



Management Area 17. Independence Lakes Location Map

## Management Area 17 Independence Lakes

### MANAGEMENT AREA DESCRIPTION

**Management Prescriptions** - Management Area 17 has the following management prescriptions (see map on preceding page for distribution of prescriptions).

Management Prescription Category (MPC)	Percent of Mgt. Area
2.2 – Research Natural Areas	1
4.2 – Roaded Recreation	17
5.1 – Restoration and Maintenance Emphasis within Forested Landscapes	19
6.1 – Restoration and Maintenance Emphasis within Shrubland & Grassland Landscapes	63

**General Location and Description** - Management Area 17 is comprised of Forest Service lands on the eastern side of the Albion Division of the Minidoka Ranger District. The entire area is in Cassia County, and the nearest communities are Elba to the east, and Almo to the south. The area is an estimated 43,300 acres, including one private land inholding of 625 acres, a patented mining claim in the Connor Creek drainage. The City of Rocks National Reserve lies adjacent to the southern portion of the management area. The area is bordered by Sawtooth National Forest to the west and north, and by primarily private ranch lands to the east. The primary uses and activities in this management area are livestock grazing and dispersed recreation.

**Access** - The main access to the area is the paved Elba-to-Almo Road, which also serves the City of Rocks National Reserve, and gravel-surfaced Forest Road 548 from Elba over Elba Pass to Oakley. Classified road density for the management area is low (0.9 miles per square mile) due to steep terrain, and an estimated 83 percent of the area is inventoried as roadless. Total road density for area subwatersheds ranges between 0.1 and 1.8 miles per square mile. Rough, native-surfaced roads access the Independence Lakes Trailhead and lower portions of the Connor and Summit Creek drainages. Trails access Independence Lakes and many of the drainages.

**Special Features** – At 10,399 feet, Cache Peak is the highest mountain in Idaho south of the Snake River. The Independence Lakes area is a popular recreation destination. Portions of the Mount Harrison and Cache Creek Inventoried Roadless Areas lie within the management area. A portion of the Mount Harrison Research Natural Area (381 total acres) preserves rare plant species and represents relatively undisturbed subalpine vegetation.

**Air Quality** - This management area lies within Montana/Idaho Airshed ID-25 and in Cassia County. Particulate matter is the primary pollutant of concern related to Forest management. The closest ambient air monitor is located in Twin Falls. It is used to obtain current background levels, trends, and seasonal patterns of particulate matter. The closest Class I area is Craters of the Moon National Monument. Visibility monitoring has been expanded for this area.

Between 1995 and 1999, emissions trends in Cassia County improved for PM 10, while PM 2.5 emissions remained constant. The most common source of particulate matter in the county was fugitive dust from unpaved roads and agricultural activities such as tilling. In addition to Forest management activities, crop residue and ditch burning may contribute to particulate matter emissions. The amount of agricultural-related burning was among the highest in the state, over 22,500 acres. There were no point sources located within Cassia County.

**Soil, Water, Riparian, and Aquatic Resources** – Elevations range from 5,200 feet at the Forest boundary to 10,340 on Cache Peak. Management Area 17 is predominantly in the Humboldt River High Plateau subsection, and the dominant landforms are fluvial mountains, plateaus and escarpments, and depositional lands. Slope gradients range from 40 to 70 percent on the fluvial mountains, to 0 to 30 percent on the plateaus and depositional lands, to near vertical on the escarpments. Limestone schist with some granite dominates the surface geology. Soils generally have low to moderate surface erosion potential, and moderate to high productivity. Subwatershed vulnerability ratings in this area are all low (see table below). Geomorphic Integrity ratings for the subwatersheds are all moderate (functioning at risk) (see table below). Some areas have impacts from roads, livestock grazing, and dispersed recreation. Impacts include accelerated erosion, upland compaction, and stream bank and channel modification.

The management area lies in portions of the Cassia Creek and Edwards-Grape Watersheds that drain east into the Raft River Subbasin, which drains north into the Snake River Basin. The main streams in the area are Green, Clyde, New Canyon, Stinson, Almo, Connor, and Cassia Creeks. Independence Lakes, in the upper Green Creek drainage, comprise the only system of natural lakes in the entire Southern Division of the Sawtooth National Forest. Water Quality Integrity ratings for the subwatersheds are all moderate (functioning at risk) due to localized accelerated erosion from roads, livestock grazing, and dispersed recreation. There are currently no water bodies listed as impaired under Section 303(d) of the Clean Water Act; however, the management area is within a TMDL-assigned subbasin.

Subwatershed Vulnerability			Geomorphic Integrity			Water Quality Integrity			No. 303(d) Subs	No. Subs With TMDLs	No. Public Water System Subs
High	Mod.	Low	High	Mod.	Low	High	Mod.	Low			
0	0	9	0	9	0	0	9	0	0	0	0

No currently listed threatened or endangered fish species occur in Management Area 17. Small populations of rainbow trout and Yellowstone cutthroat trout exist in area streams. Almo Creek and Cassia Creek have strong local populations of native Yellowstone cutthroat trout, and Almo Creek has a highly isolated local population. The Upper Cassia Creek and Mid Cassia Creek subwatersheds have been identified as high-priority restoration areas for Yellowstone cutthroat trout. Independence Lakes have been planted with Arctic grayling, California golden trout, rainbow trout, and cutthroat trout. Aquatic habitat is functioning at risk in some areas due to localized sedimentation impacts from livestock grazing, roads, and dispersed recreation.

**Vegetation** - An estimated 55 percent of the management area is non-forested, or covered by grasslands, shrublands, meadows, rock, or water. Much of this area is comprised of the Mountain Big Sagebrush, Basin Big Sage, and Perennial Grass Slopes vegetation groups. The

dominant forested vegetation groups are Aspen (14 percent) and Persistent Lodgepole Pine (24 percent).

The Mountain Big Sagebrush and Basin Big Sage groups are functioning at risk due to fire exclusion and livestock grazing impacts, which have altered structure and species composition. Fire exclusion and livestock grazing has allowed a canopy cover to increase, which has reduced the understory herbaceous cover. Native grasses in the perennial grass slopes group are being replaced by cheatgrass and other introduced species. Non-native grasses have been extensively seeded on lands adjacent to the Forest, with some seeding on Forest as well.

The Persistent Lodgepole Pine group is functioning at risk because fire exclusion has resulted in older, more decadent stands with more shade-tolerant subalpine fir and less early seral species, particularly aspen and lodgepole pine. Aspen is present in pure stands and mixed with subalpine fir. This group is presently at properly functioning condition, although some stands are dying out or being replaced by conifers.

Riparian vegetation is functioning at risk in localized areas due to grazing and dispersed recreation impacts, and fire exclusion. In some areas, introduced grasses and noxious weeds are replacing native plants. Aspen and willow communities are becoming old and decadent, and are not regenerating due to fire exclusion and livestock use. Snag levels are near historic levels in most areas due to limited access for fuelwood gathering.

**Botanical Resources** – Christ’s Indian paintbrush, a Candidate species for federal listing, is found globally in only one location at the top of Mount Harrison. An estimated 23 percent of the population (90 acres) occurs in the Mt Harrison Research Natural Area. Davis’ wavewing, a Region 4 Sensitive species, is found in this management area. No federally listed or proposed plant species are known to occur in the area, but potential habitat exists for Ute ladies’-tresses and slender moonwort. Ute ladies’-tresses, a Threatened species, may have moderate potential habitat in riparian/wetland areas from 1,000 to 7,000 feet. Slender moonwort, a Candidate species, may occur in moderate to higher elevation grasslands, meadows, small openings in spruce and lodgepole pine, and open rocky outcrops.

In addition to having the only known population of Christ’s Indian paintbrush, the summit of Mount Harrison has two of the largest intact tall forb communities remaining in Idaho. These communities are characterized by tall (16- to 48-inch) luxuriant plant communities composed of mesic forbs. Tall forb communities typically cover highly erosive soils that rapidly erode without protective vegetation. There is a need to establish the Mount Harrison Botanical Special Interest Area to maintain the tall forb communities, the Christ’s Indian paintbrush population not encompassed in the RNA, and the other endemic rare plant species found on Mount Harrison.

**Non-native Plants** – Musk thistle, spotted knapweed, Canada thistle, and leafy spurge occur in the management area, especially along main travel corridors and in areas of high activity. The main weeds of concern are Medusa head, leafy spurge, spotted knapweed, and Canada thistle, which currently occur in small, scattered populations. An estimated 18 percent of the area is highly susceptible to noxious weed and exotic plant establishment and spread

**Wildlife Resources (Updated** as part of the 2012 WCS amendment) - Most of this area lies above 5,500 feet, the terrestrial and avian wildlife are generally high-elevation species. Low-elevation sagebrush/grasslands and forests provide habitat for greater sage-grouse, pygmy rabbit, Columbian sharp-tailed grouse, Swainson's hawk and ferruginous hawk and limited mule deer winter range. Pinyon pine has limited distribution and is important habitat for pinyon jay and pinyon mouse. Nesting and foraging habitats for other Region 4 Sensitive species, including goshawk, flammulated owl and Townsends big-eared bat, are found in the mid-elevation forests. Higher elevation forests provide mule deer summer range and habitat for south hills crossbill and boreal owl. Habitat for yellow-billed cuckoo is found in cottonwood riparian corridors with dense understory vegetation. The Idaho Department of Fish and Game recently re-introduced California bighorn sheep into the area and habitat can be found in the rocky canyons. Other species present within the area include migratory landbirds, mountain lion, a small population of elk, dusky grouse and isolated moose occurrences. There is no elk-hunting season currently in this unit. This area is within the Central Idaho Wolf Recovery Area, but wolves are not currently known to occur here.

Terrestrial habitat is functioning at risk in some areas due primarily to human-caused disturbance, introduction of invasive species, grazing impacts, and changes in the fire cycle. Increasing recreation has increased disturbance to wildlife populations year-round. Long-term exclusion of fire has altered some habitats so that they no longer function as they did historically. Current livestock grazing in some areas is not allowing localized areas of historic grazing impacts to recover. Habitat fragmentation from roads, development and fire is generally moderate.

The area is not within any of the five Canada lynx geographic areas, as identified in the Canada Lynx Conservation and Strategy (2000); and therefore LAUs and lynx habitat mapping were not developed for the area. Consultation for Canada lynx on the Sawtooth NF was completed in 2003 and the US Fish and Wildlife Service concurred with the Forest's findings for lynx. Forest-wide management direction relative to the lynx does not apply in this management area.

Idaho's Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy (CWCS) was completed in 2005 and provides a framework for conserving 'Species of Greatest Conservation Need' (SGCN), designated by the State, and the habitats upon which they depend. The Forest assisted the State in identifying focal areas, or areas known to be important for SGCN. The Management Area falls within the Jim Sage designated focal area, or biologically important area. This area represents exceptional natural habitat for pinyon pine and aspen with tall forb communities and is identified as core habitat for terrestrial wildlife species including sage grouse, pinyon jay, pinyon mouse, California bighorn sheep, ferruginous hawk and south hills crossbill.

**Recreation Resources** - The Independence Lakes Trailhead is the only developed recreation site in the area. The rest of the management area provides high-quality dispersed recreation opportunities year-round, including hunting, backpacking, horseback riding, mountain biking, snowmobiling and Nordic skiing. Overall use is high along the Skyline Trail and in the Independence Lakes region. The area is in Idaho Fish and Game Management Unit 55. Most (80-90 percent) of the users come from the Magic Valley (Twin Falls, Rupert, Burley). An estimated 40 miles of trails are maintained in the area. The Ranger Trail and Independence

Lakes Trail are non-motorized, while the Skyline Trail is open to motorized use. Recreation special uses in the area are two outfitter and guide operations.

**Cultural Resources** – Cultural themes in this area are mining and emigration/settlement. The Connor Ridge and Creek area have been historically mined. One site, the Melcher Mine, has been documented and is potentially eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. The area borders a portion of the California Trail.

**Timberland Resources** - Of the estimated 11,000 tentatively suited acres in this management area, 9,600 acres have been identified as being suited timberlands, or appropriate for timber production. This represents about 7 percent of the Forest’s suited timberland acres. The suited timberland acres are found in MPCs 5.1 and 6.1, as shown on the management area map. Lands within MPC 2.2 are not suited for timber production. There have been no recent timber sales in this area. Forest products such as fuelwood, posts, and poles are collected in designated areas.

**Rangeland Resources** - The area contains all of the Elba, Pine Hollow, Chokecherry, and Grape Creek Cattle and Horse Allotments, and part of the Almo Park Cattle and Horse Allotment. The area has an estimated 16,800 acres of capable rangeland, which represents about 3 percent of capable rangeland on the Forest.

**Mineral Resources** - Current mining activity is very low (one claimant) however, several valid claims exist. Most mining activity stopped in the early 20th century. Potential for mineral development is considered low.

**Fire Management** - The Elba Fire (1997) burned 13,000 acres of south slopes in the Cottonwood and Connor Creek areas; regeneration from rehabilitation efforts is progressing. There are no National Fire Plan communities or wildland-urban interface subwatersheds in the area. Historical fire regimes for the area are estimated to be 1 percent lethal and 99 percent mixed1 or 2. None of the area regimes has vegetation conditions that are highly departed from their historical range. However, 16 percent of the area regimes have vegetation conditions that are moderately departed from their historical range. Wildfire in these areas may result in larger patch sizes of high intensity or severity.

**Lands and Special Uses** - The Mount Harrison designated communications site is located within the management area.

## MANAGEMENT DIRECTION

In addition to Forest-wide Goals, Objectives, Standards, and Guidelines that provide direction for all management areas, the following direction has been developed specifically for this area.

Resource/Program	Direction	Number	Management Direction Description
MPC 2.2 Research Natural Areas	General Standard	1701	Mechanical vegetation treatment, salvage harvest, prescribed fire, and wildland fire may only be used to maintain values for which the areas were established, or to achieve other objectives that are consistent with the RNA establishment records or management plans. (Modified as part of the 2012 WCS amendment)

Resource/Program	Direction	Number	Management Direction Description
<b>MPC 2.2 Research Natural Areas</b>	Road Standard	1702	Road construction or reconstruction may only occur where needed: a) To provide access related to reserved or outstanding rights, or b) To respond to statute or treaty, or c) To maintain the values for which the RNA was established.
	Fire Guideline	1703	The full range of fire suppression strategies may be used to suppress wildfires. Fire suppression strategies and tactics should minimize impacts to the values for which the RNA was established.
<b>MPC 4.2 Roaded Recreation Emphasis</b>	Vegetation Standard	1741	For commercial salvage sales, retain the maximum number of snags depicted in Table A-6 within each size class where available. Where large snags (>20 inches dbh) are unavailable, retain additional snags ≥10 inches dbh where available to meet the maximum total number of snags per acre depicted in Table A-6. <sup>1</sup> ( <b>Added</b> as part of the 2012 WCS amendment)
	Vegetation Guideline	1704	Vegetation management actions—including wildland fire, prescribed fire, and mechanical treatments—may be used to maintain or restore desired vegetation and fuel conditions provided they do not prevent achievement of recreation resource objectives. ( <b>Modified</b> as part of the 2012 WCS amendment)
	Fire Guideline	1705	The full range of fire suppression strategies may be used to suppress wildfires. Emphasize strategies and tactics that minimize impacts to recreation developments and investments.
<b>MPCs 5.1 and 6.1 Restoration and Maintenance Emphasis within Forested (5.1) and Shrubland/Grassland (6.1) Landscapes</b>	Vegetation Standard	1742	For commercial salvage sales, retain the maximum number of snags depicted in Table A-6 within each size class where available. Where large snags (>20 inches dbh) are unavailable, retain additional snags ≥10 inches dbh where available to meet the maximum total number of snags per acre depicted in Table A-6. <sup>1</sup> ( <b>Added</b> as part of the 2012 WCS amendment)
	Vegetation Guideline	1706	The full range of vegetation treatment activities may be used to restore or maintain desired vegetation and fuel conditions. The available vegetation treatment activities include wildland fire. Salvage harvest may also occur. ( <b>Modified</b> as part of the 2012 WCS amendment)
	Fire Guideline	1707	The full range of fire suppression strategies may be used to suppress wildfires. Emphasize strategies and tactics that minimize impacts to habitats, developments, and investments.
	Road Guideline	1708	Road construction or reconstruction may occur where needed: a) To provide access related to reserved or outstanding rights, or b) To respond to statute or treaty, or c) To achieve restoration and maintenance objectives for vegetation, water quality, aquatic habitat, or terrestrial habitat, or d) To support management actions taken to reduce wildfire risks in wildland-urban interface areas; or e) To meet access and travel management objectives.

<sup>1</sup> This standard shall not apply to activities that an authorized officer determines are needed for the protection of life and property during an emergency event, to reasonably address other human health and safety concerns, to meet hazardous fuel reduction objectives within WUIs, or to allow reserved or outstanding rights, tribal rights or statutes to be reasonably exercised or complied with.

Resource/Program	Direction	Number	Management Direction Description
<b>MPCs 5.1 and 6.1 Restoration and Maintenance Emphasis</b>	Road Guideline	1743	Public motorized use should be restricted on new roads built to implement vegetation management projects. Effective closures should be provided in road design. When the project is over, these roads should be reclaimed or decommissioned, if not needed to meet future management objectives. ( <b>Added</b> as part of the 2012 WCS amendment)
<b>Soil, Water, Riparian, and Aquatic Resources</b>	Objective	1709	Improve riparian areas and streambank stability by reducing soil compaction, accelerated sediment, and loss of vegetation caused by dispersed camping and livestock grazing in Flat Canyon and New Canyon drainages.
	Objective	1710	Maintain fish habitat for the trout fisheries in Cassia Creek and its tributaries, and other perennial streams in the area.
<b>Vegetation</b>	Objective	1711	Increase the early seral components of aspen and lodgepole pine in the Persistent Lodgepole Pine vegetation group. Move toward desired range for composition and structure, as described in Appendix A.
	Objective	1712	Restore and maintain shrubland communities, particularly the Basin Big Sage vegetation group, as described in Appendix A.
	Objective	1713	Restore Mountain Big Sagebrush canopy cover and juniper densities to desired conditions, as described in Appendix A, in the Dry Creek area to address fire hazard.
	Objective	1714	Maintain or restore riparian vegetation in Cottonwood Creek and Clyde Creek drainages to provide for riparian-dependent species.
<b>Botanical Resources</b>	Objective	1715	Preserve botanical resources in the Mount Harrison RNA consistent with the establishment guidelines.
	Objective	1716	Develop and implement an interpretive program to reduce risks to Christ's Indian paintbrush and educate the public of its uniqueness.
	Objective	1717	Establish the Mount Harrison Botanical Special Interest Area to maintain the Christ's Indian paintbrush population, tall forb communities, and other botanical resources.
	Objective	1718	Develop and implement a management plan for the Mount Harrison Botanical Special Interest Area.
	Objective	1719	Maintain and restore populations and occupied habitats of TEPCS species, including Christ's Indian paintbrush and Davis' wavewing, to contribute to their long-term viability of these species.
	Objective	1720	Emphasize reducing Canada thistle, spotted knapweed, and other non-native species within TEPCS plant actual and potential habitat.
	Standard	1721	Maintain habitat and populations of Christ's Indian paintbrush consistent with the conservation strategy developed and signed by the Sawtooth National Forest.
	Standard	1722	Do not allow commercial plant or seed collection at the summit of Mt. Harrison to help retain the rare plant species that currently occupy the site.
	Guideline	1723	Coordinate forested and grassland/shrubland restoration, prescribed fire, and non-native plant eradication efforts with a Forest botanist to minimize impacts to threatened, proposed, or sensitive plant species, actual or potential habitat, and pollinators.



Resource/Program	Direction	Number	Management Direction Description													
<b>Non-native Plants</b>	Objective	1724	Eradicate Medusa head infestations in the Rocky Hollow area. Use contain and control strategies for spot infestations of leafy spurge, spotted knapweed, Canada thistle, and other noxious weeds.													
<b>Wildlife Resources</b>	Guideline	1725	Management actions in sage grouse habitat should be designed to meet the desired conditions for sagebrush, as described in Appendix A. Where greater than 40 percent of the sage grouse habitat in the management area has less than 10 percent canopy cover, management actions should be designed to maintain or restore cover conditions.													
	Guideline	1726	Cattle allotments should not be converted to domestic sheep allotments within bighorn sheep habitat.													
<b>Recreation Resources</b>	Objective	1727	Emphasize recreation facility maintenance, specifically Independence Lakes Trailhead, and Independence Lakes and Skyline Trails.													
	Objective	1728	Complete a Limit of Acceptable Change analysis for the Independence Lakes area to help guide recreation management and reduce impacts to other resources.													
	Objective	1729	Achieve or maintain the following ROS strategy: <table border="1" data-bbox="688 800 1396 982"> <thead> <tr> <th rowspan="2">ROS Class</th> <th colspan="2">Percent of Mgt. Area</th> </tr> <tr> <th>Summer</th> <th>Winter</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Semi-Primitive Motorized</td> <td>43%</td> <td>100%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Roaded Natural</td> <td>15%</td> <td>Trace</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Roaded Modified</td> <td>42%</td> <td>0%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>The above numbers reflect current travel regulations. These numbers may change as a result of future travel regulation planning</p>	ROS Class	Percent of Mgt. Area		Summer	Winter	Semi-Primitive Motorized	43%	100%	Roaded Natural	15%	Trace	Roaded Modified	42%
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<b>Scenic Environment</b>	Objective	1730	Maintain scenic integrity in areas next to City of Rocks and Castle Rocks to preserve the high scenic value of these areas for visitors.													
<b>Cultural Resources</b>	Objective	1731	Complete a cultural resources inventory of high-elevation recreation areas adjacent to the Independence Lakes basin to locate and identify important cultural resources.													
	Objective	1732	Complete the interpretive strategy for the Albion Division to guide development of interpretive opportunities.													
<b>Timberland Resources</b>	Objective	1733	Designate firewood-gathering areas in order to maintain snag and large woody debris components for wildlife and aquatic habitat, and soil productivity.													
	Objective	1734	Provide for commercial harvest opportunities through restoration activities to reduce fire and insect hazard in the management area.													
<b>Rangeland Resources</b>	Objective	1735	Reduce livestock grazing and recreation conflicts in the Independence Lakes area when livestock use occurs during the early summer in the Green Creek drainage through more intensive livestock management.													
	Objective	1736	Whenever possible, modify developed springs and other water sources to restore free-flowing water and wet meadows in sage grouse habitat.													
	Guideline	1737	When constructing or reconstructing fences, design or relocate them to avoid potential sage grouse mortality near leks.													
<b>Fire Management</b>	Objective	1738	Identify areas appropriate for wildland fire. Use wildland fire to restore or maintain desired vegetative conditions and to reduce fuel loadings. ( <b>Modified</b> as part of the 2012 WCS amendment)													

<b>Resource/Program</b>	<b>Direction</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Management Direction Description</b>
<b>Fire Management</b>	Guideline	1739	Coordinate with adjacent land managers to develop compatible wild land fire suppression strategies.
<b>Facilities and Roads</b>	Objective	1740	Decommission Hereford Guard Station to improve management efficiency.