

## Meet the Middle Fork; an interview with Lisa Byers: by Jordan Rasure:

Lisa Byers is a woman to look up to, especially in this moment as she stands above me on the flatbed of the USFS truck, passing me one handle of a com box<sup>1</sup>. Although she is a supervisor in her role as the Wilderness and Rivers Program Manager for the Salmon-Challis National Forest, she does not hesitate to jump in and help this week's river patrol rig for their float down the Middle Fork. In fact, she is driving the shuttle for the trip – from headquarters in Salmon, to the boatshed in Challis, out to the Boundary Creek launch site, and back. It is during her time at Boundary that I got the chance to catch up with her and ask her about her role in the Frank Church River of No Return Wilderness.



Lisa Byers

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### At a Glance:

*Name:* Lisa Byers

*Title:* Wilderness & Rivers Program Manager

*Forest & District:* Salmon-Challis National Forest, North Fork Ranger District

*Years of Service:* Seven (7) with the Forest Service, two (2) with the Bureau of Land Management, one (1) with the National Park Service

*Favorite Book:* *Shadows on the Koyukuk* by Sidney Huntington

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### [Jordan Rasure]: How did you come to work at the Middle Fork, as a Supervisor?

[Lisa Byers]: I started as an intern with the SCA [Student Conservation Association] on the Klamath River. I loved that experience and learned so much working throughout the summer on the river. I loved interacting with the public, and just pursued seasonal work on rivers after that. I didn't know that I wanted to do exactly this and moving up the chain came about organically. I did that internship, then was river patrol, then lead river patrol, and now I'm here.

### [JR]: What does "here" mean? What does a so-called normal day look like?

[LB]: I'm still getting used to my new position, so I'm doing a lot of training and getting to know people that I work with. That's been an important part of my transition – communicating with the staff that have been here and learning about everyone's roles. I spend a lot of time on the computer making sure that tasks are getting done and figuring out the best use of people and resources. I will also be talking to the different user groups – float boaters, jet boaters, hikers, stock handlers, etc. – I'm working on truly listening to all groups and working out how to keep a large variety of users happy.



River Patrol 2020

### [JR]: Obviously you work with river patrol. Who else works for you?

[LB]: I don't know if I'd say, "works for me", but I also work with the trail crews, wilderness rangers, and river checkers. I honorably get to work with all components that make up the Wilderness and Rivers Program.

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<sup>1</sup> Short for commissary box; a large, usually metal dry box that holds food and can have a foam sleeping pad attached to the top to make a seat for the oarsman of a raft.

**[JR]: Did you ever question the career path you were taking?**

[LB]: No. I looked for seasonal jobs as a visitor information assistant because I wanted to do interpretation but wasn't successful landing one of those positions. It turned out to be a good thing because then I followed a career path working on rivers, which also included interpretation. Each job has been unique and awesome. I haven't worked with wilderness management quite as much, but I am very excited about this new position and getting to be more involved with the uplands and wilderness aspects.

**[JR]: What are your favorite aspects of working for the Forest Service?**

[LB]: Talking to the public. Once I learned to speak up and put my voice out there, I loved it. I still love talking to people about these places and rivers. I see people that I talked to years ago about paying parking fees, and they come up to me and tell me that their perspective on pay-to-park on public lands was changed by what I said so long ago. That impact, those interactions – that's why I do this job.



**[JR]: Do you have a favorite moment, in your career so far? Or one that stands out?**

[LB]: I met Elijah Wood while issuing his group a permit to float down the Rogue River. He was in the Lord of the Rings, the main hobbit. I was star struck! That was a standout moment.

**[JR]: What kind of qualities have made you successful as a River Ranger and now as a Program Manager? Any advice for someone wanting to become a River Ranger?**

[LB]: Being flexible and learning to truly listen to the public. I took advantage of being able to move around and gain a lot of different experiences on different rivers, and I think that made a big difference in my applications and interviews. Going to [River Management Society] conferences has also helped. You get to meet people working on different rivers with the same problems, and sometimes they have solutions to something that you're working on with your river.

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Having pushed the second patrol boat down the ramp, we migrated into the office at the Boundary Creek boat launch. As I wrap up our more formal line of questions, Lisa is glowing. She smiles when talking about her first internship on the Klamath and her love for providing interpretive information to the public. She has worked on six different sections of rivers, the Klamath (CA), Rogue (OR), Payette (ID), Situk (AK)<sup>2</sup>, the Main Salmon (ID), and now, the Middle Fork (ID). Her passion for rivers and wilderness is obvious, as is her desire to connect people to public lands. I ask, half-jokingly, "What would make your job easier?"

"Having a shuttle driver!" Lisa laughs as she answers, dangly kayak earrings bobbing with her nods. I laugh too but make a note that being able to drive a twenty-foot trailer behind a three-quarter ton diesel truck might give my application a needed edge if I ever want to be a River Ranger.

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<sup>2</sup> When asked why Alaska, Lisa says that she had always wanted to live up there and it was a permanent position. She tries to go back at least once per year to visit friends and enjoy the Last Frontier.