Is Managed Wilderness an Oxymoron?

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"Diplomacy" From the podcast series Selway-Bitterroot History Project, Episode 44, November 28, 2013

This episode, titled "Diplomacy" illustrates the ways in which rangers worked to define wilderness policy by educating users of wilderness in order to give them an experience in an unrestrained area and yet maintain the pristine nature of this special place.

Art Seamans worked as the Ranger at Moose Creek from 1975-1980. He describes living with his family in a fourteen foot tent for two years so that another family with young children could use the ranger's house. His daughter, Cindy Schacher has also worked as an archaeologist and historian in the Selway-Bitterroot area.



"Letters by Mule Post" From the podcast series Selway-Bitterroot History Project, Episode 34, February 19, 2013

In this episode, titled "Letters by Mule Post," Anna Bengtson, the Wilderness Ranger at Moose Creek, talks about the sense of history that she feels, working deep in the heart of the Selway-Bitterroot. Anna grew up in northwestern Montana and remembers visiting Glacier National Park with her family. After obtaining a forestry degree, she applied to work on fire crews in Montana and Idaho, finally ending up at Jumbo Mountain Lookout for five seasons.

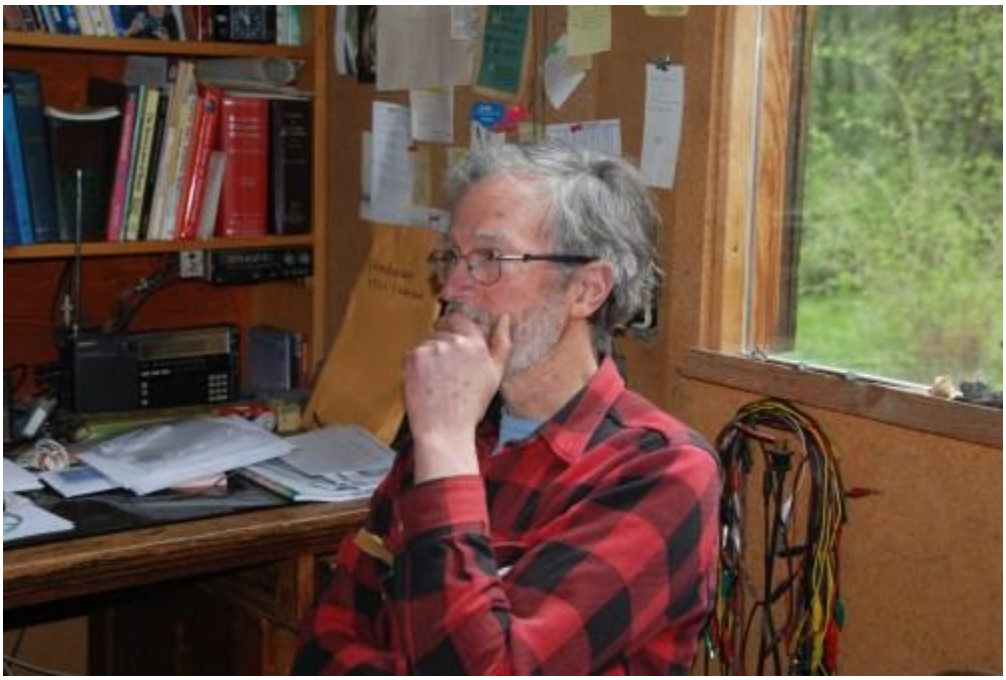
As a wilderness ranger at Moose Creek, Anna does on-the-ground wilderness management, including cleaning up camp sites, and returning fire rings to a naturalized state, as well as teaching Leave No Trace principles to wilderness users. In this excerpt, she describes living deep in the back country for months at a time, and reasons for using historic methods of transportation in the wilderness.



Moose Creek Ranger Station, Bitterroot National Forest, Flint, R. S., 1922-07-29



Use of a loading platform for safety and ease in loading cargo on pack stock. Reginald Blundell, packer., Moose Creek Ranger Station, Blackerby, A. W., 1957-08-14



“Is Wilderness Management an Oxymoron”? From the podcast series Selway-Bitterroot History Project, Episode 19, May 23, 2012

In this episode, titled “Managing Wilderness Is An Oxymoron,” Warren Miller explains how the wilderness rangers helped to interpret the Wilderness Act in a practical, tangible way, by educating backcountry recreational users and promoting primitive tool use, among other things.

Warren Miller was born in Salt Lake City, lived there until he was eleven, and then his family moved to Phoenix, Arizona. He attended Reed College in Portland where he majored in physics. After graduating, and spending some time traveling in Europe, he and his brother took a work trip with the Sierra Club, which took them into the Selway-Bitterroot off of Elk Summit. While on that trip, he was impressed with the country and its surroundings; he also met Dick Walker, who encouraged him to apply for a job as wilderness ranger. In his words, “I figured well, I’ll try this for a year or for a season and I stayed there 20 years.”

Contextual Paragraph

The three people profiled above featured in the Selway-Bitterroot History Project consider their roles as Wilderness Rangers at Moose Creek Ranger Station.

According to Bruce Farling, a Ranger at the Selway-Bitterroot from 1980-82, the role of Wilderness Rangers there included "...administering outfitter permits, some trail maintenance, fire monitoring, wildfire monitoring, law enforcement, picking up trash, educating the public about, you know, being, as much as possible, sort of low trick, you know, minimal trace sort of uses of wilderness".

There are baked-in difficulties managing Wilderness Areas due to prohibited use of motorized vehicles and chainsaws among other items. A no-trace policy for hunting camps can be difficult to enforce. Trash left in Wilderness Areas has to be packed out. Outfitters and Back Country visitors often require a reasonable level of diplomacy from Rangers in order to see the value of compliance.

The nature of working in remote areas enhances the appreciation for simplicity and makes a memorable experience for those who see the day-to-day concerns of Wilderness Rangers. That simplicity is key to the conviction that land use needs a strict code of ethics and that through personal challenges experienced by Rangers, a love of the land and the freedom it represents prevails.

Key Questions

1. Describe how each of the Rangers featured addressed the challenges of their work at Moose Creek Ranger Station.
2. Why does Warren Miller say that Wilderness doesn't need to be managed?
3. How does Art Seamons address the issue of disrespectful packers and would Warren Miller approve or disapprove of that solution? Why?
4. How do Federal protections of Wilderness areas such as leave-no-trace affect the personal land ethic of those who spend real time in remote areas?

Assessment

1. Are people and their pack animals in Wilderness Areas the problem or the solution?