

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

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I. Purpose of the Management Plan

This plan provides program management direction for the Frank Church – River of No Return Wilderness, also referred to in this document as the FC-RONR Wilderness or the FC-RONRW. Program direction is derived from the provisions of the National Forest Management Act (NFMA) and the Resource Planning Act (RPA), and includes Desired Future Conditions, Goals and Objectives, Standards and Guidelines, and Monitoring Requirements with associated Indicators.

Program direction describes activities that may occur in a given area, but does not require that these activities actually occur. It is similar in concept to Planning and Zoning at the city and county level, and does not represent an irreversible or irretrievable commitment of resources. To be effective, program direction for wilderness should tell the land manager what and how much activity a given area of land can support, while still preserving the wilderness character of the area. Program direction must also explain what people want and need from the wilderness.

This management plan retains previous relevant direction while adding new direction for emerging issues where existing direction has been identified as inadequate or in need of refinement and updating. Section 5(a)(1) of the CIWA mandated preparation of a comprehensive management plan. The original plan was completed in 1984, and amended in 1986 and 1994. This plan is a revision of the original plan. Modifications in wording and formatting of the plan have occurred to better reflect planning conventions in use at this time.

II. Relationship of the Management Plan to Other Documents

This plan revision incorporates direction for implementation of the selected alternative displayed in the Frank Church – River of No Return Wilderness Management Plan Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) and Record of Decision (ROD).

The direction contained in this plan serves as an “umbrella” for site-specific environmental analysis. Future projects and activities, including those requiring preparation of a Categorical Exclusion (CE), Environmental Assessment (EA) or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), may tier to the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS).

Administrative actions and direction shown in this plan are provided for reference and do not require additional environmental analysis prior to change.

This Management Plan supercedes the 1984 Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness Plan, as amended, the 1993 Middle Fork of the Salmon River Wild and Scenic River Plan, as amended, and the “Wild Section” portion of the 1982 Salmon River Wild and Scenic River Plan. Upon final approval, all wilderness activities will conform to this Management Plan, and the Forest Plans on the Bitterroot, Boise, Nez Perce, Payette, and Salmon-Challis National Forests will be amended to reflect these changes.

III. Major Definitions Used by this Plan

Background provides historical context for the direction in this plan. Information on the current condition, trends or management situation is given to provide a context for the program direction.

Desired Future Condition (DFC) is a description of the condition of the wilderness resource to be achieved in the long term, up to 200 years in the future. The DFC results from the cumulative effects of implementing the goals expressed in this Management Plan.

Goals are concise statements that describe a desired condition to be achieved sometime in the future. They are normally expressed in broad, general terms and are timeless in that they have no specific date by which they are to be completed. Goal statements form the principal basis from which objectives are developed.

Objectives are concise, time-specific statements of measurable planned results that respond to pre-established goals. An objective forms the basis for further planning to define the precise steps to be taken and the resources to be used in achieving identified goals. When an objective does not have a time period it is assumed to be during the planning period.

Standards are management requirements or quantifiable thresholds for an indicator that specifies conditions or levels to be achieved.

Guidelines are descriptions of a preferred or advisable course of action.

Monitoring is an activity to determine if plan objectives have been met and how closely management practices should be adjusted.

Indicators are measurements or gauges showing the condition of an ecological or social resource. In management terms, an indicator is linked to a standard that, if exceeded, would trigger a change in management direction or emphasis. Indicators are typically the items monitored during the life of the plan.

Management Zones are subsets of the wilderness used for describing program specific direction that applies only within that zone. There are four generalized management zones within the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness, based on the Central Idaho Wilderness Act and the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. In 1978 Congress designated a ½ mile corridor along the Middle Fork of the Salmon River as part of the Wild and Scenic River system. When the Frank Church – River of No Return Wilderness was designated as Wilderness, Congress also delineated a similar ½ mile wild and scenic river corridor along the Salmon River. A Special Mining Management Zone, Clear Creek, was delineated too. The fourth zone is the general wilderness zone, which contains the wilderness not covered by the other three zones. This management plan has standards and guides often focused within one of these four zones. Where management goals, objectives, standards, and guidelines are unique to the Middle Fork or Salmon Rivers Management Zones or Special Mining Zone, they are so noted. Otherwise all direction in this plan applies wilderness-wide.

IV. Plan Structure

This management plan provides long-term direction for managing the Frank Church – River of No Return Wilderness. This plan contains the overall direction, and defines some of the activities that will be implemented to achieve the Desired Future Conditions for the wilderness. Management zones are used to focus management emphasis and to conform management direction to achieve common goals.

The plan is organized into the following chapters:

Chapter 1: Management Plan Introduction

Chapter 1 discusses the general purposes of this Plan, the relationship of the Plan to other documents, and the plan structure. It also includes a brief description of the FC-RONR Wilderness.

Chapter 2: Background and Direction for Management by Administrative and Resource Topic

Chapter 2 describes how each resource will be managed within the wilderness. The plan addresses and responds to the significant issues identified during the planning process. In this chapter, the Desired Future Condition for the Wilderness is identified and management direction for the wilderness in the form of goals and objectives, standards and guidelines, monitoring and indicators, are presented. Background and direction is provided at a broad scale and then addresses more specific direction to meet specific desired conditions. The goals and objectives provide the broad overall direction on the types of uses and activities that will be allowed. Standards provide the amplitude of acceptable changes in ecological and social conditions or restrictions and limits that may occur in order that natural forces are predominate in the wilderness and that wilderness character is preserved. Maintaining standards helps achieve the goals and objectives while moving toward the DFC.

Chapter 3: Monitoring

This chapter describes monitoring requirements by resource with the associated indicators that will be used to do the monitoring.

V. About the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness

A. History

The origins of the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness began in 1930 with the administrative establishment of the 1,090,000-acre Idaho Primitive Area. A later addition brought this total to 1,224,350 acres. Creation of the primitive area was promoted by concerns in the Forest Service that large expanses of America's remaining wildlands be preserved in their natural state before they were developed.

To the north, the Selway-Bitterroot Primitive Area was established in 1936, including most of the area between the Salmon and Lochsa Rivers. In 1963, a portion of this primitive area was re-designated as an administrative wilderness, while another portion bordering the Salmon River and the Idaho Primitive Area was designated as the Salmon River Breaks Primitive Area. The land between these two areas, known as the Magruder Corridor, was left unclassified, but has remained essentially undeveloped.

In 1964 Congress passed the Wilderness Act ([Appendix A](#)). This legislation gave statutory protection to many existing administratively designated wilderness areas, including the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness. The Act also required that primitive areas and adjacent lands be studied for their suitability for wilderness designation.

In 1968, the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act was passed by Congress, designating the Selway River and the Middle Fork Salmon River as components of the National Wild and Scenic River System ([Appendix B](#)). The Salmon River downstream from North Fork, Idaho, was named for study for potential classification.

The mandated studies for the Idaho Primitive Area, the Salmon River Breaks Primitive Area, and the Salmon River were conducted concurrently in the early 1970's. The reports, submitted in 1974, proposed wilderness and wild and scenic river designations for these areas. Studies of additional adjacent Roadless areas, including the Magruder Corridor, were completed in 1979 with additional lands recommended for addition to the proposed wilderness.

On July 23, 1980, Congress passed the Central Idaho Wilderness Act (CIWA), Public Law 96-312 ([Appendix C](#)). This Act created the 2,361,767-acre River of No Return Wilderness. The Wild and Scenic River Act was also amended by this legislation to designate two portions of the Salmon River as part of the National Wild and Scenic River System. The Salmon River was classified as a National Recreation River from

North Fork to Corn Creek, and a National Wild River from Corn Creek to Long Tom Bar. Approximately 105,600 acres were also added to the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness.

The name of the wilderness was changed in 1984 to “Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness” by public Law 98-231, to honor the late Idaho Senator Frank Church who was instrumental in passing the CIWA ([Appendix D](#)).

Congress designated this wilderness area to preserve its natural conditions and wilderness character, while allowing for several traditional uses to remain. Key provisions of the CIWA that affect management include:

- a. Provision for continuation of aircraft uses where such uses had become established
- b. Allowing jetboat use at levels at or above those in existence in 1978
- c. Identification of the 40,000 acre Special Mining Management Zone, where wilderness constraints are not applicable relative to mining activities for cobalt and associated minerals
- d. Prohibitions on dredge and placer mining in the Salmon River, the Middle Fork Salmon River, and tributaries of the Middle Fork Salmon River.
- e. Requirements for cultural resource management, including inventory and management of historic cabins and other structures in the wilderness
- f. Providing for two water developments
- g. Requirements for annual clearing of trail obstructions, to the extent practicable
- h. Requirements for completing a comprehensive management plan for the wilderness.

Plan direction for the FC-RONRW was created in 1984 with release of the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness Plan. This plan was amended in 1986 and 1994 as a result of a lawsuit settlement with outfitter caches. Plan direction for the Wild and Scenic Rivers was created for the Salmon River “wild” section in the 1982 Salmon River Wild and Scenic River Plan, and for the Middle Fork Salmon River in the 1993 Middle Fork of the Salmon River Wild and Scenic River Plan.

B. Location and Size

The Frank Church – River of No Return Wilderness (FC-RONRW) is located in central Idaho on the Boise, Bitterroot, Nez Perce, Payette, and Salmon-Challis National Forests. Portions of Custer, Idaho, Lemhi, and Valley Counties are contained within the wilderness. Figure 1 displays the general vicinity of the wilderness. The acres of land on each of the six National Forests are shown in Table 1.1

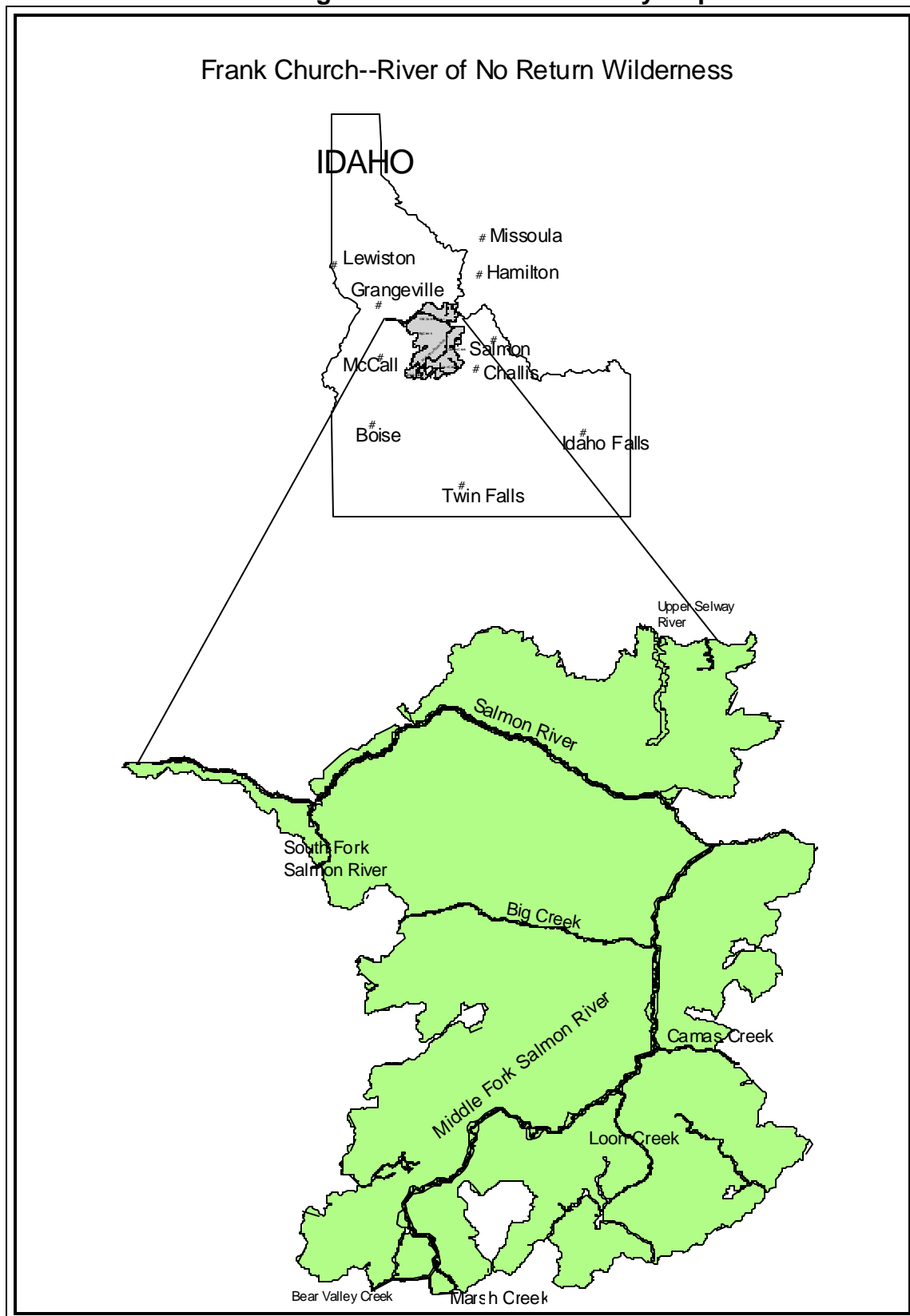
Table 1.1 National Forests and Net Acreage in Wilderness

| National Forests | Net Acres |
|-------------------------|------------------|
| Bitterroot | 193,703 |
| Boise | 332,891 |
| Challis | 515,421 |
| Nez Perce | 110,773 |
| Payette | 791,675 |
| Salmon | 421,433 |
| Total | 2,365,896 |

Source: Land Areas of the National Forest System, September, 2001

The legal boundary description and maps for the wilderness are documented in a USDA publication, The Exterior Boundary of the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness, Boise, Challis, Payette, Salmon, Bitterroot, and Nez Perce National Forests Northern and Intermountain Regions July 1985, as covered in the National Wilderness Preservation System by the Central Idaho Wilderness Act of 1980, dated July 23, 1980, (P.L. 96-312). This document is available for review at any of the Forest Supervisor Headquarters Offices that manage the FC-RONR Wilderness.

Figure 1.1 Wilderness Vicinity Map



C. Description

The FC-RONRW is the largest contiguous wilderness in the lower 48 states and in the National Forest System. As the largest block of primitive and undeveloped land outside Alaska, the wilderness is of national importance. By law, the FC-RONRW is to be preserved in its natural state for future generations. It is intended that the FC-RONRW is to remain a vast, remote region of soaring peaks, rolling uplands, deep canyons and rushing rivers where the forces of nature operate freely.

The CIWA also established the Salmon River as a Wild and Scenic River. Two other Wild and Scenic Rivers, the Middle Fork of the Salmon and the Selway, either flow through or border the FC-RONRW. These rivers, together with their tributaries and lakes, provide habitat for anadromous and resident fish species, wildlife and plant species, and provide recreation opportunities for local residents and visitors from afar. These rivers support tourism based businesses that are important to local and regional economies.

Elevations within the FC-RONRW range from less than 2000 feet in the lower river canyon bottoms to over 10,000 feet on the higher mountain peaks. Geological formations include river breaks and canyons (some up to 5000 feet deep), high mountains, meadows, rugged peaks, hot springs, and glaciated basins.

Soils of the area are diverse, varying from granitic in and near the Idaho Batholith, to basalt in the area of the Challis Volcanic. The granitic Idaho Batholith weathers into coarse, highly erosive, and low to moderately productive soils. A large area of Challis' Volcanic area, which occurs in the southern half of the wilderness, weathers into more productive, but often unstable, soils.

Seven physiographic types characterize the FC-RONRW:

- Lower River Canyon Lands
- Upper River Canyon Lands
- Rolling Basin Lands
- Low Relief Fluvial Lands
- Steep Volcanic Lands
- Steep Granitic Fluvial Lands
- Strongly Glaciated Lands

Precipitation varies from less than 14 inches to nearly 60 inches annually, mostly in the form of snow. Summers are generally dry and temperatures often exceed 100°F at lower elevations. Winters are long and hard. Winds are generally westerly over the wilderness, but are considerably altered near the ground by local topographic features. Canyon and ridge complexes result in local winds and typical diurnal patterns of up-canyon/up-slope daylight air movement and down-canyon/down-slope movement during darker periods.

The elevation range, with accompanying climatic variations, results in diverse flora and fauna. Vegetation varies from ponderosa pine/bluebunch wheatgrass or Idaho fescue, and Douglas-fir/ninebark or snowberry at lower elevations, to subalpine fir types in areas above 5,000 feet. A near-alpine habitat occurs in the highest elevation areas. Wildfires have continually altered the wilderness landscape, creating brush fields, large lodgepole pine stands, extensive snag patches, and variations in species and age classes of vegetation.

A total of 366 wildlife species have been listed as possibly occurring in the area: 75 mammals, 242 birds, 19 fish, 21 reptiles, and 9 amphibians. Nonnative species, which have been introduced into the area prior to wilderness designation, are chukar partridge and gray (Hungarian) partridge. Eight species of big game are found; mule deer, whitetail deer, elk, bighorn sheep, mountain goats, black bear, mountain lion, and moose.

The FC-RONRW provides habitat for several threatened, endangered, and sensitive species. The size of this wilderness and the dynamic character of its natural forces provide a wide and constantly changing variety of habitat for a large variety of wildlife and plant species.

The area contains both resident and anadromous fisheries. Steelhead trout and chinook salmon (spring and summer runs) migrate nearly 1,000 miles to the Pacific Ocean and return to complete their life cycles. Resident fish are found in both lake and stream environments. Native game fish include cutthroat, bull, and rainbow trout, whitefish, and sturgeon. Brook trout, California golden trout, and Arctic grayling have been introduced.

Approximately 95 wildfires occur per year; most (88%) have been lightning caused. While most have been suppressed at less than one acre, the occasional major fires produce an overall average of 60 acres per fire.

Recent recreation use of the wilderness includes a wide variety of activities with camping, big game hunting, fishing, and whitewater rafting among the most popular. Approximately 35,000 recreationists enjoy over 300,000 Recreation Visitor Days per year. Many utilize the services of the 88 outfitters who operate in the area.

The wilderness resource is of high quality over much of the area. In so vast an area, opportunities for solitude abound and, in a general sense, evidence of man is substantially unnoticeable. There are many expansive (greater than 20,000 acres) areas that have no Forest Service maintained trails (although there are user created trails within most of these zones). Numerous locations do exist where man's works are noticeable or even dominant, and the naturalness and solitude are impaired.

There are 2,600 miles of Forest Service trails within the wilderness, 24 airfields, 33 fire lookouts, 15 administrative sites (guard stations, patrol cabins, etc.), and over 100 trail

bridges. Inholdings consist of 61 parcels of private or state owned land, many with resort-type developments. Mining activities, past and present, also impact the wilderness resource. A 40,000-acre area in the eastern portion of the wilderness is identified as the Special Mining Management Zone, where wilderness considerations will not inhibit exploration and extraction of cobalt and associated minerals. Domestic livestock grazing, while once widespread, is no longer active over most of the area. Most current grazing is near the southern and southeastern periphery.

Historic and prehistoric heritage of the area is a recognized component of this wilderness. It is evidenced in numerous locations by artifacts of the Shoshone and Nez Perce Indian occupation, by the journals of early fur trappers and missionaries, and by the remnants of early miners and homesteaders. Over 350 sites in the wilderness, such as administrative sites and abandoned homesteads and mining claims, contain cabins or other buildings and structures. Thirty-seven of these are historically significant; about 75 more may be.

D. Administrative Coordination

The Bitterroot, Nez Perce, Payette and Salmon-Challis National Forests currently administer the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness. Acres located on the Boise National Forest (NF) were assigned to the Challis NF in 1991. In 1995, the Salmon and Challis National Forests were combined into one administrative unit. The Salmon-Challis National Forest currently serves as the lead Forest and administrative headquarter for the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness. The Salmon-Challis NF hosts a Wilderness Coordinator. The administrative units are shown in Table 1.2 along with the acreage per unit.

Table 1.2. FC-RONR Wilderness Administrative Units and Acreage per Unit

| Administrative Units | Net Acres |
|--|------------------|
| West Fork R.D. (Bitterroot NF) | 193,703 |
| Red River R.D. (Nez Perce NF) | 110,773 |
| Krassel R.D. (Payette NF) | 791,675 |
| Middle Fork-North Fork R.D. (Salmon-Challis NF) | 1,269,745 |
| Total | 2,365,896 |

A FC-RONR Wilderness Board of Directors provides policy-level leadership for the FC-RONR Wilderness; a Wilderness Lead Working Group is primarily responsible for policy implementation. The FC-RONRW Coordination and Operating Charter (October 2002), provides operating principles for the Board of Directors and the Lead Working Group ([Appendix E](#)).

The Board of Directors consists of the Forest Supervisors for each of the managing National Forests, and the Program Directors for Wilderness in Regions 1 and 4. The Lead Working Group consists of the District Rangers for each of the managing Ranger Districts, the FC-RONRW Coordinator, the Wilderness program managers for each of the managing National Forests, and the Wilderness Coordinators for Regions 1 and 4.

The Salmon-Challis NF administers the Salmon River and Middle Fork River private float boating lotteries and most of the river-related outfitter and guide permits. The Middle Fork/North Fork Ranger District issues and administers outfitter and guide float boating permits for the Middle Fork and Salmon Rivers.

Administration of commercial powerboat permits is split between the Salmon-Challis NF (North Fork R.D.) and the Nez Perce NF (Salmon River R.D.) based on the location of the permit holder's base of operation or residence. The Salmon River Ranger District issues and administers private jet boat permits.

The 79 mile long "wild" section of the Salmon River is managed by the North Fork Ranger District (Salmon-Challis National Forest) and the Salmon River Ranger District (Nez Perce National Forest), with the administrative boundary between these two managing districts being Salmon Falls. Trail responsibilities are assigned to the Ranger District where the trail is located unless adjusted by written agreement.

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