Starkey Experimental Forest and Range

A first-class U.S. Forest Service and Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife research facility, the Starkey Experimental Forest and Range is a 28,000-acre enclosure of forests and mountain meadows in Oregon's Blue Mountains. Located off Oregon 244, southwest of La Grande, twenty-seven miles of eight-foot high, woven-wire fence encloses most of the present-day forest.

The initial research on the Starkey began in the early 1900s, when the Forest Service carried out plot studies to assess the impact of cattle grazing. By the 1940s and 1950s, the Forest Service's Pacific Northwest Research Station expanded its investigations at the Starkey Forest to address issues of carrying capacity, the production of forage, and the effects of the grazing of all ungulates on forest health.

Jack Ward Thomas, the lead wildlife biologist at Starkey (and later chief of the U.S. Forest Service), conceived the idea of building an enclosure to control deer, elk, and cattle populations within the study area. With funding approved in 1987, field workers began putting up the first fencing. Over time, the staff built interior fences to establish separate areas for wintering deer and elk. Three scientists and a small field crew comprise the permanent staff.

The research findings at Starkey have provided some significant results: mature bull elk produce stronger calves; elk do not require thermal cover to survive the winter; deer, elk, and cattle keep to themselves; and all-terrain-vehicles are more disruptive to wildlife than nonmotorized human activity. These findings all have implications for the management of public lands.

Written by William G. Robbins

Further Reading:

The Starkey Project. http://www.fs.fed.us/pnw/starkey/.

U.S. Forest Service. "Starkey Experimental Forest and Range." *Pacific Northwest Research Station.* http://www.fs.fed.us/pnw/exforests/starkey/index.shtml.

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