



Frankly Speaking

Inside This Issue:

- USFS Project Highlights
- Fire Lookout Restoration
- Outfitters Corner
- New Faces
- Trails, trails, trails!

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

Spring 2023

Salmon-Challis NF Trail Work Accomplishments



Grading the airstrip at Indian Creek.

During the 2022 field season, four Forest Service wilderness trail crews completed work in the Salmon-Challis administered portion of the Frank Church River of No Return Wilderness. Partner groups, outfitter and guide, and volunteer groups assisted agency crews in completing over 500 miles of trail maintenance in the wilderness. Notable projects included construction of 7 turnpikes, grading the Indian Creek Airstrip with an agency driving team, staffing the remote Loon Creek Guard Station, and conducting over 600 visitor contacts. Wilderness crews worked with 8

different partner groups to complete work in recent burns, in remote portions of the wilderness, and to perform wilderness character monitoring. The outfitter and guide trail stewardship program assisted in completing over 175 miles of trail maintenance in the Frank. The stock program expanded to accommodate three short string packers to assist in the completion of wilderness trail work, as well as two driving teams to assist with airstrip and heavy maintenance projects.



Trail work on Hoodoo Meadows Trail at the confluence of Camas Creek and the Middle Fork.

Payette NF puts together emergency trail crew to repair Big Creek trail

In November 2022, a pack string lead by an outfitter guide traveled down lower Big Creek trail in the Frank Church River of No Return Wilderness on the Payette National Forest. As the



Big Creek Emergency Trail Repair

pack string came around a corner in a steep canyon section above the river, one of the mules stepped on the outside edge of the trail and caused part of the trail to fail.

Unfortunately, two mules fell off the trail into the river and the trail was left impassable to stock. Each fall, lower Big Creek is a popular place for late season big game hunting. With two popular backcountry airstrips, the University of Idaho Taylor Ranch field campus, and three outfitters that all rely on the trail to access hunting areas. An impassable section of trail during this time of year created major hardships, especially with the high country covered in deep snow. To make matters worse, seasonal trail crews had long been laid off and were not able to be pulled back into work on an emergency project. Some creativity was needed and the Krassel Ranger District began a recruiting mission to cobble together a crew to head down to Cabin Creek and do an emergency repair of the trail. Rebuilding a frozen trail in an icebox canyon where the sun

doesn't shine isn't appealing to many. Selling the project as a scenic flight into Cabin Creek, with an exclusive stay in a historic, one-room, drafty cabin with marginal wood heat was the ticket! The crew that jumped at this opportunity was Caelan Parker (Krassel Trails Lead), Raina Phillips (Wilderness Ranger), Alex Cravener (ITA), Anne Poinier (ITA), Jacob Irwin (McCall RD Wildlife), and Austin Wrem (New Meadows RD Soils). After a week on the trail, the crew returned with an excellent wilderness experience and a successful mission. Braving the cold during the day, the trail was made whole, with at least a 50% chance that the repair will last into this spring. Evenings were spent in the cabin, enjoying well-earned warm drinks, card games, and even a charcuterie board. Huge thanks to everyone who made this project happen!



Wilderness Emergency Strike Team, Big Creek Trail



Cabin Creek Ranger Station

Outfitter Corner

Steve Zettel Idaho Wilderness Company



Tell us about your outfitting business.

Our operating area essentially borders the Middle Fork and Big Creek, which is a pretty great office. We do horseback big game hunts and fishing. My wife leads a women in the wilderness trip, where guests learn how to pack mules, cook in dutch ovens, and identify edible plants. Along with that, we take groups down the Middle Fork during summer float season as well.

Why did you become an outfitter?

I'm originally from suburban Philadelphia and I worked construction one day with a fellow that had gone to guide school and got placed at Cabin Creek. He came back to Philadelphia, fell in love, and never returned to Idaho. So, I took his place and I did the opposite- I never went back to Philadelphia! I took the greyhound bus out west in 1980. It was cool because after my first season, I knew what I was going to do forever.

How is your work in the Frank unique?

We are a family, we raised our kids back here, & we operate the entire business together. We've always attracted families as well and I think we make our decisions based on our enjoyment and our guest's enjoyment; it doesn't have a lot to do with math. I mean, we make a living doing this and that's important to us, but the Zettel's having fun takes priority over everything else, and it always has, which I think is unique.

How does your company impact people's lives?

Simply put, it's life changing for everyone. For example, going down the Middle Fork, the people that you deal with on the phone prior to the trip and the people that you deal with when they are leaving Stanley are completely different; its cool to see the transformation. I like to say if you go for four days it's fun, if you go for five days it's a great time, and if you go for six days it's life changing. On a horseback trip, it's the wilderness itself that is so therapeutic for everyone, it doesn't matter how much money you have or who you are, if you're in there long enough, it will change you.

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

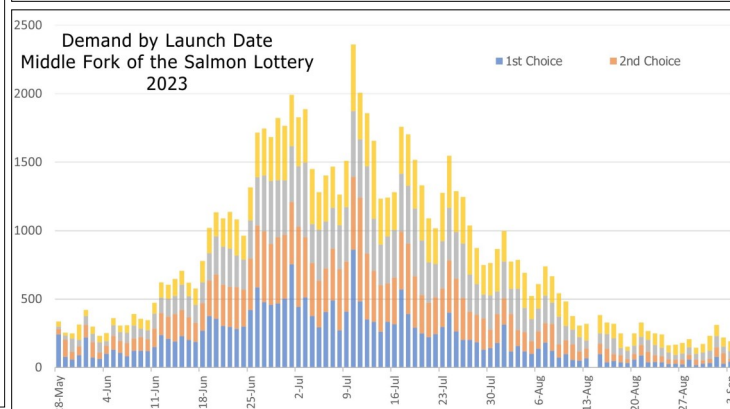
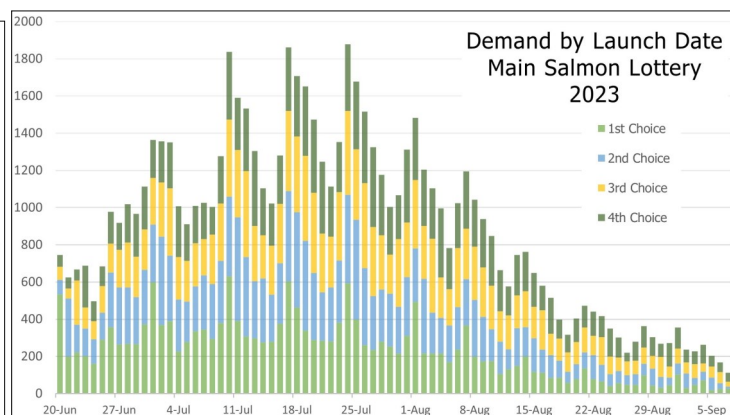
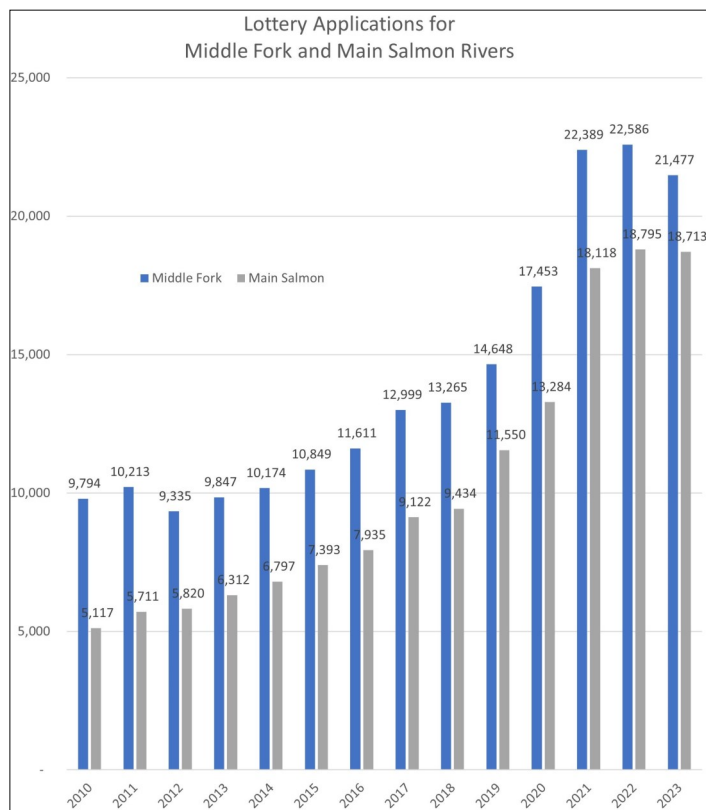
I appreciate the trust that has evolved over the years. I enjoyed working with Clem Pope, who became one of my biggest advocates. Even when we disagreed, we were always honest with each other, so we had a good bond. The relationship between outfitters and the Forest Service has ebbed and flowed, but I appreciate how we've progressed and where we are at now.

Float Boat 2023 Lottery Statistics

Each year, from December 1 through January 31, people from around the world submit applications for their chance to be awarded a river permit to float the Main Salmon and Middle Fork of the Salmon Rivers during their “control” seasons. These are some of the most sought-after river permits in our country, so when February 14 comes around, applicants are eagerly checking their emails to see if they were awarded a river permit. After the lottery is conducted, the Forest Service computes the data and develops graphs that help the public understand the various statistics. One of these graphs is the “Lottery Applications for the Middle Fork and Main Salmon

Rivers”. You’ll see in the graph the total number of applications that were submitted for each river from 2010 through 2023. Although the numbers have been on a steady increase, they seem to have plateaued in the last couple of years and actually dropped in 2023. Another interesting fact for this year’s lottery is that a person had better odds of drawing a Middle Fork permit than drawing a Main Salmon permit (1 in 58 vs 1 in 60), which is the first time this has happened since 2010. The other two graphs show the “Demand by Launch Date” for each river from the 2023 application season. Each graph shows the most sought after dates to put in for. What is

interesting to see when looking at these 2023 graphs, especially for the Main Salmon, is how uniformly-based the demand was on the day of the week. For example, on the Main Salmon, starting July 10 and continuing for three weeks, there is a noticeable trend. Monday’s have the highest demand for a launch date, followed by Tuesday, then Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, and lastly Saturday. It jumps back up with Sunday having a similar demand as Thursday. Overall, Saturdays were the least desired launch dates to apply for a Main Salmon launch date in 2023. For more information: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/activity/scnf/recreation/wateractivities>



New Faces

Introducing Ryan Ghelfi Executive Director, Selway Bitterroot Frank Church Foundation



Tell us about yourself.

I studied accounting in college at Southern Oregon University where I also ran track and cross country. After finishing college in 2012 I opted out of working in a cubicle doing other people's taxes and became an alpine climbing and backcountry ski guide. During that same time, I was able to compete professionally in ultra marathon races around the US and the globe for ten seasons. In 2016, I co-founded a business called Trails and Tarmac, coaching long distance runners from all over the world. In 2021, my wife and I founded a new guide service offering ultra-light backpacking trips in the Trinity Alps and Marble Mountains of Northern California called Wilderness Fastpacking.

What about the SBFCF's mission drew you to this position?

I have loved and valued Wilderness since I was a young kid. My very brave mother took me and my three younger siblings on backpacking trips when we were all under 12 years old. I am grateful to her and super impressed now that I have kids of my own. I believe in

the transformative power of immersive wilderness experiences for people. I believe places like the Frank Church Wilderness are vital today and even more so in the future for human flourishing. In a world where the pace of life only speeds up and being "connected" technologically consumes more of our existence, people NEED to know that they can always find refuge on our protected public lands. The SBFC mission to assist the Forest Service in stewarding one of the largest wilderness complexes in the US resonates on a personal level. It's definitely far more than a "job" for me.

What is one thing you are looking forward to as the SBFCF executive director?

I am looking forward to creating innovative ways to both increase our capacity to bring more crews and volunteers to work in the Frank Church Wilderness and to help more people to experience what Wilderness has to offer for their lives.

Tell us about your family and your hobbies outside of work.

My wife Natalie and I have three children, Laiken (6), Alden (2) and Josephine (0). We moved to McCall from Southern Oregon in 2023 when I began my role with SBFCF. We have enjoyed the town & all that it has to offer so far. We love to get our children outside as much as possible and will take them skiing, biking, hiking and backpacking at every opportunity. My hobbies all involve being outside! I am a long distance runner, backcountry skier, and backpacker, among many other pursuits, primarily human powered endeavors. Though it will be intertwined with my role at SBFCF, I expect to spend a significant amount of time exploring on foot in the Frank Church-River of No Return and Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness areas.

What is your go-to backcountry meal?

My favorite right now is instant potatoes with bacon, butter, cheese and other toppings that strike my fancy at the grocery store.

Introducing New River Rangers



Katie Gregory looking forward to working with and meeting boaters on the river.



Seamus McMorrow removing trash from the Snake River, Bridger-Teton NF 2021.

The Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forest would like to introduce two new river rangers: Katie Gregory and Seamus McMorrow, who were hired on late last fall. Katie and Seamus will be overseeing River Ranger responsibilities on the Main Salmon, Selway, and Lochsa Rivers; rotating between rivers to provide a presence during peak flows and visitation periods.

Katie is from the southeast and has spent over a decade working and instructing on rivers across the country. She started her federal service as a river ranger with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) in Oregon and has since worked for the National Park Service (NPS) in Colorado and Utah. Her favorite rapid is Pillow Rock on the Gauley River in West Virginia.

Seamus is a native of Maine, where he grew up rafting with his family on the Kennebec River. As soon as he was old enough, he took his first river guide job on that same river. Since then, he has been a guide on 15 other rivers around the west and abroad. Seamus began his federal career in 2020 as a river ranger with the BLM in Oregon and has since worked as a river ranger for NPS in Utah, and for Bridger-Teton NF. When he's off the river, Seamus is an avid skier, and has been trying his hand at ceramics, making bowls and mugs.

The Forest is excited to have an active presence on the rivers and welcomes the wealth of river experience these two bring to the recreation program. Please say hello, when you see them sporting the FS logo along the Salmon, Selway and Lochsa river corridors!

WANTED...

**Your
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**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

Spring 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: kelly.martin@usda.gov

River Checker Interpretation

Have you ever visited Corn Creek, Boundary Creek, or Indian Creek? These are remote Forest Service stations located along the Wild & Scenic Main Salmon and Middle Fork of the Salmon rivers and also major portals into the Frank Church River of No Return Wilderness, that are staffed for five to nine months out of the year. The employees that work and live out of these remote stations are often referred to as “River Checkers”. They are the front line of the Forest Service when it comes to interacting with river and wilderness users such as float boaters,

fisherman, stock users, jetboaters, aviators, hunters, and backpackers. Their work on the ground is imperative for sharing the roles and responsibilities that we all play in supporting and protecting Wilderness Character and Wild & Scenic River Values. In 2022, River Checkers working

throughout the Salmon-Challis National Forest provided wilderness and river ethics interpretation to 23,657 visitors and issued 1,629 float boat permits. These stations can be busy, happening places during the summer months! The hustle and bustle of groups getting ready to embark on a river trip or venture out into the wilderness down a trail can be quite exciting and the River Checkers take pride and passion in chatting with visitors about these special places. If you get the opportunity to swing by one of the stations, stop in and say hello!



Corn Creek River Checkers giving a talk to float boaters.



River Checkers at the Indian Creek Guard Station.



Boundary Creek River Checkers giving talk to float boaters.

Arctic Point Fire Lookout Restoration



Arctic Point Fire Lookout and cabin.

Payette National Forest archaeologists and volunteers finished a six year long restoration of historic Arctic Point Fire Lookout in the Frank Church River of No Return Wilderness. Each summer crews and restoration gear traveled by foot, by airplane, and by mule to one of the most remote fire lookouts in the lower 48 states to restore the site. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, Arctic Point Fire Lookout is the last Aermotor Company, galvanized steel fire lookout, still standing in the Frank Church wilderness. The tower, built in 1936, has a commanding view of the remote backcountry landscape and stands 7,518 feet on a plateau above Arctic Creek. There is also an associated Rocky Mountain-style log cabin, used as a residence by the guard, that was added to the lookout station in 1939. The Forest Service used the lookout seasonally for fire watch until 1997, when it was no longer staffed. Beginning in 2017, the cabin and lookout received some well over-due maintenance. The crew replaced rotting logs and support posts on the cabin, replaced the front porch floor and floor joists, replaced rotten roof sheathing and installed new cedar shingles, re-glazed windows in the cabin and lookout cab, and deep cleaned the cabin interior which had been infested with rodents.

Lodgepole pine logs near the lookout were used in the restoration, but many other supplies had to be brought in, which was logistically challenging. The site is about 40 miles from the nearest trailhead, so trails had to be cleared by wilderness trail crews before each trip. In 2021, mules packed 2,500 lbs of gear to the site, including cedar shingles and traditional carpentry tools. “The logistics were a big aspect of this project. Coordinating backcountry flights, figuring out what cargo would go from the airstrips and what cargo would go from the trailhead— every aspect had to be figured out and fine-tuned,” said Morgan Zedalis, forest archaeologist. The remote location and difficult logistics were the reason the project occurred over multiple years. “When we look at a project like the restoration of a



Crews remove old shingles and replace rotten roof sheathing.



Volunteer carpenters replace the front porch floor.



Volunteer carpenters install new cedar shingles on the cabin roof.

historic site in this wilderness area, we have to answer the first question– is it necessary?” said Joshua Simpson, Payette wilderness program manager, “and we figured out that yes, the project is necessary. This is a significant historic fire lookout and associated cabin, degrading over time, and it’s listed as a National Register property, so there’s value there. We analyzed the effects of this project on wilderness character and we determined that ultimately, it was worthwhile and worth doing as part of meeting our mission.” The restoration work gave this National Register listed property a new lease on life and honors the history and stories of one of the most remote fire lookouts in the United States. To learn more about the restoration, watch this video, which highlights the lookout history and the project: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=McZSkv7oohw>



Archaeologists assist volunteer carpenters with splitting a log, which will be used to replace a rotten log segment on the cabin.



Arctic Point Lookout cabin before restoration in 2016.



Arctic Point Lookout cabin after restoration in 2022.