

## **Wilderness Management Review**

### **Frank Church River of No Return Wilderness**

Submitted by: CP

Date: 8/24/2018

Report Title: Shellrock Ridge Hike

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

A week backpack – from Thunder Mtn to Shellrock Peak and down to Big Creek via Pioneer Creek, to Cabin Creek airstrip.

Summary: 250-word max

Arranged shuttle from McCall to Thunder Mountain. Followed long abandoned trails and bush-wacked during this week-long hike. Visited old Lookout on Shellrock Peak. Stopped at U of Idaho Taylor Wilderness Research Station, where caretakers provided a tour. Ended at Cabin Creek where we took advantage of public airstrip and flew back to McCall via charter aircraft. A very remote and lightly used part of this Wilderness. The only other people we saw during the week were our shuttle driver, the Taylor caretakers and our charter pilot.

Wilderness or Wild River: Frank Church – River of No Return Wilderness

Management Unit: Payette National Forest

Administrative Location: Supervisors Office, McCall, Idaho

Head of Administrative Unit: Keith Lannom, 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.

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

We did not see much evidence of resource damage. The trailhead is on Thunder Mountain—an old mining area and those impact are still visible. It constitutes an exclusion to the Wilderness. At first we were on the Lookout Mountain Trail, which is part of the Idaho Centennial Trail for the first few miles. This trail has not been maintained recently, it was obscured at the start and there were some deepening erosion channels. After we turned off the Lookout Mountain Trail we followed abandoned trails or bush-wacked, until we reached Taylor Wilderness Research Station and connected with Big Creek trail. Not much in way of camps in general, and those with relatively minimal impacts. Many abandoned trails well along in process of fading away!

**B      Management; regulations, permit systems, education, enforcement actions.**

The trailhead information board/registration kiosk at Thunder Mountain was not in best of condition. The absence of active FS trail maintenance or presence in this area of Wilderness was positive in terms of opportunity to experience Wilderness, discover solitude and endure a physical challenge.

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

See previous comment ... see following comment.

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

We came across a chain saw cut tree in one location on the ridge top that was mystifying. In response to a query, the FS suggested it was associated with a fire suppression action order by RO (Regional Office) last year.

The Shellrock Lookout has been long abandoned and is deteriorating—seemingly at an increasing rate—as it appears that much of the window glass has blown out only recently. So, the mountain top around the lookout is scattered glass and debris. This is both an interesting historical remnant, a fine example of structures resilience and decay, but also admittedly a blight on the Wilderness. The lookout is not now accessible to stock and I would not advocate trying to open the trail to make a site clean-up mission possible now would I advocate motorized (helicopter) access for a cleanup. So, I support the “neglect” approach of the FS as being the best Wilderness management. Let the deterioration continue; no need to interfere at this point. Finally, there is nothing much left to burn—that means NO fire protection efforts, such as the ubiquitous structure “wrapping”, when a fire is anywhere in vicinity.

We ended our hike at Cabin Creek, a public airstrip in the Wilderness. We used a charter service to fly back to McCall. This property was purchased by FS to further Wilderness management of the area. While most of the buildings from the previous resort and outfitting operation were removed and signs of the past hay cultivation are almost gone, the FS identified two of the more historic structures for retention and administrative use AND the private airfield was converted to public use. While this was certainly NOT the ideal resolution from a Wilderness perspective (ending up with an open public airstrip and two FS maintained structures in the Wilderness) it did actually serve to enhance the Wilderness and avoid conflicts between Wilderness and private property use that would have otherwise existed.

On the flight out of Cabin Creek to McCall, plane wreckage was noted near Acorn Creek, along Big Creek. This location was acquired by the FS and the building and improvements removed. However, the marginal strip that was previously used by the land owner to access the property is still receiving unauthorized/trespass use. (One of four such situations in the Wilderness!) The FS has tried to recognize this location as available for emergency use only, although trespass, non-emergency use continues to occur, mainly by strip “baggers”. The plane wreckage was most certainly associated with a strip “bagger” who was unsuccessful. A query to the FS about the wreckage revealed that it has been waiting salvage for 9 weeks. Which of course will necessitate helicopter activity. This situation is blight on the Wilderness, and alone serves to reduce the management /stewardship score.

**B** Fire Management, Wildlife Management, Other

Our route took us through the U of Idaho's Taylor Wilderness Research Station (TWRS). This is truly a bubble of non-Wilderness surrounded by Wilderness. The U of Idaho has apparently decided there is no need to try, in any manner, to modify the use of this private property to minimize impacts and inconsistencies with the surrounding designated Wilderness.

As private property there is little control the FS can exercise. Since the property's purchase by the U of Idaho there has been considerable development. The U of Idaho is showing no sensitivity to the Wilderness in its approach to the use and development of the property. A query has been forwarded to the U of Idaho asking for clarification on the institution's position regarding balancing the use of TWRS and the Wilderness.

There is FS pack bridge crossing Big Creek that accesses Taylor Ranch. The only FS trail that this bridge now accesses is one to Rush Creek Point. However, there is no clear routing through or around Taylor Ranch that connects the bridge to that FS trail—or to NFS land at all for that matter. For example, we came down the abandoned Pioneer Creek trail and stumbled into Taylor Ranch. The caretakers were gracious hosts and even provided a station tour. (No complaint in that regard).

Except on Monumental Summit, outside but on the edge of the Wilderness, and on the way into Thunder Mountain, we did not encounter any fire operations or activities—a plus for sure. A good part of the country our route passed through had burned over in the last 20 years or so. We noticed the shade diminishment for sure, it was hot, but appreciated the natural environment and active processes of nature that were on display.