

# Appendix C

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## RECREATION ACTIVITY REVIEW

In the late 1990s, the Methow Valley Ranger District began receiving comments and concerns about outfitter-guide activities in the Pasayten Wilderness. Field observations from some people indicated that some activities did not meet Forest Plan standards and guidelines. “The 1999 Report on the State of the Pasayten Wilderness” (Hall, M., 1999) described use and conditions. The report was based on field observations by two individuals about the Spanish Camp/Rommel Lake area. While most of the observations were valid for isolated spots, they lacked perspective concerning the overall wilderness condition. The report also failed to take into account past actions and conditions still visible, but not caused by current recreation use or outfitter-guide permit activities. A detailed analysis and response to the report is in the project analysis file.

In response to the concerns raised by the 1999 Report and others, the Methow Valley Ranger District developed a “Wilderness Recreation, Stock, and Outfitter Use Strategy and Action Plan”, signed by the Forest Supervisor on April 24, 2000. The objective of the plan was to reduce stock-related wilderness impacts in both the Pasayten and Lake Chelan-Sawtooth Wilderness Areas. The plan included 22 specific action items for the 2000 outfitter-guide season, and beyond, designed to address Forest Plan compliance and concerns raised by the public (USDA Forest Service, 2000e).

One of the action items requested an internal Wilderness Activity Review regarding recreational impacts in the 2000 season. The review was completed with focus on the Spanish Camp/Rommel Lake area. The objective of the review was to determine if activities were in compliance with the Forest Plan. The final report, “Recreation Activity Review, Spanish Camp and Rommel Lake Area, Pasayten Wilderness” (USDA Forest Service, 2000c) documents a number of corrections needed to bring activities into compliance, however, no conditions or threats were found that constituted an emergency or that were jeopardizing the wilderness resource. In fact, the reviewers found an upward/improving trend in overall resource.

These general observations were made (USDA Forest Service, 2000c):

- *Although there are some areas where actions are needed, no conditions or threats which constitute an emergency or that jeopardize the wilderness resource were found in the Spanish Camp/Rommel Lake Area of the Pasayten Wilderness. In fact, an upward/improving trend in overall resource conditions was observed.*
- *A confusing network of trails occurs in the area, many of the existing trails are not needed, and have caused localized impacts to some riparian areas and wet meadows; there are established campsites that do not meet forest plan standards and guidelines, some of the established campsites are also contributing to unacceptable resource and social effects.*

- *The limited and/or localized trail and site conditions, which must be addressed, can be treated with known actions and methods; in addition it is understood that the effects related to outfitter guide activities will be addressed in the ongoing outfitter guide environmental analysis.*
- *Stream/riparian habitats are largely in proper functioning condition with primarily limited and/or localized effects of recreational stock grazing, trampling, and trailing.*
- *The wetlands and riparian areas are functioning properly, provide aquatic habitat, and meet the specific stream and riparian standards of PACFISH and InFish.*

The report made the several findings that the Methow Valley Ranger District has been using to guide recreation and outfitter-guide management in the Pasayten and Lake Chelan-Sawtooth wilderness areas. The findings and actions taken to address the findings are detailed below.

**Finding #1:** The network of trails in the area is the result of historic and current undirected travel, not by the need for trails and the need to manage resource effects.

Actions Taken to Address Finding #1:

- Grant application underway to fund a comprehensive trail plan for the Rimmel Lake/Spanish Camp area;
- Received capital investment program funding to implement a portion of the Chewuch Trail reroute in fiscal year 2006;
- Installed signs at trail junctions to identify system trails;
- Created brochure “Traveling With Stock in Pasayten High Country” that includes information about camping and traveling in fragile alpine habitats, and a trail map of the Spanish Camp/Rimmel Lake area;
- Provided up-to-date trail information at Forest Service offices and on the Forest website;
- Discussed camp access with outfitters to develop and maintain one main access trail into camps;
- Worked with outfitter who uses Bald Mountain camp to manage stock trails between camp and grazing area;
- Signed sensitive plant habitat area below Amphitheater to keep riders on trails;
- Two deeply rutted trails in the Spanish Camp area are being restored with check dams, drainage structures, and closures by the Spanish Camp ranger and volunteers.

**Finding #2:** Forest Plan party size and campsite standards are not compatible at all locations. Many established campsites do not meet at least one standard and guideline however it appears that most sites could be managed within an acceptable range of effects and toward plan standards.

Actions Taken to Address Finding #2:

- Completed a campsite inventory of Spanish Camp/Rimmel Lake area, showing users trails, exposed roots, vegetation loss and bare, and compacted soil;
- Collect use information by permit system, including date, duration, type of use, and area;

- Installed hitch rails at Hidden Lake and Bald Mountain, repaired hitch rail at Upper Cathedral;
- Enacted a CFR restriction at Black Lake to eliminate stock camping within ½ mile of the lake shore;
- A campsite near the shoreline of Williams Lake was closed, scarified, and re-planted in the fall of 2005. This campsite had been identified as a priority for restoration due to the proximity of the lake and the availability of alternate campsites in the area. This campsite was used primarily by the non-outfitted public;
- Two campsites in wet areas near Rimmel Lake were closed via signage and removal of a hitchrail. One site has recovered with vegetation filling in the bare area; no longer identifiable as a campsite. Recovery at the other site is slower but progressing. These campsites were used primarily by the non-outfitted public;
- The Pasayten Campsite Restoration Project funded the completion of restoration activities on additional campsites in the summers of 2007 and 2008;
- Forest Service personnel have been working with the outfitter who uses the Bald Mountain camp to determine the best location for hitchrails, which were selected instead of a highline because there were no trees suitable for a highline. The outfitter has also worked to establish a route for the stock to take from camp to the grazing area that avoids or minimizes impact to wetland hummocks;
- Permanent improvements at the Sheep Mountain camp were removed in 2002. The corral was retained to reduce grazing near the camp where native plant succession has been altered by past stock animal grazing. The materials used for the corral were changed; old wire was removed and live trees are no longer used as posts;
- An outfitter camp at Corral Lake was closed to outfitter use, partially scarified and the access trail was blocked. Pioneer plant species were allowed to become established on the recommendation of the District Botanist;
- A trail above Rimmel Lake will be adjusted to access more appropriate, already established camping areas;
- Campsites are being evaluated for potential impacts to threatened and endangered species;
- Dead and defective tree habitat is abundant in the Pasayten Wilderness. Due to the relative lack of management activities, dead and defective tree habitat occurs at natural levels. The Pasayten and Lake Chelan-Sawtooth are dominated by high elevation forests of subalpine fir, Engelmann spruce, lodgepole pine, and Douglas-fir, though there are a few areas with ponderosa pine. Recent forest insect and disease activity has resulted in an abundance of dead and defective tree habitat in some areas. Pine beetle activity has killed large numbers of mature lodgepole pine trees and root-rots have killed many pockets of Douglas-fir. Recent large wildfires in the analysis area have consumed some dead and defective tree habitat, but have also created many new snags.

**Finding #3:** Overall range conditions appear to be improving from over 100 years of sheep, cattle, and horse grazing; however localized disturbances persist that affect wetland/riparian and unique habitats.

- Livestock grazing permits in the Pasayten and Lake Chelan-Sawtooth have not been restocked;
- A regional CFR requiring weed-free feed on all National Forest System Land;

- Denied request for an outfitter-guide camp at Middle Oval basin based on monitoring of range condition, 2008.
- Reduced the number of authorized over-sized parties by approving a very limited number of requests.
- Worked with outfitter-guide who using the Bald Mountain camp to find a way to move stock through the near-by wetland to drier hillsides for grazing.

**Finding #4:** Special use permit administration has not kept pace with the increasing complexity of social, resource, and Forest Service policy issues, nor actively sought the outfitter guides as partners to effectively model wilderness stewardship. The review team evaluated the 4/24/2000 action plan, and concluded that it is complimentary and consistent with the team's findings and recommendations.

Actions Taken to Address Finding #4:

- Worked to maintain positive relationships with outfitters through annual meetings with individual outfitters to discuss performance, operations, and concerns;
- Hosted annual spring meeting with all outfitters to discuss upcoming Forest Service activities, outfitter concerns, and Forest Service concerns;
- Permit administrator and lead Wilderness Ranger attended Special Use Permit Administration Training;
- Outfitter Guide Permit Administration Review was conducted for the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest to standardize and improve overall administration;
- Campsites are discussed with outfitters, and field reviews with Forest Service employees and outfitters help address camp management issues. Campsite conditions are also discussed and evaluated in annual performance evaluation meetings;
- To minimize the potential for bears to access human food, garbage or other attractants, these items are required to be stored in a bear-resistant manner with the proper storage.
- Priority use numbers have been maintained to meet Forest Plan standard and guideline;
- Drop camps are discussed at annual performance evaluation meetings; these camps are visited by Forest Service employees to assess camp management, location, and compliance with permits;
- Permit administrators on the Chelan and Methow Valley Ranger Districts have been working together in the field, in meetings, and in correspondence with outfitters to provide cross-unit coordination;
- The number of oversized parties has been reduced substantially; since 2001 there have been fewer than five oversized parties;
- Highline areas were established at the Crow Lake camp so stock would not be tied to trees;
- Highline areas were also established at Beaver Creek to replace an ineffective highline;
- Notices of non-compliance have been issued to outfitters found to be out of compliance with permit clauses.

**Finding #5:** There is a lack of social and resource inventory, and monitoring information and documentation.

Actions Taken to Address Finding #5:

- Inventory and monitoring plan developed for threatened and endangered species
- Work with plant groups to inventory

- Conservation assessment status?
- Completed two year of National Visitor Use Monitoring. This will be completed every five years, and will provide statistically valid information about use level.
- Inspections/monitoring of outfitter camps
- Baseline campsite monitoring done on 26 campsites in Spanish Camp/Rommel Lake area and 70 sites in the western portion of the Pasayten
- Encounter data collected and recorded by Wilderness Rangers

**Finding #6:** Some visitors lack minimum impact skills and wilderness resource knowledge.

Actions Taken to Address Finding #6:

- Information about wilderness ethic and resource information, in addition to rules and regulations, is posted at all trailheads, and available to all groups. It is also available at the Forest Service offices;
- Information is provided on wilderness permits;
- Wilderness ethics and resource information is on the Forest Service web site;
- Leave-No-Trace camping techniques are taught by Wilderness Rangers;
- Handouts detailing Leave-No-Trace camping techniques are available at Forest Service Offices, and on Forest Service and outfitter websites;
- Lead Wilderness Ranger and Wilderness Stock Ranger have attended Leave-No-Trace training; both have taught Leave-No-Trace stock in conjunction with Backcountry Horsemen;
- Local and State Backcountry Horsemen groups have hosted Leave-No-Trace workshops. The Methow Valley Ranger district Lead Wilderness Ranger and the Wilderness Stock Ranger have assisted in the instruction;
- Backcountry Horsemen and Forest Service co-host a Leave-No-Trace display and interaction at annual spring festival hosted by Washington Outfitters and Guides Association;
- A Wilderness Ranger worked with a group of Backcountry Horsemen volunteers contacting campers in the Spanish Camp/Rommel Lake area, promoting Leave-No-Trace camping techniques and rules and regulation;
- All outfitters and outfitter clients are required to securely store, using wildlife resistant containers or hanging methods where feasible, all food, garbage, toiletries, and other possible wildlife attractants. These guidelines are discussed with clients. Outfitters are required to follow the additional outlines provided by wildlife biologists in regards to acceptable food and trash storage methods.
- "Traveling With Stock in Pasayten High Country" brochure aids visitors in using the Pasayten, and is available at the district offices;
- Wilderness Rangers, trail crew members, and Lead Wilderness Ranger have attended training at Nine Mile Training Center for stock use, Leave-No-Trace training.

The Methow Valley Ranger District prepared Wilderness Action Plans and Reports for 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, with a follow-up report in 2005, and an Action Plan for 2006. Copies of these are in the project analysis file. They demonstrate a concentrated effort on the part of the District to bring recreation and outfitter-guide activities into compliance with the Forest Plan, and to address the Findings in the Recreation Activity Review.