

FOR IDAHO PORTION OF BITTERROOT NATIONAL FOREST

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Prepared cooperatively by Representatives of the
State Department of Fish and Game, Idaho,
the U. S. Forest Service and local residents
of the Area concerned.

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University of Idaho Library
Date Collected: 2008
Source: BNF Hist Files

Bitterroot Natl Forest
History Files

WILDLIFE TENTATIVE MANAGEMENT PROBLEMS AND PLAN
FOR IDAHO PORTION OF BITTERROOT NATIONAL FOREST.

I.

A. Status of Land.

This area consists of 823,663 acres lying on the head of the Selway River with some overlap south to the Salmon River just below the mouth of the Middlefork, all in Idaho County. There is a total of 1400 acres of patented homesteads on the Selway above the mouth of Bear Creek, and around the forks of Moose Creek. Some ten or twelve unpatented mining claims dot the area.

B. Elevation, Topography, Precipitation, etc.

The area ranges in elevation from 2000 feet on the Selway River below the mouth of Moose Creek up to 9000 feet on the east boundary along the crest of the Bitterroot Mountains, and also on the Selway-Salmon River divide to the south.

The lower slopes are generally rocky, well timbered, rugged and steep, with narrow canyons. Above 5000, the topography smooths up to gentle timbered ridges, large timbered basins, and some alpine meadows broken up by high pinacles.

The Bitterroot Range on the east with its numerous east and west canyons materially affects the administration of elk, deer, goats and fur bearers. This will be discussed under Sections III and IV of this report.

Annual precipitation ranges from less than 20 inches on the Salmon river lower slopes to more than 40 inches along the high divides. Almost half of the totals is in the form of snow from December to February, while more than half the rain comes in the months of March, April, May and November.

Maximum snow depths at Moose Creek Ranger Station (elevation 2400 feet) reaches 65 inches in severe winters. Normal winters, it averages 24 to 36 inches, and in the mildest winter on record, the maximum depth was 4 inches.

II. LOCAL ECONOMY

The permanent population of the area consists of six families. These families are generally law-abiding and favorable to cooperation with the game department, but each feels that the department could do a much better job of management if the rules for application of policies were made on the ground. For instance, the cowmen think more attention and effort to the

salting program would better manage the range and make more critical range available to both the cows and the game. The summer Forest Service employee feels that if a predatory animal control job is contemplated, that he could do a better job than anyone else, provided the state set the job up to fit in with his winter unemployment period. All the residents are certain that management cannot be attained by the present seasons or bag limits.

Aside from the local population on the area, the management of wildlife is directly affected by populations of the Clearwater Valley in central Idaho, and the Bitterroot Valley in southwest Montana. The Clearwater Valley population averages very moderate in economic circumstances. ~~They are extremely self-centered, provincial in thought, and jealous of their rights.~~ They feel that the wildlife in this area is theirs because of location, and resent the fact that roads through the Bitterroot make it more accessible to people from north and south Idaho than it does to the population of central Idaho. Hunting season, coming after the fall rains set in, causes bad roads on the high divides and prevents many people from central Idaho from attempting to hunt this area.

The Bitterroot Valley in Montana, lying along the eastern edge of the area, contains the only relatively large population readily accessible to the area. It has more than twenty approaches into this area, useable by foot travelers. Some twelve to fifteen approaches are useable by saddle or pack stock, and three approaches have good mountain roads penetrating into the area. Thus, several Bitterroot guides and packers do considerable business with big game hunters, using the area. A substantial percentage of the deer, elk and goats wintering on the upper Selway summer in these west side Bitterroot canyons, but return to Idaho with the first snows of fall, or the first shots fired during the Montana hunting season. A great many Bitterroot sportsmen feel, with some justice, that the two states should enter into a cooperative agreement allowing sportsmen from both states to hunt both sides of the divide. The number, permitted of course, to be based upon a reliable census of the migrating interstate herds.

Because of the easy access to the Bitterroot Valley, this area was trapped from the Montana side long before the establishment of any attempts at wildlife regulations in either state. The fur bearers are migratory in a limited way along the Bitterroot divide, and up until now, the states have not considered this interstate migration, and consequently have opened and closed seasons without regard to the fact that this migration exists, or that no patrol is provided to prevent poaching from one side or the other.

B. The only industries located within the area are dude packing, small cattle raising and summer work for the Forest Service. The dude enterprises are directly dependent upon the proper management of the wildlife of the area. The cattle raising is directly dependent upon the maintenance of the forage crop. Besides the dude packers living within the area, as indicated above, some seven or eight dude packers from the Bitterroot Valley derive 50% or more of their income from this area, and three or four packers from the Clearwater Valley get up to 50% of their income there also. Two to three trappers from the Clearwater drainage and as many from the Bitterroot make the major portion of their catch on the area.

III. BIG GAME

Because of the large amount of feed growing in the 1910 and 1919 burns, the short hunting seasons, and the inaccessibility this area built up large deer and elk herds prior to 1930. By that time, the herds were so large that besides spreading to the lower Selway, where they had not before been abundant, they were beginning to over-use their winter range on the upper Selway. This was evidenced by a reduction in the twig volume produced annually on the browse, and the appearance of cheat grass on ranges used exclusively by big game.

The winter of 1931 - 32 was very severe and resulted in a restriction of the winter range. This caused heavy over-use of the browse, and the death of all average deer, elk, and most of the fawn deer. Loss of prime deer, prime elk and calf elk was light.

The browse on the critical winter range was badly depleted and in the dry summer which followed, frequent individual bushes died entirely. The calf and fawn crops were not good. Then the winter of 1932 -33 was the most severe since 1919. Starvation was rampant and when spring came, there were very few elk calves or fawn deer left, and the prime elk were decimated, while the prime deer were reduced by 50% or more.

The summer of 1933, the critical browse areas showed many large patches of complete kill, with only puny twig growth on that which did survive. It was estimated the forage for an average severe winter had been reduced by more than 75%.

Fortunately, the winter of 1933 was the mildest on record, and game wintered well above the critical ranges. The following winter was less than average in severity and losses were only normal. Browse damage began to repair itself.

The winter of 1935 -35 was of somewhat more than average severity, but fortunately a substantial work relief crew was working on the area that winter, and during the February critical period, were put to work cutting down mossy trees for game feed. Thus while herd sizes had substantially increased since the spring of

1933, losses were not unduly large. However, the browse on the critical winter ranges again took a beating, and ~~severe~~^{average} winter reserves were again cut to less than 25% of what they were in 1930.

The estimated carrying capacity of the average ~~severe~~ winter range in 1936 was 3000 elk and 3000 deer. Since then, all winters have been mild to average in severity, and while some ^{h^h seasons} have been occasionally lengthened, and the Selway Game Preserve consistently opened to hunting, yet natural reproduction in both elk and deer has kept building the herds larger in spite of hunter kill on the area, and drift of the game to outside winter ranges.

The last three winters have been very mild, maximum snow depths at Moose Creek being 7", 9" and 11" respectively. This has given the game a chance to winter successfully at elevations above the critical areas. These, in turn, have responded with a recovery of at least 60% of the 1930 forage reserves. The present estimated carrying capacity for an average ~~severe~~ winter is 4000 elk and 5000 deer.

Estimates of both the deer and elk herds exceed these figures, and the prospects are for a bumper calf crop this spring. It is evident that definite steps must be taken to reduce these herds if the waste of meat a normally severe winter would cause is to be avoided, or the prevention of a catastrophic loss of both a large part of the breeding herds and productive capacity of lands which a series of abnormally severe winters is most sure to bring. (142)

Game Preserves

This area has one game preserve by administrative closure, Whitecap, and parts of two other preserves, Selway and Salmon River.

White Cap Preserve.

An administrative closure of 39,000 acres on the Mountain Sheep range from White Cap Creek to Indian Creek. Made in 1939 for the purpose of preventing accidental or otherwise shooting of Mountain Sheep, in the hopes that the diminution of hunters would cause the sheep to increase.

The sheep have made no apparent increase, and the state has since been closed to all sheep hunting. The preserve contains a good stocking of deer and elk readily accessible to road hunters. Therefore, the closure should be lifted, and the deer and elk hunting resumed.

Selway Preserve.

Established in 1917, 450,000 acres, 67,794 of which lie

in this unit. Made for the purpose of furnishing breeding stock of elk, moose, goats and fur bearers. The elk have propagated so well that they now overrun the country, and the preserve has been open to special elk hunting for many years. Goats and moose seem to be holding their own without any appreciable increases. The furbearers, because of lack of patrol, are poached regularly and are no more numerous on the preserve than off.

The vast proportion of summer game range within the preserve is not balanced by a proper amount of winter range. The preserve is so large that it has never been adequately posted and patrolled. It hampers administration, and if opened to regular hunting, administrative closures by classes of wildlife and specific areas would serve the purposes of management much better. A Forest Service primitive area already covers both the area and the surrounding country so that domestic livestock, except from dependent ranches within the area, are automatically excluded.

If administrators of other management units, whose unit covers a part of this preserve prefer to maintain that part of the preserve on their respective units, then, at least all that part lying on the Moose Creek drainage should be eliminated.

Salmon River Preserve.

Created in 1923; some 120,000 acres. Made for the purpose of establishing a herd of deer and elk on the Salmon River slopes, on the Bargeman Creek, Sabe Creek and Harrington Creek drainages.

This preserve should be opened to hunting because it is so large that it has never been adequately posted or patrolled. It has had 20 years in which to achieve its purpose, and administrative closures by specific area, and classes of game would be better management.

(The above three measures will not only provide a possibility for the return of the Fool hen, but will also provide a guarantee of substantial reserves of Blue Grouse.)

4. Drastic control of bobcats and Columbian Ground squirrels.

5. Seeding of tall heavy seeded grasses along the Selway River from North Star to Bad Luck Creek.

(See VIII - C)

V. MIGRATORY WATER FOWL.

There are probably a dozen pair of ducks that nest at a few of the high lakes in this area. The area is off the route of any regular flyway, and there are no migratory bird hunters who use the area. Therefore, there is no management problem at present.

VI. FUR BEARERS.

This area used to produce substantial number of mink, marten, beaver and otter, with occasional fox and badger. Now depletion is very much in evidence for all but beaver and badger. Badger have increased greatly in the last 20 years, keeping pace with the increase in Columbian Ground squirrels. Beaver have increased also, but have been retarded by the lack of enforcement patrol on most of the side streams.

This depletion, except for beaver, has been^{as} uninterrupted since Idaho and Montana have been attempting some regulation as it was with the coming of the first fur traders. This is largely because both states have not considered the migratory nature of fur bearers, and because neither state has considered the open or closed seasons in the other state when making their regulations. The fact that little if any patrol was provided in a closed area, only contributed to poaching from someone with a license in an adjacent open area. Then, both states have been very delinquent in implementing such patrol as was attempted. Thus, one or two men would be sent on foot to patrol on snowshoes a million or so acres of uninhabited wilderness. The average poacher is a pretty skookum man physically, so unless the patrolman was very lucky indeed, and met the poacher face to face, one was seldom caught in either state. Airplane patrol and parachute jumping enforcement men can now change this.

5. Boundary posting on bird refuges along high divides. Total cost, \$1000.
6. Checking station construction at Nez Perce Pass and end of Elk Summit Road, or Lolo Pass. Cost \$2500 each; total \$5000.
7. Posting salt licks $\frac{1}{2}$ mile out on all trails, cost \$1000.
8. Acquisition of North Star Ranch, 114 acres, approximate cost, \$1200.
9. Acquisition of McKinzev Ranch on Fitting Creek, approximate cost, \$800. 156 acres

IX. NUMBER OF USERS

There are more than 1000 wildlife users of the area each year. Of this number, very few come for birds alone. Approximately 30% come primarily for the fishing, and the balance for big game hunting, although most of these also do some fishing.

Of this thousand or more users, more than 50% do not knowingly violate the laws or regulations. Of these who do knowingly violate the laws, 90% or more would desist if they knew an adequate patrol was maintained that would likely pick them up. The rest, of course, would have to be convicted before they stopped violating.

Since a game poacher who persists in violating the laws is also a potential fire and property trespasser for the Forest Service, and the opposite is also true, it should be the plan for officers of the Game Department and the Forest Service to attend each other's training schools, and attempt to do dual enforcement work.

Much of the lack of success of such patrol as has been done is due to the reluctance of the two organizations to use the most effective means of transportation in doing their work. With the use of airplanes, snowmobiles and parachute jumpers when deemed necessary, two patrolmen doing field work from the opening of bird season, until beaver hides become unprime in the spring, would be able to do much toward bringing the desired results. The number of patrolmen, of course, would have to be augmented by checking station operators and road checkers during concentrated hunting seasons.

Some technical violations are caused by lack of checking station control of the big game hunters, and by the absence of mandatory regulation of packers and guides. That is, the hunter checks in h.k., but where hunting is accessible

without packing he doesn't hire a packer until he sees whether he needs one. After making his kill of deer or elk, he doesn't know too well how to take care of it, and if the packers are busy, it spoils before it is moved to the road.

The wise hunter engages his packer first, but the competition being what it is, every packer contracts all the parties possible and if the hunters are lucky, the packers have contracted more than they are able to take care of. This area is so far away from population centers that it is impracticable to bring in additional stock for short emergencies. Therefore, some of the wise hunters' game also spoils in the woods.

It is probably that legislation will have to be resorted to in order to bring this whole thing within the control of the game department so that the following thing can be done:

1. Require proof at checking station that the hunter has a packer engaged or has adequate packing facilities of his own.
2. Require that the packer make no more commitments than his facilities will take care of.
3. Require that the packer post and adhere to his maximum prices per trip, and kind of services rendered.
4. Make either the hunter or packer definitely responsible for care of the meat at the time the hunter checks in.

In the interim from now to the time that legislation can be secured, definite action can and should be taken to have either State or Forest Service stock available for emergency packing at these road terminals. Steps should also be taken to arrange for a portable quick freezing unit on the Selway road near the Magruder Ranger Station.

Another source of violation is caused by the refusal of the States of Idaho and Montana to consider the modern progress of mobility for the average fisherman. Each state provides that licenses can be sold only within the boundaries of the respective states. Thus a tourist traveling north on Highway 93 from Idaho passes 30 miles of good fishing water on the Bitterroot river before getting to Darby, the first town where he can buy a Montana license. If he is an inveterate

fisherman, and in a hurry, the chances are he breaks the law. Adjacent vendors in Idaho should handle Montana non-resident licences.

A tourist wanting to fish the heads of Moose Creek and Bear Creek from the towns of Hamilton or Darby, Montana, must make a trip 65 miles each^{way} to the MacGruder Ranger Station, to the nearest vendor in Idaho. His tendency is to take the chance that he wouldn't consider if Idaho non-resident licenses were available from adjacent vendors in Montana.

Efforts should be made by the commissions of both states to bring about a cooperative trade of non-resident vending rights so that more consideration is given the sportsmen's needs for facilities.

The Attorney-General of the State of Montana has ruled that no non-resident of Montana may even possess any wildlife or transport it through the State of Montana without a non-resident license. The State Game Department of Montana has been trying to get around the law by decreeing that Idaho resident hunters and trappers must buy a reshipping permit in Montana in order to transport their game or fur legally taken in Idaho through the State of Montana to their homes in north or south Idaho. This causes some grumbling from Idaho hunters and trappers, and at the same time, it is really sitting on a volcano for there is no cinch that the Montana Attorney-General will not find out what is going on, and clamp down with a wholesale arrest of a bunch of Idaho hunters in the fall. This would cause a lot of criticism ~~over~~^{with} both states and it would seem that the Idaho Attorney-General should take this up with the Attorney-General of Montana, and try to get a reconsideration of his ruling. If impossible to do so, hunters from north and south Idaho should be warned before the bird and big game seasons open.

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