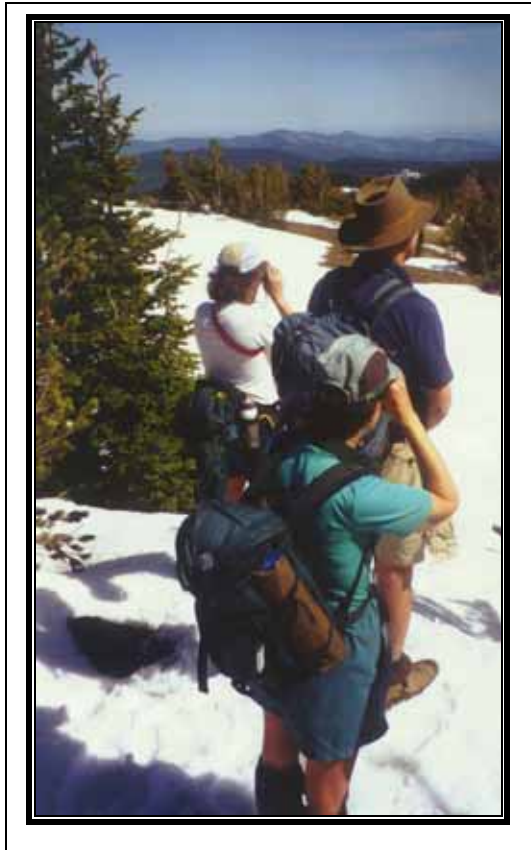


Pacific Biodiversity Institute Unprotected Wilderness Report

Sawtooth Ridge- June 17-18, 2000

Preface



This report describes an exploratory outing on June 17 and 18, 2000 in an unprotected wilderness area southeast of the Sawtooth – Lake Chelan Wilderness area in the Okanogan National Forest. The Pacific Biodiversity Institute (PBI) hosted the trip in an effort to collect information about this area and to provide our members with an opportunity to experience wilderness first hand. There were nine members of the party that was lead by Peter Morrison, PBI executive director.

One of the unique aspects of PBI's wilderness trips is that we explored **unprotected** wild areas. Questions asked while on the trip included what is the definition of a wilderness and does the area we in have wilderness characteristics. The following definition is provided so that be can be better understood what protection is offered to designated wilderness and if the areas we travel into have characteristics that would make it the area a likely candidate for becoming protected as wilderness.

According to the "Wilderness Act" (16 U.S.C. 1121 Sec. 1(c)) a wilderness area needs to have the following characteristics:

- (1) generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man's work substantially unnoticeable
- (2) has outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation
- (3) has at least five thousand acres of land or is of sufficient size as to make practicable its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition
- (4) may also contain ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value.

The area explored was not designated Wilderness but the following description from the National Forest Service Manual and Handbook (http://www.fs.fed.us/cgi-bin/Directives/get_directives/fsm?2300) addresses what its or is not allowed in Wilderness areas:

“With certain exceptions, the Act prohibits motorized equipment, structures, installations, roads, commercial enterprises, aircraft landings, and mechanical transport. The Act permits mining on valid claims, access to private lands, fire control, insect and disease control, grazing, water resource structures (upon the approval of the President), and visitor use” (Forest Service Manual 2320.1).

Location and Access

The study area can be accessed from I-5 at Burlington by taking the North Cascade Highway (Hwy 20) to the Methow Valley. Go south from Winthrop to Twisp, and at Twisp take Highway 153 south to the Gold Creek Road (FS road 4330), which is just south of Calton, Washington on Highway 153. Go west on this road to FS road 600 headed toward Chelan. Turn on to FS road 600 and follow it to the junction of FS road 600 and FS road 8220- stop at the divide. The Okanogan and Chelan County divide follow along Sawtooth Ridge. This is also the divide between the Wenachee and Sawtooth ranger districts. From eastern Washington highway 97, take Highway 153 from Pateros to the Gold Creek road and follow the directions above.



There is a jeep trail up the hillside from the divide but it fades after approximately one-quarter mile. There was recent motorized travel for a short distance up the jeep trail and beyond the jeep trail into the grass. Past this point there is an intermittent hiking trail. We followed the ridge up to End Mountain, camping just before the rock outcrop of End Mountain. The ridge was still snowy but it was an easy to follow route. The next day, we continued on to just below Bryan Butte.

Motorized travel into meadow

Land Use

From Sawtooth ridge there are views of Chelan Lake, to the south, and the Columbia River off to the northeast. Lake Chelan is the third deepest lake in the United States. A man-made dam raised its level in 1927 (Orr and Orr, 1996). Looking south to Slide Ridge you can also see where there is an area with an extensive burn and then it was salvage logged.



Lake Chelan in the background

Grazing



The hummocky appearance of this hillside is a result of heavy grazing. According to Christina Bowlman at the US Forest Service, historically, from the 1880's, the Sawtooth Ridge area was used incredibly intensively for sheep grazing. Around 15 bands (1,200 to 2,000 units per band) were grazed from the shore of Lake Chelan all the way to Hart's Pass. Presently, there is no sheep grazing in this area.

Hummocky appearance from grazing

There are 250 cattle units presently grazing in an area that includes Black Canyon, Squaw Creek, Rainy Peak and McFarlin. We saw cow droppings within the entire area we explored, which was up to the base of Bryan Butte.

Mining

A mining claim post was found approximately one mile up the ridge. The post had a tobacco can nailed to it. Claims used to be marked in this way and the claim papers were put inside the tobacco can.

Recreation

There was evidence of snowmobile use. Several spark plugs, plastic broken off from a machine, and a winter fire pit with beer cans and tin foil. It seemed to be a winter fire since it was a tree stump that was burned all the way down to the ground. The trees adjacent were charred but didn't catch on fire.

There were horse tracks from last fall that had just been uncovered by recently melted snow. These were probably from hunting parties and there were several areas where gun shells were found. There was little evidence of hikers.



Flora

One interesting aspect of this area is that there is sagebrush on the southern aspect of the Sawtooth Ridge. Sagebrush was mixed with sensceum, a wildflower in the sunflower family, grasses, and lodgepole.

Father along the ridge there many snags left standing. An early fire had killed the trees and then the 1970 fire had burned the

snags. The soft charcoal left by the 1970 fire was then easily eroded out of the snags, leaving the snags beautifully carved by the abrasive action of snow and sand. This was a particularly good area for observing bird populations.



Snags provide bird habitat

Trees

For most of the distance along Sawtooth Ridge white bark pine and larch were the dominant species. The white bark pine did show signs of blister rust but for the most part they were a relatively healthy stand. At the 6000-foot elevation level there was an interesting, unique transition zone where white bark pine, lodgepole pines, ponderosa pine, subalpine fir were present.

In between End Mountain and Bryan Butte there was a stand of white bark pine that had been clawed by a bear. Peter Morrison estimated that these marks were not fresh and were possibly as old as ten years.

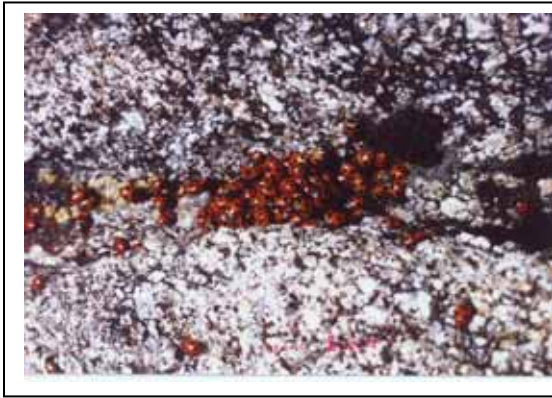
Wild Flowers

Spring beauties (*Claytonia lanceolata*) were present along the entire route. This is an indication that the snow had recently melted in these areas. We tasted the corms and they were pleasant and starchy. Peter pointed out that bear eat the spring beauty corm and if you find freshly dug up patches this is the work of bears. Lupine were in bloom in the lower elevations.

Checklist:

- Spring beauties (*Claytonia lanceolata*)
- Lupine (*Lupinus polyphyllus*)
- Sedges (*Carex* spp.)
- Seneceum
- Globe flowers (*Tollius laxus*)
- Yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*)
- Engelmann Aster (*Aster engelmannii*)
- Waterleaf (*Hydrophyllum capitatum*)
- Larkspur (*Delphinium*)
- Death Camus (*Zigadensis venenosus*)
- Bitterbrush (*Purshia tridentate*)

Fauna



Below End Mountain there was a rock outcropping that had a large number of ladybugs congregated. According to wildlife biologist, Jason Karl, this is a hatch. The eggs had just hatched and as evidence to this they bit.

Birds

It was windy on both days that we were exploring and this may have directly affected the number of birds that we saw. Clark's nutcrackers (*Nucifraga columbiana*) were observed with in the white bark pine population. Blue birds were sighted along the route mostly perched in the snags. A Red-tailed Hawk was sighted near End Mountain.

Checklist:

- Clark's Nutcrackers (*Nucifraga columbiana*)
- Mountain Blue birds (*Sialia currucoides*)
- Red-tailed Hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*)
- Mountain Bluebirds (*Sialia currucoides*)
- Red-tailed Hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*)
- Chipping Sparrow (*Spizella pallida*)
- Black-Capped Chickadee (*Parus atricapillus*)
- White-Breasted Nuthatch (*Sitta carolinensis*)
- Dark-Eyed Junco (*Junco hyemalis*)
- Grouse (*Dendragapus* spp.)



Mammals

The most important sighting, in terms conservation concern, was the Western gray squirrel. Snowshoe hare scat was found but there was no evidence of lynx. Bear scat and claw marks on the white bark pine tree trucks were found. While driving along FS road 600 near Gold Creek some of the party saw a black bear along the road. This was near a recent prescribed burn where the lupines were copious. We found

two skeletons; one from a deer and the other from a marmot. There were also many deer tracks.

Geomorphology



Wetland in a nivation basin

Southeast of End Mountain there is a small nivation basin, which is a shallow depression formed by freeze and thaw and mass wasting under a snow bank, (Easterbrook, 1999). This area was interesting because of its southern aspect. There was still snow in the small basin, covering a 20 to 30 foot diameter. This area hosts Globeflowers and sedges and provided a wetland type environment.

Wilderness Potential

While standing on the rocky outcrop of End Mountain looking south, one can see part of the 50-mile long Lake Chelan imagining the huge glacier creeping along carving out the deep trough that is now the lake. To the east there is the Columbia River. Visible From End Mountain is the basalt layers that make up the river canyon walls. The basalt layers represent the many fissure eruption events that built up the Columbia Plateau (Easterbrook, 1990). The Columbia River has cut through the basalt to make a deep canyon that runs through the sagebrush desert. In contrast to the deserts of Eastern Washington are the high snow covered peaks and the forested valleys to the west and south. This is an incredible area that fills a wilderness traveler with awe and a sense of the diversity of this land.

The study area is south east of the Sawtooth- Lake Chelan Wilderness area in the Okanogan National Forest. From Raven Ridge down to FS road 8220 there is approximately 50 square miles of unprotected wilderness. One of the observations made about the access to the Sawtooth Ridge area is that FS road 8220 is a seasonal road. This road can only be driven for a few months every year yet it completely divides the Sawtooth unprotected wilderness area of approximately 50 square miles from a roadless area of approximately 75 square miles. The Sawtooth Ridge area is a likely addition to the Lake Chelan – Sawtooth Wilderness as it has wilderness characteristics not yet spoiled by man; it is home to threatened species, offers solitude and its scale is ecologically significant.

References

Easterbrook, Don. 1999. *Surface Processes and Landforms*. Upper Saddle River:

- Pentice Hall. P.334.
- Orr, Elizabeth and William Orr. 1996. *Geology of the Pacific Northwest*. San Francisco: McGraw-Hill. P.120.
- Spellenburg, Richard. 1988. *National Audubon Society Field Guide to North American Wildflowers*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Udvardy, Miklos. 1977. *The Audubon Society Field Guide to North American Birds*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- National Geographic Society. 1987. *Field Guide to the Birds of North America, Second Edition*. Washington D. C.: National Geographic Society.