



# Frankly Speaking

Report of the Frank Church — River of No Return Wilderness July 31, 2003

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## Final EIS to be Released for Review

The long-awaited Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for the Frank Church – River of No Return Wilderness (FC-RONRW) Management Plan is nearly completed. The FEIS provides the basis for our decisions to revise the management plan that will provide programmatic direction for day-to-day management decisions in the 2.4 million acre Wilderness.

The FEIS will be mailed in mid-August. Comments on the FEIS will be accepted for 45 days following its release and those comments will be evaluated prior to issuing the Record of Decision (ROD). The ROD will result in a revised management plan and amendments to the Forest Plans of the National Forests that administer the FC-RONR Wilderness. The ROD will be issued later this year.

The decision is being delayed and comment is being invited for three reasons.

1. Many of you that have expressed an interest in this management plan are currently working in or enjoying the FC-RONR Wilderness and the Middle Fork or Salmon Rivers and have asked that the Forest Service recognize that in the timing of the deci-

sions relative to comment and appeal periods.

2. The Forest Service has reviewed the decisions being made based upon this FEIS. Those decisions that are programmatic in nature have been identified and will be reflected in the revised management plan. Some decisions involve site-specific actions that are not appropriately addressed in the management plan revision. Still other decisions are administrative in nature and are decided under different authorities and will not be made in this EIS.
3. As a result of the review of decisions being made, the alternatives previously presented in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) and Supplemental DEIS (SDEIS) have been restructured to better integrate various management decisions. The components of the restructured alternatives were presented in the DEIS or SDEIS but will be formatted differently in the Final EIS.

# History

## HISTORY OF PLANNING EFFORT

In December 1994, the notice of intent to prepare this EIS was issued. The Forest Service asked for your comments to help identify the issues that would be addressed in the analysis.

In January 1998, the DEIS was issued with five alternatives, including continuation of present management direction. The overwhelming comment from the public was that the range of alternatives considered was too narrow and all alternatives re-



**Senator Frank Church**

stricted use below current management plan levels, which was not perceived to be appropriate. Comments supported an aggressive noxious weed treatment strategy, but expressed concern that the Forest Service was attempting to fix recreational use problems that did not exist.

The issue of weed control was considered to be too urgent to delay during the completion of the Management Plan EIS. A FEIS and ROD for Noxious Weed Control within the FC-RONRW was issued in August 1999.

In September 1999, the Forest Service issued a SDEIS for the revision of the FC-RONRW Management Plan that added six additional alternatives. Many of these alternatives only addressed specific issues of concern and did not address all of the decisions being made.

In 2000, a major fire outbreak resulted in the burning of over ½ million acres (>20%) of the FC-RONRW, temporary closure of the entire Wilderness, and a diversion of the Forest Service focus from the Management Plan EIS to fire recovery through 2000 and 2001.

It is now 2003 and needs to revise the Management Plan have not gone away. Time and public comments have led the Forest Service to a different perspective on the problems being addressed and the methods available to resolve these concerns.

*“The true meaning of Wilderness will open our eyes like an Idaho sunrise on a summer day.” Senator Church*

# Introduction

## RESTRUCTURED ALTERNATIVES

To provide an integrated suite of management actions and clarify the decisions being made, Alternatives 1 through 11 from the DEIS and SDEIS have been consolidated into Alternatives A through E in the FEIS. Alternatives A through E display and analyze the full range of actions displayed in the DEIS and SDEIS, but address only those actions being carried forward for decisions in the FEIS.

Actions that were common between some alternatives or that were not significantly different from another alternative have been eliminated. Alternatives have been renamed to reduce confusion.

Decisions and actions discussed in the DEIS and SDEIS that will not be made in the FEIS include:

- Site specific decisions that are beyond the scope of this programmatic EIS
- Decision made within existing management authority
- Decisions on issues not identified in the purpose and need for this EIS
- Decisions that are the within the purview of, or shared with, other governmental agencies
- Decisions that conflict with the provisions of the Central Idaho Wilderness Act (CIWA)

## DECISIONS TO BE MADE

As described above, the principle objective in revising the FC-RONRW Management Plan and amend the six Forest Plans is focused on programmatic management direction. Many comments that were received and some of the actions presented in the Drafts included site specific actions and suggestions to take actions that are beyond the authority of the Forest Service. Some actions could be made under existing authorities or under the terms and conditions of special use permits, or are contrary to the provisions of the CIWA. These actions are not appropriately decided in a programmatic amendment to the Forest Plans or revision of the Wilderness Management Plan.

The purpose of this issue of Frankly Speaking is to explain how each of the decisions not addressed in the FEIS will be made and identify those that will be made based upon the FEIS. To provide continuity with the Drafts, the explanations are presented by topic area.

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# Aviation

The aviation decisions originally outlined in the DEIS revolved around the level of commercial aircraft use that would be allowed on four landing strips along Big Creek (Dewey Moore, Mile-Hi, Simonds, and Vines). These alternatives looked at closing these landing strips, increasing the maintenance level to support greater use, and the maintenance methods used on all landing strips within the FC-RONRW.

The CIWA specifically authorized the landing of aircraft to continue within the FC-RONRW. It further prohibited the Forest Service from permanently closing any aircraft landing strip in regular use on national forest lands prior to the date of enactment (1980), unless it obtains written concurrence of the Idaho Department of Transportation, Division of Aeronautics. At one time all four of these landing strips had been privately owned and were not

available for public use. The Simonds landing strip was acquired by the Forest Service in 1981, after the CIWA was enacted. The other three were acquired prior to CIWA.

Current direction for these four landing strips states that they will not be maintained for public use as landing strips, their use will be discouraged, except for emergencies, and they will not be maintained. Air taxis are to be notified that these strips are to be used for emergency landings only.

A leading issue of debate is whether the Forest Service must consult with the State prior to closing these landing strips. It is argued that none of the landing strips were open for public use, therefore the provisions of CIWA do not apply. On the other hand it is argued that at least three of the landing strips were federally owned at the time of CIWA and are covered by provi-



# Aviation

sions of the CIWA, or that federal ownership itself, regardless of the date of acquisition, requires state consultation on closure of the landing strips.

In reviewing the language of CIWA and debate testimony on the Act, it is clear that the authors wanted the State to be consulted prior to the Forest Service closing any landing strips. At this time, the State of Idaho does not concur with a decision to close any landing strips within the FC-RONRW. While the public opinion is diverse on the use of these landing strips, available information does not indicate a current or imminent environmental need to change the management status of these landing strips to either close them or enhance their current operational status.

***The issue of whether the Dewey Moore, Mile-Hi, Simonds, and Vines landing strips should be closed is not within the sole authority of the Forest Service. The State of Idaho must concur in this action and does not support closure. Therefore, a decision on landing strip closure will not be made in the FEIS.***

If the four landing strips are to remain open, it is appropriate to consider their operational status.

***The FEIS will analyze the options of retaining the current emergency only status of the Dewey Moore,***

***Mile-Hi, Simonds, and Vines landing strips, (with or without maintenance), or designating the landing strips as open for public use.***

The degree and priority for maintenance of all wilderness landing strips was an action considered during the DEIS and SDEIS.

***Site specific decisions on each of the landing strips within the FC-RONRW are beyond the programmatic scope of this EIS. Those decisions will not be made at this time, but will be made through an appropriate analysis that focuses on specific landing strip issues. This includes operation plans for each landing strip, maintenance priorities, and establishing baseline landing strip conditions and dimensions.***

Reducing conflicts between aircraft use and other wilderness users was another concern identified in the DEIS. The unique legislation establishing the FC-RONRW allows and expects aircraft use to continue within Wilderness. The education of aircraft users about the Wilderness is appropriate.

***An information and education program for pilots within the Wilderness will be implemented using a voluntary registration system for noncommercial pilots. The data collected will be used to monitor aircraft use.***

## Land Based Recreation

One of the actions contemplated in the DEIS was to establish management direction providing goals for recreation visitor management using the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) and the establishment of indicators for the number of encounters or human impacts as measured by People at One Time (PAOT). Further review and public comment identified that ROS classifications, maximum potential PAOT, and anticipated PAOT are effects of various management actions rather than decisions being made.

***The Forest Service has completed an ROS inventory for the FC-RONRW and has included that inventory in the FEIS. The effect of the alternatives evaluated in the FEIS on existing recreation settings and maximum potential and anticipated PAOT will be displayed for each alternative in the FEIS.***



A second action addressed is standards for campsite condition and location. Current management plan direction, which defines campsite condition inventory methods and directs that campsites should be located at least 200 feet from lakes, trails, and streams, where terrain permits, does not provide enough direction on how to determine when and where to relocate campsites that are degraded.

The analysis addressing this concern has identified campsites that need to be addressed are those that are classified as Frisell Condition Class IV or V. Research indicates that degraded sites are relatively stable over time because impacts occur early in a campsite's use. Programmatic direction resulting from the FEIS will not provide specifics necessary to address specific campsites.

## *Land Based Recreation*

***Site specific decisions on campsites requiring restoration or relocation within the wilderness are beyond the scope of this EIS. Campsite condition and trend will be monitored on degraded campsites. Relocation or restoration actions will be made through an appropriate analysis for individual campsites.***

The DEIS and SDEIS identified the need to study the wilderness trail system for extent, condition, and priorities of maintenance. To address this need, a transportation plan was developed that identified the current trailheads and categorized each trail according to four categories corresponding to trail management objectives (Mainline, Secondary, Way & Un-maintained).

The transportation plan concluded that the existing distribution of roaded and aircraft access (trailheads) is adequate to provide visitors access. It also determined that the extent of the trail system is such that not only does it provide access to the identified points within the Wilderness, it also allows for user dispersal beyond the identified points and provides a spectrum of trail experiences and opportunities. Therefore, no trailhead or trail closure or construction is proposed at this time.

***The FC-RONRW Transportation Plan will be used to guide and prioritize trail maintenance within the Wilderness.***



# Rivers

## ***River Use Levels***

One of the dominant issues during this revision effort has been management of the level and allocation of use for the Main and the Middle Fork of the Salmon River Wild Rivers. The initial concern that led the Forest Service to believe the management plans for the FC-RONRW should be revised resulted from the observation that actual use levels on the rivers had increased dramatically since the original management plans were written. Current permitted river use during the control season, particularly float boat use, is often at or near the campsite capacity on each river. Increased use levels beyond those experienced today will likely result in campsite degradation, increased encounters between parties, and potential conflicts between different user groups as they vie for campsites each night. Management plans currently provide for potential increases in use the Forest Service believes will result in unacceptable impacts to campsites and user experiences.

The alternatives addressed in the DEIS addressed this in ways that would have reduced current use levels. Comments you provided stressed that the Forest Service was attempting to solve a problem (current use levels) that did not exist and the proposed solutions would be worse than the problem. The SDEIS addressed your concerns by analyzing a variety of options. Further analysis of these alternatives and public comment on the DEIS, and SDEIS has led us to conclude that, with one exception, management actions dealing with river

use are programmatic decisions that will be addressed in the FEIS.

***The FEIS will analyze management options designed to reduce the potential for unacceptable growth in visitor use and to fully use the launch allocations currently assigned to different user groups. Alternatives in the FEIS will consider float boat launches, lengths of stay limits and maximum party sizes on the Middle Fork and Salmon Rivers and also consider reallocation of unused commercial float boat launches on the Salmon River.***

***The alternatives also consider length of stay limits and maximum party sizes for commercial and noncommercial jetboat launches on the Salmon River.***





# Rivers



## ***Kicker Motors***

The use of kicker motors on float boats within the Salmon River corridor was also discussed in the DEIS. Concerns about kicker motors include the fact that current management direction does not address kicker motors, and concern that these motors can cause noise, odor, and potentially disturb wildlife

***Kicker motors were used to assist float boats on the Salmon River in 1978 and before. They are an established motorized use that is allowed by CIWA and will be permitted on the Salmon River consistent with the provisions of CIWA.***

## ***Noncommercial Jetboats***

The one exception noted above deals with management direction for the allocation of noncommercial jetboat permits on the Main Salmon River. Current direction has not allowed this user group to increase use beyond levels established in 1978 which is viewed as a “floor” rather than a “ceiling” based upon the provisions of the CIWA.

***The Forest Service is analyzing alternative levels of use allocations for private jetboat use in the FEIS.***

Manufacturing standards for outboard motors are regulated by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). EPA has issued regulations mandating that outboard motor manufacturers meet higher emissions and sound level standards by 2006. Some manufacturers are already meeting the EPA 2006 standards.

***The Forest Service does not have the authority to establish emissions and noise standards for outboard motors. Because EPA has that authority and has already made the decision, this issue will not be addressed in the FEIS.***

# Rivers

## Allocation Systems

Many of the alternatives analyzed in the DEIS and SDEIS addressed changes in the current river use allocation system because of perceptions that the system is “unfair” to some user groups. During the control 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. It is apparent to the Forest Service based upon comments on the DEIS and SDEIS that “fairness” is dependent on the perspective of the user. 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 Forest Service has not identified a new or revised river use allocation system that would be more equitable to all user groups than the current system. Revising the allocation system was not part of the purpose and need for this EIS.***

***Therefore, no changes to the overall allocation systems will be made at this time. However, decisions on some components of the allocation systems as described above are analyzed in the FEIS.***

## Day Use

The DEIS identified a decision to be made about whether single day river use would

be permitted in the river corridors or tributaries. The SDEIS expanded this discussion to include trips that could be more than single day, but would float the same segment of river multiple times.

Concerns with this type of use involve increased impacts to the river and campsites in certain desirable segments of rivers. These include increased potential for user conflict because there would be more users on these segments and an associated increase in jetboat traffic in the corridor to support day use.

The Middle Fork and Salmon River provide a unique opportunity for multi-day trips within the Wilderness setting. Few float areas in the United States provide this experience. Current management direction this unique niche and places emphasis on longer trips since there is more demand than supply for multi-day trips. Allowing for day trips within this area would limit the use for multi-day trips and/or create conflicts between different user groups. Other rivers allow day use without jeopardizing these unique multi-day trip.

***Outfitter Guide permits provide the vehicle for authorizing day use.***

***The terms and conditions of these permits provide the mechanism for making these decisions. Therefore, it is beyond the scope of the EIS.***

***Day use will not be authorized on the Middle Fork or Salmon Rivers. Definitions used in the Outfitter Guide Operation Plan and Annual Operating plan will be clarified to address this issue.***

# Rivers

## *Passenger Exchange*

The SDEIS discussed another activity commercial outfitter guides offer on both the Middle Fork and Salmon rivers called ‘passenger exchange’. The concern is that passenger exchange creates additional traffic within the river corridors. A passenger exchange involves some members of a party departing and/or joining the party during course of a trip. This most commonly involves flying the members that are being exchanged via an airstrip along the river corridor or transporting them via jetboat on the Salmon River. Passenger exchange does not allow exception from either the party size or length of stay limits for the launch.

*As described for day use, passenger exchange is authorized under the terms and conditions of the Outfitter and Guide Permit. Therefore, this use will be managed under the terms of these authorizations and is beyond the scope of this EIS.*



## *Campsite Competition*

Competition for campsites between river users within the Salmon River corridor is managed using a reservation system for a limited number of campsites on a first come, first served basis. The partial reservation system, which has been used since the 2001 control season, does not restrict use on the Salmon River and it is apparently resolving some of the major concerns about competition for campsites.

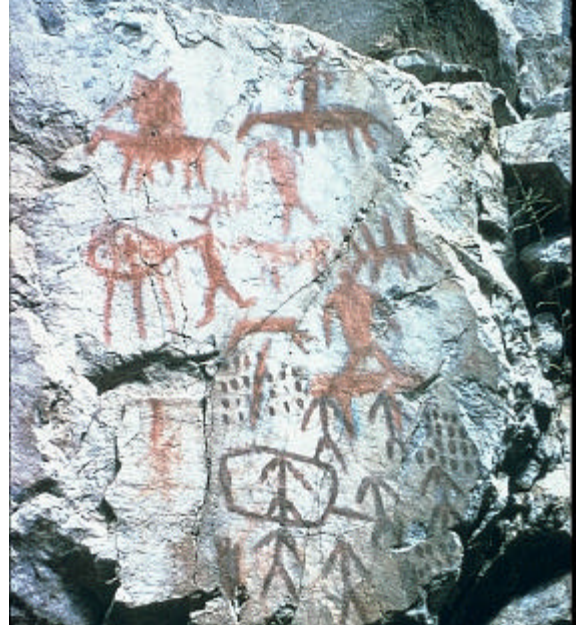
*The partial campsite reservation system based on first come, first served requests for a limited number of campsites on the Salmon River will continue to be used. The effectiveness of this system will be monitored to determine if there is a need for change and will not be addressed in the FEIS.*

# Rivers

## ***Campsite Conditions and Capacities***

Campsite availability within the river corridor is the most limiting factor for increased river use. Degradation or undesirable expansion of campsites is the most likely environmental effect of that increased use. Rather than establishing additional campsite standards in the FEIS, the impacts on campsites by river use are evaluated as effects of the alternative management systems considered in the FEIS. Mitigation measures have been developed for situations when anticipated campsite use may exceed the available campsite capacity.

***The FEIS evaluates campsite use as an effect of alternative management schemes. Mitigation measures are identified for those instances where campsite use exceeds capacity. Current standards for campsite inventory and location are adequate and are not a decision to be addressed in the FEIS.***



## ***Other Motorized Use***

Concern for motorized vehicle use along the road between Mackay Bar and the Painter Bar homestead was identified in the DEIS. The concern is that this use is inconsistent with the wilderness designation. The original need for access to private lands has changed and use levels within the control season are adversely affected by increased access.

***The FEIS will present and evaluate alternative management direction for the Painter Bar homestead road.***

# Rivers

## *Floating the Tributaries*

Since the river management plans were written, float boat use on some of the tributaries to the Salmon and Middle Fork rivers has developed and is increasing. The DEIS identified that a decision to be made was to establish standards for float boat use on the floatable tributaries.

Permits are not currently required to float the tributaries, however permits are required year round on the Middle Fork and during the control season on the Salmon. Some tributary floaters are not obtaining permits for the main rivers and their use occasionally conflicts with the permitted users.

*The Forest Service will not issue commercial float permits for the tributaries without additional analysis. If an outfitter proposes a commercial use of the tributaries, a site specific analysis, with appropriate public involvement, will be conducted before a decision is made on issuance of a special use permit.*

*The Forest Service will require tributary use permits for noncommercial tributary floaters. These permits will allow boaters to exit from Big Creek onto the Middle Fork or from the South Fork Salmon River onto the Salmon River without a permit. Floaters entering from Big Creek or the South Fork must exit the Middle Fork or Salmon River corridor on*



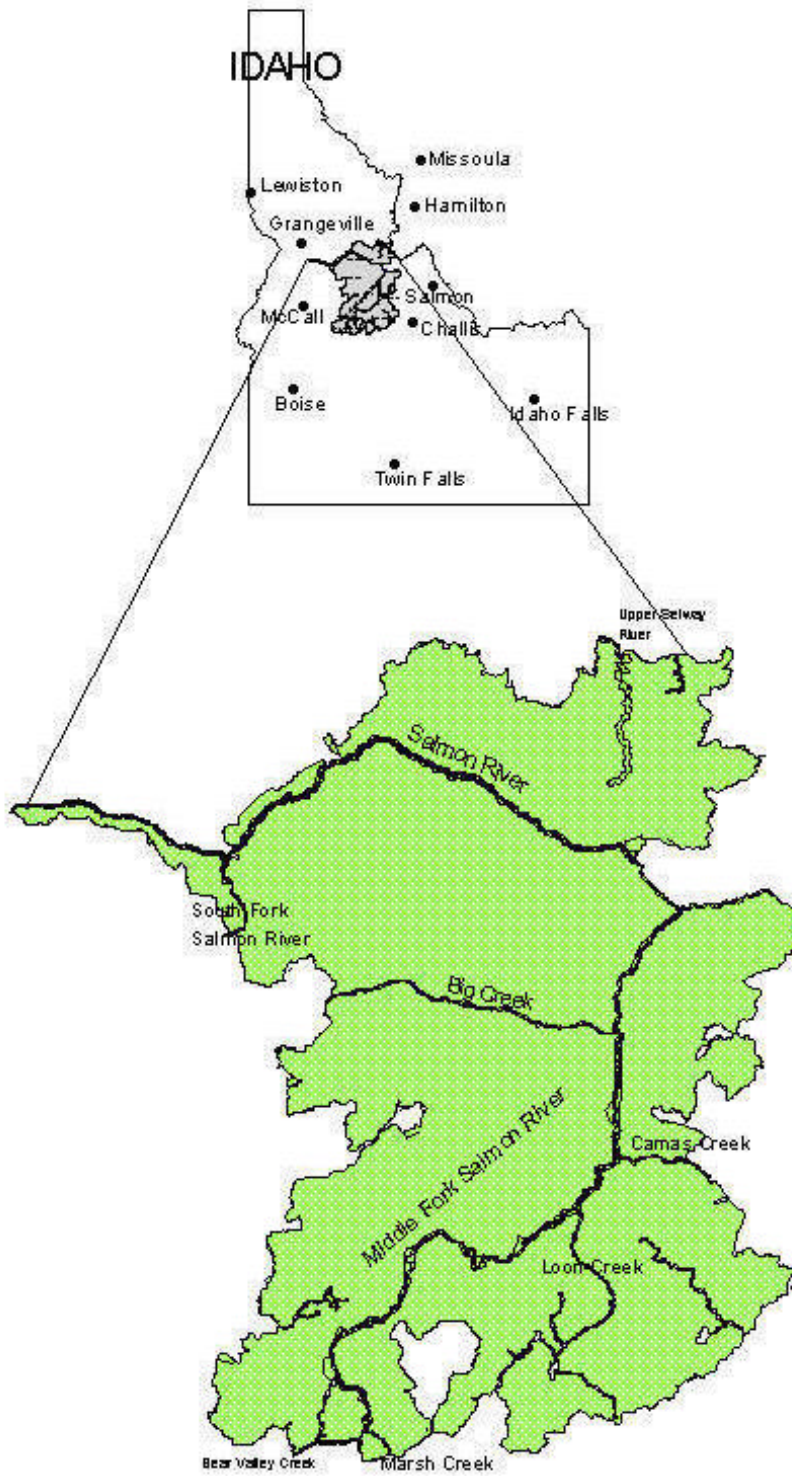
*the same day they enter, with no overnight camping on those rivers. Floaters on other tributaries will be required to have a valid Middle Fork or Salmon River permit to enter or camp on those rivers. Use of free tributary permits will provide information and education to floaters and will be used to collect accurate data and monitor tributary use.*

## *Three Special Use Camps*

The SDEIS indicated a decision based upon this analysis would set the appropriate level of development at three Special Use Permit sites on the Salmon River. The permitted lodges have been the subject of litigation, court orders and environmental analysis outside of this planning process.

*Decisions regarding the three Special Use Permit sites have already been considered in a separate analysis are beyond the scope of this FEIS.*

Frank Church--River of No Return Wilderness



# Noxious Weeds

The ROD for the FC-RONRW Noxious Weed Treatment EIS selected an alternative that was to be applied until the FW-RONRW Management Plan revision is implemented. The Forest Service also committed to the development of coordination, education, inventory, and prevention practices that would proceed in conjunction with noxious weed treatments.

A Noxious Weed Prevention Plan for the FC-RONRW has been developed. The Weed Prevention Plan utilizes existing authorities and management direction as well as the guidelines from the Departments of Agriculture and Interior and the State of Idaho and provides guidance on actions to reduce the spread of weeds within the FC-RONRW.

***The Forest Service will continue to implement the Noxious Weed Prevention Strategy utilizing existing authorities and management direction.***

The Noxious Weed Treatment EIS was written as an interim plan until the completion of the FC-RONRW Management Plan EIS. As the Forest Service has implemented noxious weed treatments, additional analysis needs have been identified that were not considered in the original analysis. These include:

- A new herbicide (Weed-R) has become available which may be useful and should be analyzed for its application within the wilderness.
- The fires of 2000 created many more acres of susceptible habitat and have resulted in a more rapid spread of noxious weeds than was predicted in the EIS. This is a changed condition that should be analyzed.

***A Supplemental EIS to the noxious Weed Treatment EIS will be initiated. Therefore, decisions regarding noxious weeds are beyond the scope of this FEIS.***



Pulling rush skeleton weed along the Middle Fork of the Salmon River.

## **LOOK FOR THE FEIS!**

**The journey leading to a revised management plan has been long and arduous. Thank you for your involvement, patience, comments and suggestions. After the FEIS is issued there will be a 45-day comment period on the FEIS before a decision is released.**

**The ROD for the FC-RONRW Management Plan FEIS including the revised Management Plan, and amendments to the six Forest Plans is planned for release later this year.**

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