



# Frankly Speaking

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- Trails, trails, trails!

The Newsletter for the Frank Church – River of No Return Wilderness

Summer 2020

## Crews rebuild Middle Fork River Trail in 3-phase rebuild

Starting at Meyers Cove on Camas Creek and ending 31 miles later at Big Creek Pack Bridge, the Middle Fork River Trail #6044 on the North Fork Ranger District has one of the longest seasons for accessing the Middle Fork of the Salmon River and the heart of the wilderness. Besides having the lowest elevation access into the Middle Fork, the trail gives access to other trails upriver and Big Creek downriver. If early snows come in the fall, Camas Creek is the way out for many outfitters and hunters with their pack animals.

In 2016, the Salmon-Challis National Forest (SCNF) partnered with Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation (IDPR) and Montana Conservation Corp (MCC) for a phased approach to rebuild this important mainline trail over a few years. The Forest was awarded grants totaling over \$400,000, with much more added value being matched by Forest and MCC crews that perform the work.

The trail work was tough, with crews being resupplied by rafts and pack strings while backpacking deep into base camps and living up to 45 days at a time in wilderness. Work included building rock walls, using picks to retread the trail, and brushing thickets along the way.

In 2017, the Camas Creek portion was completed. In 2018, trail work continued from Camas to Jack Creek. In 2019, trail work began below there with plans to finish the trail to Big Creek in April, 2020.

With logistics in place to keep 40 people in the wilderness for all of April, plans were thwarted with the arrival of Coronavirus. Now the SCNF is asking for an extension to complete this project in 2021.



US Forest Service Photo by Khalil Taylor

**A Montana Conservation Corps crew works on Middle Fork River Trail #6044.**

# Salmon-Challis partners with outfitters for innovative approach to trail stewardship

The Outfitter and Guide Trail Stewardship Credit Pilot Program on the Salmon-Challis National Forest is part of the [National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act](#), which was passed by Congress with bipartisan support and signed into law in late 2016. The Act focuses on National Forest System trails, requiring the Forest Service to significantly increase the role of partners and volunteers in trail maintenance. The Forest Service manages nearly 159,000 miles of trail, the largest managed system of trails in the country. The management of this extensive trail system poses many challenges for the Forest Service to effectively maintain these trails for access and enjoyment

by the American public. In order to address these challenges, the Trails Stewardship Act required the Forest Service to create Priority Trail Maintenance Areas and the Outfitter and Guide Trail Stewardship Credit Pilot Program (Pilot Program). The Central – Idaho Complex, which includes all of the Frank Church – River of No Return Wilderness, was named one of fifteen priority areas across the country. Additionally, the Salmon-Challis was named one of the twenty pilot Forests within the Agency to implement a Pilot Program. Outfitters and Guides who contribute work that supports public access to trails, trailheads, and developed sites are then able to offset their

annual fees associated with the commercial use of public lands. The Salmon-Challis National Forest is excited to participate in the Pilot Program this year. For the 2020 season, 11 outfitters have signed up to take part in the Pilot Program, proposing to clear over 350 miles of trail within the Salmon-Challis National Forest, with approximately 175 miles of proposed maintenance within the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness. Outfitters have great knowledge and skills to contribute to our trails program and the Salmon-Challis National Forest is looking forward to a successful season of partnership building and shared stewardship.

## WANTED...

Your  
Picture  
Here

### Frankly Speaking

#### Inside This Issue:

- Outfitters Corner:
- Planned Projects
- Partnership Spotlight:
- Seasonal Goals
- And More ...

The Newsletter for the Frank Church – River of No Return Wilderness

Summer 2020

This newsletter is only as good as its content, and no one can provide better content than those who know, love, and spend time in the Frank Church—River of No Return Wilderness. Every issue will feature a new banner photo, and it could be yours! For consideration, submit entries to: [heather.degeest@usda.gov](mailto:heather.degeest@usda.gov) with subject line: *Frankly Speaking Banner*

This edition's banner photo was provided courtesy of the Middle Fork Ranger

## Outfitter Corner



**Ron Ens**  
Middle Fork Outfitters

Tell us about your outfitting business?

Since 2004, Middle Fork Outfitters has been offering fair chase wilderness hunting and fishing trips, deep in the heart of Middle Fork Country.

Why did you become an outfitter?

I started my guiding career in 1995 in the Selway Wilderness. My path soon brought me to the

Middle Fork & I fell in love with the country. When the opportunity came up, I bought an outfit. It's been a great life. I get to work in the Frank & share its beauty with people who may not make it to some of these places on their own.

How is your work in the Frank unique?

Our work is unique because we get to practice age old ways from packing to clearing trails with traditional tools. Guiding back here is one heck of a way to make a living.

How does your company impact people's lives?

As guides & outfitters we have a unique opportunity to let people experience wilderness in a way most aren't able to do on their own. The country can be steep, the weather unpredictable & some days are longer than others but the beauty & solitude of the landscape tend to humble most.

What do you appreciate the most about your partnership with the Forest Service?

I appreciate that we have a good working relationship with the Forest Service. We know it's not always easy keeping the trails open but by working together, it's easier to get the job done.

## SCNF invests in stock for backcountry maintenance

In 2019, the Middle Fork Ranger District of the Salmon-Challis National Forest purchased five new mules to assist with trails and airstrip maintenance in the backcountry. We look forward to sharing their adventures with you as we put them to work in the Frank!



# BNF, MCC open long-neglected wilderness trail

In the northwest portion of the Frank Church–River of No Return Wilderness on the edge of the boundaries between the Bitterroot and Nez Perce–Clearwater National Forests lies a remote and rugged trail in the Sabe Creek drainage. The trail starts high on the ridgeline south of the famous Magruder Corridor, the primitive road sandwiched between the Frank Church – River of No Return Wilderness and the Selway–Bitterroot Wilderness. The trail drops towards the Salmon River more than 3200 vertical feet, switch backing through thick timber and historic burned areas clogged with regeneration.

During the summer of 2019 a Bitterroot National Forest Wilderness Ranger, two Forest Biological Science Technicians, and four Montana Conservation Corps members spent two 8-day hitches opening the overgrown Sabe Creek trail. The crew based

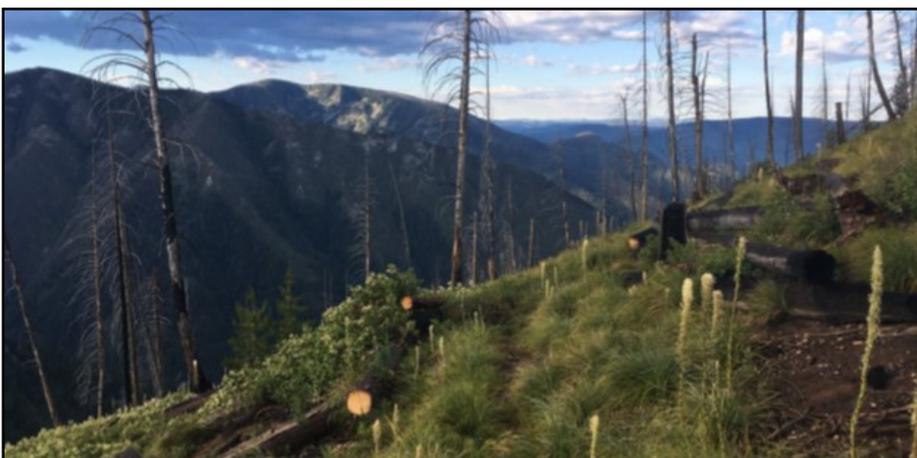


Montana Conservation Corps crew members cutting a tree that had fallen across the Sabe Creek Trail.

out of the Horse Heaven Cabin high up on the ridgeline. Each day the work took them further and deeper into the precipitous Sabe creek drainage. Each day they worked down the trail, mile by mile and hundreds of vertical feet; 1000, 2000, 3000 feet

below the cabin and each night they would climb 1000, 2000, 3000 feet back up to the camp. In some sections the trail was either completed overgrown with brush or it disappeared entirely.

Despite difficulty, the crew cleared over 700 trees and maintained 10 miles of trail to standard. By opening the trail, the Forest Biological Technicians were able to monitor and treat for invasive species encroaching in the Wilderness. This is all part of an ongoing effort to connect Sabe Creek Trail to the Dennis Creek drainage that would allow access for recreation, invasive weed eradication, and outfitter and guide hunting.



The Sabe creek Trail, freshly cleared by the Bitterroot National Forest and Montana Conservation Corps.

## Partnership Spotlight

### Selway Bitterroot Frank Church Foundation



Photos courtesy of SBFC.

**Selway Bitterroot-Frank Church Foundation volunteers working on the Marble Creek Trail during Summer 2019. Marble Creek trail is a portion of the Idaho Centennial Trail.**

**What is your organization’s mission?**

The Selway Bitterroot Frank Church Foundation (SBFC) assists the Forest Service in providing stewardship for the Selway-Bitterroot and Frank Church-River of No Return Wildernesses and surrounding wildlands through boots on the ground work, public education, and partnerships. SBFC is a community of wilderness-minded and hardworking individuals dedicated to bringing adult and youth volunteers from the surrounding communities to open and maintain wilderness trails. SBFC was founded in 2005 specifically to expand the wilderness stewardship capacity of the US Forest Service. SBFC helps take care of the 4 million acre Selway-Bitterroot and, since 2011, the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness areas, in Idaho and Montana.

**What do members of your organization like most about working in the Frank?**

We love bringing young people and volunteers to the Frank to experience the remote wilderness landscapes and rich history. At 4 million acres, the Selway-Bitterroot and FC-RONR Wilderness is the biggest Wilderness area in the lower 48 states. SBFC is really fortunate to be able to work with our Forest Service partners to open the wilderness trails. We especially enjoy working with many dedicated, skilled Frank Church Wilderness managers.

**How is the work the SBFC completes in the Frank impacting youth/volunteers’ understanding or appreciation of wilderness?**

Each year since 2011, SBFC has recruited college students to serve in the Frank Church Wilderness as Wilderness Ranger Interns. This program teaches students traditional stewardship skills and creates a love for wilderness.

**SBFC 2019  
Accomplishments**

**Total volunteer hours:  
3512**

**Trash Removed:  
26.5 pounds**

**Trees Removed :  
2,087**

**Miles of trail maintained:  
97.25**

# Airfields offers air access to wilderness

The Frank Church- River of No Return Wilderness was created with the passage of the Central Idaho Wilderness Act, [PUBLIC LAW 96-312](#) (S. 2009)—JULY 23, 1980, which states:

“(1) the landing of aircraft, where this use has become established prior to the date of enactment of this Act shall be permitted to continue....”

The Wilderness Act of 1964 allows for special provisions, where activities that would normally be prohibited in designated Wilderness areas are allowed to continue when the enabling legislation specifically allows them. These special provisions are activities that were well-established at the time of Wilderness designation. The backcountry flying culture was robust when the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness was designated and remains an important part of the landscape. The airstrips that are on Federal land within the Wilderness were not excluded from the Wilderness, but were designated as air access points within, upon and surrounded by Wilderness. The Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness has incredible air access opportunities for advanced backcountry pilots. These airfields are utilized as trailheads, boat launches and campsites for hunters, anglers, hikers and whitewater rafters who visit the wilderness throughout the spring, summer and fall.



**Early spring at Indian Creek Airfield, Middle Fork Salmon.**

When it’s time for maintenance on the Forest Service airstrips, we are required to consider the minimum tool concept, for tools or techniques that are normally prohibited. On the airfields administered by the Forest, we use historic graders that are, by definition, mechanized transport. They have wheels and gears, people ride on them, and they transport soil and rocks. So using the Minimum Tool Decision Guide, we have evaluated the need for these graders as the minimum tool for accomplishing airstrip maintenance. Since we are using horse or mule teams to power these wheeled conveyances, the graders qualify as the minimum tool needed to

accomplish grading and crowning of the landing surfaces. Cutting brush, painting markers, replacing the windsocks and ensuring proper drainage are also part of the routine maintenance on the airstrips, in addition to providing latrines and tie downs in good working order.



**2018 grading work in progress on Bernard Airstrip.**

# Forests maintain airstrips in backcountry

Payette National Forest airstrip maintenance tasks are done on a weekly, annual, or as needed basis. Work involves contracting a grader and stock to accomplish the grading and fill work. In 2019, the contractor did grading work on Cabin Creek and Soldier Bar Airstrips.

The Salmon-Challis National Forest conducts as needed

airstrip maintenance on an ongoing basis and has a special fleet of mule teams and associated equipment to handle the grading and fill work on a three year rotation amongst the three airstrips in the Frank Church under their jurisdiction. The Idaho Aviation Association (IAA) and the Idaho State Division of Aeronautics often

volunteer to help. In 2019, Middle Fork trails program did surfacing maintenance at Mahoney Airstrip and volunteers from IAA assisted with the work. In addition to the airstrips on Federal land, there are numerous state and private airstrips in the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness.



**Grading Soldier Bar on the Payette National Forest.**



**Grading Soldier Bar on the Payette National Forest.**



**New Soldier Bar outhouse on the Payette National Forest.**



**Getting fill material for Bernard airstrip on the Salmon-Challis National Forest.**

## ~~LOW TECH REDNECKS~~

Poem by Ron Ens, Middle Fork Outfitters

There's still a few low-tech rednecks left in the hills  
Resisting technology that gives them a chill  
Computers and web pages they don't understand  
But they can shoe a rank mule that's sixteen hands  
The world wide web is where folks go to surf  
That's fine by us – just stay off our turf  
They say you can find anything by going online  
But they can't find that bull elk, which, by us, is just fine  
When asked for our e-mail address, we don't wanna be liars  
So, we tell 'em just look for the smoke of our coffee fires  
GPS gadgets and cell phones ride at those high-tech hips  
But we'll keep our knives and pistols, so don't give us no lip  
Now we don't shun all gadgets that are electronic  
'Cause we don't know what we'd do without our Tri-Tronics  
Now there's not many of us primitive guides around  
Who can sharpen a crosscut and sleep on the ground  
So when folks ask what we'll do when we're too bent for the trail  
We'll tell them not to worry cause we can do this job  
By brail.....



Photo Courtesy of Harrison Stone