Into the Wilderness

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Boy Scout Troop #288 crossing bridge

Boy Scout Troop #228 from Richland, Washington crossing the pack bridge across the South Fork of the Flathead River near the Black Bear guard station in the Bob Marshall Wilderness. The boys are age 11 to 15 years and carry packs weighing 28 to 40 pounds. They are on the return leg of the trip and will have been on the trail 6 and a half days upon reaching Spotted Bear on the evening of August 11. Flathead National Forest, Montana. Recreation; Hiking. WO# 517312. Date: 1967.



Backcountry supplies at Big Prairie

Supplies for the backcountry loaded on mules at Big Prairie. Date: Unknown.



Big game hunter in Bob Marshall Wilderness

Big game hunter in the Bob Marshall Wilderness Area. Flathead National Forest, Montana. Recreation; Hunting. WO# 516609. Date: 1965.

Contextual Paragraph:

Wilderness with a capital W is a federal distinction created by the 1964 Wilderness Act that defines Wilderness as an ”area where the earth and its community of life are untrammeled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain … an area of undeveloped Federal land retaining its primeval character and influence, without permanent improvements or human habitation”. The Wilderness Act allows Congress to research and designate certain natural places as Wilderness, giving them official legal protection against modern development and use by prohibiting road construction, cars, power tools, chainsaws, dirt bikes, and other devices that might alter the landscape. Humans are still welcome to enjoy the natural beauty by hiking or camping along designated trails so long as you’re on foot or horseback.

What does it take for an area to become Wilderness with a capital W? In 1964, when Congress passed the Wilderness Act, they identified three main principles to define Wilderness: “(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”

South of Glacier National Park lies the Bob Marshall Wilderness. Secretary of Agriculture Henry A. Wallace designated this land a wilderness area in August 1940. Then, it became federally protected land when the US Congress designated it through the Wilderness Act of 1964. Today, the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex includes three designated Wilderness areas: The Great Bear, Bob Marshall, and Scapegoat. Totaling 1.6 million acres, it is the 3rd largest Wilderness in the lower 48 states. The complex is managed across 3 national forests and 5 ranger districts. Bob Marshall, for whom the Wilderness is named, was a forester, conservationist, and co-founder of The Wilderness Society.

Key Questions:

1. Name and describe 2 ways in which designated Wilderness contributes to the value of public lands.
2. Name 2 to 3 stakeholders of the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex, explain what they each contribute, and describe how their management affects public access.
3. How does designated Wilderness compare to other types of public lands?
4. What is the importance of the existence of Wilderness?
5. Why is land stewardship important?

Assessment Question:

1. How can proper use of designated Wilderness areas increase land stewardship?