

FIELD OBSERVATIONS 5/21/23

LAZYMEN INVENTORIED ROADLESS AREA, SUBUNIT C

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Observers departed the Tenmile Picnic Area at 0930, traveling on the interpretive trail for access into the IRA. The gate on the road was swung open with no signage on appropriate use of the route for motor vehicles. The FS Divide Travel Plan shows the route to be a non-motorized trail. However, we immediately found a vehicle with 2 people who had evidently camped behind the open gate. They told us there was others camped further up the road which we found to include 3 more vehicles and 4 people. Both groups informed us that they used the Trail Forks website which indicated that there was mtn. bike trail(s) and camping accessed from that road. We need to check with the FS on the current status of that road.

This road had been opened and used for timber harvest. We observed a variety of weeds in the harvest unit and along the road, including Spotted Knapweed, Hounds Tongue, Musk Thistle, and Common Mullein.

Continuing up the creek, we noticed a significant decline of weed observations after leaving the road. There was evidence of the impacts from mountain pine beetle on ponderosa pine and lodgepole pine with some downfall along the creek and north-facing slope south of the creek. This impact appears to be well within and what could be expected for the natural range of variation (NRV). The lower slope north of the creek and the north-facing slope south of the creek exhibits a diverse forest of ponderosa pine, lodgepole pine, Douglas Fir, and aspen. Most of the area south of the creek contains late-seral stage trees with one exception of a mid-seral stage old timber harvest unit from 1974. The harvest unit has regenerated very well, primarily consisting of Douglas Fir.

North of the creek on the south-facing slope, there is considerable understory development of Douglas Fir under very open-grown late-seral stage ponderosa pine and Douglas Fir. This area appears, under natural conditions and fire regime activity, to what would have been classified a grassland with very few, scattered trees.

At the very head of the creek, on the west slope of Black Mountain, there is a significant patch of bug-killed lodgepole pine with most of the trees still standing. It appears there are some live Douglas Fir scattered in the patch and possibly still a few lodgepole pine. Regeneration is

evident and represents an early-seral stage classification. The natural processes in this patch appear to be well within the NRV.

The creek flows well and clear currently. There is some evidence of past livestock grazing on the stream bank and lack of riparian vegetation on some segments of the creek. It appears the banks are recovering and some stretches have increasing riparian vegetation, particularly along an area with less gradient and may well have had previous beaver activity.

Along the entire length of the route we followed up drainage, there was a trail that has been kept cleared. There is no official trail above the interpretive trail. An individual, or others, have been routinely sawing out downfall along this non-system trail.

Leaving the drainage bottom, we climbed the steep south-facing slope heading north. We entered a grassland area with some scattered large, old ponderosa pine and an occasional Douglas Fir. For the most part, the grasslands appear healthy and with no evidence of any recent livestock grazing. We did find some Dalmatian Toadflax and, rarely, Hounds Tongue. It is not known if this is a new infestation or something that has existed for some time at this density.

Elk use sign is abundant throughout the area and we soon spotted a group of 23+. As we travel north along the ridge, we observed at least 3 or 4 more groups ranging size from 6 to 8 or a dozen or more individuals. The mix of primarily late-seral stage forest, primarily Douglas Fir, on the north and east facing slopes and grasslands on the south slopes and ridgetops, make for a wonderful habitat for elk and a diversity of wildlife. From the top of the divide between Colorado Gulch and Tenmile headed downslope to the west, the diversity of the vegetation makes for an ideal winter range for elk. We also noted at least a couple of piles of bear scat.

As we continued to the north and down from the ridgeline, we entered a younger stand of Douglas Fir on a north-facing slope. This area had been cut for cordwood in the late 1800s to early 1900s so this stand represented second growth that was around 120 years old. The trees were well spaced and appeared healthy. As we descended, we started to observe more of a component of ponderosa pine mixed with the Douglas Fir.

We exited the IRA into BLM managed land and on to the Rimini Road at around 1630. New red boundary markers had been recently installed along the FS-BLM boundary.

Submitted by,

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