

Fremont National Forest, 1911

By Forest Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture

This 1911 U.S. Forest Service map shows the Fremont National Forest, located in southern Lake County and eastern Klamath County.

In 1898 B.F. Allen, a forest superintendent in northern California, suggested that a forest reserve be established in the Warner Mountains near Lakeview in order to regulate timber cutting and to protect the water supply for local irrigators. Oregon officials worked cooperatively with California officials to recommend that a large tract of land surrounding Goose Lake—which crosses from southern Oregon into northern California—be withdrawn from the public domain.

In 1900 Forest Superintendent G.I. Taggart traveled throughout northern California and southern Oregon to ascertain the status of the region's timber and to gather local opinions about the proposed forest reserve. A 1903 newspaper article reported that Taggart found that "a great majority of the citizens whom he interviewed were in favor of the creation of a forest reserve. 'In Southern Oregon,' he said, 'the water question is a serious and important one to all settlers. The only objectors to a reserve were sheepmen, sawmill men and shake makers.'...The millmen, he found, did not want a reserve because it would prevent them trespassing upon Government land and cutting timber illegally, which, he added, many of them were then doing."

The U.S. Geological Survey refused the request, however, giving no reason for their rejection. Local stockmen responded by circulating a petition demanding the immediate establishment of a reserve so that grazing could be regulated. Historian Lawrence Rakestraw notes that "not a rancher in the district affected refused to sign." Local stockmen were hoping to prevent the intrusion of migratory sheep herds, which competed with local stock for forage.

In 1903, the Bureau of Forestry again recommended the creation of a forest reserve in the Warner Mountains country. The bureau stated that "these lands are practically all non-agricultural, forested lands, and their protection is of great importance not only to preserve the forest as a source of timber supply, but also to insure an equable and continuous supply of water to those arid and semi-arid districts." The Secretary of the Interior responded by temporarily withdrawing the lands in question from the public domain. The Fremont National Forest was permanently withdrawn from settlement in 1906.

In 2002 the Fremont National Forest was administratively combined with the adjacent Winema National Forest, creating a 2.3 million-acre tract designated the Fremont-Winema National Forests.

Further Reading: Rakestraw, Lawrence. "A History of Forest Conservation in the Pacific Northwest, 1891-1913." Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Washington, 1955.

Written by Cain Allen, © Oregon Historical Society, 2005.

Oregon History Project

<https://www.oregonhistoryproject.org/articles/historical-records/fremont-national-forest-1911/>