Unspoiled Area Near Missoula Must Be Preserved as Wilderness

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The wildlands of the UpperSelway will never be lost forever. Surveys for logging roads are in process, and construction of major access roads is already under way.

Conservationists must act now on this critical issue if they are to prevent logging and development that would destroy the pristine wilderness area in its unique form — an area which from 1915 to 1916 was protected as part of the national forest primitive system.

On Jan. 11, 1963, Secretary of Agriculture Orville Freeman announced the reclassification of the Selway-Bitterroot Primitive Area. Part of it, Area E, was reclassified as wilderness, but one large central section, the 230,900 acres of the headwaters of the Selway River — was eliminated from such designation.

Conservationists had asked that protection of this section (Area E) as wilderness be continued. The U.S. Forest Service justified exclusion of Area E from protection by the existence of the Magruder Road, which traverses the broad corridor from east to west.

Values in Area E include watersheds, recreation, wildlife, scientific study, history, and timber production; their relative importance is probably in the order mentioned.

Many Idaho and out-of-state hunters enjoy excellent elk hunting in a wilderness atmosphere that enhances the sport. Trout fishing in these virgin wildlands is an outstanding experience. The Idaho Fish and Game Department has spent approximately one million dollars on the Selway to restore free passage of anadromous fish to the river's spawning grounds. In recent news releases the Department reports the completion of the fish tunnel at Selway Falls. Due to its clear, still water, the Upper Selway could become one of the most productive chum- and steelhead-spawning streams in the nation.

Statements of two scientists describe the special attributes of this area with regard to environmental research. Dr. Robert Orr, associate director of the California Academy of Sciences, in his study of the Selway watershed, says that "it is an exact replica of a historical island in the Great Basin, essentially an island of the same climate isolated by mountain barriers." Dr. Kesey Millar of the Rocky Mountain Laboratory in Hamilton refers to the Upper Selway as a "... great biological museum, the only exhibit of pristine America in its prime... big enough to include both highlands and lowlands and to give nature room in which to operate... ."

The only man-created disturbances in the area at the time of the recreation planning and completion to date are a road built by the CCC, fire lookouts, and guard and ranger stations. Out of sight and sound of the road one is in an environment as pristine as that encountered by missionaries, goldseekers and trappers who followed the historic Southern Nez Perce Trail.

An account of some of the Indian trails in the Upper Selway has recently been published.