

# **A Review of Past Recreation Issues and Use in the Hells Canyon Complex and the Hells Canyon National Recreation Area**

## **Technical Report E.5-1**

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### **1. INTRODUCTION**

This report contains a comprehensive description of recreational sites and facilities within the HCRA and the results of an extensive literature review concerning the history of the HCC and the HCNRA, as well as recreational use associated with the HCRA. Emphasis is placed on information related to issues associated with the HCC.

The goal of this study was to collect, organize, and report available information from the past through the present to describe recreational use and issues associated with the Hells Canyon area. The objectives were to summarize 1) the availability of recreation facilities, 2) recreation management, 3) past recreational use, and 4) past recreation issues in the Hells Canyon area. It contains information relating to recreation before and after the HCC dams were constructed; however, information on pre-dam conditions is limited.

### **2. CONCLUSION**

Pg. 3 – “This reach extends from approximately 8 mi. downstream of the U.S. 30N bridge and west of the town of Weiser, Idaho, at the project boundary, designated by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC), downstream to the northern boundary of the Hells Canyon National Recreation Area (HCNRA)....”

*This sentence defines the study area. BLM has consistently stated that the study area should extend beyond the HCNRA boundary to Captain John Creek. There are BLM lands within this reach that are affected by project operations. Impacts to these lands need to be addressed as well.*

Pg. 8 – “Several special management areas also exist in the Hells Canyon area and are directly administered by the USFS.”

*The study did not list any BLM special management areas such as ACECs and WSAs. Both the Lower Salmon and Grande Ronde Rivers are designated ACECs at their mouths with the Snake River. There are BLM lands, which are designated wilderness within the Hells Canyon Wilderness. Designated WSAs include McGraw, Homestead, and Sheep Mountain along the reservoirs in Oregon.*

Pg. 14 – “From 1995 through the summer of 2000, IPC participated in the program and drafted specified amounts of reservoir water between July 4 and early fall. The amount and timing of these drafts were planned to balance environmental, recreation, and power generation needs.”

*Why did the post-July 4 drawdowns begin in 1992 when NMFS did not begin their request until 1995? Why were the drawdowns much more than the 18-feet that NMFS requested? In 1997 the spring drawdown was 101-feet as required by CORPS for flood control but why was there an additional 70-foot drawdown after July 4<sup>th</sup>?*

Pg. 21 – “The lower portion of railroad track was removed in 1936. In 1959, Brownlee Reservoir inundated Robinette. Later, a road replaced portions of the railroad track.”

*I assume the road being referred to is the Snake River Road. This statement provides evidence that since Brownlee Reservoir inundated the road, IPC has some maintenance responsibility for the new road which was reconstructed by IPC (personal communication Larry Taylor, Baker County).*

Pg. 29 – “Idaho is predicted to grow at a rate twice that of the rest of the country. The state’s expected rate of population growth through 2025 could be the sixth largest in the nation. Oregon and Washington show similar growth trends.”

Pg. 30 – “During the 1980s, recreation visitation in the HCNRA dramatically increased, rising from 1979 through 1991 by more than 147%.”

*BLM agrees. With this kind of growth, IPC’s commitment to public recreation and “no growth” approach may be destructive to the resource. The proposed Adaptive Management Plan is essential to implement and monitor the changes over time.*

Pg. 34 – “The major portion of this site is located on the rock spoil that resulted from HC Dam construction. It is located in the HCNRA, outside the project boundary....”

*How can it be outside the project boundary when it is setting on the spoil pile? This is inconsistent with FPA project boundary definitions.*

Pg. 40 – “The 1995 Vessel Waste Disposal Plan prepared by Oregon State Marine Board identified the need for .... floating restrooms at Powder River and South Reservoir.”

*BLM agrees. These floating restrooms may still be need, especially on the Powder River arm of Brownlee Reservoir. No study addressed this issue..*

Pg. 45 – “While anglers expended 15,955 angler days in the study area, other recreational use was estimated to be 25,927 recreational-user days. Activities

included swimming, boating, water-skiing, camping, hunting, picnicking, and sightseeing.”

*This is from a 1971, IDFG study. I find it interesting that IDFG recognized almost twice the amount of non-angler use than angler. The IPC studies indicate that almost 100% of the use is angling with negligible other activities. How could these two studies be polar opposites?*

Pg. 46 – “Peak use by hunters was between October 6 and October 19, a period that included opening weekend for pheasant season in Oregon and opening weekends for chukar, deer, and waterfowl seasons in both Idaho and Oregon.”

*BLM disagrees with this statement. This is not an accurate portrayal of hunting activity. Chukar hunting produces the highest visitation rates. Chukar season extends through January. There appears to be an inconsistency between this statement and IDFG and ODFW records.*

### **3. STUDY ADEQUACY**

“Recreational use of the HCRA has been documented by state and federal agencies and IPC over the last 50 years. The majority of the information reported has been limited to qualitative review. Information collected in this literature review will help IPC and appropriate agencies avoid duplication of study efforts; provide background information to entities involved in the relicensing process for the development of protection, mitigation, and enhancement measures; and provide background information for all other recreation studies in the HCRA.”

This quote is the entire conclusion to this study. It has limited value. Even though the above comments indicate that the study has inadequate parts, it probably met its intended purpose. It did provide superficial background information. It does not address affects of project operations and therefore does not drive development of PM&Es.

### **4. BLM CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Review IDFG and ODFW records of hunting activity in study area and assure this study reflects those figures.
- Extend HCRA study boundary downstream to include Captain John Creek and associated public lands.
- Display drawdowns and timing as required by NMFS and Corps versus what actually happened.
- Identify affects of project operations on non-IPC roads (Steck, Snake, Homestead) and determine IPC responsibility for on-going maintenance.
- Profile recreation use of the Snake River from Copper Creek to Cobb Rapids just prior to dam construction.

