wilderness hunting.

Browse is needed for the elk herds, particularly winter browse, according to Elmer Norberg, Idaho Fish & Game Department game biologist. Much of the country which was burned over by forest fires in the 1920s and 1930s has now been overgrown with young conifers.

"Any effort to provide browse for the major elk herds will have to be elsewhere than in the Magruder District," Morton Brigham states. "Logging would be mainly on the northern slopes and the elk don't use these slopes for winter range. And winter range is what is needed. If the Forest Service sets up buffer zones along the Selway and other streams — as they say they will do — no logging will take place in the zones. Therefore no browse will be provided in areas where elk concentrate in the winter."

Brigham based his conclusions on personal observations — he's hunted the Selway for years — and on the 1956-57 winter survey of big game made by Norberg. Almost 7,000 elk were counted in the Selway drainage, and fewer than 600 of these were above White Cap Creek and only 186 above the Magruder Ranger Station. Logging is proposed for these areas.

Road building and logging could also be a disturbing influence on the bands of mountain goats and bighorns. Present access roads are more than adequate, Brigham believes, for entry into the wilderness area. At any rate, roads become snowed in early in the Selway country, so they can be used only during the early part of the big game season.

A large number of western senators and representatives have taken an active interest in the Upper Selway problems, including Rep. Arnold Olson of Montana. Sen. Maurine Neuberger of Oregon and Sen. Frank Church of Idaho.

In a recent letter to this reporter, Senator Church wrote: "I have just completed writing a long letter to the secretary of agriculture asking for a detailed explanation as to why the area was left out by the Forest Service and also asking for some definite answers as to FS plans for the Upper Selway. I have, as you know, had the wild river designation for the Selway extended from the Magruder Ranger Station to Thompson Flat, which I think

will afford the area some added protection.

"I stressed to the secretary that the effectiveness of the wild river category for the Selway could be impaired unless proper conservation methods are applied in the watershed."

Are proposed Forest Service plans "proper conservation methods?" The economic returns of the dribble of timber in the Upper Selway do not seem to justify the great risks to other more important resources in the area. The deletion of Area 'E' from wilderness protection in the first place is highly questionable.

Like any government bureau with large responsibilities, the Forest Service is subject to pressure from all sorts of conflicting interests. And even within the Forest Service itself, opinions as to what should be done with the Upper Selway are by no means unanimous. The decisions being made at the administrative level are privately opposed by some Forest Service people down the line.

That is not unusual; what is surprising is the Forest Service's apparent reversal in this case of a time-honored policy. The concept of wilderness preservation has been a part of Forest Service tradition since 1924, when a wilderness type unit was established in New Mexico's Gila River National Forest. It was a long step forward in the history of conservation, for few people then shared the Forest Service's view of the need to retain a part of primitive America.

Today the Forest Service has a tremendous responsibility in the guardianship of 54 wilderness areas and 34 primitive areas — plus the entire national forest system. Within 10 years the primitive areas must be reclassified under the Wilderness Act. Other Upper Selway situations will arise — in fact there are many of them throughout the West right now.

Over in northeastern Oregon, the Minam

River Canyon is a storm center; and in Montana the Middle Fork of the Flathead River, among other areas, is embroiled in controversy. These are not purely state or regional problems, they are national problems for they involve the public lands and rivers which belong to all of the people of the United States.

These lands belong to future generations, too. We have to keep that in mind as the destiny of each area is decided. In the case of the Upper Selway, conservationists feel that too many questions remained unanswered. Time, they say, is needed for impartial surveys of the area's economic and recreational resources and for public discussion of the issues.