

Trail Advocates

of the Clackamas River Ranger District of the Mount Hood National Forest

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Using power equipment in wilderness areas for trail clearing

Topic: Using power equipment in wilderness areas for trail clearing

Author: Tom Kelly

Topic 6/20/2008; 9:09:53 AM

Started:

Last Posted: 6/27/2008; 3:23:14 PM

Using power equipment in wilderness areas for trail clearing

Tom Kelly : 6/20/2008; 8:09:53 AM

Reads: 554, Responses: 19 ([view responses to this item](#))

I would like to get you to think about one of the comments on the "Trail Advocates" web site. In it you support (and urge others to support) the use of chain saws in wilderness areas to clear trails. I strongly disagree with the statement. Though it would be quicker from a trail building perspective I would argue that quicker is not always better and may defeat the ultimate purpose of why we all like to get out and hike. Think about the big picture! Wilderness means an absence of the evidence of human impact and is based on four main evaluation criteria: 1) naturalness; 2) solitude; 3) primitive and unconfined recreation; and 4) special or outstanding features. Wilderness, however, means more than just these things. With true wilderness comes an element of risk, challenge, and breathtakingly untamed beauty. There is wildlife, changing weather, and sometimes-difficult terrain including cliffs, stream and river crossings, and vegetation. Inherent in the term wilderness is the idea of the importance of preparation. Map and compass and other mountaineering skills are important to acquire. Having the obstacle of crawling over and under trees before they can be cleared by less obtrusive means is not much of a hardship and sometimes even adds to the challenge and enjoyment. I for one do not want the sound of chain saws in a wilderness-like environment, I hike partly to get away from the noise of civilization. I am also willing to spend a bit more sweat in both hiking and clearing trails. We need to be extremely choosy in every bridge we advocate and the methods we use to clear trails. Some of the more "efficient" ways of clearing trails are the antithesis of wilderness. Do we really want to be put in the position

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where we have to go to Alaska or Canada in order to get a true wilderness experience or do we want to preserve the character of what we have?

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Re: Using power equipment in wilderness areas for trail clearing

Joe Keller : 6/20/2008; 12:44:41 PM

Reads: 538, Responses: 8 ([view responses to this item](#))

I will defer to others more knowledgeable about this issue, but the site is called Trail Advocate, and wouldn't the statement "Wilderness means an absence of the evidence of human impact" preclude trails?

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Re: Using power equipment in wilderness areas for trail clearing

Donovan : 6/20/2008; 6:00:39 PM

Reads: 540, Responses: 7 ([view responses to this item](#))

Exactly.

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Re: Using power equipment in wilderness areas for trail clearing

Robert Koscik : 6/22/2008; 6:51:23 AM

Reads: 543, Responses: 3 ([view responses to this item](#))

There is a civil compromise available, there has to be, we are a democracy.

The Forest Service doesn't care about trails any more. If it wasn't for volunteers, we'd lose our living history forever.

I love old technology, both my cars are pre 1970, just got a couple crosscuts. But if you look at a map of our large wilderness areas you'll see how many miles of trails are out there. Volunteers just don't have the manpower to do the job. And these trails are being used by a lot of people. Backpacking and climbing over gigantic down old growth trees gets really old after the 10th one. I know from experience that the Middle Santiam is littered with down trees, huge ones....

IF people put their \$\$\$ in th' mouth, we'd have an army of volunteers and none of this would matter. But the truth is, a handful of guys working on the weekend just can't do it.

Wilderness is there to be enjoyed. A few historic trails surrounded by ridges of solitude, don't we all need that once in a while?

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Re: Using power equipment in wilderness areas for trail clearing

Kevin Wright : 6/22/2008; 6:42:21 PM

Reads: 522, Responses: 2 ([view responses to this item](#))

A civil compromise must be in order - that's exactly what's needed here. I haven't spent a lot of time on the Clackamas district, I live closer to and spend a lot of trail time on the Detroit and Sweet Home districts. And the trails there are in pretty good shape, I must admit, but their older, lesser traveled (less crowded) trails always seem to suffer the same neglects that I read about here regarding the Clackamas trails. Bingo on the Middle Santiam trails - brutal shape - anyone tried reaching the summit of Chimney Peak via the McQuade Creek Trail? Or the Crag Trail off the South Breitenbush trailhead? Both excellent trails but in need of lots more work than any volunteer teams and short summer seasons will allow. It's a real shame to see some of these in the shape they're in now (or were last time I used them.) And those that are lost to time and neglect like the old trail over Minto Mountain into the Pamela Lake basin. (Mt. Jefferson Wilderness) The small impact of limited useage of chainsaws, etc. for trail clearing lets us do what we can't on a weekend or a day trip.

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Re: Using power equipment in wilderness areas for trail clearing

Donald Presley : 6/22/2008; 9:36:33 PM

Reads: 536, Responses: 1 ([view responses to this item](#))

Having come back from a trip in central Oregon visiting a couple of Wilderness Areas in preparation for some volunteer trail maintenance next month, it appears to me that there is a bias against using power equipment in wilderness areas when it comes to trail maintenance. I have witnessed first hand, how it is OK to use power equipment in fire suppression and the clearing of ditches for private water rights in wilderness areas, but using such equipment for clearing trails is forbidden. There is not enough volunteer manpower in which to clear the needed trails if we are only allowed to use crosscut saws and axes in these wilderness areas. Our congressmen need to hear from the those who do the maintenance of our forest trails, and not only from those who enjoy our labors, in deciding what changes in future forest practices are needed.

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Re: Using power equipment in wilderness areas for trail clearing

Robert Koscik : 6/23/2008; 5:29:26 AM

Reads: 552, Responses: 0 ([view responses to this item](#))

I wasn't aware of that. How is it legal to use power equipment in wilderness as things stand today? Especially for resource exploitation...

Hell all we want to do is clear a few historic routes. I guess I don't get it.

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Re: Using power equipment in wilderness areas for trail clearing**Simon Harding** : 6/23/2008; 8:55:19 AMReads: 482, Responses: 3 ([view responses to this item](#))

Interesting. I wonder how it is folks will go enjoy their solitude in wilderness when the advocates of roadless areas have closed the road access to trailheads and the trails have all faded away into oblivion. I also wonder how S & R folks will make it in to rescue the many more people who will become lost in wilderness when the trails have faded into oblivion or who have been injured trying to cross a dangerous trail obstruction.

A trail like the Whitewater Trail into Jefferson park could easily be chainsaw cleared of blowdown in a day. No one is talking about advocating chainsaw use or lawn tractor use or mechanized brushcutter use on a regular basis. And it is not as if those using the saws would be running them nonstop, 24 hours a day. Rather, if the trails are cleared annually, the use of saws would be sporadic, with long breaks between uses as the sawyer moves along to the next blowdown.

What is being advocated is the ability to once a year clear winter blowdown.

Having spent a few hours clearing a tangle of blowdown on a trail recently, I have a fresh memory of a ton of brush, small (6 inch) softwood spring poles and large broken and intact Hemlocks, as well as an old chunk of a rotten snag all across 70 feet of trail I can say with confidence that I would not enjoy the "wilderness experience" of traversing that chunk of trail (trail?) with a pack on and a desire to get down the trail to my hoped for destination. I also would have been exposed to more danger using a crosscut to clear that mess. And it would have been a multi-day task. Thus, it would still be there because I (and those with me), as volunteers, had only that one day to deal with it. Of course, it would have been legal to dynamite it, under current rules! How's that for incongruous.

Anyone who hunts or otherwise spends time off trail can tell you (and I am sure you know from experience) that it is far, far harder to travel overland in the Maritime northwest, than it is over a trail. About the only thing harder, is walking on a decommissioned road to get to the trail head one used to be able to drive to, but I digress. Kids and older folks, or people who are perhaps not as fit as some of the rest of us, have even more of a challenge crossing large trail obstacles.

If you have been to the Wallowas, or to any other wilderness area popular with horse packers, you likely have walked a trail that was (illegally) cleared with a chain saw. Some packers and guides surreptitiously clear the trails as the melt occurs, with chain saws because their livelihood depends on that access. Given the cutbacks at the USFS, it is my opinion that this is becoming more common as the risk of getting caught doing so is small.

Sure, trails can be cleared with less obtrusive means than a chainsaw. But

far, far less trail will be cleared that way. And it is polyyanna-ish to say (as some folks I have talked with at environmental groups have) that the USFS and BLM just need more budget money. That is unrealistic. Nothing short of a CCC type public works effort would allow the USFS to effectively clear the wilderness trails using old school methods.

Having said that, many of the folks who have posted in this thread have spent, and are gearing up to spend more time behind a crosscut because they(we) recognize the rules are unlikely to change any time soon. It would be nice to see more people who advocate for keeping the rules as they are do likewise.

I feel that wilderness can best be enjoyed, to the benefit of everyone who wishes to so enjoy it, if it can be safely accessed. Blowdown can and does make it difficult to do so. As in all things, moderation should be the order of the day. USFS personnel and legitimate volunteers should be allowed a day a year in wilderness areas to clear trail with chain saws. It would be a very small price to pay for better, and safer access and for the preservation of our cultural and historic heritage.

I share your value of the quiet enjoyment of wilderness. But I'd like to be able to access it in order to do so.

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Re: Using power equipment in wilderness areas for trail clearing

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Rob Williams : 6/23/2008; 11:30:50 AM

Reads: 505, Responses: 0 ([view responses to this item](#))

To lessen the impact even more, I would go so far as to say that even every OTHER year would be much better than what we have now. Without chainsaws, the wilderness trails are destined for oblivion.....At least in the valley, where things grow so much quicker. I posted a while ago about the response I got from Ron Wyden about a potential exception that can be made to allow chainsaws on a limited basis. Unfortunately, it requires an exception EACH TIME they are used. It would be nice if there was one period per year where they were allowable or a schedule that says "this wilderness area on this date/dates(s) may have mechanized equipment in it", and if that bothers you, you can simply re-schedule your visit. I think that would be a very reasonable compromise....

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Re: Using power equipment in wilderness areas for trail clearing

Bill Cattrall : 6/23/2008; 7:26:23 PM

Reads: 490, Responses: 2 ([view responses to this item](#))

I have a friend that says the only time he can stand the sound of a chainsaw is when he is using it, I would have to agree. That got me to thinking about why they are so loud. My v8 pickup is nothing next to the sound of my chainsaw? Can't they make a quiet saw? Not for everyone perhaps but just a few so that they could be used in places like a wilderness where the noise is a problem. They require special snowmobiles in Yellowstone why not chainsaws too?

Bill

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Re: Using power equipment in wilderness areas for trail clearing

Simon Harding : 6/24/2008; 6:07:25 AM

Reads: 518, Responses: 1 ([view responses to this item](#))

I think the special snowmobile rules for Y Stone fell by the wayside with the Bush Reich, er, I mean administration. And I think those rules had more to do with emissions than noise.

A two stroke engine is always going to be loud. And your pickup has a large muffler. A large sound deadener is impracticable on a chainsaw one would be humping over trails. They are heavy and unwieldy enough as is.

I don't mind the noise if I know it is not unnecessary or wasteful, as in the case with most motorcycle and quad use, as well as most snow machine use. Chain saws are not typically used recreationally, although I do know some people who seem to enjoy using one a bit more than might be normal.

Frankly, the noise gets to me whether I am using the saw or doing the swamping. Earplugs!

they are dangerous, heavy, noisy and unpleasant and no fun to carry over a trail. But they are necessary and do a lot of good.

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Re: Using power equipment in wilderness areas for trail clearing

Robert Koscik : 6/24/2008; 6:41:58 AM

Reads: 523, Responses: 0 ([view responses to this item](#))

I agree with ya Simon. I dislike chainsaws too for the very reasons you mentioned. But I'm getting one soon because they are damn functional tools.

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Re: Using power equipment in wilderness areas for trail clearing

Dan Butler : 6/24/2008; 7:32:18 AM

Reads: 488, Responses: 5 ([view responses to this item](#))

The Forest Service's inability or lack of interest in maintaining secondary trails is yet another reason I refuse to purchase a NW Forest Pass. The relatively short time it would require to clear a particular trail with a chain saw would be minimally intrusive to the wilderness experience. I'll bet there are many trails that could be cleared with a saw and no one would even know- or care. Sometimes it's easier to ask for forgiveness than for permission...

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Re: Using power equipment in wilderness areas for trail clearing

Robert Koscik : 6/24/2008; 7:48:32 AM

Reads: 489, Responses: 4 ([view responses to this item](#))

With 15 hours of volunteer service ya get a free pass. A perk at least.

Never mind that I rarely visit trails that require a pass...

I agree with ya tho.

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Re: Using power equipment in wilderness areas for trail clearing

Simon Harding : 6/24/2008; 1:16:08 PM

Reads: 519, Responses: 3 ([view responses to this item](#))

Lawyerly disclaimer: I would never ever advocate or defend anyone using a chainsaw or other mechanized prohibited device in a wilderness. Nothing I typed should be interpreted as encouraging that or defending knowing illegal activity.

I'd rather not risk the fine and potential prison time, myself.

It is funny how something quiet, like a game cart, is illegal while potentially obtrusive devices like wristwatches (that dang beeping alarm in the tent across the meadow!), flashlights (light pollution!) and GPSs (completely inconsistent with the wilderness ethic and experience) and roaring propane and pressurized liquid fuel stoves, are apparently ok. And what about those dang helicopters and airplanes flying over my wilderness experience like the planes and helicopter that buzzed Jeff Park when I was in there last year?

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Re: Using power equipment in wilderness areas for trail clearing

Tom Kelly : 6/24/2008; 9:02:59 PM

Reads: 453, Responses: 1 ([view responses to this item](#))

I have found far more overuse problems in wilderness areas than the reverse (erosion, closed campsites, #s limitations). I don't believe following the example of the ditch-like horse packing trails in the Wallowas is a good model because that is what it leads to. Ease of access is a two edged sword. However, I have to admit that after clearing brush and downed timber off of trails I have had thoughts about the advantages of power tools. I just don't think it is the way to go in a wilderness setting. I would rather have more of the element of "wild" in wilderness than mimic the large tracks that exist in national, state, and city parks where access is easy and the way is paved.

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Re: Using power equipment in wilderness areas for trail clearing

Simon Harding : 6/25/2008; 5:32:23 AM

Reads: 510, Responses: 0 ([view responses to this item](#))

Try the less used wilderness areas like Bull of the Woods and Table Rock. Poorly marked and confusing and vague trail intersections, faint trails, much blowdown. I agree the Wallowas and Jeff Park are not such a great example. Most of those trails are like freeways, and I wouldn't camp in any of the lakes basins again. Too many REI Gore tex clad lemmings crapping in the rocks around the lakes and too many beat down campsites. And the trails are either freeways or similar to dusty dry creekbeds due to heavy horse use.

Power tools are not so effective, and the returns are limited when clearing brush. But for blowdown, a chain saw is gold versus a crosscut.

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Re: Using power equipment in wilderness areas for trail clearing

Ian Harding : 6/25/2008; 6:05:54 PM

Reads: 504, Responses: 2 ([view responses to this item](#))

Riiiiight.... Cuz you'd NEVER use a chainsaw in an un-approved or unsafe manner....

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hUbTmYkJyog>

E

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Re: Using power equipment in wilderness areas for trail clearing

Simon Harding : 6/26/2008; 5:27:52 AM

Reads: 508, Responses: 0 ([view responses to this item](#))

Professional driver. Closed course. There were supposed to be no witnesses. And that's an OSHA approved scaffold I'll have you know.

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Re: Using power equipment in wilderness areas for trail clearing

Tom Kelly : 6/27/2008; 2:23:14 PM

Reads: 521, Responses: 0 ([view responses to this item](#))

Thats classic!!!



























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