



Outdoors editor Niki Forbing-Orr
Phone: 377-6446
E-mail: outdoors@idahostatesman.com

IDAHO OUTDOORS

Report: Roadless areas vital to wildlife

Trout Unlimited says controversial rule benefits Idaho hunters, anglers

By Faith Bremner
Gannett News Service

WASHINGTON — Idaho's largest sport fish populations and its biggest game animals can be found in the state's roadless areas, according to a report released Wednesday by the angler group Trout Unlimited.

Sportsmen long have known that roadless lands managed by the U.S. Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management are great places to hunt and fish. The Trout Unlimited report for the first time proves it with data collected by state and federal wildlife agencies, said Scott Stouder, Trout Unlimited's western field coordinator.

It comes at a time when the Bush administration is considering easing rules adopted during the Clinton administration that protect national forest roadless areas from development.

"We've all felt this whole roadless debate has been pretty much defined by environmentalists and industry," said Stouder, who lives and works in Pollock.

"Anglers and hunters have never had a voice of their own."

Next to Alaska, Idaho has the most roadless areas. A total of 17 million acres, or 32 percent of the state, are without permanent roads. The Forest Service manages 9 million acres of roadless areas, in addition to 4 mil-

lion acres of pristine wilderness. The Bureau of Land Management has an additional 4 million acres that don't have roads.

The report layers fish population surveys and hunters' harvest reports over maps of Idaho's roadless areas.

"We found some surprising numbers," Stouder said. "Three-quarters of chinook salmon habitat lies within roadless areas. This habitat is the heartbeat of the Columbia River Chinook system."

Idaho's roadless areas also are home to 74 percent of the state's steelhead habitat, 68 percent of its bull trout habitat and 58 percent of its west-slope cutthroat trout habitat, the report says.

Roadless areas also are havens for the biggest and most mature deer and elk, the report shows. The highest concentrations of branch

bulls, or male elk that are two or more years old with branched antlers, can be found in the Selway-Bitterroot and Frank Church-River of No Return wilderness areas and in roadless areas in the Kootenai, Salmon-Challis and Targhee national forests.

Roads can increase erosion and send large amounts of sediment into streams and rivers, smothering fish eggs, making it harder for fish to breathe and choking out the insects fish eat, the report says.

Roads also increase the access for hunters, and more hunters mean fewer mature deer and elk, said Idaho hunter Carl Nellis, who supports the protection of roadless areas.

Roadless areas are more physically challenging to hunters, but they also offer more solitude. One of the

main reasons Nellis hunts in roadless areas is because so few people go there.

"It's just a lot more pleasant if you don't have to contend with someone running around in a vehicle," said Nellis, a retired Idaho Department of Fish and Game biologist.

"I've seen some of my favorite places get roads through them. They suddenly become somebody else's and not mine, and I look for another spot."

On Main 1

The Outdoor Industry Association wants people to support the roadless rule and is equipping its members with stories to educate people about it.

On the Web:

► Trout Unlimited:
www.tu.org



Photo courtesy U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Idaho Fish and Game. Bull elk like this one thrive in roadless areas, a report released Wednesday by Trout Unlimited says.