

CHAPTER 1 - PURPOSE OF AND NEED FOR ACTION

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Introduction

The Frank Church–River of No Return Wilderness (FC–RONRW) covers over two million acres in central Idaho (see Figure 1.1). The FC–RONRW is the largest contiguous wilderness in the lower 48 states and the largest in the National Forest System. The FC–RONRW is very rugged with steep slopes and mountainous terrain. The lowest point in the wilderness is less than 2000 feet in elevation, and the highest peak is over 10,000 feet high. Numerous small, glaciated lakes are located in the higher terrain. Vegetation ranges from open sagebrush, mountain mahogany, and ponderosa pine communities on the lower and southerly slopes, to more heavily timbered Douglas fir stands on north aspects. Engelmann spruce and subalpine fir dominates the higher terrain. Mid to upper slopes with less variation in elevation are timbered with lodgepole pine. Most of the vegetation types in the FC–RONRW have evolved with fire as a component of their natural growth processes.

Two wild and scenic rivers (W&SR), the Salmon and the Middle Fork of the Salmon (Middle Fork), flow through the wilderness, for additional information on the history of the Middle Fork and Salmon Rivers see Appendix B - River History. The headwaters of the Selway W&SR lie in the northern-most part. The FC–RONRW includes parts of four counties in Idaho: Custer, Idaho, Lemhi, and Valley; Administration is shared by the Bitterroot, Nez Perce, Payette, and Salmon-Challis National Forests (NF). A portion of the Wilderness is located on the Boise NF; the Salmon-Challis NF administers this portion. These six Forests lie within the boundaries of two Forest Service Regions, the Northern (Region 1) and Intermountain (Region 4) Regions.

Two other wildernesses border the FC–RONRW: the Gospel Hump Wilderness (206,053 acres) to the northwest along the Salmon River; and the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness (1,340,681 acres) to the northeast, separated from the FC–RONRW by the Magruder Corridor. Together, these three adjoining areas compose a nearly solid block of wilderness almost four million acres in size.

Legislative History of the Wilderness and Wild and Scenic Rivers

The majority of the FC–RONRW was managed as a primitive area from the 1930s until it was designated a wilderness in 1980. In 1931, approximately 1,090,000 acres were designated as the Idaho Primitive Area and an addition in 1937 brought the total to 1,224,350 acres.

In 1936, the Selway-Bitterroot Primitive Area was established and included most of the area between the Salmon and Lochsa Rivers. A portion of this was redesignated as the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness in 1963. Another portion, bordering the Idaho Primitive Area, continued in primitive area status as the Salmon River Breaks Primitive Area. The remaining portion, known as the Magruder Corridor, was left unclassified but has remained essentially undeveloped.

The Wilderness Act of 1964 (Public Law 88-577) gave statutory wilderness designation to existing wildernesses, including the Selway-Bitterroot. It further required the primitive areas and adjacent lands to be studied for suitability for wilderness designation.

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Frank Church--River of No Return Wilderness

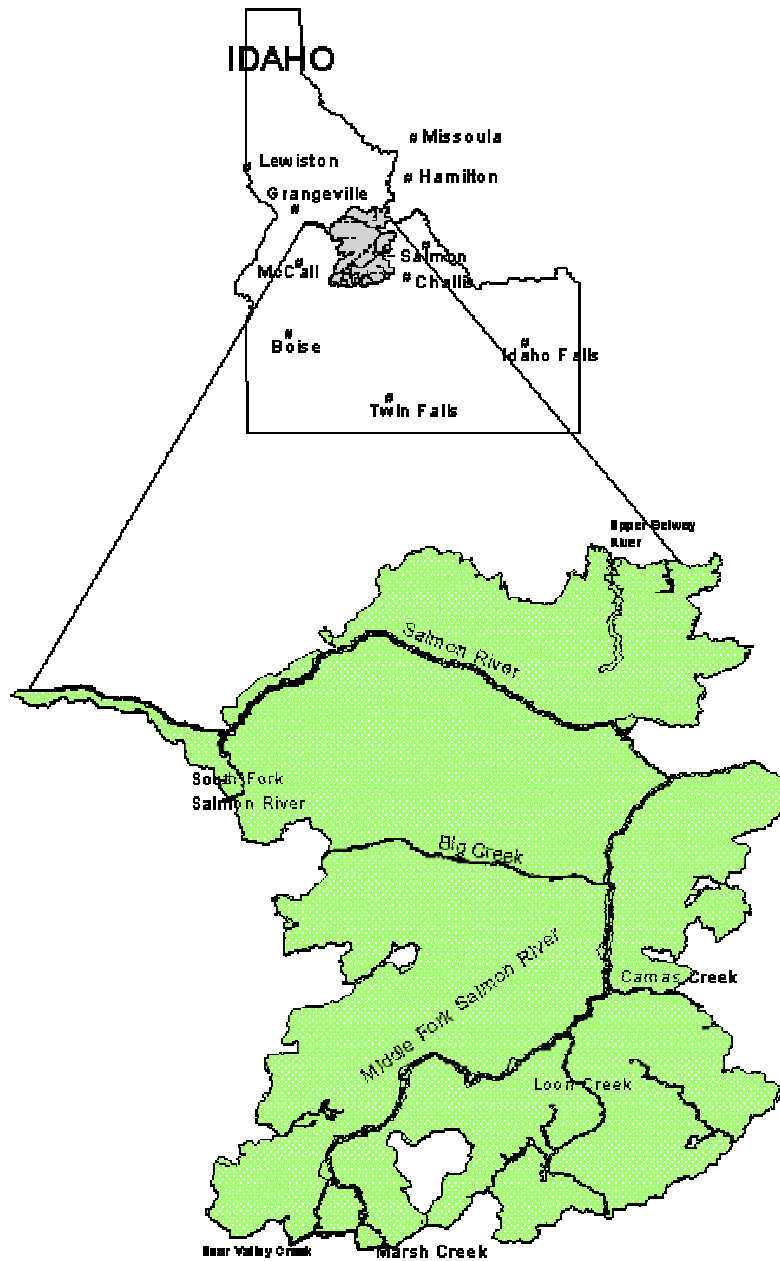


Figure 1.1 Vicinity Map

In the 1968 W&SR Act, the Selway River and Middle Fork were designated as components of the National W&SR System. The Salmon River downstream from North Fork, Idaho, was designated for study for potential classification. Specific legislation from the act stated:

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Sec. 1(b) "selected rivers...with their immediate environments...shall be preserved in free-flowing condition...for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations..."

Sec. 2(b) (1) "Wild river areas - Those rivers or sections of rivers that are free of impoundments and generally inaccessible except by trail, with watersheds or shorelines essentially primitive and waters unpolluted. These represent vestiges of primitive America.

The Forest Service conducted the mandated studies of the Idaho Primitive Area, the Salmon River Breaks Primitive Area, and the Salmon River, and, in 1974, proposed wilderness and W&SR designations for the areas studied. The Forest Service completed studies of other adjacent roadless areas, including the Magruder Corridor, in 1979 and recommended additional areas be added to the proposed wilderness.

On July 23, 1980, the United States Congress passed the Central Idaho Wilderness Act (CIWA), Public Law 96-312. This law established the River of No Return Wilderness.

Some of the highlights of the CIWA that are specific to the issues being addressed in this analysis are:

- ♦ Provided for the landing of aircraft, the maintenance of landing strips and a restriction on the closure of landing strips;
- ♦ Designated the Salmon River as "Wild" from Corn Creek to Long Tom Bar;
- ♦ Specified the Salmon River would be managed under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, which is less restrictive than the Wilderness Act; and
- ♦ Provided for the use of jetboats on the Salmon Wild River at a level not less than the level of use that occurred in 1978.

Planning History of the Wilderness

The FC-RONRW Management Plan was approved in December 1984. This plan was incorporated into the Forest Land and Resource Management Plans (Forest Plans) for the National Forests that comprise the FC-RONRW (Bitterroot, Nez Perce, Boise, Payette and Salmon-Challis NFs). The FC-RONRW Management Plan and the six Forest Plans were amended in July 1994 to include standards and guidelines regarding outfitter and guide operations.

River management direction for the Middle Fork W&SR from its origin to its confluence with the Salmon River is contained in the Management Plan for the Middle Fork of the Salmon Wild and Scenic River (1993).

The Salmon W&SR Management Plan (1982) provides management direction within the Salmon W&SR corridor. The W&SR designation encompasses the river and the adjacent lands within

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approximately one-fourth mile on each side of the river. Management consideration in this Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) is limited to the “Wild” segment, which is located within the FC–RONRW.

The majority of wilderness recreation users are float boaters on the Salmon and Middle Fork rivers. Both rivers manage recreation use with a permit system during the summer season. During the summer seasons noncommercial float boating permits are randomly assigned by a lottery system, and the commercial operators are assigned a set number of launches for each river in their special use permits. Over 17,000 people float these two rivers each year.

A 1995 survey of late summer and fall users of the land portion of the wilderness revealed that enjoying nature, fishing and hunting were the three major reasons people visited the FC–RONRW. Seeking solitude was fourth, and physical fitness was fifth in the priority list, slightly ahead of photography, sixth (Hunger and Watson 1996).

In 1994, the Forest Service published a notice of intent to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to revise the FC–RONRW Management Plan, W&SR Management Plans for the Middle Fork and Salmon Rivers, and amend the six NF Forest Plans. A Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) was issued in 1998 and a Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement (SDEIS) was issued in 1999. This Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) is the final step in this analysis. The Forest Service will also prepare a Wilderness Management Plan that will replace the Frank Church–River of No Return Wilderness Management Plan, Management Plan for the Middle Fork of the Salmon Wild and Scenic River, and the Salmon W&SR Management Plan reflecting the decisions made in the Record of Decision.

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Management of the FC-RONRW is directed by the existing wilderness management plan, Management Plan for the Middle Fork of the Salmon Wild and Scenic River, the Salmon W&SR Management Plan, and the Forest Plans for the FC–RONRW. There is a need to consolidate this direction into a single management plan and amend the six Forest Plans to incorporate the revised direction.

The majority of the current direction in these plans is still considered adequate. However, some components of these plans are outdated and need to be amended to address issues that have emerged since the plans were approved and amended. New management direction is needed for the following:

- ♦ Management of Dewey Moore, Mile-Hi, Simonds, and Vines landing strips in the Big Creek drainage.
- ♦ Management of commercial and noncommercial float boat use on the Middle Fork and Salmon Rivers.
- ♦ Management of noncommercial jetboat use on the Salmon River.

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- ♦ Management of the Painter Bar road.

Other proposed management direction discussed in the DEIS and SEIS but no longer carried forward in this analysis are discussed in the Decision Framework section of this chapter.

Management of Dewey Moore, Mile-Hi, Simonds, and Vines landing strips in the Big Creek drainage

Sixteen landing strips are located on public land within the wilderness, including 12 on federal and 4 on state lands. Four of these federal landing strips, Dewey Moore, Mile-Hi, Simonds, and Vines are located in the Big Creek drainage and have been the subject of debate and controversy over their management status and maintenance levels.

In general, motorized use, including aircraft, is prohibited in wilderness. However, the Wilderness Act and the CIWA include special provisions that permit the landing of aircraft where this use had been established before the date of enactment. The CIWA also stipulated “... *the Secretary shall not permanently close or render unserviceable any aircraft landing strip in regular use on national forest lands on the date of enactment of this act for reasons other than extreme danger to aircraft, and in any case not without the express written concurrence... of the State of Idaho...*” (Sec.7 (a) CIWA).

When the 1984 FC–RONRW Plan was signed, the Forest Service decided not to maintain Dewey Moore, Mile-Hi, Simonds, and Vines landing strips and discouraged aircraft use at these landing strips except in an emergency. These four landing strips have not been rated by the State of Idaho, are not currently considered public use landing strips, and have not received any Forest Service maintenance.

There is evidence that non-emergency aircraft use has increased at these landing strips and that commercial use is also occurring. There are reports that suggest sporadic and unapproved maintenance is being performed on these emergency strips. The current management direction for these landing strips leaves an unresolved status and use controversy (State of Idaho, 2000). Therefore, there is a need to determine an appropriate management strategy for these landing strips.

Management of commercial and noncommercial float boat use on the Middle Fork and Salmon Rivers

Middle Fork of the Salmon River (Middle Fork River)

When the Middle Fork was designated under the W&SR Act as a “wild” river, it was to be administered “permanently” as a free flowing, wilderness river (Sec. 2(a)(ii)). Its attributes were defined in three key sections of the Act. In Section 2b, a “wild” river is defined as the river and its adjacent land (determined later to be one-fourth mile corridor on each side) as “... *generally inaccessible except by trail, with watersheds or shorelines essentially primitive.*” In Section 10a, the Forest Service was given the authority to administer the river in a manner that protects or enhances its wilderness characteristics, including limiting non-conforming uses and developing a

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protective management plan. In Section 10b, Congress specified that, should a conflict arise between the Wilderness Act and W&SR Act, the “...*more restrictive provisions would apply...*” on the Middle Fork.

Today, the Middle Fork remains free flowing and essentially primitive, even though some human-built structures, such as bridges and cabins, visible from the river have increased. The numbers of visitors floating the river have increased from 7,723 people in 1985 to 11,031 people in 2002, during the typical floating season from May 1 through September 30.

To better understand the amount of use that is occurring on the river, it is easier to look at use on a daily basis. For example, river use for the 1995 high use summer season averaged approximately 650 People At One Time (PAOT) along the river from Boundary Creek to the confluence with the Salmon River. The highest use reported for a single day was 923 people on July 18. In addition, there were 22 days where there were more than 800 PAOT on the river. With the amount of river users in the 1995 high use summer season, congestion and crowding along the river corridor is occurring on peak use days.

Because most launches on the Middle Fork are used during the summer season (June 1 – September 3) the growth in use during this time period comes from increasing party sizes and the additional numbers of boats that carry these people. With improved boating techniques, equipment, and skill levels, visitor use before and after the summer season is also increasing. Taken together, the potential is for current use to continue to increase, which will result in Middle Fork recreation levels with more peak use days and more congestion and crowding along the river corridor. Under the existing management plan direction this trend could continue unchecked to a maximum potential use of 1,488 PAOT in the river corridor.

High use levels, by themselves, do not necessarily mean there is a problem in river corridor management. The Middle Fork is managed as one of the few premier wilderness river opportunities in the continental United States, and users have commented that their primary motivation was perceived naturalness. With more people the effects of human activities on the social setting and river environment lead to less primitive settings.

Because of the steep and rugged nature of this river canyon, there are physical limitations on the number and size of places where people can camp. This is especially true in the lower reaches below Big Creek known as the Impassable Canyon where use is concentrated in relatively few campsites. As use within the Middle Fork corridor increases, opportunities for a primitive recreation experience, solitude, and other aspects of a wilderness river experience are decreasing.

With higher use levels come greater impacts to campsites and attraction areas. Most of the large river campsites are used and are needed every night during the peak use of the summer season (1994 Campsite Condition and Occupancy Use Summary). Because of the current use levels, managers are seeing conditions that indicate resource damage is occurring at some river campsites as a result of sustained use. Most of the deteriorated campsites are located above the high water line. The type of damage that is occurring is soil erosion, soil compaction, exposure and loss of cultural resources, user-created trails, loss of vegetation, and invasion of exotic

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species. Campsites in damaged condition (Frissell Condition Class 4 and 5) detract from the primitive setting visitors expect in the wilderness.

Campsite capacity on the Middle Fork is limited and depending on the water level, about 20 percent of the campsites are unusable during the high water season. In addition, some large parties have been using the medium and small campsites causing these camps' perimeters to expand to fit the larger groups. Group size can be a cause of campsite expansion and resource damage to campsites.

Other users, such as recreation stock users and hikers, within the river canyon also contribute to the number of people in the river corridor. Current use levels show that increasing numbers of people, encounters¹ and boats are creating a perception of crowding, which is inconsistent with the wilderness experience.

All of these conditions indicate a need for new management direction for float boating on the Middle Fork, addressing the maximum PAOT per day, party sizes, and lengths of stay.

Salmon River

Even though the Salmon River is within the FC-RONRW, the "wild" section of river from Corn Creek to Long Tom Bar was to be administered differently than the Middle Fork. In order to recognize and maintain existing motorized jetboat use on the river, Congress provided that the less restrictive management direction of the W&SR Act would prevail in the Salmon River corridor, rather than the provisions of the Wilderness Act. This special provision allows for jetboat use to continue and a greater emphasis on recreation to be considered.

Today, the Salmon River remains free flowing and wild and along with the Middle Fork provides one of the few opportunities in America for a multi-day wilderness floating experience. Similar to the Middle Fork, use has also increased, but somewhat less. Float boat use has increased from 5,097 float boaters in 1985 to 5450 in 2002 during the June 20 through September 7 summer seasons, with a peak use of 6892 visitors in 1999.

To better understand the amount of float boat use that is occurring on the river, it is easier to look at use on a daily basis. For example, the average float boat use within the river corridor during the 1995 high use season was 655 PAOT, with the highest float boat use reported at 787 PAOT.

The current plans allow a maximum potential use of 2,400-float boat PAOT in the Salmon River corridor. Given the annual growth rate and good water conditions, it is expected use could continue to grow beyond current levels, mainly through increases in party sizes, better utilization

¹ Numbers of encounters are used to describe the frequency of groups meeting other groups in the wilderness. To provide a wilderness experience visitors need to feel apart from human habitation and influence. The more encounters a wilderness visitor experiences, the more the visitor is removed from a wilderness experience and feelings of solitude. Therefore, the number of encounters (or times a visitor meets other groups) represents a measurement of the quality of the wilderness experience.

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of all launch dates, and longer stays in the river corridor. With the potential for increased float boat use, and increasing motorized use and private land access, Salmon River recreation use levels could soon approach levels where congestion and crowding are more apparent and detract from the current river experience.

Float boat use outside the summer season within the Salmon River corridor is increasing. With more people and boats on the river, visitors' opportunities for solitude and primitive conditions decrease. Although the majority of float boaters are satisfied with the daily encounters they have with other float parties, other visitors report they are encountering too many floaters and consider the number unacceptable (Hunger 1996).

When considering that actual use is currently much less than potential permitted use, a greater loss in opportunities for solitude would occur with growth allowed under the current plan than would be acceptable for semi-primitive motorized recreation settings consistent with W&SR designation. Based on the projected growth rate of 0.5 percent per year, it is expected that the number of human encounters would increase resulting in a deteriorating recreation experience along the Salmon River.

Similar to the Middle Fork, there are physical limitations on size and capacity of campsites. The river dynamics alter beaches used for campsites annually. As the water rises and falls, the number and size of accessible beaches increase and/or decrease in availability along the river. In addition, other users of the river canyon, such as recreation stock users and hikers, contribute to the number of people in the Salmon Wild River corridor.

Most of the river campsites are used every night during the high use summer season with no rotations to allow campsite areas to recover. The majority of the impacts to campsites occur within a short time-period but rehabilitation of these sites takes a much longer time, especially if use is constant. Campsites in damaged conditions can detract from the semi-primitive setting visitors expect in the river corridor. Because of the current use levels, managers are seeing conditions that indicate resource deterioration is occurring at some river campsites with most of the deteriorated campsites located above the high water line. The type of damage that is occurring is soil erosion, soil compaction, exposure and loss of cultural resources, user-created trails, loss of vegetation, and invasion of exotic plant species (noxious weeds).

Campsite capacities on the Salmon River are limited and depending on the water level, up to 50 percent of the campsites are unusable during the high water season. In addition, some large parties have been using the medium and small campsites causing these camps' perimeters to expand to fit the larger groups. Group size can be a cause of campsite expansion and resource damage in and adjacent to campsites.

There is a need to develop new management direction for float boating on the Salmon River to provide recreational experiences consistent with W&SR designation in terms of the number and type of encounters, and the amount and conditions of campsites.

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Float launch allocation on both rivers

The existing plans provide for the allocation of float launches on each river using different criteria. The Middle Fork float boat allocation allows for 288 commercial and 371 noncommercial launches or a 43:57 ratio when calculated for the season. This equates generally to three commercial and four noncommercial launches per day. Party sizes on the Middle Fork are limited to 30 commercial users and 24 noncommercial users. Using these numbers, the opportunities for people to float can be calculated: commercial float opportunities = (3 launches X 30 people) 90 opportunities, noncommercial float opportunities = (4 launches X 24 people) 96 opportunities.

Further examination shows that, of the people floating the Middle Fork, about 60 percent are in commercial groups and 40 percent in noncommercial groups. In other words, the commercial permits use 43 percent of the launches but comprise 60 percent of the number of people floating the Middle Fork. This is because outfitters tend to take larger groups while noncommercial permit holders prefer smaller groups. Middle Fork commercial average party size is about 23 people; noncommercial average party size is about 11 people. For more detail, see Chapter 3, Middle Fork River Use 1992–1995 Averages by Season.

The Salmon River seasonal allocation calls for 320 commercial and 320 noncommercial launches or a 50:50 ratio during the summer season. This equates to four commercial and four noncommercial launches per day. Party size maximum of 30 applies to both commercial and noncommercial groups, so each group has the same float boating opportunities.

On the Salmon River, actual summer season statistics show that 61 percent of the people float in commercial groups and 39 percent are in noncommercial groups. Again, this is because commercial floaters are in larger groups and noncommercial floaters are in smaller groups. Salmon River commercial average party size is 17 people and the noncommercial party size is 11 people. Some noncommercial float boaters see the 61:39 split as an unfair situation favoring commercial outfitters. Projected increases in future use would probably aggravate the perceived imbalance between commercial and noncommercial float boaters.

Over the last 14 years the noncommercial demand for float boat permits on the two rivers has increased by about 99 percent on the Middle Fork and about 235 percent on the Salmon as shown in Table 1.1. As the demand for noncommercial permits increases, more people are paying closer attention to the balance between allowed permit and actual use numbers for both commercial and noncommercial users. The current allocation system of reserving launches for commercial river floaters and lotteries for noncommercial river floaters have come under criticism for being out of balance. Since the demand for noncommercial permits is increasing, the perception of some noncommercial float boaters is that commercial outfitters allocation exceeds demand.

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Table 1.1				
Increase in Noncommercial Permit Applications				
1990, 1995, and 2003				
River	Total applicants listing river as first choice			Percent Increase
	1990	1995	2003	
Middle Fork	4820	7563	9,568	99%
Salmon	932	1697	3,119	235%

On the Middle Fork, a review of commercial use data shows virtually all commercial launches are being utilized. There is essentially no opportunity for reallocation of launches on the Middle Fork.

On the Salmon River, a review of use data over the last 10 years shows there are approximately 100 commercial launches each year that are not used.

There is a need to address unused commercial launches and an increasing demand for launches by noncommercial recreationists on the Salmon River.

Management of noncommercial jetboat use on the Salmon River

The CIWA does not allow the Forest Service to restrict the use of motorboats on the Salmon River to a level less than the motorized use that occurred in calendar year 1978 (CIWA, Sec 9(a)). In addition, management of jetboat use on the Salmon River is guided by provisions of the W&SR Act with additional stipulations included in the CIWA to ensure that the standards of the W&SR Act prevail in the Salmon River corridor regarding this motorized use.

Noncommercial jetboat use was established during the summer season and is documented in the existing plan at 15 boat user days (BUDs) per week, running Wednesday through Tuesday. This number was calculated from existing use data recorded during the 1978-1981 summer seasons and provides for a slightly higher use level for noncommercial jetboats than the use level that occurred in 1978. There have been concerns this use level is too low to meet current demand for jetboat access during the summer season. There have also been concerns that the existing allocation actually limits use since it often is perceived as preventing larger parties from boating together, the permit system has not been widely understood, and that a launch is based on one boat, instead of multiple boats like noncommercial float boaters. Noncommercial jetboaters also feel that their use has been capped for the last 20 years while noncommercial float boater use and other wilderness user groups have been allowed to increase substantially. Noncommercial

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jetboaters have asked for an increase in summer season opportunities. There are no limits on noncommercial jetboat use outside of the summer season.

There is a need to reexamine the use levels in the existing plan for jetboats consistent with the CIWA and to consider allowing increases in jetboat use that do not conflict with the Semi-primitive Motorized setting along the Salmon River.

In order to preserve the semi-primitive motorized conditions along the river and to be consistent with party size levels for other groups there is a need to establish party size limits for noncommercial jetboat operations during each season of use on the Salmon River.

Management of the Painter Bar road

The original purpose of the Painter Bar Road was to access a private inholding; Painter Mine and Homestead. When the Forest Service purchased the Painter Homestead, the road was receiving use by the public and some private landowners.

Management of motorized use on the road from Mackay Bar Campground to Painter Bar Homestead/Mine has been an issue because of its location within the FC-RONRW and the Salmon River “wild” corridor. This road is currently described as open on the Nez Perce NF Travel Plan and in the existing wilderness management plan because of past access to private in-holdings.

Public use of this road has created user conflicts with wilderness and wild river management. All Terrain Vehicle (ATV) and 4-wheel drive traffic are inconsistent with wilderness designation, and the land based non-motorized setting in the river corridor.

There is an opportunity to address these changed conditions and develop management direction for this road that is more compatible with other management direction for the corridor.

Proposed Action

As a result of the analysis and public comment associated with the DEIS and SDEIS, the Proposed Action has evolved to encompass the following actions which were described in the SDEIS Alternative 6.

- ♦ Dewey Moore, Mile High, Simonds, and Vines, aircraft landing strips would be managed for use as public landing strips, which will require additional maintenance actions at these landing strips in the future.
- ♦ Float boat trip length of stay limits for both commercial and noncommercial trips on the Middle Fork and Salmon River would vary from 6-8 days based on trip party size. These limits would apply to the Middle Fork all year and to the Salmon River only during the summer season (June 20 to September 7).

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- ♦ On the Salmon River, float boat trip length of stay limits for both commercial and noncommercial trips in the winter and spring will be limited to 10 days. In the fall, length of stay will be limited to 14 days. Party size for all trips during the winter, spring, and summer is 30 people. During the fall, the party size limit is 20 people. During winter, spring, and fall there is no limit to the number of float boat launches per day. Assigned, but unused commercial launches will be reallocated; 50 percent will be reassigned to noncommercial launch opportunities and 50 percent will be available in a pool for other commercial launches.
- ♦ Noncommercial jetboat use during the summer season (June 20 to September 7) is increased from the current 15 BUDs per week to 40 BUDs, and 20 launches is established as the maximum number of launches per week. Outside of the summer season, (September 8 to June 19) the number of jetboats and launches are not limited. Jetboat trip length of stay limits for trips in the winter and spring will be constrained to 10 days. In the fall, length of stay will be limited to 14 days. Party size for all trips during the winter, spring, and summer is 30 people. During the fall, the party size limit is 20 people. There will be no differentiation of use levels above or below Ludwig rapid at any time during the year.
- ♦ Commercial jetboat use would remain at current permitted levels for number of outfitters, number of boats, and mix of authorized activities. In the fall, length of stay will be limited to 14 days. Party size for all trips during the winter, spring, and summer is 30 people. During the fall, the party size limit is 20 people.
- ♦ The Painter Bar Road will be closed from the eastside of Mackay Bar Campground to Painter Bar Homestead to motor vehicles and other forms of mechanical transport from June 20 to September 7 annually.

Decision Framework

The Forest Supervisors who administer lands contained in the FC–RONRW have been delegated authority to make amendments to the Forest Plans involved in the wilderness. The responsible officials will make the decisions described below based on the interdisciplinary team’s analysis contained in the FEIS and planning record. Some portions of these decisions are part of the overall wilderness plan and give direction to managers on a programmatic or broad level. Other portions of these decisions are specific to the area or resource and do not amend Forest Plans, but do amend specific parts of the existing management plan.

Decisions being made

The FC–RONRW Management Plan is a programmatic document that provides general direction for resource management in the Wilderness. This plan has been incorporated into the Forest Plans. In the Record of Decision (ROD) for this EIS, the Forest Supervisors for the Bitterroot, Nez Perce, Payette, and Salmon-Challis NFs will decide to revise the FC–RONRW Management

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Plan and incorporate the revised management plan into the respective Forest Plans, which includes the Boise NF. The specific changes being decided are:

- ♦ Management of Dewey Moore, Mile-Hi, Simonds, and Vines aircraft landing strips for public and/or emergency use;
- ♦ Management within the river corridors on the Salmon and Middle Fork Rivers, including:
 - Number of launches, maximum party sizes, and length of stay
 - Reallocation procedures for unused commercial float boat launches
 - Noncommercial jetboat use levels
- ♦ Management of motorized use on the Painter Bar road

Site-Specific Decisions not made in this ROD/FEIS

The next level of decision-making for managing the Wilderness involves the analysis and documentation of site-specific management practices designed to achieve the programmatic direction contained in the Wilderness Management Plan.

These decisions will be made separately, will tier to the Wilderness Management Plan, and will be reached through the appropriate analysis required by National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

Site-specific decisions that will not be made include:

- ♦ Operation plans for Dewey Moore, Mile-Hi, Simonds, and Vines aircraft landing strips;
- ♦ Establishing baseline condition and landing strip dimensions;
- ♦ Closing or relocating campsites to reduce resource impacts or user conflicts;

Actions not ripe for decision in this ROD/FEIS

Other actions affecting the Wilderness are not ripe for decision and are not within the scope of this EIS. These decisions will be considered through appropriate analysis required by NEPA.

These decisions include:

- ♦ Updating the FC–RONRW Noxious Weed Treatment EIS (August, 1999).

The ROD for the FC–RONRW Noxious Weed Treatment EIS directed that this EIS would decide how, where, and when non treatment practices such as coordination,

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education, inventories, and prevention, will occur. Since completion of the Noxious Weed Treatment EIS, fire has created larger potential noxious weed treatment areas than were analyzed in that EIS and there is a need to analyze an additional herbicide for noxious weed treatment. The additional noxious weed treatment needs will require analysis that is beyond the purpose and need for this EIS. A separate analysis will be conducted to decide on future Noxious Weed Treatment activities within the FC-RONRW.

- ♦ Revising or Replacing the River Use Allocation System

Allocations of trips on the rivers are analyzed in the FEIS, however many of the alternatives analyzed in the DEIS and SDEIS addressed changes in the river use allocation systems because of perceptions that the system is “unfair” to some user groups. During the summer seasons these systems include a lottery for noncommercial float boat users, a schedule for commercial float boat users, and a first-come, first-served schedule for noncommercial jetboat users. Commercial jetboats are regulated by number of boats and types of activities authorized. Most proposed changes to the existing allocation systems would come at the expense of one or more user groups or would affect the wilderness experience provided on the rivers. The existing allocation systems work and are understood by the affected user groups. Additional monitoring and analysis are necessary before changing the systems to allocate trips on the Middle Fork and Salmon Rivers.

Decisions made under other authorities

Several actions identified in the DEIS, SEIS and suggested by the public affect existing authorizations for use and occupancy of National Forest System lands. Modification of the terms and conditions of these uses will be accomplished through separate decision processes, with opportunities for permit holders to provide comment and appropriate administrative review. Other decisions are administrative actions, which do not require analysis under NEPA.

These decisions include:

- ♦ Setting priorities for landing strip maintenance;
- ♦ Implementing voluntary registration of noncommercial pilots to collect data on use at wilderness landing strips, as part of an information and education program for pilots in wilderness;
- ♦ Developing a Transportation Plan;
- ♦ Placing commercial pilots under special use permit for use of wilderness landing strips;
- ♦ Clarifying that day use float boating is not allowed under existing Outfitter and Guide float permits;

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- ♦ Requiring permits for noncommercial jetboats outside summer season;
- ♦ Authorizing passenger exchange by Outfitter and Guides;
- ♦ Requiring permits for noncommercial float boats on tributaries;
- ♦ Not issuing permits for commercial float boat on tributaries;
- ♦ Implementing a partial campsite reservation system on the Salmon River and;
- ♦ Addressing development levels at the three special use permit sites on the Salmon River. These have been addressed through a separate NEPA analysis and decision, and are the subject of litigation and proposed legislation.

Decisions for which the Forest Service does not have authority

The Forest Service does not have authority to implement some of the actions identified in DEIS, SEIS and suggested by public comment. These actions, while they do influence the achievement of management direction in the Plan, fall under the authority of other federal agencies or the State of Idaho. Therefore, the Forest Service does not have authority to decide whether or not to take the action, nor whether to modify the action.

These decisions include:

- ♦ Phasing in the requirement that kicker motors must meet 2006 Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) standards. EPA has authority for, and has already made, this decision and;
- ♦ Formal closure of Dewey Moore, Mile-Hi, Simonds, and Vines aircraft landing strips would require written concurrence from the State of Idaho. At this time, the State has not concurred with closure of these four landing strips.

Issues

Environmental issues raised during scoping and public comment were separated into two groups. Issues to be addressed are defined as those directly or indirectly caused by implementing the proposed action. Issues not addressed include those: 1) outside the scope of the proposed action; 2) included in the proposed action; 3) already decided by law, regulation, Forest Plan or other higher level decision; 4) irrelevant to the decision to be made; 5) decided under another authority; or 5) conjectural and not supported by scientific or factual evidence.

Issues Addressed in this Analysis

The Forest Supervisors have identified the following environmental issues relative to the proposed action:

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Issue #1 Aviation

Maintenance level at Dewey Moore, Mile-Hi, Simonds, and Vines landing strips.

Consistent with the current plan, the Forest Service has never done any maintenance on these landing strips.

Aviators believe that the landing strips are not adequately maintained by the Forest Service in order to provide an emergency level of service. In addition, aviators would like these landing strips to be maintained for public use rather than as emergency use only.

- ♦ Indicator: Maintenance condition for the four landing strips

Issue #2 River Recreation

River Use

Use in the river corridors is increasing and may seasonally move into conditions not consistent with visitors' river recreation expectations or the Wilderness Plan's desired condition and is adversely affecting campsite conditions. During high use times, increasing numbers of people and boats (including motorboats on the Salmon River) and congestion at launch sites, campsites, and special features on some of the rivers are creating a perception of crowding.

In addition, the quality of the visitors' experience in a primitive setting is partly determined by how much human intrusion on the wilderness resources is evident.

- ♦ Indicator: Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) Setting
- ♦ Indicator: Maximum People At One Time (PAOT's)

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Conflicts and Crowding between Users

Encounters or conflicts are occurring between the different types of user groups, motorized recreationists (jetboaters and aviators) and non-motorized recreationists (backpackers, stock users and floaters). Conflicts are also occurring between parties and individuals within user type groups. Group size, integrity, and ethics are also factors in user conflicts. Crowding and competition at launch sites, landing strips, campsites, trailheads, and popular destinations are beginning to affect the wilderness resource and recreation experiences

- ♦ Indicator: Maximum float boat launches per day by season of use
- ♦ Indicator: Maximum float boat party size in number of people by season of use
- ♦ Indicator: Maximum float boat length of stay in days by season of use

Jetboat Use on the Salmon Wild River

Many float boat visitors believe that jetboats detract from their Wild River experience and that jetboat use should be held to the minimum required by law.

Many noncommercial visitors who use jetboats to access the Salmon River believe their use is too restricted. They point out the use of all other user groups to the FC-RONRW that has been allowed to grow, while their use has been constrained to 15 BUDS per week. Jetboat visitors question whether 15 BUDS per week meets the intent of the CIWA when the CIWA uses the language of “not less than” implying a floor, rather than a ceiling of use.

- ♦ Indicator: Boats At One Time (BAOT) for each user group (commercial/noncommercial) by season

Campsite Capacity and Condition in the Middle Fork & Salmon River Corridors

Campsite capacities in the river corridors are limited by water level of the rivers, and the number and size of the campsites. During the summer high use season, maximum campsite capacity is nearly met on some days. If growth continues, campsites may not be available for all campers. Camps suitable for smaller groups are sometimes being used by medium or large sized groups, which leads to deteriorated campsite conditions. In addition, allowing user growth to continue does not allow campsites to have a recovery/rest period to revegetate.

- ♦ Indicator: Number of campsites needed to accommodate users by water level
- ♦ Indicator: Campsites Condition Trend

Balance between Commercial and Noncommercial Launches

Some noncommercial users perceive the current permit allocation system as favoring commercial float boaters. They point to reserved launches for outfitters, unequal numbers of

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actual noncommercial launches compared to commercial, and the unequal total numbers of people float boating in each category as evidence of inequity.

- ♦ Indicator: Number of actual launches by user group

Issue #3 Painter Bar Road

Management of Painter Bar Road

In the mid-1990s, the Forest Service acquired the private inholding 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 ATV users and has been used by hunters and fishermen for years. Use of the road is not compatible with the Wilderness Act direction and may not be compatible with the W&SR Act.

- ♦ Indicator: Types and season of use allowed

Issues Addressed in Effects Analysis

Cultural Resources

Both the public and other agencies raised protection of cultural and historical resources as an important consideration for this planning effort. Review of the existing management direction found that the plans were sufficient. All Forest Service management activities must comply with the National Historic Preservation Act, Archaeological Resources Protection Act, Native American Graves Repatriation Act, and American Indian Religious Freedom Act, including any activities within wilderness. Archaeologists are evaluating and monitoring a number of sites along the rivers and will propose mitigation. Prehistoric sites can be closed to the public if necessary. An information and education program could share cultural and historical information with the public outside the wilderness and explain the importance of preserving these resources. Effects to cultural resources are discussed in Chapter 4.

Fisheries

Current management direction is sufficient for managing fisheries resources. Since the current plan was adopted, three anadromous fish species (chinook and sockeye salmon, and steelhead trout), and a resident species (bull trout), have been listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Critical habitat for chinook and sockeye salmon has been identified within the FC-RONRW.

Wildlife Species

Human activities can affect the condition and extent of wildlife habitats needed to maintain naturally occurring populations of all indigenous species. Of special concern are critical habitat components such as denning, calving, wintering areas, and riparian habitat conservation areas.

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Unaltered habitats within the wilderness for experimental, threatened, endangered, proposed, and sensitive wildlife species are particularly important for their role in long-term survival and/or recovery of species such as gray wolf and wolverine.

Some revisions in management direction may need to address changes in listed species and changes in other resource management. Effects to wildlife, including threatened, endangered, or sensitive species are analyzed and disclosed in Chapter 4.

Air Quality

The FC–RONRW is a Class II airshed. A recently compiled inventory has shown air quality to be within the Clean Air Act (as amended in 1977 and 1990) standards for Class II airshed and that management is currently sufficient to protect the air quality resources. Description of the Air Quality can be found in Chapter 3 and effects are described in Chapter 4.

Soil and Water Quality

The soil and water inventory shows that soil and water quality are within the existing Plan standards and sufficient to protect these resources. In 1996 some stream segments within or near the FC–RONRW were nominated for Idaho State Outstanding Resource Water (ORW) designation. The water quality ranges from good to excellent. There are some areas affected by mineral and energy development in areas adjacent to the FC–RONRW that have resulted in some streams being listed as water quality limited (303(d)).

The proposed action does not affect ORW or 303(d) listed streams and soil and water quality are not considered a significant issues in this analysis.

Planning and Analysis Record

The information found in this FEIS represents a summary of records found in the planning and analysis files for the Frank Church–River of No Return Management Plan EIS. The record may be viewed by contacting the FC–RONR Wilderness Coordinator at the Salmon-Challis National Forest headquarters.