



# NORTHERN REGION

## Clearwater National Forest

Issue Paper

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**ISSUE NAME:** Clearwater National Forest's management of the Lolo Trail National Historic Landmark

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**BACKGROUND:** The Lolo Trail National Historic Landmark is an historic travel route between the Lolo Creek country just east of Weippe over the mountains to the Bitterroot Valley. Once out of the Lolo Creek drainage, the route follows the high divide that separates the Lochsa and Middle Fork Clearwater on the south and the North Fork Clearwater River on the north.

Today the Landmark exists in a variety of landscape settings with different levels of development both on and off National Forest lands. On the Clearwater NF, about 20% of the Landmark lies in a developed setting intermingled with private timberlands on the east end of the Forest near Powell. US Highway 12 is within the Landmark in this area as is Powell Ranger Station. The setting on the west 20% or so of the Landmark is also somewhat developed. The 60% in the middle is remote. There are few roads here, and no timber harvest.

The Landmark has a long and diverse history as a travel route that began thousands of years ago. Originally the route was used by Indian tribes as a foot trail. With the introduction of the horse the route took on new importance as a travel corridor. This route was used by the Lewis and Clark Corps of Discovery in 1805-06. Later activities along the route include construction of the Bird Truax Trail (1866), the Nez Perce War (1877), heavy Forest Service use (1900 – 1930s), extensive wildfires and suppression activities (1910-1930s), widespread sheep grazing with sheep driveways (1920s-1940s), construction of the Lolo Motorway (1930s), increased hunting due to tremendous elk populations (1940s – 1980s), timber harvest on the east and west ends (1940s – present).

In recognition of this history, the route was designated as the Lolo Trail National Historic Landmark in 1960. The Lewis and Clark expedition and Nez Perce war were considered such significant events in the nation's history that their routes were designated as National Historic Trails. Portions of these trails fall within the Landmark.

**How do we know where the trails are located?** As described above, the trail treads and tread remnants that exist today came from a variety of uses: historic travel, livestock grazing, trail construction, and more. Over the years, in addition to federal efforts, a number of different amateur historians have investigated trails and campsites within the Landmark. Each of these efforts produced an opinion about which treads are associated with the Lewis and Clark expedition, Nez Perce War, and other historical events. The early maps of the Clearwater NF show the Lolo Trail. These maps reflect the best information of their day about the Lolo Trail's location. People have continued to investigate trail treads with different techniques and widely varying skills and they inevitably reach different opinions about the exact locations of historic trails. Some investigators acknowledge the uncertainty associated with their work and the possibilities for error and others do not. Investigations of this sort will undoubtedly continue into



the future and the most precise location of historic trails may well be the one that comes from an investigation ten years from now - or twenty. From a purely academic standpoint, determining the exact location of where Lewis and Clark walked 200 years ago is undoubtedly a fascinating exercise.

We believe that the national recognition accorded to the Lolo Trail is based on its importance as a travel route, or a travel corridor across difficult mountains and we manage the Landmark with that corridor view.

When designating the National Historic Trails on the Clearwater NF, we have considered the locations of old treads as well as other factors important to providing a trail that can be maintained and that people will use. The sections of the Lewis and Clark and Nez Perce National Historic Trails that we actively maintain are clearly along the general routes associated with those events. We consider treads important as a heritage resource even though their origins may be uncertain but for overall management and service to the public, it is the general route or the Lolo Trail National Historic Landmark corridor that is most important.

### **Who manages the Lolo Trail National Historic Landmark.**

While the National Parks Service has oversight management responsibilities for the Lolo Trail National Historic Landmark, the Forest Service is responsible for the day to day management. As stewards of the trail, the Forest Service has to balance a variety of public perspectives and resource needs, providing opportunities for the American public to enjoy and experience this unique historic landscape. We are guided in our approach by a broad range of environmental rules, regulations, Forest policies, and by the very specific mandates of the Historic Sites Act (HSA), National Trails System Act (NTSA), and the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA). The Clearwater NF is committed to fulfilling its responsibilities to preserve, protect, and manage the Lolo Trail NHL for the American people. Consistent with the goals of the National Historic Landmarks Program, created by the HSA and the intent of the NTSA, the forest has worked hard to preserve the integrity of the Lolo Trail. The Forest in compliance with the NTSA goals is taking every effort to “provide a variety of outdoor recreation uses” and “to provide for maximum outdoor recreation potential and conservation and enjoyment of the nationally significant scenic, historic, natural or cultural qualities of the areas through which” the Lewis and Clark and Nez Perce National Historic Trails pass.

### **Management of the Lolo Trail NHL**

In the 1980s following the designations of the Lewis and Clark and 1877 Nez Perce routes as National Historic Trails, the Forest set about providing opportunities for the public to travel these routes. There were a variety of existing treads available within the Landmark corridor. Since we think the actual location of historic footsteps is difficult to determine, subject to varying opinions, and open to revision based on new information, the Forest adopted a strategy of using existing treads where they were maintainable and constructing reroutes where necessary to avoid steep, eroded sections. We seek to provide an opportunity for the public to experience travel along the historic routes with as much historic “look and feel” as practicable while still protecting other resources. We have designated these trails with the appropriate National Historic Trail signing and their locations fully meet the intent of the National Trails Act.

Where trails have been rerouted, we have used brush, logs, and other natural materials at the old tread junctions to encourage people to travel the maintained trail. Anyone interested in old treads can identify these departure points easily. It’s also important to note, that maintained trail

exists on only a small percentage of the overall routes across the forest, with the rest in scattered tread remnants awaiting discovery by those who seek it.

The Lewis and Clark Bicentennial challenged the Clearwater NF to look closely at new ways to protect the trail, cultural values, site integrity, and also provide a quality experience for the visitor. To meet this challenge the Forest assembled a Lewis and Clark Bicentennial planning committee, which included representatives from the NPS, the Nez Perce Tribe, and other interested parties. The committee has worked diligently since 1996 to develop a management and protection strategy. Recognizing the need for additional inventory of the Landmark, the Forest, in cooperation with the NPS, began a new intensive inventory of the landmark that involved both outside contractors and Forest Service personnel. While some of this inventory was directed towards resource protection projects designed to mitigate visitor impact, much of the work has been designed to provide a more comprehensive inventory of the landmark. In a joint effort with the NPS, the Clearwater NF has begun a monitoring program to evaluate the condition of both recreation sites and heritage sites within the landmark. The monitoring is designed to assess the affects of visitor usage within the landmark. The NPS has been an active partner in developing and implementing the Forest's Lewis and Clark Bicentennial resource protection measures

### **Heritage Research in the Lolo Trail NHL**

The Clearwater NF recognized the significance of the Lolo Trail and the need for protection by designating it a unique management area in the 1987 Clearwater National Forest Plan. It was assigned specific management standards to insure that the historic trail routes and the character and integrity of the landmark would be protected. However active management of the trail began even earlier. The Clearwater NF began formal heritage inventory of the Lolo Trail in the early 1970s. Some of the earliest heritage records on the forest relate to the documentation of the Lolo Trail. These early reports document the forest's concerns and commitment to managing and protecting the Lolo Trail. Since 1970 over 70 inventory projects have been undertaken within the Landmark boundary documenting a variety of heritage resources, sites and artifacts including tread remnants. In the 2000 to 2004 period alone we completed over 7,500 acres of inventory in a cooperative effort with the National Park Service (NPS).

### **What is the history of timber harvest in the area?**

Overall only about 11% of the area within the Clearwater NF portion of the Landmark has seen regeneration timber harvest. This began as early as the 1940s and peaked in the 1980s. As with every other facet of modern day life, the things that are of concern to us and the science, tools, and techniques available continue to evolve. An ecosystem management approach, which considers forest dynamics and ecosystem processes, has replaced the former approach to timber harvest that focused primarily on wood products. More recent vegetation management activities in and near the Landmark are a far cry from the approaches used in the past and are much more sensitive to producing landscapes that emulate those that would have resulted from natural processes. Since the beginning of the 1990s the area of harvest and the use of roads for harvest have been dramatically reduced.