



Salmon-Challis National Forest

# Forest Plan *Monitoring and Evaluation Report for 2000 and 2001*

*To our Customers, Partners and Friends:*

Welcome to the Salmon-Challis National Forest with over 4.3 million acres of spectacular river and mountain country. The past two years on the Salmon-Challis Forest have been very busy for Forest personnel, due to the fires in 2000 and the recovery efforts following those fires. This report gives an overview of some of our important activities and brings you up to date on our Forest Plan implementation efforts. After reading this report, please send me any comments you may have.

George Matejko  
Forest Supervisor

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# Firestorm 2000



July 14, 2000, Clear Creek Fire. Photo by Cindy Borchardt

Fire season 2000 began earlier than usual with the first large fire on the Forest occurring in late June. Although the early fires were successfully fought by fire crews, they were a preview of what was to come. By the end of the fire season of 2000, almost 400,000 acres burned on the Salmon-Challis National Forest (SCNF) at a cost of \$ 98 million.

The events of July 14 changed the course of the summer for employees on the Forest and residents of Lemhi and Custer County. That afternoon, the Clear Creek and Fenster fires both blew up, sending large columns of smoke and ash into the sky, and threatening communities in the Salmon area.

By late afternoon July 14, the Clear Creek fire, until then burning in the Frank Church River of No Return wilderness, was threatening residences along Panther Creek; the Fenster Fire, just a few miles north of Salmon, was threatening residences in the Diamond Creek area. This situation stressed local firefighting forces, including the Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, and volunteer fire departments from Salmon, North Fork and Gibbonsville.

The Clear Creek fire was started by a lightning strike on July 8, 2000. A wilderness guard spotted the fire on the morning of July 10 and immediately called it in to Forest Dispatch. An eight person heli-rappell crew sent to the fire was forced to pull back due to its aggressive growth. Early on July 14 the fire was approximately 1,000 acres with over 60 fire fighters on it. The fire began to grow rapidly around 2 pm and, by late evening, it had traveled over 8 miles, burning over 20,000 acres.

The Clear Creek fire grew throughout the summer and was finally declared contained on October 13, at nearly 200,000 acres. It was the largest fire in the United States in 2000.

The Fenster Fire was detected early in the afternoon of July 14 and by 4:30 pm, campgrounds and residences to the north and west of Salmon, were being evacuated. The fire burned about 2,500 acres in one afternoon. The Fenster Fire was declared contained on July 18 at 3,245 acres.

Through both firestorms, no one was seriously injured and only one out-building was destroyed by fire. This was a wake-up call to the local communities of Salmon, North Fork and Gibbonsville. Fuels reduction is now a common term among these communities.

Between July 14 and August, several other fires were detected, all started by lightning. On August 6 several more fires were found in the Frank Church River of No Return Wilderness.

Through the summer, many unprecedented events took place. The largest impact was the closing of the entire Frank Church River of No Return Wilderness, including both the Main and Middle Fork of the Salmon Rivers, from August 17 through September 5. This affected many Outfitters and Guides who make their living on these rivers and through other recreational uses in the Wilderness.

The Wilderness and rivers were closed for almost 3 weeks, and other portions of the Forest outside the Wilderness in the Panther Creek area were closed from July 14 to early November, nearly four months. The fires and the heavy smoke caused many recreationists to change their plans and spend their vacation, and vacation dollars, elsewhere. This had a huge impact on commercial businesses in the Salmon area.

# Firestorm 2000

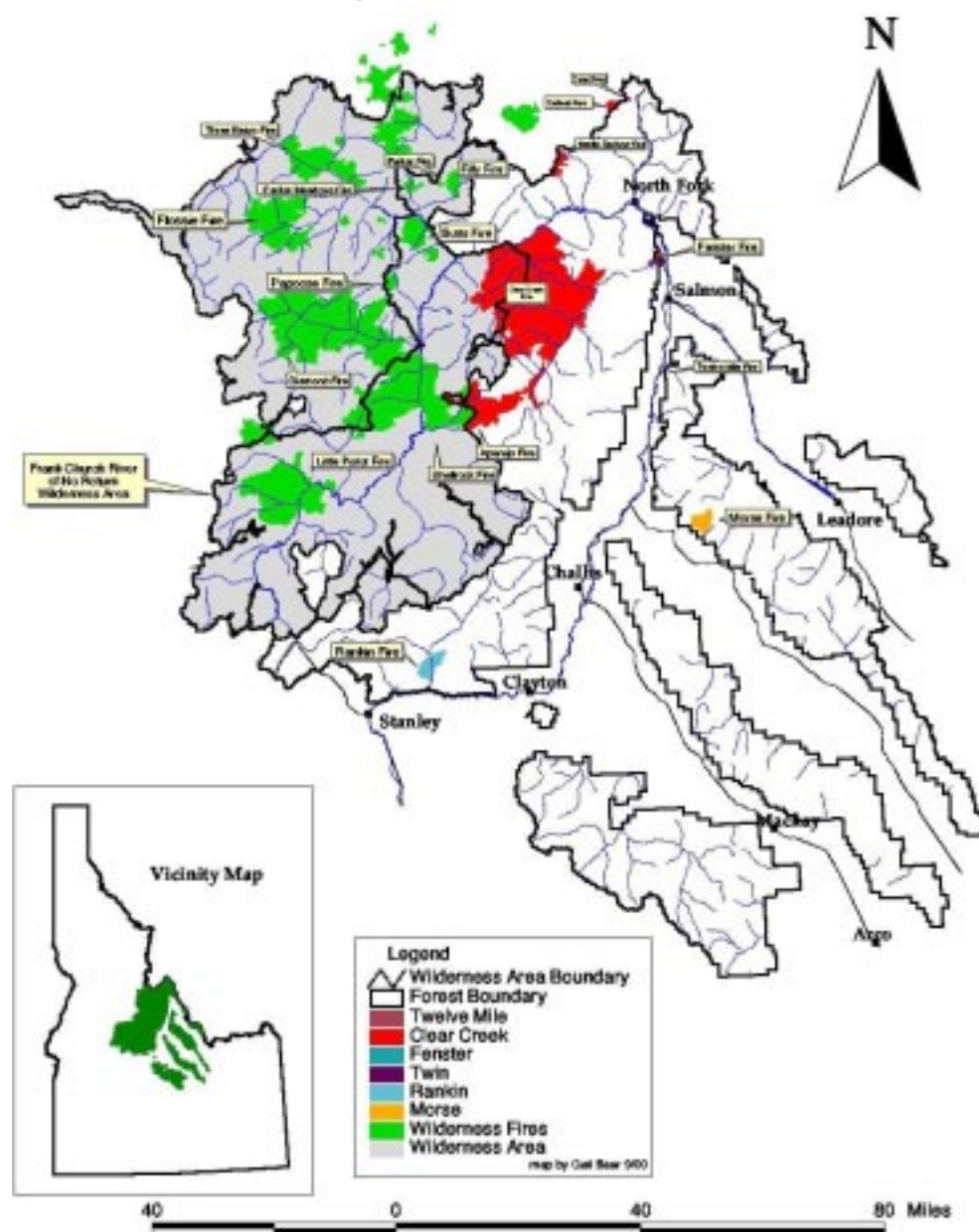


July 14, 2000, Fenster Fire approaching residential area in the Diamond Creek Area.

Thousands of fire fighting personnel plus helicopters, engines and bulldozers were assigned to the fires on the SCNF during the summer of 2000.

At the end of the fires season, no primary homes were lost and no one was seriously injured, an accomplishment of which the Forest is very proud. Within the Wilderness, 12 summer residences were lost due to the extreme fire conditions.

## Salmon - Challis National Forest Fire Season 2000



## 2000 Fire History

Fire Name	Start Date	Containment Date	Acres Burned
Squaw Gulch	6/22	7/1	98
Pepper Creek	6/23	6/25	115
Twelve Mile	7/6	7/7	250
ClearCreek/Aparejo	7/10	10/13	216,961
Iron Creek	7/12	7/15	150
Fenster	7/14	7/18	3,245
Twin	7/23	8/3	458
Reynolds	7/29	8/2	36
Otter	8/5	8/9	6
Wilderness Fires *	8/6	N/A	182,600
Morse	8/11	9/6	5,756
Rankin	8/11	8/25	6,710
Marlin Springs	8/13	9/16	6,249
<b>Total</b>			<b>422,634</b>

\* The FCRONR Wilderness was closed from August 17 – September 6, 2000



July 27, 2000. Clear Creek Fire looking north on Panther Creek Road.



## National Fire Plan

After the record-breaking wildfire season of 2000, the President requested a national strategy for preventing loss of life, natural resources, private property, and livelihoods in the wildland/urban interface. Working with Congress, the Secretaries of Agriculture and Interior jointly developed the National Fire Plan to respond to severe wildland fires, reduce their impacts on communities, and assure sufficient firefighting capabilities for the future.

The National Fire Plan (NFP) includes five key points: firefighting preparedness, rehabilitation and restoration of burned areas, reduction of hazardous fuels, community assistance, and accountability.

### National Fire Plan Key Points

#### 1. Firefighting Resources

This point focuses on being prepared for future fire seasons, and includes staffing, training, equipment and resources, and facilities such as airtanker bases. Regional Office Fire & Aviation Management staff, Forest Supervisors, and Fire Management Officers (FMOs) determined needs for the Most Efficient Level (MEL) of suppression resources, including firefighters, engines, aircraft, and other personnel.

In 2001 the SCNF hired 41 people in fire related positions in order for the forest to be at Maximum Efficiency Level. The majority of the positions were for hand, engine, and helitack crew personnel at the GS-4 to 6 levels.

#### 2. Rehabilitation and Restoration

After the 2000 fire season, Burned Area Emergency Rehabilitation (BAER) teams were formed to identify necessary emergency projects for protection of life and property. The teams have been working on those projects since the fires ended. The next phase is long-term restoration within the burned areas. As BAER teams dealt with emergency needs, the "Black Area Teams" compiled a list of proposed projects from each National Forest to submit for funding for continued restoration in the burned areas.

The SCNF received \$8 million in FY 01 through the National Fire Plan for fire season 2000 burned area recovery projects. Projects included are erosion control, trail reconstruction, weed spraying and administrative site repair in areas burned by the 2000 wildfires.

The Forest has made great progress in rehabilitation efforts, but still has a long way to go before the areas are totally rehabilitated.

#### 3. Hazardous Fuel Reduction

The Forest Service worked with State Foresters, other state and federal agencies, and local communities to identify both communities at risk and projects to reduce the potential for wildfire damage. Most projects will focus on the wildland/urban interface.

Combined with projects already identified and analyzed through the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), these projects will be our critical program of work into the future.

A planning team was created on the SCNF to support the National Fire Plan objectives, especially in the area of fuels reduction. A total of nine specialist positions were filled solely for the planning team. The team is currently finishing an urban interface fuels reduction environmental assessment for the Gibbonsville area and has begun work on a watershed assessment as the first step towards an additional urban interface fuels reduction project in the Salmon area. The NEPA analysis for the second project is scheduled to begin in the fall of 2002.

#### 4. Community Assistance

The National Fire Plan calls for working with communities in many ways: consulting to reduce fire risk, public involvement for hazardous fuel reduction, creating jobs in restoration and fuel reduction projects and products, providing defensible space information, volunteer and rural firefighting assistance and economic action programs.

In 2001, the National Fire Plan assisted community services in the following ways:

\$100,000 to High Country RC&D Council for hazardous fuel mitigation

Noxious Weed Abatement (\$1.37 million to Idaho Dept. of Agriculture)  
Fire Fighting Equipment (\$201,000 for State Fire Assistance to IDL, \$307,000 for Volunteer Fire Assistance to IDL)

Emergency Services Mapping (\$24,000 to Custer Co., \$12,000 to Lemhi Co.)

Public Information (\$25,000 to Idaho Outfitter & Guide Assoc. for fire ecology training module for guides)

\$1.98 million for hazardous fuel reduction and \$390,000 for hazardous fuels mitigation to IDL

Lost River National Learning Site/Antelope Watershed Restoration Project

Bio-Fuels (\$145,000 to Lemhi & Custer Co. for Feasibility Study)

\$225,000 to IDL, \$420,000 to Idaho Farm Service

Local private landowners adjacent to the SCNF received \$62,000 for the replacement of fences and corrals burned in the wildfires.

#### 5. Accountability

More than just accounting for the money we spend, our commitment to Congress and the public is that we can accomplish the critical work in each of the five key areas.

We have been entrusted with a significant increase in dollars that must be well managed through our accounting systems. Equally important is our commitment to learn and work together with our communities to restore landscapes and reduce fire risks.

## Amendments to the Forest Plan

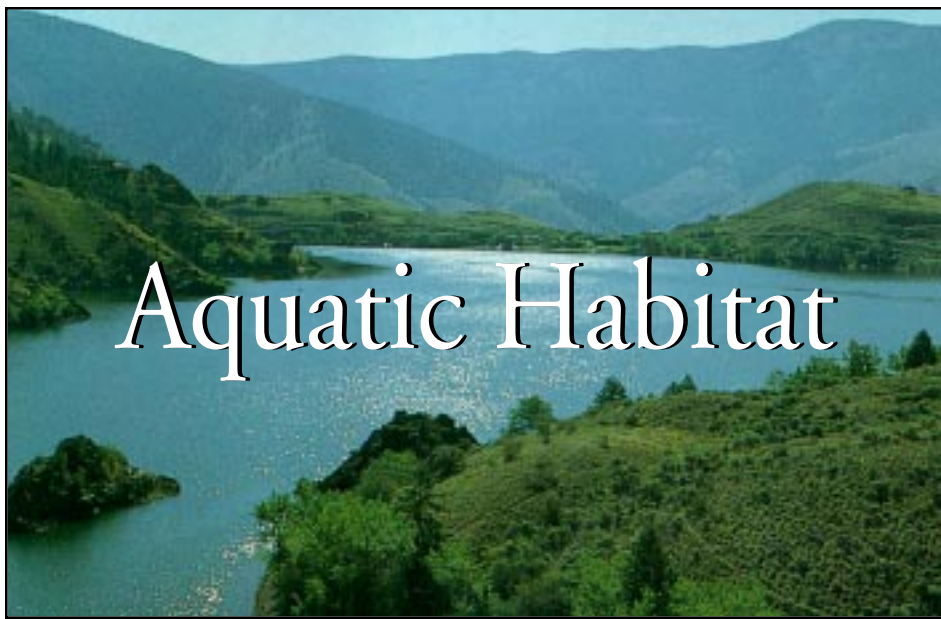
The Forest completed two amendments to the Salmon National Forest Plan that recognized the historic Lewis and Clark Expedition crossing on the Forest. Below is a summary of how the two amendments have helped to highlight and protect important Lewis and Clark historic sites on the Forest:

- **Amendment # 7** On July 7, 2001, a decision was signed to establish a Trail Management Area consisting of 14.5 miles of trail plus 1/4 mile, on either side of the Trail, covering 7,911 acres. This amendment recognized nine segments of the Trail and provided for protection and management for those segments. This amendment also updated management for the Lemhi Pass National Historic Landmark.
- **Amendment # 8** On January 7, 2002, a decision was signed by the Forest Supervisors of both the Beaverhead-Deerlodge and SCNF. This amendment updates management direction for the Lemhi Pass National Historic Landmark to better coordinate and unify management direction on the Idaho side of the Landmark with direction for the Montana side.

### Lynx Amendment – an ongoing study

For the past three years, the SCNF, in conjunction with other federal and state agencies, has participated in a nation-wide study to determine Canada lynx occurrence and densities across the lower 48 states. The Canada lynx was listed in April 2000 as a threatened species, protected by the Endangered Species Act. The USDA Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management have proposed to change land management plans for 18 national forests and four BLM units in the northern Rocky Mountains to include measures to conserve lynx habitat. Information meetings were held and nearly 2000 comments were received during the 90-day comment period that closed Dec. 10, 2001. Another round of meetings is expected later in 2002 when the environmental analysis for the amendment is released. The most significant examples of proposed land management plan changes include:

- ❖ No pre-commercial thinning in lynx habitat until trees grow too large to provide cover and forage for snowshoe hare, the lynx's primary prey.
- ❖ No net increase in miles of groomed or designated trails provided for snowmobilers, cross-country skiers, or snowshoers in lynx habitat.



## Aquatic Habitat

**A**n aquatic monitoring program on the SCNF is identifying the effects of the 2000 fires upon aquatic habitats and documenting the recovery of aquatic life in burned areas.

The Clear Creek fire covered major portions of the Garden, Hot Springs, Clear, Trail, Big Deer, Jureano, and Blackbird subwatersheds, which all burned intensely. The Beaver, Napias, Arnett, and Musgrove subwatersheds show a more diverse mosaic of fire intensities, while the Deep and Moyer subwatersheds were almost unburned and serve as a comparison for fire-related effects. Most severely affected was Clear Creek, the entire channel of which was blanketed with fine sands following a severe rainstorm in July 2001.

Sediment surveys document trends in stream sediment levels using core sampling, which excavates cores to a depth of four inches at resident fish spawning sites, and six inches at anadromous fish spawning sites. Core sampling was conducted at 121 monitoring sites in 2001. Sites affected by wildfires in 2000 were the highest resampling priority in 2001. Core samples from streambeds measure the levels of "fines" (particles less than 1/4 inch in diameter) in fish spawning habitats. High levels of fines mean low rates of egg survival.

Fifty percent of core sampling stations surveyed in 2001 displayed "good" spawning habitat capability, 24 percent were "fair", and 26 percent were "poor." In 2000, 39 percent of all stations were "good", 32 percent "fair", and 29 percent "poor."

Streambank stability measurements at core sampling stations showed that 71 percent of these stations met or exceeded the PACFISH and INFISH objective of 80 percent or higher bank stability. The 2001 results reflect a general improvement in streambank conditions compared to the 2000 inventory, in which 58 percent of surveyed banks displayed stability levels of 80 percent or better.

Fisheries crews also collected baseline water temperature data at 173 locations, using recording thermographs, which were installed in April or May and removed in late September or October after water temperatures dropped.

Before 1995, the only rearing temperature criteria guiding Forest direction were the State of Idaho Beneficial Use Criteria for coldwater biota, which identified 71.6 degrees as a recommended maximum for maintenance of aquatic life forms. PACFISH and INFISH revised these criteria to a maximum of 64 degrees and 59 degrees.

In 2001, 93 percent of stations fully met State of Idaho Beneficial Use Criteria for coldwater biota. Fifty-two percent of the PACFISH area sites analyzed met the more stringent INFISH rearing temperature criteria on all dates of record.

## Large Scale Assessments

**F**ederal land management agencies are advised to assess landscapes at the sub-basin level under direction from the Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Project (ICBEMP). The main objectives are to identify issues that are unique to the landscape level, characterize the ecological and social conditions and trends, validate the scientific findings and conclusions from ICBEMP, identify risks and opportunities that may affect the current situation and prioritize future ecosystem analyses at the watershed scale (EAWS).

The SCNF has identified nine separate sub-basins on the Forest. In 2001, we completed the Pahsimeroi Sub-Basin Review, covering the Challis Ranger District and BLM lands. We now have three sub-basin reviews completed out of the nine originally identified.

The SCNF has completed 12 EAWS since 1997 out of a total of 172. In 2001, we completed the Morgan Creek and Yankee Fork EAWS.

## Resource Advisory Council

**T**he Central Idaho Resource Advisory Council (RAC) was established by the Secretary of Agriculture under Title II of the *Secure Rural Schools and Community Self Determination Act of 2000* to work collaboratively with the SCNF. Senators Craig and Wyden authored the bill that was signed into law in 2000. It was designed to compensate for the sharp decrease in federal timber sales and intended to bring in needed dollars to schools and communities surrounded by national forest land.

The Central Idaho RAC is one of four established in Idaho by Secretary of Agriculture; other Idaho RAC's include Idaho Panhandle, North Central Idaho, and Southwest. The boundary of the Central Idaho RAC includes Custer, Lemhi and Butte Counties.

The new legislation reformed the federal payments programs to counties with National Forests within their boundaries. The law gave counties the option of continuing to receive twenty-five percent of the revenue generated from national forest activities such as timber harvest, grazing permits, and mining, or elect to receive their share of the average of the three highest twenty-five percent payments made to the state from 1986 through 1999. Counties electing to receive full payment based on the new formula are required to reserve between fifteen and twenty percent of their funds, referred to as Title II funds, to be used for forest restoration, maintenance, or stewardship projects.

The RAC was established to recommend projects on federal lands or that benefit natural resources on federal land within the RAC boundary. Members of the RAC were selected by the Secretary to represent various interests and they generally live within Custer, Lemhi, and Butte Counties.

The Central Idaho RAC covers Custer, Lemhi, and Butte Counties and includes the SCNF. Custer and Lemhi Counties have elected to set aside 20% of their federal payments to county funds for the Central Idaho RAC to use on conservation projects. This made \$122,000 available to the RAC for projects. Because Butte Counties total payment was less than \$100,000 the county was not required to contribute to the Title II funds.

The following Idahoans were appointed to serve on the Central Idaho RAC:

Name	Home
Baker, Melodie Lynn	Clayton
Cole, Bruce Allen	Salmon
Cope, Robert E.	Salmon
Doughty, Phillip A. "Bert"	Challis
Broncho, Claudio	Fort Hall
England, Michael Wayne	North Fork
Farr, Scott	Challis
Hamilton, Jerry S.	Carmen
Hauff, Richard T	Salmon
Power, Gary D.	Salmon
Roberts, Hadley	Salmon
Skeen, David Earl	Challis
Stauffer, Mark Lane	Howe
Westfall, Doug S.	Salmon
Woiciechowski, Bart W.	Mackay
Ziegler, Troy Russell	Challis

Any person or group can submit project proposals for review by the RAC. Forms are available at the Salmon – Cobalt National Forest Offices or from RAC members. The RAC meets once a month in Challis. Meetings are open to the public and announced in the local newspapers. So far the RAC has approved three projects for 2002 including: The purchase of a solar powered pump to improve grazing utilization and protect riparian areas on the Copper Basin Grazing Allotment. They approved the purchase of biological agents for the three counties' Cooperative Weed Agreement. The biological agents are insects that attack spotted knapweed, yellow star thistle and other noxious weeds. The RAC also approved funds for spraying sulfur cinquefoil infestations in the Gibbonsville – North Fork area.

## 6 Facilities – Roads and Bridges

More than 300 miles of roads and a Forest Service bridge were affected by the fires of 2000. At the Flying B Ranch in the Frank Church – River of No Return Wilderness, the Bernard Bridge was damaged when a firestorm tore one end of the bridge from its footings and set it down a few feet away. Repairs on the bridge have been completed.

Outside the Wilderness, bulldozers were used to widen existing roads to improve access for firefighters and equipment. Decommissioned roads were re-opened; some 2-track roads were widened; dips designed for control of water runoff were smoothed out; and some roads were entrenched to prevent burning debris from rolling downslope. Post-fire priorities for road crews include control of sediment source areas, repair of unstable road banks, and the reclosure of decommissioned roads. Areas where soil was disturbed still have the potential to put sediment into streams.

Reconstruction and maintenance needs increased the year following the fire. Reconstruction increased from 4 miles to 41; maintenance increased from 755 miles to 1081. Public safety remains a concern, and road maintenance needs will increase over the next five years as road banks slough, rocks fall, and trees fall across roads. Meeting the increased level of work will involve contracts for road and fire line rehabilitation, and equipment leasing to rehabilitate roads with Forest Service crews.

Road construction as predicted in the Forest Plan ranged from less than 5 miles to 50 miles per decade. Actual road construction has been lower, with less than one mile of new road construction in the past two years.

Historically, the Forest Service has not been considered a public road agency, although the National Forest system contains the largest number of roads managed by any public agency. However, with the Reauthorization Bill for Transportation scheduled for approval in 2003, the Forest Service may be included with other public road agencies such as the Federal Highways Administration. This will allow the National Forests to receive additional funds from gasoline tax dollars. About 15% of the 4,300 miles of inventoried system roads on the SCNF could qualify for gas tax funding. The roads would have to meet public road standards before they could be eligible for the gasoline tax funds. This funding would improve our ability to meet minimum road standards and improve public safety.

Road closures scheduled for 2000 were postponed due to the fires; in 2001 approximately 26.5 miles of road were rehabilitated and closed to motorized use.

A new roads analysis process is required for any project after January 13, 2001. The SCNF will use this new analysis process for the Gibbonsville Wildland-Urban Interface fuels reduction project and the upcoming Forest Plan revision. The analysis process is designed to provide information on existing road networks and resource conditions that will aid in decision-making. Public participation is an integral part of the road analysis process; meetings will be scheduled throughout the year.



*Bernard Bridge buckling from fire damage.*



*Bernard Bridge repaired after fire damage.*

## Heritage

Heritage personnel listed the following accomplishments for 2001:

- Review and analysis of Recreation facilities for the Lemhi Pass National Historic Landmark Management Plan
- Completed work on two interpretive signs located at Sore Feet Horse Camp and at Pine Creek Rapids on the Salmon River Road
- Completed design of trailhead signs at Wagonhammer Picnic Area and Lemhi Pass Trailhead
- Updated the Forest Lewis and Clark website
- Completed the Sextants to Satellites Passport in Time program in which 20 volunteers learned about the 19th Century map making used by Lewis and Clark, and 21st Century mapping procedures to help locate and record the National Historic Trail
- Provided funding for the Sacajawea Interpretive and Educational Center and helped plan meetings for the Center's development.





## Inventoried Roadless Areas

The Forest's inventoried roadless areas were remapped using GIS (geographic information system) technology based upon the digital 7.5 minute topographic base maps. Due to the increased accuracy of GIS mapping, 48,634 acres were added to our total original acreage for a new grand total of 2,271,238 acres. The next step in reinventory of these areas will be to review all boundaries to see if any changes are needed and to review the roadless qualities and wilderness characteristics. Long term protection and management of inventoried roadless areas will be addressed during Forest Plan Revision, now scheduled to begin in 2005.

## Wilderness Weeds Program

The North Fork and Middle Fork Ranger Districts of the SCNF manage over 1.2 million acres of the Frank Church – River of No Return Wilderness (FCRONR). Wilderness lands managed by the districts contain vast, undeveloped expanses of rugged topography, deep canyons, high elevation forests, and whitewater rivers.

Noxious weeds are also present in these areas. In response to the continuing and growing threat of these invasive species, the FCRONR Noxious Weed Management Team has been employing a coordinated, cooperative management approach since 1999. Team members come from each of the 4 National Forests and 6 Ranger Districts that manage the Wilderness. This group of land managers develops and implements an Integrated Weed Management strategy for the entire 2.4 million acre Wilderness. Some of the techniques utilized include Prevention, Education, Treatment, Inventory, Monitoring, Partnerships, Coordination, Restoration, Program Evaluation, and Accountability.

Spotted knapweed and rush skeletonweed are the most prevalent weed species on the North Fork and Middle Fork Ranger Districts. Smaller infestations of Canada thistle, sulfur cinquefoil, hounds tongue, yellow toadflax, and black henbane are also present. These weed infestations are largely confined to the river corridors of the Middle Fork and Main Salmon Rivers. Weeds occur primarily in these areas for a variety of reasons. The sagebrush and grasslands found in these locations are the habitat types most susceptible to invasion by these weed species, the elevational range and climate conditions in the corridors are favorable to the weed species, and large concentrations of recreationists (floatboaters, backpackers, horse packers, and aviators) utilize the corridors and spread weed seeds.

During the 2001 field season nearly 2500 acres of noxious weeds were inventoried on the Wilderness portions of the North Fork and Middle Fork Ranger Districts. Over 85% of these inventoried acres were rush skeletonweed infestations located on the Middle Fork Ranger District.

The most significant finding of the 2001 field season was the truly explosive growth of rush skeletonweed in burned areas. Nearly 50 new sites of rush skeletonweed were found in areas that burned during the Fire Season of 2000. Also, previously inventoried sites that burned in 2000 expanded greatly in size and, equally significant, the density of skeletonweed at these sites increased dramatically. The removal of cover and resulting prolific seed-germination probably caused this increase in rush skeletonweed. Inventory and treatment priorities for 2002 will again focus on these burned areas.

During the 2001 field season 1627 acres of noxious weeds were treated on the Wilderness portions of the North Fork and Middle Fork Ranger Districts. Treatment techniques followed the direction outlined in the FCRONR Wilderness Noxious Weed Treatments Environmental Impact Statement. Physical, chemical, and biological treatment techniques were employed. Numerous Contractors were

utilized in the treatment of noxious weeds in 2001. This strategy for treatment will also be followed in subsequent years. The shortcoming of acres treated versus acres inventoried points to the need for additional staffing and funding for noxious weed management in the Wilderness.

In an effort to slow the spread of weeds by recreationists, an expanded education program was employed in 2001. Forest Service personnel working at the launch sites of the Middle Fork and Main Salmon Rivers did a superb job of informing and educating river users on the threats of noxious weeds, their biology and management, and Prevention measures visitors should use. Over 15,000 Wilderness users were contacted at the launch sites in 2001.



*The education program for wilderness floating trips at the Corn Creek boat launch site, includes a discussion of weeds.*

***If you received more than one copy of this report, have an address correction, or wish to have your name removed from our mailing list, please call Pat Pearson at (208) 765-5148 or write to Forest Planning, 50 Hwy 93 South, Salmon ID 83467.***

# Salmon-Challis National Forest

