

Wilderness Management Review Mount Jefferson Wilderness

Submitted by: Art Pope Date: 7/21-7/24/18

Report Title: Mount Jefferson Wilderness

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

This was a four-day trip. We started at the top of the Santiam Pass on the PCT and followed the Santiam Lake Trail to the Dixie Lakes Trail. We camped in the Eight Lakes Basin and the next day followed the Blue Lake Trail and Pine Ridge Trail to the brushy and logged-over Turpentine Trail. This took us to the Duffy Lake Trail and that to the Blue Lake Trail which took us back to our camp. The next day we pushed our way through the brush on the very logged-over Bowerman Lake Trail to the Minto Pass Trail and then followed the PCT back to the trailhead.

Summary: 250-word max

Away from the PCT we encountered few hikers on this route. Trails were often brushy and heavily eroded but few user impacts were observed except for the area immediately around Duffy Lake. An unusually large number of reroutes were observed on this trip; all representing a significant amount of work and resources, nearly all in suffering significant erosion and ready to be relocated for the second, or third time.

Wilderness or Wild River: Mount Jefferson 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.

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

Trail erosion is epidemic; typically, in the moderate to severe range. Nearly all drainage structures are clogged with debris and sediment and no longer workable. Mitigation of erosion issues and restoration of these trails will require the installation of hundreds and hundreds of check dams over many years.

The route we followed was often through a well-charred forest dotted with islands of green. In most areas user impacts were minimal. That said, the area around Duffy Lake is indeed heavily used. Campsites are bare of vegetation and, though no trash or human sanitation issues were observed, this is an area where a reduction in use levels might be appropriate.

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

Currently, the Forest Service is considering a proposal for a limited-entry permit system that would apply to all day hikes and overnight camping in five Cascade wilderness areas. This agency justifies the need for this permit system based on their assessment of user impacts associated with heavy use levels. During this four-day trip we observed no trash, debris or garbage anywhere and we saw very few other hikers. What we did

observe was frequent areas of significant to severe trail erosion—resource damage more related to poor trail maintenance than overuse.

We encountered no agency personnel on this hike—not a bad thing when you are seeking the peace and solitude of wilderness.

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

Management is highly focused on the implementation of a limited-entry, quota-based permit system but has failed to adequately defend the need for such an all-encompassing system across five wilderness areas. Details about the permit fees that will accompany this permit system have not been revealed but one may postulate that the generation of fee-based revenue is a significant driver in this process.

Currently the area is suffering what one might term begin neglect. Management action is limited, user impacts are highly localized, and much of the area is slowly growing wilders and more inaccessible.

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

Crews have done a great job of logging out some trails. At a time when aging fire-charred snags are staring to fall in the hundreds this is a significant task.

With the exception of some sporadic and light maintenance of drain structures on the PCT near the Santiam Pass trailhead, no drainage structure maintenance was observed.

Failure to address drainage issues is leading to significant resource damage. There are areas where sections of trail have been relocated two and three times; each allowed to erode so deeply and severely that it was deemed more cost-effective to simply build another trail. At least one of the reroutes now in use is eroded waist-deep in places.

C Fire Management, Wildlife Management, Other

Much of the land traversed during this hike has burned in recent years. The older burns are at the point when hundreds of fire-charred snags are falling every year and vigorous and aggressive Ceanothus is reaching ten feet in height and starting to close the trail corridor.

After recent wildfires, some trails have become nearly impassible due to fallen trees and encroaching bush. Although backcountry travels should always expect the unexpected, trail status reports could easily be posted at trailheads to warn the more modest hiker away from these routes.