

‘Scapegoat’ New Wilderness

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When it's summertime in the Rockies and vacationists have returned again to Montana's mountains, they will find something new has been added while they were gone last winter—the brand new Scapegoat Wilderness. An area “just made for” hikers and trailriders and contiguous to the famed Bob Marshall Wilderness, it was formally created a Wilderness Area at the end of last summer after many hearings and much public involvement.

This newest unit of the Nation's Wilderness Preservation System is 75 miles northeast of Missoula and 10 miles north of the Helena National Forest's Lincoln Ranger Station. The Wilderness occupies an area which extends into three National Forests: Lolo, Lewis & Clark, and Helena. It is physically very similar to the adjoining Bob Marshall Wilderness to the north. One of the distinctive landmarks is 9,204-foot Scapegoat Mountain on the Continental Divide. It is an extension of the massive rock formation known as the Chinese Wall which runs through the Bob Marshall Wilderness.

Exciting and Varied Geography

Scapegoat Wilderness averages 11 miles wide (east to west) and 25 miles long (north to south). The area, like the Bob Marshall Wilderness and Glacier National Park to the north, was born of glaciers and ancient rock upthrusts. The reddish color of the rocks and mountains is impressive, particularly on Red Mountain and Red Ridge.

Many of the erosional landforms, resulting from glaciation, can be seen in the form of glacial cirques, trough lakes in the lower broad valleys, lateral moraines, and terrace remnants. Many streams disappear into the thick glacial deposits and probably return and add to the stream-flow downstream. The 14 lakes are small and shallow. Thirty-three-acre Heart Lake is the largest.

North Fork Falls

Elevations vary from 5,000 feet along the Blackfoot River to 9,400 feet atop Red Mountain. Generally, the topography is broken, steep and rocky. Most ridges and peaks rise above 7,000 feet. Streams have numerous falls and rapids. The most spectacular waterfall is the North Fork Falls on the North Fork Blackfoot River. The two-step falls—the upper falls is 20 feet high and the lower falls is more than 50 feet high—flows through a colorful, vertical-walled canyon near the North Fork Blackfoot River near the Dry Fork Junction.

To the visitor the topography creates a feeling of security at the lower elevations and exhilaration on the summits, where wilderness recreationists enjoy panoramic views of the country. Winters are long and are marked by deep snows, Summers are short with minimal growing seasons for vegetation. In the higher elevations, frost can occur every month of the year. Precipitation, mostly snow, ranges from 40 to 50 inches a year.

Timberline at 8,588

Vegetation cover ranges from grasses and sagebrush at the lower elevations to sedges, mosses, and small forbs on the higher elevations. Lodgepole pine, ponderosa pine, and western larch cover much of the lower country. Spruce, alpine fir, and whitebark pine mark the higher elevations. Timberline is about 8,5000 feet.

The Wilderness is home for deer, elk, mountain goat, mountain sheep, mountain lion, black and grizzly bear, wolverine, marten, coyote, and Canada lynx. Upland birds include Franklin, ruffed fed and blue grouse. Except for the mountain goat, most animals migrate to fall, winter, and spring ranges outside the Wilderness. Approximately 89 miles of streams and 14 lakes in the Wilderness contain fish. Key fish species are native westslope cutthroat, eastern brook, rainbow trout, grayling, and Dolly Varden.

The National Forests are now in the process of developing a management plan which will prescribe specific management direction for the area. Some implications include limited forage which is currently utilized to capacity by wildlife and recreation stock. Visitors using pack and saddle stock should plan on using supplemental feed.

The Scapegoat Wilderness is served by a basic network of trails with directional signs. Much of the area will remain trailless in order to perpetuate grizzly habitat. Limited trail construction may be required to disperse visitor use and enhance the wilderness environment. These trails are now closed to all types of motorized vehicles.

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