

**SCOPING DOCUMENT  
Minidoka Ranger District  
Sawtooth National Forest**

**LOWER ROCK CREEK DISPERSED AND DEVELOPED CAMPING**

**Background**

Lower Rock Creek (Third Fork Trailhead north to the Forest boundary – refer to map on page 4) offers varied dispersed and developed day and overnight use. The current facilities include three developed campgrounds (Schipper, Birch Glen and Steer Basin) two decommissioned developed campgrounds now used for dispersed camping (Three-thirty Springs and Big Bluff). Other recreation facilities in this area include the Third Fork and Rim View Trailheads and The Harrington Fork Picnic area. Unregulated dispersed camping is currently allowed in the area, with the highest use occurring in the Magpie Basin area. The Sawtooth National Forest Travel Plan, implemented in 1987, closed this area to motorized travel except on roads and trails. Access to temporary (dispersed) campsites within 300 feet of a designated route was allowed where such use would not damage the land or streams. The current Visitor Use/Recreation map restricts off-road motorized travel, but does allow travel to undeveloped campsites within 300 feet of a designated road, with a request that temporary access routes be selected carefully and avoid damage to forest resources.

**Proposed Action: What is being proposed?**

The Minidoka Ranger District is proposing to improve the overall watershed condition of Lower Rock Creek from Third Fork Trailhead north to the Forest Boundary and to reduce the negative impacts on water quality and fish habitat currently being caused by ever increasing recreation use. The following is a detailed list of proposed changes. Not all of these changes will require a decision under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA); those components that may require a formal NEPA decision are highlighted in **bold**. Many of the proposed activities do not require a formal NEPA decision and could be implemented immediately. However, prior to implementing those “non-NEPA” decisions the District wants to take this opportunity to update the public on upcoming changes and receive feedback.

- 1. Allowing dispersed camping in designated areas only (this applies to Third Fork Trailhead north to the Forest Boundary only). This would include the closure of the Magpie Basin area to all motorized travel including travel to dispersed/temporary campsites. This concept is mentioned in the current proposal to revise the Sawtooth National Forest Visitor/Travel Plan. It is anticipated that a separate decision dealing with designated, dispersed camping in Lower Rock Creek will be made and will not be part of the travel planning decision. The closure of the Magpie Basin area would be accomplished through physical barriers. Rehabilitation will include, but not be limited to, planting and seeding of native vegetation and recontouring and ripping of compacted motor vehicle travel ways.**

2. **Removal of the foot bridge at Schipper Campground and rehabilitation of the west side of Rock Creek.**
3. Establish and designate distinct campsites in the Schipper and Steer Basin Campgrounds. Restrict size and number of vehicles/campers considering campground design and capacity of the site.
4. Convert the Birch Glen Campground to day use. Continue to allow day use on the west side of Rock Creek.
5. Designate dispersed campsites within the two decommissioned campgrounds (Thirty Springs and Big Bluff) considering past use and site capacity.
6. Utilize a portion of the Harrington Fork Picnic Area for walk-in (tent) designated, dispersed camping.
7. Establish designated, dispersed camping sites within the Third Fork and Rim View Trailheads considering past use and site capacity.

### **Purpose and Need: Why Are We Proposing This Project?**

Recent data collected by Idaho Department of Environmental Quality has shown a nearly two-fold increase in sedimentation in Rock Creek from 2004 to 2006. Much of this can be attributed to the concentrated recreation use in Lower Rock Creek. A portion of Rock Creek off the Forest is currently listed as a 303(d) stream – a stream that is not supporting beneficial uses (aquatic life and recreation). The Minidoka Ranger District wants to be proactive and improve water quality and fish habitat. The District plans to accomplish this through reduction in erosion caused by motorized use off designated roads, allowing dispersed camping in areas where resource impacts can be minimized and better managing our developed campground use within the sites capacity. Currently there are approximately 15 dispersed sites in the Magpie Basin area that are in close proximity to Rock Creek. These campsites and their associated travel ways are denuded of vegetation and are experiencing increased erosion. Our overall goal for dispersed camping in this area is not to have a net loss of available camping opportunities, realizing that areas designated for dispersed camping that have a lower level of resource concerns, but may not be as desirable to the public for camping.

Due to the increased population growth in the Magic Valley, recreation use in Lower Rock Creek has reached a level that is currently not sustainable. This is not only true in the Magpie Basin area but in our developed campgrounds as well. These small campgrounds were designed and built for tent camping with only a few designated sites in each one. We are now seeing use by large recreational vehicles and group events of 50 or more. These far exceed the capacity of these sites and given the proximity to Rock Creek, the resource is suffering.

### **Environmental Review Process**

The analysis for those components that will require a NEPA decision will be completed this winter and early spring with implementation beginning in April or May of 2007. Projects not requiring a NEPA analysis maybe implemented sooner as funding becomes available. At this point it is anticipated that any forthcoming NEPA decision will be a Decision Memo and fit a category of activities that is exempt from documentation in an Environmental Assessment (EA) or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

### **PUBLIC INPUT – How and When to Comment:**

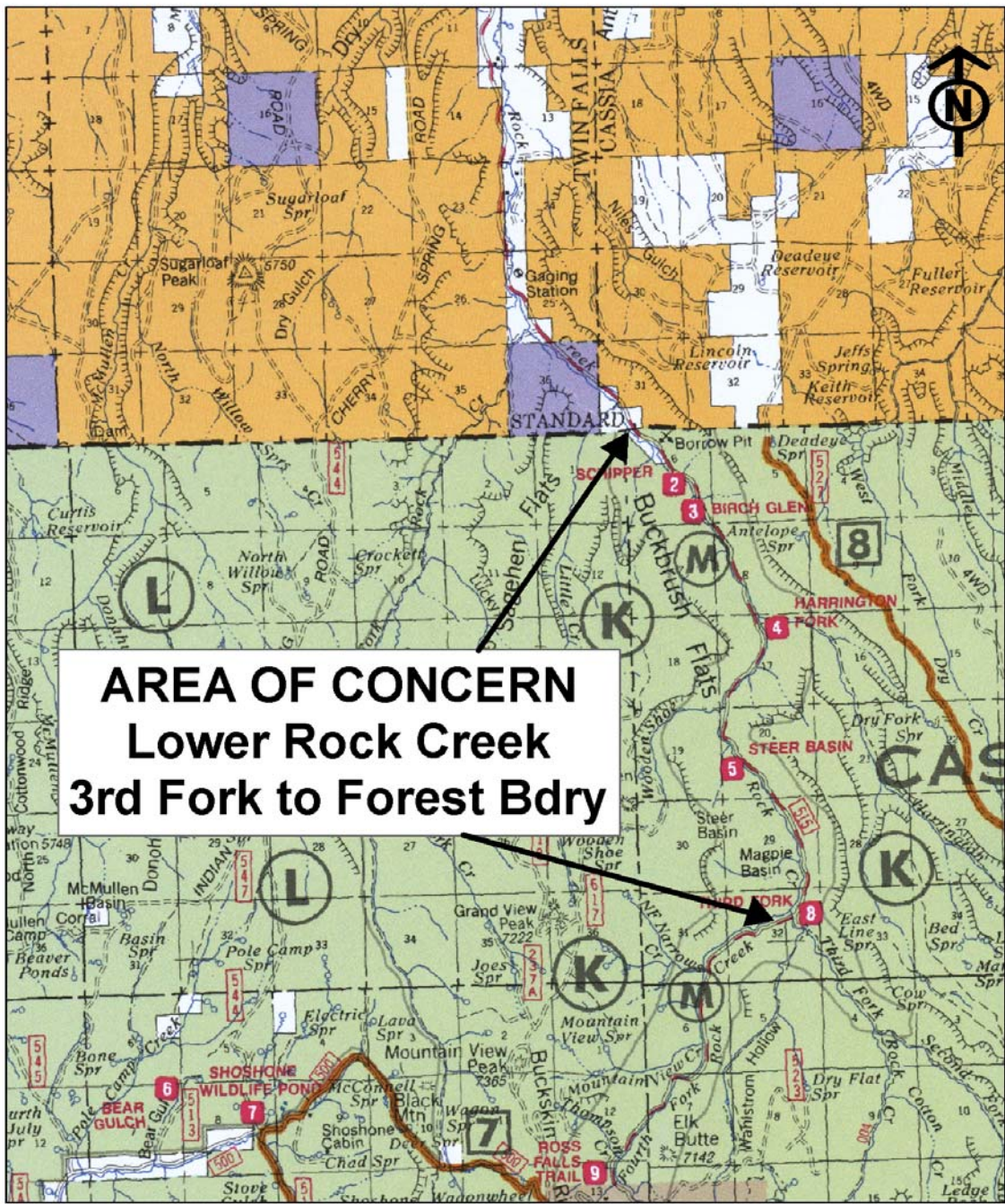
The District would appreciate your comments or feedback on any of the proposed activities listed above and not just those requiring a NEPA analysis. To be most helpful comments should be

submitted by December 31, 2006. Submit written comments on issues related to the proposed action to:

District Ranger  
Minidoka Ranger District  
3650 S. Overland Ave.  
Burley, ID 83318

Or submit comments via e-mail to: [comments\\_intermtn\\_sawtooth\\_minidoka@fs.fed.us](mailto:comments_intermtn_sawtooth_minidoka@fs.fed.us)

Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record on this proposed action and will be available for public inspection. Additionally, pursuant to 7 CFR, Part 1, Subpart B, Section 1.27(d), any person may request the agency to withhold a submission from the public record by showing how the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) permits such confidentiality. Persons requesting such confidentiality should be aware that, under FOIA, confidentiality may be granted in only very limited circumstances, such as to protect trade secrets. The Forest Service will inform the Requester of the agency's decision regarding the request for confidentiality, and where the request is denied; the agency will return the submission and notify the requester that the comments may be resubmitted with or without name and address within 10 days.



**AREA OF CONCERN**  
**Lower Rock Creek**  
**3rd Fork to Forest Bdry**

