

Wilderness Management Review

Three Sisters Wilderness

Submitted by: Art Pope

Date: 8/5/18

Report Title: Millican Crater Loop

Route: Where did you go? How many days were you camping?

This was a day trip starting at Lava Lake Trailhead on Millican Crater Trail connecting with Scott Pass Trail and then back to Lava Lake on the North Matthew Trail.

Summary: 250 word max

A disheartening return to this loop after two years; much of the loop has burned and restoration from suppression efforts of a previous fire are unimpressive. Trail erosion is frequently/often significant and progressing unchecked.

Wilderness or Wild River: Three Sisters Wilderness

Management Unit: Deschutes National Forest

Administrative Location: Bend, Oregon

Head of Administrative Unit: John Allen, Forest Supervisor

Trip Report: Grade the success of the management agency with an A to F letter grade. Comments must support letter grades in each category; skip any category on which you do not want to comment.

F Access; is resource damage occurring at campsites on trails or at trailheads?

Trail erosion on much of this loop ranges from moderate to severe. Unmaintained reroutes created in the last ten or twenty years are incised due to failure to maintain drainage structures. Some sections of this trail have been relocated as many as three times because of erosion; a needless expense and a significant impact on the ecology of the area readily avoided by getting water off the trail. When follow the trail downhill erosion quickly eats away the soil. When it creates a trench calf deep and/or filled with rocks, water or mud "neighbor" trails start to develop increasing impacts and compounding the problem. At this point recovery is expensive and time consuming often requiring the installation of great numbers of check dams to control erosion and restore the tread.

C Management; regulations, permit systems, education, enforcement actions.

Trailhead signage is very good addressing a variety of issues including one poster that exhorts users to minimize the impacts of their campfires in all areas. Regulations also address the heavy use at North and South Matthew Lakes banning campfires in these areas and requiring users to camp at designated sites.

C Stewardship; are management actions in accord with wilderness values and best practices in wilderness management?

After fire crews enhanced the Millican Trail for use as a fireline the Forest Service relocated that section of trail. Unfortunately, this relocation lacks any semblance of elegance in layout and design and is more a fireline than a trail. Rather than the wide graceful turns and consistent grades of days past this new trail twists and turns around

stumps and rocks, the brushing swath is poorly addressed, and the tread is bumpy, irregular and full of rocks.

Much of this loop has recently been logged out. The crew had a sharp saw and knew how to use it removing hundreds of snags fallen across the trail from the previous wildfires. Unfortunately, it seems this crew had no time to maintain badly clogged waterbars. Except for a dozen or so on the trail to North Mathew Lake that received a quick scrape all were untouched. Good stewardship dictates that erosion control take priority over log removal because while logs do not damage the environment water washing down trails has a significant impact.

New signage has been added since the fire. Wilderness does not care about signs but when they are installed it is nice when they are consistent with wilderness values. In this case the posts are native material, shaped with crosscuts and the top chamfered by hand.

C Wilderness; how well is management protecting the wilderness resource?

In terms of wildfire management, not very well. In terms of protecting fragile soils from trail erosion, not very well. However, frequent and visible signage informs the visitor that campfires are not allowed in around Upper and Lower Matthiew Lakes and that users must camp in designated areas.

F Fire Management, Wildlife Management, Other

This area has burned several times in recent fires. One leg of the trail was heavily impacted by fire suppression efforts that included using chainsaws to fall hundreds of trees. Given that this area was well within the wilderness and therefore the fire of little immediate threat to the public one may well ask why this action was considered necessary. Post-fire restoration of the trail was long delayed and the quality of workmanship disappointing.