

Record of Decision

Final Environmental Impact Statement for the

Frank Church – River of No Return Wilderness

Revised Wilderness Management Plan

and

Amendments for Land and Resource Management Plans

Bitterroot, Boise, Nez Perce, Payette, and Salmon-Challis NFs

Located In: Custer, Idaho, Lemhi, and Valley Counties, Idaho

Responsible Agency: USDA - Forest Service

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Acronyms

BA – Biological Assessment
DEIS – Draft Environmental Impact Statement
FEIS – Final Environmental Impact Statement
FC-RONR Wilderness – Frank Church – River of No Return Wilderness
NEPA – National Environmental Policy Act
NF – National Forest
NFMA – National Forest Management Act
NOA – Notice of Availability
NOAA – National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NOI – Notice of Intent (to Prepare an Environmental Impact Statement)
PAOT – People at one time
ROD – Record of Decision
SDEIS – Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement
USC – United States Code
USFWS – U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
W&SR – Wild and Scenic River

Preface

The document you are about to read is called a Record of Decision or a “ROD.” It describes our decision to approve the [Revised Wilderness Management Plan](#) (Revised Plan) for the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness (FC-RONR Wilderness) and why we made this choice. Our decision will also amend the Land and Resource Management Plans for the National Forests that administer the FC-RONR Wilderness. We felt a good way to describe our decision in this ROD would be an informal message to the people we work for – each and every American across this land. These are your National Forests and we thank you for your interest in them.

Specifically, this ROD has two purposes: first, it is a legal document detailing a formal decision from a government agency. Second, and equally important, it explains the “why” of that decision. It is our desire to speak clearly through this document. In those places where legal requirements make for difficult reading, we apologize.

Our decision strikes a balance between competing demands expressed by many people. It addresses Americans’ needs and desires for use and protection of this Wilderness and the mandate we have for managing Wilderness resource values. Although this decision is ours, it has not been made alone. More than 3500 people have provided comments during the decade it took to develop this Revised Plan. These comments helped guide staff and interdisciplinary team members as they developed the Revised Plan. This ROD and the supporting documents will shape the management of the Wilderness for the next 10 to 15 years.

This revision process has been arduous, lengthy, and at times contentious. We want to sincerely thank all the people who participated in the process, especially those who became involved in the numerous collaborative efforts seeking solutions. When we began the revision effort, public comment on our suggested management changes made it clear that there was little “broken” in the existing management plan for the Wilderness. Therefore, our revision effort is narrowly focused and addresses four main topics:

- Management of Dewey Moore, Mile-Hi, Simonds, and Vines landing strips
- Management of float boat use on the Middle Fork and main Salmon Rivers during the control season
- Management of motorboat use on the Salmon River during the control season
- Management of the Painter Bar Road

We want to make it clear that the Forest Service understands its special role in managing Wilderness. Through their representatives in Congress, Americans have told the Forest Service that the 2.4 million acres FC-RONR Wilderness should be managed under the direction of the Wilderness Act, the specific provisions of the Central Idaho Wilderness Act, and the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. These Acts together prohibit some uses in general, while specifically allowing others in the FC-RONR Wilderness. The Central Idaho Wilderness Act was carefully crafted to recognize the unique and special values of the FC-RONR Wilderness. This Act recognized and provides specific direction to wilderness managers regarding pre-existing uses and expectations regarding future management decisions – notably motorboat use on the Salmon River and aircraft.

All human uses of Wilderness and our management actions have effects on the physical and biological environment of the FC-RONR Wilderness, as well as on social characteristics and experiences, such as the number of encounters with other parties and opportunities for solitude. Recognizing that the resources and use of the FC-RONR Wilderness are dynamic and that new information is constantly being developed, the Revised FC-RONR Wilderness Management Plan embraces an adaptive management approach. This means that as conditions change, so will the management plan and our management responses. There will be future updates to the Wilderness Management Plan based upon monitoring and evaluation that will, if you wish, involve you. Through both scientific research and talking to the people who use the enduring resource of Wilderness, we intend to keep the Revised Plan current in respect to protection of the Wilderness resource, the needs of present and future generations, as well as nature's processes.

Thank you again for your interest in management of the FC-RONR Wilderness.

David T. Bull - Forest Supervisor, Bitterroot NF

Bruce E. Bernhardt - Forest Supervisor, Nez Perce NF

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Setting

The Frank Church – River of No Return Wilderness (FC-RONR Wilderness) is located in central Idaho within portions of Custer, Idaho, Lemhi and Valley Counties.

Elevations vary greatly across the Wilderness, from nearly 11,000 feet at Mt. McGuire to less than 2000 feet near the Wind River pack-bridge. The wide range of landforms, elevation, and climate across the Wilderness has produced a wide variety of ecological conditions. The Wilderness provides habitat for close to 260 terrestrial species of mammals, birds, reptiles, and amphibians, as well as 23 species of native fish.

The primary socio-economic zone of influence for the FC-RONR Wilderness includes Custer, Idaho, Lemhi and Valley Counties and the communities within this area. Because people use the surrounding forest and non-forest settings for social and cultural purposes as well as a variety of goods and services, national forest management has many influences. Wilderness resource values include ecological, geological, scientific, educational, scenic and historic values. People also value Wilderness for recreation, spiritual and economic reasons and simply as wild lands and waters. People view scenery and recreate, which affects tourism. People value aquatic ecosystems because they provide for a variety of beneficial uses, including recreation, clean drinking water, fishing and wildlife opportunities, and social and economic importance.

Our Decision

We have selected Alternative D, with modifications, to revise the FC-RONR Wilderness Management Plan (Revised Plan), including the Salmon Wild and Scenic River Management Plan and the Management Plan for the Middle Fork of the Salmon Wild and Scenic River. By selecting Alternative D with modifications, we are approving management direction that maintains the integrity of Wilderness and Wild and Scenic River (W&SR) resources; establishes future management direction; and balances commercial and noncommercial use for current and future generations. This decision will also amend the Land and Resource Management Plans for the National Forests that administer the FC-RONR Wilderness.

This Revised Plan incorporates an adaptive management and monitoring strategy. This adaptive management strategy offers an avenue to describe and evaluate the consequences of changing conditions and knowledge. Monitoring and additional analysis will be used to shape future management actions within the framework of the Revised Plan and reshape any direction that is not effective in furthering the goals of the Revised Plan.

Therefore, we have modified Alternative D to implement an improved monitoring program that will, as a minimum, be designed to focus on visitor use and experiences, campsite conditions and other

resource conditions within the Wilderness to provide a basis for evaluating future changes to recreation management within the wilderness. Monitoring programs will be designed to gather information both within the control season and at other times of the year.

Key elements of our decision are:

Management of Dewey Moore, Mile-Hi, Simonds, and Vines Landing Strips – Dewey Moore, Mile-Hi, Simonds, and Vines landing strips will be maintained for emergency use only; public use of these airstrips will be discouraged. This decision changes current management direction, which did not provide for any maintenance of these airstrips.

The Idaho Division of Aeronautics and the Federal Aviation Administration will be notified of the emergency use only status of these landing strips. The Forest Service will work with these agencies regarding appropriate notifications and actions consistent with the emergency use status. Details of landing strip maintenance levels and activities, and the priorities for providing that maintenance will be addressed through the collaborative efforts of the Idaho Division of Aeronautics and the Forest Service, with public input as needed.

Middle Fork Salmon River Strategy – Year round, the river is managed with emphasis on float boating recreational activities with opportunities for a primitive recreation experience.

During the controlled season, a variable trip length option allows commercial permittees and noncommercial floaters to choose their party size with a corresponding length of stay that varies between six and eight days, with larger groups allowed shorter stays.

In response to public comments, Alternative D is modified to allow exceptions to the variable trip length guidelines for hunters who are successful in drawing a "once in a lifetime" Idaho bighorn sheep tag within the Middle Fork Salmon River corridor, or when longer trips are needed to perform work authorized by Volunteer Agreements, or for commercial outfitters whose operation is primarily wilderness education based and only at those times when there are no concerns with exceeding campsite capacity.

Alternative D is also modified regarding the management of unused launches to provide opportunities for recreational use of the river within the limits describe above. Any launch uncommitted 21 days prior to the launch date will be offered on a first-come, first-served basis to other users. Any such redistribution of unused launches is for that launch opportunity only. This change is within the range of the alternatives analyzed in the FEIS and produces no difference in environmental effects.

Commercial float boat outfitter and guide use will be managed consistent with Forest Service Manual and Handbook direction. Current direction is that the highest 2 years of actual use from the previous 5 years will be averaged and permits adjusted accordingly when permits are reissued. A five-year transition period will occur prior to making adjustments in outfitter permits resulting from the redistribution of unused launches.

Outside the control season, 7 launches per day are allowed on a first-come, first-served basis.

Salmon River Strategy – Management emphasis is on noncommercial and commercial float boating during the summer season and noncommercial and commercial jetboat and float boating, fishing, and hunting during the spring, fall, and winter seasons.

Commercial and noncommercial float boat operations during the control season are based on variable trip length options, where party size determines the maximum trip length.

In response to public comment, Alternative D is modified to allow exceptions during the control season when longer trips are needed to perform work authorized by Volunteer Agreements or for commercial outfitters whose operation is primarily wilderness education based and only at those times when there are no concerns with exceeding campsite capacity.

Alternative D is also modified regarding the management of unused launches to provide opportunities for recreational use of the river within the limits describe above. Any launch uncommitted 21 days prior to the launch date will be offered on a first-come, first-served basis to other users. Any such redistribution of unused launches is for that launch opportunity only. This change is within the range of the alternatives analyzed in the FEIS and produces no difference in environmental effects.

Commercial float boat outfitter and guide use will be managed consistent with Forest Service Manual and Handbook direction. Current direction is that the highest 2 years of actual use from the previous 5 years will be averaged and permits adjusted accordingly when permits are reissued. A five-year transition period will occur prior to making adjustments in outfitter permits resulting from the redistribution of unused launches.

There is no change in the management of ingress and egress jetboat permits providing access to private in-holdings.

Commercial jetboat use remains at current permitted levels for number of outfitters, number of jetboats, and mix of authorized activities year round.

During the control season, noncommercial recreational jetboat use is managed through the total number of jetboats on the water at one time. This decision modifies Alternative D to change from a maximum of 5 overnight boats on the water at one time, plus 5 one-day trips per week; to no more than 6 jetboats on the river at one time. The maximum length of stay is 7 days. This is within the range of alternatives analyzed in the FEIS and produces no difference in environmental effects.

Painter Bar Road – The Painter Bar Road is closed to motorized use, year round, upriver of Mackay Bar Campground except as allowed under special use permit.

This modifies Alternative D that proposed a seasonal closure for the Painter Bar Road. This decision is within the range of alternatives analyzed in the FEIS and produces no difference in environmental effects.

Decision Authority

The authority for this decision, under 36 CFR 219.10(f), belongs to the four FC-RONR Wilderness managing Forest Supervisors. The Supervisors who administer lands contained in the FC-RONR Wilderness have the authority to make amendments to the six Forest Plans involved in the wilderness.

Decisions made in this ROD will revise specific parts of the existing FC-RONR Wilderness Management Plan, and the River Management Plans for the “wild” sections of the Salmon and Middle Forks River.

Approximately 65,000 acres of the FC-RONR Wilderness is part of the Boise NF, but is managed by the Salmon-Challis NF, Middle Fork Ranger District. This administrative agreement was documented in a February 1991 letter signed by the Regional Forester for the Intermountain Region, to provide an efficient and consistent approach to wilderness management and granted authority for management decisions to the Salmon-Challis Forest Supervisor.

Why Alternative D?

We selected Alternative D, with modifications in response to public comments and concerns. Our decision has been crafted in recognition of the unique values and situations within the Wilderness and the specific provisions of the Central Idaho Wilderness Act that created the FC-RONR Wilderness. It provides the best mix of benefits to address the needs for change from the existing management plans for the FC-RONR Wilderness, while maintaining the wilderness and wild and scenic river values for which the area was established. Because views on many issues vary, we realize that none of the alternatives will satisfy everyone. However, Alternative D, with modifications, provides the best management approach to protect wilderness and wild and scenic river values, while providing for use and enjoyment across a spectrum of recreational opportunities.

Reasons for the selection of Alternative D and the modifications made to it are described in more detail in the following sections.

Public Involvement and Alternatives Considered

Government and Public Involvement

Tribal Trust Responsibilities

No American Indian reservations are located within the FC-RONR Wilderness or the FC-RONR Wilderness's socio-economic area of influence. However, the ancestors of the modern day Nez Perce and Shoshone-Bannock Tribes were present in this area long before the Wilderness was established. Many of the treaties and executive orders signed by the United States government in the mid-1800s reserved homelands for the Tribes. A government-to-government relationship exists between the Tribes and Federal government. Treaties with the Nez Perce and Shoshone-Bannock Tribes reserved certain rights outside of established reservations, including fishing, hunting, gathering, and grazing.

The Forest Supervisors have consulted with the Nez Perce and Shoshone-Bannock Tribes regarding development of the Revised [Wilderness Management Plan](#). During development of the DEIS, both Tribes were given opportunity to review the DEIS and Plans, and identified concerns were recognized and discussed. From February through April of 2002 a series of communications, document reviews and a meeting were conducted with the Nez Perce Tribe regarding the FEIS. In addition, the FC-RONR Wilderness management of historic and prehistoric cultural values is addressed in the FC-RONR Wilderness Programmatic Agreement (PA). This PA was developed in consultation with Tribal interests.

Forest Plan direction also ensures appropriate consultation during project-level planning and that Tribal rights and interests will be considered and addressed in Wilderness management activities.

Public Involvement

Public involvement began in 1991 with the release of a *Frankly Speaking* newsletter in July, which was the first wilderness-wide attempt to communicate with all known FC-RONR Wilderness interests. In December 1992 an open invitation was extended to the 2,500 individuals and interests on the FC-RONR Wilderness to participate in a "Visions of the Future" Symposium. In March 1993, the Symposium was attended by over 300 individuals, representing a diverse group of FC-RONR Wilderness interests. A "Visions of the Future" manuscript was compiled and distributed at the event, and over 20 groups exhibited displays.

In December 1994 scoping was formally initiated. Three rounds of public involvement took place prior to release of the Draft EIS. The first round consisted of a series of facilitated public meetings throughout Idaho and Montana which resulted in 1,300 comments regarding issues, desired future conditions and management areas. The second round consisted of six public meetings plus development of a mail-in response form addressing issues, indicators and standards. A total of 180

response forms were returned to the Forest Service from 12 states. The third round consisted of a peer review of the DEIS, and review by regulatory agencies and Tribal governments (Shoshone-Bannock and Nez Perce). Where concerns were identified they were resolved prior to release of the DEIS. Finally, briefings were made to key federal, state and local government officials.

In January of 1998, more than 3,700 people received either an Executive Summary or the DEIS containing 5 Alternatives, Draft Programmatic Plan and Draft Operational Plan. To explain the DEIS Alternatives and Draft Plans, the Forest Service hosted a series of open houses and public hearings, and attended special interest group hosted meetings on request. A total of more than 1,100 people attended these presentations. Because of continued requests several extensions of the comment period were granted, totaling over 1-year total comment time, ending on February 1999. In total, 1,623 letters and transcripts were received commenting on the DEIS. Public comment was polarized and generally not satisfied with the scope of change described in the Alternatives.

To respond to these public concerns, a Supplemental DEIS was prepared. The SDEIS, released on September 7, 1999, displayed six new alternatives responding to public concerns with the DEIS. There were 1,410 public comments received on the SDEIS. For the most part the public supported one of the displayed alternatives, generally the alternative developed to respond to their interest or organization's concerns.

The Final EIS, released in August 2003, was mailed to more than 3,500 interests and individuals. The FEIS responded to public comments received on the SDEIS by simplifying the decisions to be made and issues considered and consolidating Alternatives 1 through 11 into Alternatives A through E.

Because of the changes between the SDEIS and the FEIS, a 45-day comment period was provided on the FEIS. A total of 896 responses were received. These letters have been reviewed and taken into consideration in making our decision. More details are described below.

Issues

As a result of the public participation process, review by other Federal, State and local government agencies, Tribes, and internal reviews, significant issues were identified and are described in detail in Chapters 1 and 3 of the FEIS. Of the 8 issues identified, 3 issues directly contributed to development of alternatives. These 3 "planning" issues are stated below. The other 5 issues were used in development of mitigation measures, incorporated into management direction (goals, objectives, standards, and guidelines) or management prescriptions, or used to analyze effects. How the selected alternative addressed the planning issues is presented later in this document.

ISSUE 1 – AVIATION

Consistent with the current plan, the Forest Service has done very little maintenance at Dewey Moore, Mile Hi, Simonds, and Vines landing strips. Management of these landing strips has been an ongoing issue since their acquisition by the Forest Service, which occurred shortly after the creation of the FC-RONR Wilderness.

Aviators believe that the landing strips are not adequately maintained by the Forest Service to provide for landings under emergency conditions. In addition, aviators would like these landing strips to be maintained for public use rather than as emergency use only. Use of these landing strips concerns

wilderness users. In addition, landing at these strips is extremely hazardous because of approach and their physical location.

ISSUE 2 – RIVER RECREATION

Use in the river corridors is increasing and may seasonally create conditions inconsistent with visitors' river expectations, the Wilderness Plan's desired conditions, and adversely affects campsite conditions. During high use times, increasing numbers of people and boats creates congestion at launch sites, campsites, and special features, creating a perception of crowding and causing physical damage to campsites and other resource values. Existing management direction would allow use to increase over time resulting in unacceptable crowding and damage to Wilderness resources.

ISSUE 3 – PAINTER BAR ROAD

In the mid-1990's, the Forest Service acquired the private in-holding at the Painter Bar Homestead. Painter Bar road has long been used to provide ingress/egress to the Painter Mine/Homestead as well as to private landowners of Five-Mile Bar. This road has become increasingly popular with Off Highway Vehicle (OHV) users and has been used by hunters and fishermen for years. User created trails are expanding the extent of resource impacts as well as disrupting solitude and recreation experiences. Use of the road is not compatible with the objectives of the Wilderness Act or the W&SR Act.

Alternative Development

The range of alternatives considered in the FEIS was generated from the Draft and Supplemental Draft EIS's: The Draft EIS contained Alternatives 1 through 5, while the Supplemental DEIS displayed Alternatives 6 through 11. Because the alternatives presented in the DEIS and SDEIS were not fully integrated and included items beyond the scope of the analysis, Alternatives 1 through 11 were consolidated into Alternatives A through E for presentation in the FEIS.

- Alternative A is the No Action Alternative displayed as Alternative 1 in the DEIS and required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) to establish a baseline for evaluating and comparing effects of the action alternatives.
- Alternative B is a combination of DEIS Alternatives 1, 2, 3, and SDEIS Alternative 9.
- Alternative C is a combination of DEIS Alternative 1, and SDEIS Alternatives 6, 7, 8, 10 and 11.
- Alternative D is a combination of DEIS Alternative 5 and SDEIS Alternative 6 modified to respond to public comments on the SDEIS.
- Alternative E is SDEIS Alternative 6 and was designed to reflect public comment received on the DEIS.

All the action alternatives were designed to address the purpose and need to various degrees, and to address one or more of the significant issues identified above.

Alternatives Not Considered in Detail

Although they contributed to the range of alternatives considered, 6 alternatives were eliminated from detailed study or display in the FEIS listed below. A more detailed description of these alternatives and their reasons for elimination can be found in the DEIS, Chapter 2, *Alternatives Considered but Not Analyzed in this EIS*, pg 2-3 through 2-5.

- Increasing wilderness preservation by drastically reducing use levels;
- Decreasing wilderness preservation by allowing unrestricted use;
- DEIS Alternative 4;

DEIS Alternative 5; SDEIS Alternative 7; and SDEIS Alternative 8 were not carried forward for analysis in the FEIS because they were incorporated into Alternatives A through E as described above.

Alternatives Considered in Detail

ALTERNATIVE A – NO ACTION

Alternative A continues current management, and provides a baseline for comparisons of effects.

ALTERNATIVE B -- PRIMITIVE EMPHASIS

Alternative B emphasizes opportunities for solitude by greatly reducing float boat use levels and maximum party sizes on the Middle Fork and Salmon Rivers, and keeping current jetboat limits on the Salmon River. There is no maintenance provided for the Dewey Moore, Mile-Hi, Simonds and Vines landing strips. Painter Bar Road is closed.

ALTERNATIVE C – PRIVATE USER EMPHASIS

Alternative C emphasizes private access by increasing noncommercial float boat launches on the Middle Fork and by greatly increasing noncommercial summer jetboat use on the Salmon River. The Dewey Moore, Mile-Hi, Simonds and Vines landing strips are maintained for public use. Painter Bar Road remains open.

ALTERNATIVE D – THE PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE

Alternative D reduces the potential for growth in float boat use while maintaining current use levels. It increases noncommercial jetboat use on the Salmon River. The Dewey Moore, Mile-Hi, Simonds and Vines landing strips are maintained for emergency use only. Painter Bar Road is closed during the summer season.

ALTERNATIVE E – THE PROPOSED ACTION

Alternative E reduces the potential for growth in float boat use while maintaining current use levels. It moderately increases noncommercial jetboat use on the Salmon River. The Dewey Moore, Mile-Hi, Simonds and Vines landing strips are maintained for public use. Painter Bar Road is closed during the summer season.



Introduction

The analysis of alternatives and public comment received on the DEIS and proposed Revised Plan documented in the *Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Frank Church – River of No Return Wilderness Management Plan* (FEIS) serves as the foundation for our decision for the Revised Plan. Our decision incorporates by reference the analysis of effects and management direction disclosed in the FEIS and Revised Plan and the planning record in its entirety. All references and citations used in this ROD are fully described in the FEIS and Revised Plan.

Our decision applies only to National Forest System lands in the FC-RONR Wilderness. It does not apply to any other Federal, State, or private lands, although the effects of our decision on those lands are considered.

Wilderness Management Plan Decisions

The [Wilderness Management Plan](#) establishes the framework for future decision-making by outlining a broad, general program for achieving the goals and objectives for the FC-RONR Wilderness – to provide for both use and enjoyment of the area and protect the Wilderness and W&SR characteristics for this and future generations. A Wilderness Management Plan does not make a commitment to the selection of any specific project and does not dictate day-to-day administrative activities needed to carry on internal operations, but is implemented through the design, execution, and monitoring of site-specific activities.

Rationale for Our Decision

Our decision to select Alternative D, with modifications, for implementation is based on three principal factors.

- 1. Consistency with National Policy and direction.** Wilderness Management Plan decisions must be consistent with the extensive body of law, regulation and policy established at the national level.
- 2. The relationship of our decision to planning issues identified during the planning process.** State and local governments, organizations, and the general public all submitted comments that required us to take a hard look at the planning issues and how they were addressed by each alternative. In a number of cases public and agency comments helped us identify a reasonable range of alternatives and necessary management direction.
- 3. Compatibility with goals of other Governments and Tribes** was another important factor that drove our decision making process. Comments received from State agencies, Indian Tribes and elected officials were considered in making our selection.

How each of these factors was considered in our decision is detailed below:

Consistency with National Policy

In making our decision we evaluated each of the alternatives for compliance with national policy and direction. In all cases, except for the No Action Alternative, the alternatives are consistent with national policy and direction.

LEGISLATION

The Wilderness Act (1964), the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act (1968) and the Central Idaho Wilderness Act (1980) all provide both general and specific language for management of the FC-RONR Wilderness. The sum of this direction restricts some activities while allowing others not normally seen in designated Wilderness. The Central Idaho Wilderness Act contains specific provisions recognizing aircraft use at existing landing strips and motorboat use on the Salmon River. These provisions helped us frame the range of Alternatives considered and our decision to select Alternative D, with modifications. The result is a balancing act for both area managers and users, presenting the challenge of managing recreation use of the FC-RONR Wilderness without compromising the Wilderness resource.

FOREST SERVICE OUTFITTER/GUIDE POLICY AND DIRECTIVES

Throughout the development of the Revised Plan, concerns regarding the management of outfitter and guide operations have surfaced. In the DEIS and SDEIS, options were considered which affected management of these operations. In many cases, existing policy addresses these situations and is found in Forest Service Manuals (FSM) and Handbooks (FSH):

- FSM 2320 - Wilderness Management;
- FSM 2340 - Privately Provided Recreation Opportunities;
- FSM 2715 - Fees;
- FSM 2721.53 - Outfitter and Guide Service;
- FSH 2709.11 - Sec. 37 Outfitter and Guide Fees;
- FSH 2709.11 - Chap. 41.53 (a) (b) Outfitter and Guides.

Following these policies and guidance contained in the *USDA Forest Service Outfitter – Guide Administration Guidebook* will result in consistent management of these operations. This direction provides a policy framework for day-to-day management as well as guidance regarding some of the “how-to” details and will not be changed as a result of this revision effort and will not be repeated in the Revised Plan.

How the Revised Forest Plans addresses the planning issues

One of the major reasons we selected Alternative D, with modifications, as the Revised Wilderness Management Plan, is because it responds positively and thoroughly to the issues. The following is our evaluation of the responsiveness of our decision to each of the planning issues.

In making our decisions, we used the best available information in conjunction with public comments. However, we are concerned that future management decisions regarding the management of visitor use within the Wilderness should be based upon improved monitoring of visitor use and experiences, campsite conditions and other resource effects particularly in the river corridors. Therefore, we are

modifying Alternative D to implement an improved monitoring program to better assess the cumulative effects of recreation use in the Wilderness and serve as the basis for future management decisions.

ISSUE 1 – AVIATION

Management of Dewey Moore, Mile Hi, Simonds, and Vines landing strips – Consistent with the current plan, the Forest Service has done very little maintenance on these landing strips. These landing strips have never met minimal safety requirements for safe landing for the public or for agency personnel. They are on terrain that physically limits the level of possible improvements. Five other landing strips, both public and private, provide access in and adjacent to the Big Creek drainage – adjacent to the Wilderness at the Big Creek Ranger Station, and within the Wilderness at Cabin Creek and Soldier Bar, at the State owned Taylor Ranch, and at a privately owned Dovel strip on Monument Creek. Big Creek has trail access from the trailhead maintained at the Wilderness boundary to the confluence of Big Creek with the Middle Fork Salmon River. In addition, numerous trails from side drainages provide access to the Big Creek drainage.

Public comment is mixed on this issue. Aviators believe that the landing strips are not adequately maintained by the Forest Service to provide for landings under emergency conditions. In addition, Idaho Department of Aeronautics and aviators would like these landing strips to be maintained for public use rather than as emergency use only. Other recreating publics point out the number of landing strips, both public and private, that already provide adequate access to the Big Creek area. They encourage the Forest Service to close these four landing strips and allow only wilderness-dependent use of other landing strips within the FC-RONR Wilderness.

Pursuant to the provisions of the Central Idaho Wilderness Act, permanent closure of these landing strips requires written concurrence from the State of Idaho; to date the State has not concurred. Therefore, our decision is limited to what constitutes acceptable use.

The strips do not meet standards for regular operation by the State of Idaho or the Forest Service. We have determined the Dewey Moore, Mile-Hi, Simonds and Vines landing strips as unsafe for all but the most proficient pilots with aircraft suited to such backcountry use. They do not meet standards that will allow their use by Forest Service aircraft. It is also our determination that the Central Idaho Wilderness Act constrains "improving" these landing strips beyond their dimensions and conditions when they were acquired in 1980.

Therefore, the strips will be maintained for emergency use only and their use will be discouraged. Steps will be taken with the State of Idaho to identify and schedule maintenance activities and to discourage their use as recreation access to the wilderness. Our decision to designate and maintain the airstrips for emergency use for both commercial and noncommercial aviators recognizes the difficulty of their use, management, and maintenance, while still providing for a margin of safety should an emergency situation require their use.

ISSUE 2 – RIVER RECREATION

Middle Fork River and Salmon River Strategies – Use in the river corridors is increasing and may seasonally result in conditions inconsistent with visitors' expectations and the Wilderness Plan's desired conditions. Visitors generally support current levels of use and do not support additional growth that would detract from current conditions. Growth in use and group size is threatening to exceed camp capacities and is causing adverse impacts at some campsites. During high use times,

increasing numbers of people and boats and congestion at launch sites, campsites, and special features are creating a perception of crowding.

Management of float boat use with a variable trip length system reflects current use patterns and levels, while reducing the likelihood of future growth that could result in degradation of campsites or campsite capacity concerns in the river corridors. We are modifying Alternative D in response to requests for exceptions to this standard in specific situations. Limited exceptions to the variable trip length strategy are allowed on both rivers. On either river parties with volunteer agreements or wilderness education based outfitting permits may be granted an exception. On the Middle Fork, individuals who have drawn a bighorn sheep hunt lifetime tag may also be granted an exception.

Within the Middle Fork of the Salmon, this strategy maintains the primitive and semi-primitive settings consistent with the River's Wilderness designation. Management of the Middle Fork of the Salmon is to be governed by the Wilderness Act based upon the provisions of the Central Idaho Wilderness Act. Management of the river must ensure it will be unimpaired for future use and enjoyment as Wilderness. Maintaining both commercial and noncommercial use within prescribed limits allows for use without degradation of the wilderness resource. In addition, implementing the variable trip length strategy recognizes that smaller parties generally have less impact and reduces the need for large capacity camps.

On the Salmon River, this strategy maintains the semi-primitive motorized settings consistent with the Central Idaho Wilderness Acts provisions, which specifies management under the W&SR Act and allows for the continued use of motorized boats, including jetboats.

Management of the Salmon River is governed primarily by the W&SR Act, which is less restrictive in many ways than the Wilderness Act, particularly regarding the use of motorized equipment. Our challenge here was to provide maximum opportunities for use within the capability of the resource (for example, campsite conditions) and experiences consistent with the "wild river designation." We also evaluated the need to manage private recreational jetboat use consistent with the Central Idaho Wilderness Act such that the 1978 use levels were considered a "floor" for regulating use rather than a "ceiling." Salmon River 1978 jet boat use levels are defined in *1978 Jet Boat Use Levels on the Salmon River – Forest Service Estimates of 1978 & 1979 Jet Boat Use Levels on the Salmon River Between Corn Creek and Vinegar Creek*.

As a result, Alternative D has been modified in response to public comment on the Final EIS to simplify the approach to managing private recreational jetboat use, to respond to concerns about safety (number of boats/party), and to reflect desired use patterns. Recreational jetboats will be limited to no more than six boats a day during the control period with a maximum length of stay of seven days.

There have been a significant number of scheduled but unused float launches during the past decade. Concerns were raised by the public regarding the proposal for redistributing unused launches on both rivers. As a result, Alternative D is modified to apply the same system for redistributing launches on both rivers. We have determined these unused launches should be redistributed to provide additional opportunities for other users within the limits established for each River. The redistribution of unused launches is for that launch opportunity only.

The variable trip length is the least impactful strategy for curtailing growth. Most river users were concerned that the number of available launches not be changed, so we have decided not to reduce the number launches. Noncommercial groups tend to choose smaller parties and stay on the river longer

than commercial groups. The variable trip length allows them to choose their trip characteristics. However, some noncommercial groups have historically used medium or large groups and elected a longer trip length. This option will no longer be possible under the variable trip length strategy. These groups believe that the burden of reducing float boat growth is unfairly placed squarely on their shoulders.

With few exceptions, commercial float groups run 6-day trips. Therefore, a 6-day limit has very little impact to their current operations. However, this change still results in limiting future growth that would detract from current and desired conditions. Exceptions may be allowed for holders of a “once in a lifetime” bighorn sheep tag, on the Middle Fork Salmon River or when longer trips are needed to perform work authorized by Volunteer Agreements or for commercial outfitters where their operation is primarily wilderness education based and campsite capacity is not an issue.

ISSUE 3 – PAINTER BAR ROAD

Painter Bar Road – The original purpose of the Painter Bar Road was access to a mine and homestead, both of which were in private ownership at the time of Wilderness designation. The homestead and mine have since been acquired as National Forest System lands, with no outstanding private rights. Use of the Painter Bar Road for ingress/egress to private at Five Mile Bar has also evolved over time, in addition to ingress/egress via powerboats on the river. This road has become increasingly popular with OHV users and has been used by hunters and fishermen for years.

Use of the road is not compatible with the Wilderness Act direction or the W&SR Act. This road is no longer needed for private land access. Other options exist for ingress and egress for private landowners at Five Mile bar. Closing the road will eliminate unmanaged use by motor vehicles including high clearance vehicles and OHVs.

FEIS Alternative D proposed closing the Painter Bar Road only during the summer control season. Except for some respondents who desired road access because float permits may be difficult to get, public comment supported closing the road year round. The road accesses a very small portion of the river and does not substitute for float boat access.

It is our decision to permanently close the road upriver of the Mackay Bar campground. Continued use of the road is not compatible with the W&SR Act. However, we also acknowledge the possibility for permitted exceptions, and reserve the prerogative to evaluate permitted use on a case-by-case basis.

Compatibility with Goals of other Governments and Tribes (36 CFR 219.7(c))

We considered comments received from public agencies, American Indian Tribes, and elected officials in our decision-making process. Based on these comments, we have made a comparison between the Revised Plan goals and the goals and concerns expressed by the following agencies, Tribes or officials:

The Nez Perce and Shoshone-Bannock Tribes – The Forest Service recognizes both of the reserved rights held by these Tribes and the government-to-government relationship that exists. Both have a long history of collaborative management with the Forest Service in central Idaho.

The Forest consulted with the affected Tribes numerous times during the revision effort. The method by which a consultation meeting would occur was mutually agreed to between the Forest Service and the Tribe prior to the event. In several instances tribal council members were hosted for multiple-day

visits to the wilderness where issues were discussed on the ground. In other cases meetings occurred in an office or presentation setting with technical specialists and/or Forest Supervisors. Electronic messaging and reviewing of pre-release draft documents was used to resolve concerns prior to release of documents to the general public. Even though formal correspondence did not often result from Forest Service and Tribal consultation, for the most part issues and concerns were recognized and discussed.

Relative to the decisions being made, neither the Shoshone-Bannock or Nez Perce Tribes expressed a vested interest in aviation management, river float management or the Painter Bar Road. The Nez Perce tribe did express concern with jetboat use and the potential impact to fisheries. The Salmon River, where jet boat use occurs, is a travel corridor for anadromous fisheries; therefore jetboats are very unlikely to have a negative impact on spawning fish. While the Tribe did not express agreement, neither did they continue to pursue jetboat impacts as a fisheries issue.

While work has been ongoing with the Shoshone-Bannock and Nez Perce Tribes regarding the Programmatic Agreement (PA) for management of cultural resources within the FC-RONR Wilderness we consider this just the initial stages in regard to heritage management. Much of the work to recognize significant Tribal issues, identify properties of traditional cultural and religious values, and management of those resources will take place during development of the Historic Preservation Plan, update of the Cultural Resource Overview, and implementation of the Heritage Program Activity stipulations. These actions are beyond the scope of the current revision effort.

County and State Officials – The Forests provided periodic status and project updates to County and State agencies and officials.

Consultation with State agencies and local governments indicates that disagreements between the direction in the Plan and the goals and objectives of these government entities is limited to two issues; management of the Dewey Moore, Mile-Hi, Simonds and Vines landing strips, and redistribution of unused launches and the effect on commercial float boat operators.

The State of Idaho Department of Transportation, Division of Aeronautics and the Valley County Commissioners take exception to the "emergency use only" status for Dewey Moore, Mile-Hi, Simonds and Vines landing strips.

The City of Salmon also expressed concerns regarding the redistribution of scheduled but unused launches. Their concern is directly related to economic impacts to the community of Salmon from reduced commercial launches. From an economic standpoint commercial groups do generally contribute more to the local economies of towns like Salmon than do noncommercial groups. On the other hand, if these launches are not being used, they generate no economic value. The end result will be a slightly increased economic benefit through utilization of previously unused launches by both commercial and noncommercial parties.

USFWS and NOAA Fisheries – The Revision Team wildlife biologist, fishery biologist, and other staff members have worked with their State and Federal agency counterparts to identify concerns to be addressed in FC-RONR Wilderness management direction. In addition, formal and informal consultation meetings were held with NOAA Fisheries and USFWS.

Threatened and Endangered Plant Species: According to USFWS species list updates #1-4-02-SP-911, 1-4-02-SP-908, and 1-4-02-SP-983 (September 3 and September 30, 2002), the

Payette, Salmon, Challis, and Nez Perce NFs have no occurrences or potential habitat for any Threatened, Endangered, or Proposed plant species in the FC-RONR Wilderness. The Bitterroot NF has no Threatened or Endangered plant species or habitat.

Fisheries: Fisheries consultation was completed with two separate analyses, one regarding the recreational activities and the other, the noxious weeds treatment program. The weeds treatment consultation will be addressed in the Supplemental Noxious Weed Treatment EIS.

An amendment to Biological Assessments for the Middle Fork Salmon River and Main Salmon River Section 7 Watersheds was prepared March 4, 2003 for Snake River Spring and Summer Chinook Salmon, Steelhead and Columbia River Bull Trout. The 8 BA's that cover the FC-RONR Wilderness were amended with a finding of no effect.

Wildlife: A Biological Assessment (BA) was prepared for Threatened, Endangered and Proposed Terrestrial Species for the FC-RONR Wilderness Management Plan. The BA reached a conclusion of; "no effect" for Canada Lynx, "no jeopardy to the continued existence" of the nonessential experimental population of gray wolf, and "may affect but is not likely to adversely affect" for Bald Eagle. The USFWS was asked to consult under section 7 of the Endangered Species Act and the Forest Service was provided a letter of concurrence from the USFWS on August 26, 2003.

Idaho State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) – A Programmatic Agreement has been finalized and signed by the Idaho State Historic Preservation Officer, the Presidents Advisory Council on Historic Preservation and by the Forest Supervisors who manage the FC-RONR Wilderness. The Programmatic Agreement updates direction for cultural resource management in the FC-RONR Wilderness and was prepared by the Forest Archeologist, the Idaho SHPO, the Advisory Council on Historic Properties, and representatives of the Shoshone-Bannock and the Nez Perce Tribes.

Findings Related to other Laws and Authorities

Findings Required by Law

How does the Revised Forest Plan meet other laws and authorities?

NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ACT (NEPA)

Consideration of Long-term and Short-term Effects – The Revised [Wilderness Management Plan](#) will govern management of the FC-RONR Wilderness for the next 10 to 15 years. The FEIS discloses the analysis of effects for a range of alternatives including No Action. It considered effects to the significant issues and other resources for this time frame and projected from 10 to 25 years.

Unavoidable Adverse Effects – Decisions made in the Wilderness Management Plan do not represent irreversible or irretrievable commitments of resources. Any proposed disturbance to Forest resources cannot occur without further analysis and a decision document, and therefore the decision on this Revised Plan will result in no commitment of resources.

During project implementation the application of Wilderness-wide standards and guidelines and resource protection measures described in the Revised Plan limit the extent and duration of any adverse environmental impacts associated with management activities proposed. For a detailed discussion of effects see Chapter 4 of the FEIS.

Environmentally Preferable Alternative(s) – Regulations implementing the NEPA require agencies to specify "the alternative or alternatives which were considered to be environmentally preferable" (40 CFR 1505.2(b)).

Based on the description of the alternatives considered in detail in the FEIS and this ROD, we have determined that Alternative B best meets the goals of Section 101 of NEPA and is therefore the environmentally preferable alternative for this proposed Federal action. Alternative B best addresses the primary risks to ecological integrity and the opportunities to minimize those risks, however it does so at the expense of opportunity for use and enjoyment of wilderness resources and a reduction in services that support local economies and lifestyles.

NATIONAL FOREST MANAGEMENT ACT

The NFMA requires that "permits, contracts, and other instruments for use and occupancy" of National Forest System lands be consistent with the Forest Plan (16 U.S.C. 1604(i)). There are currently 6 Forest Plans that include management direction for the FC-RONR Wilderness. Each of these plans is amended as part of this ROD to ensure their consistency. Each of the amendments is non-significant. These amendments are summarized in Table 1.

Forest and Date of Plan	Plan Amendment Number	Amendment	Plan Page Number(s) Affected
Salmon (1988)	9	Whenever the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness (FC-RONR) Management Plan is referenced, use the revised Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness Management Plan (12/2003)	IV-156 to IV-157 for Mgmt Area 7B
Challis (1987)	17	Whenever the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness (FC-RONR) Management Plan is referenced, use the revised Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness Management Plan (12/2003)	IV-47 to IV-52 for Mgmt Area 1
Bitterroot (1987)	24	Replace Appendix K-2 , which reference the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness Management Plan (2/85) with the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness Management Plan (12/2003)	III-49 to III-52 for Mgmt Area 7b; App K-2, FC-RONR Wilderness Mgmt Plan (2/85)
Boise (2003)	1	Replace the wilderness plan completed and approved on March 11, 1985 with the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness (FC-RONR Wilderness) Management Plan (12/2003)	III-354 to III-358 for Mgmt Area 22
Payette (2003)	1	Manage designated wilderness in accordance with the current management plan for the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness Management Plan (12/2003)	III-73 to III-74 for Mgmt Area 14
Nez Perce (1987)	31	Replace Management Standards – Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness Management Plan (Appendix L) with the revised Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness Management Plan (12/2003)	III-28 to III-29 for Mgmt Area 9.3

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE (E.O. 12898)

Executive Order 12898 (59 Fed. Register 7629, 1994) directs Federal agencies to identify and address, as appropriate, any disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects on minority populations and low-income populations.

We have determined from the analysis disclosed in the FEIS that the Revised Wilderness Management Plan is in compliance with Executive Order 12898.

ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT (ESA)

The ESA creates an affirmative obligation “...that all Federal departments and agencies shall seek to conserve endangered and threatened (and proposed) species” of fish, wildlife, and plants. This obligation is further clarified in a National Interagency Memorandum of Agreement (dated August 30, 2000) which states our shared mission to “... enhance conservation of imperiled species while delivering appropriate goods and services provided by the lands and resources.”

Based upon consultation with the USFWS and NOAA Fisheries, findings in their respective Biological Opinions, and our commitment to meet obligations under ESA concerning conservation measures, reasonable and prudent measures, and terms and conditions, we have determined that the Revised Wilderness Management Plan is in compliance with the ESA.

NATIONAL HISTORIC PRESERVATION ACT (NHPA)

The Revised Wilderness Management Plan is a programmatic action and does not authorize any site-specific activity. Projects undertaken in response to the direction in this Revised Plan will fully comply with the laws and regulations that ensure protection of cultural resources.

It is our determination that the Revised Plan complies with the NHPA and other statutes that pertain to the protection of cultural resources.

INVASIVE SPECIES (EXECUTIVE ORDER 13112)

The Revised Plan is a programmatic action and does not authorize any site-specific activity. Executive Order 13112 on Invasive Species directs that federal agencies should not authorize any activities that would increase the spread of invasive species.

A supplemental EIS is being prepared that will update direction for management of noxious invasive plant species. Through field season of 2004 invasive species management will continue current direction. We anticipate the noxious weeds management direction will be revised prior to the 2005 field season. Current direction is designed to limit the spread of invasive species and utilizes integrated pest management methods to contain and control the spread of invasive species. Therefore, we have determined the Revised Plan is in compliance with E.O. 13112.

PRIME FARMLAND, RANGELAND AND FOREST LAND

There is no prime farmland within the FC-RONR Wilderness. This FEIS does not include any changes to Grazing Allotments found within the FC-RONR Wilderness.

EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY, EFFECTS ON MINORITIES, WOMEN

The FEIS describes the impacts to social and economic factors in Chapter 4. The Revised Wilderness Management Plan will not have a disproportionate impact on any minority or low-income communities (FEIS, Chapter 4, pages 4-31 and 4-32). We have determined that the Revised Wilderness Management Plan will not differentially affect the Civil Rights of any citizens, including women and minorities.

WETLANDS AND FLOODPLAINS

The Revised Wilderness Management Plan is a programmatic action and does not authorize any site-specific activity. We have determined that the Revised Wilderness Management Plan will not have any adverse impacts on wetlands and floodplains and will comply with Executive Orders 11988 and 11990.

OTHER POLICIES

The existing body of national direction for managing National Forests remains in effect.

Implementation

How and when will the Revised Wilderness Management Plan be implemented?

Detailed direction for implementation of this ROD is contained in the accompanying FC-RONR [Wilderness Management Plan](#). This decision will be implemented no sooner than 5 working days following the latest publication date in the newspapers of record.

If an appeal is filed and a stay is granted, implementation begins no sooner than 15 calendar days following a final decision of the appeal. Decisions on site-specific projects are not made in the Revised Wilderness Management Plan. Those decisions will be made after site-specific analysis and appropriate documentation in compliance with NEPA.

Administrative Appeals of Our Decision

This decision is subject to appeal pursuant to the provisions of 36 CFR 217.3. A written notice of appeal must be filed with the Regional Forester for the Intermountain Region within 45 days of the date that legal notice of this decision appears in the following papers of record: Recorder Herald, Salmon, Idaho; Ravalli Republic, Hamilton Montana; Idaho Statesmen, Boise Idaho; Lewiston Morning Tribune, Lewiston, Idaho; and the Challis Messenger, Challis, Idaho. Appeals must be sent to:

Appeals Deciding Officer
USDA Forest Service
Intermountain Region
324 25th St
Ogden, UT 84401

A copy of the appeal must simultaneously be sent to the Lead Forest Supervisor and Deciding Officer for the FC-RONR Wilderness:

Lesley W. Thompson
Acting Lead Forest Supervisor and Deciding Officer
50 Hwy 93 South
Salmon, ID 83467

Any notice of appeal must be fully consistent with 36 CFR 217.9 and include at a minimum:

- A statement that the document is a Notice of Appeal filed pursuant to 36 CFR Part 217.
 - The name, address, and telephone number of the appellant.
 - Identification of the decision to which the objection is being made.
 - Identification of the document in which the decision is contained, by title and subject, date of the decision, and name and title of the Deciding Officer.
 - Identification of the specific portion of the decision to which objection is made.
 - The reasons for appeal, including issues of fact, law, regulation, or policy and, if applicable, specifically how the decision violates law, regulation, or policy.
 - Identification of the specific change(s) in the decision that the appellant seeks.
-

Contacts

Where can I obtain more information on the Revised Plan?

More information on the Final EIS and the FC-RONR Wilderness Revised Wilderness Management Plan can be obtained by contacting:

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50 Hwy 93 South
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208-756-5100

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Public Affairs Officer
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Salmon, ID 83467
208-756-5100

Conclusion

For the past decade, personnel from the Salmon-Challis, Bitterroot, Nez Perce, Payette, and Boise National Forests have worked with Tribes, the public, elected officials, interested organizations, and other agencies to produce this Revised [Wilderness Management Plan](#). We are pleased to make our decision based upon solid relationships that have evolved through these efforts.

We are committed to implementing the Revised Wilderness Management Plan and implementing a monitoring program to evaluate the consequences of these decisions and to provide a basis for those we will make in the future. We are confident that continued cooperation will unite us, because we believe the concern we all have for the FC-RONR Wilderness is our common bond - that these lands remain wild and primarily affected by natural forces - not only for the current generation, but for future generations as well.

David T. Bull

David T. Bull
Forest Supervisor, Bitterroot NF

November 20, 2003

Date

Bruce E. Bernhardt

Bruce E. Bernhardt
Forest Supervisor, Nez Perce NF

11/20/03

Date

Mark J. Madrid

Mark J. Madrid
Forest Supervisor, Payette NF

11/20/03

Date

Lesley W. Thompson

Lesley W. Thompson
Acting Forest Supervisor, Salmon-Challis NF

November 20, 2003

Date