

Wilderness study draws criticism

By JACK DESMOND
Of the Emerald

Boulder Creek, 35 miles to the east of Roseburg, lies in a large, low-elevation valley in the Umpqua National Forest containing stands of old-growth Douglas fir.

The valley, along with 172 other roadless areas in Oregon, is currently a center of controversy pitting three major groups against each other. The timber industry wants to log Boulder Creek because the valley is one of the last low-elevation, uncut forests. For the same reasons, conservationists hope to protect the valley from cutting. The Forest Service must gingerly plod between both camps, though it has already tentatively announced that it wants to log the area.

The roadless areas of Oregon and 1,700 areas nationwide are currently being evaluated for wilderness designation by the Forest Service in a study termed RARE II (Roadless Area Review and Evaluation). It is the second attempt by the Forest Service to resolve the future of roadless areas.

When RARE II was publicly issued June 15, it listed 13 alternatives for allocation of the 3.1 million acres of roadless area in Oregon. The alternatives ranged from allocating all roadless areas to timber production, to designating all roadless areas as wilderness.

Conservationists soon bitterly attacked the document as being biased in favor of the timber industry, as only three of the alternatives allocated more than 20 percent of the areas to wilderness.

Randall O'Toole of OSPIRG responded to the document by developing an economical model of roadless areas. At a recent press conference at the University, O'Toole issued an OSPIRG report entitled *An Economic View of RARE II*.

O'Toole, citing economics, stated that "between 2.4 million and all 3.1 million acres of Forest Service roadless areas in Oregon should be protected."

He was able to arrive at those figures by comparing the annual value of timber that could be extracted against the annual costs of building roads and extra logging costs for each roadless area. He further assigned a value of \$5 for each visitor day use of the roadless areas.

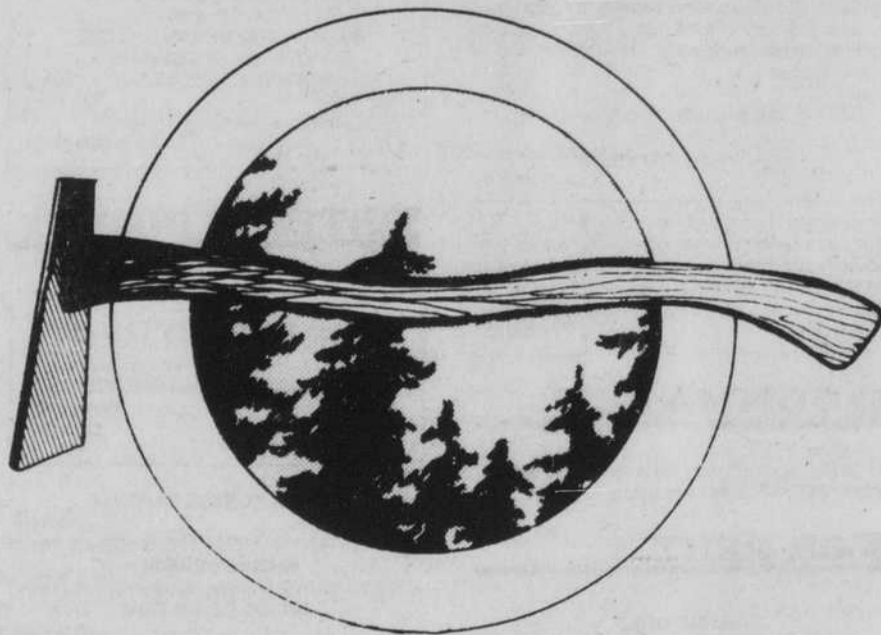
"Wilderness has always been free because there was lots of it. Now it's in short supply," noted O'Toole. "We have to be willing to pay for wilderness, though I'm not saying the Forest Service should start charging for wilderness."

He explained that there was very little research relating to the value of primitive recreation. The Willamette National Forest had tentatively set a figure of \$13 per visitor for day use in wilderness areas and \$6 a day in roadless areas. O'Toole chose \$5 as a value.

Through a convoluted mathematical process, which makes the study rather difficult to understand, he projected a benefit-cost ratio. Some notable projections were:

- Boulder Creek — 1.6; that is, the Forest Service would annually receive \$1.60 for each dollar invested in development.

- Waldo Lake — .3; the Forest Service receiving only 30 cents for each dollar annually invested.



Emerald graphic

Overall, the study indicated only 47 of the 173 roadless areas had a benefit-cost ratio greater than one-to-one. If O'Toole had not assigned a \$5 visitor-day use value, only 800,000 acres would be economically unfeasible. However, he maintained that primitive recreation use was growing by 10 percent a year in contrast to timber demand which was only growing by 2 percent.

The day after the report was issued, the Eugene Register-Guard editorialized that most areas worthy of wilderness in Oregon had already been so designated

and that the Forest Service should open up most of the roadless areas. The Register-Guard also mentioned that the timber industry would not idly sit by and let O'Toole's study become gospel for saving all of the roadless areas.

Of the three timber industry people approached by the Emerald, only one felt confident in commenting upon the study.

"Randy (O'Toole) has built the best possible case he could to save all roadless areas from his point of view," replied Dave Cox of Industrial Forests Association.

"But, I think using different figures, the outcome might change greatly."

Cox said he thought O'Toole's statistic that one million board feet of timber supports only two jobs was wrong and said the figure would be 8-10 jobs.

Contacted later, O'Toole admitted that Cox was correct. However, O'Toole maintained that the new figures did not substantially change the benefit-cost ratios of most roadless areas.

Cox further claimed that O'Toole was attributing all of the road-building costs to timber and discounting the value of the road for recreational use.

"The Forest Service always requires the timber industry to build roads of a much higher quality than necessary for hauling timber," Cox added. "That has al-

ways been a bone of contention to the timber industry."

But O'Toole said he had used only road-building costs necessary for timber transportation.

Roger Fight of the Forest Service said he had not studied the document enough to comment.

Asked what he thought the impact of O'Toole's study might be, Cox replied, "I really don't know what impact it will have. It will depend on the Forest Service study (an economic study of selected roadless areas)."

"I don't want to make any predictions because we've done these analyses since January 1977," O'Toole said. "The timber industry has never uttered a response. By hoping not to give it credence, people will forget about it. I could be wrong, but they haven't said anything yet."

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