

Middle Fork Ranger District Trails



The Middle Fork Ranger District (MFRD) office is located in Challis, Idaho, and is one of six districts on the Salmon-Challis National Forest. The Middle Fork District administers and oversees over one million

acres of land, including over 900,000 acres of the [Frank Church River of No Return Wilderness](#) (FC-RONRW) area, one of the last intact wild places in the lower 48 states.

A land of steep mountains, deep canyons, and wild rivers, the Frank Church – River of No Return Wilderness is the second largest Wilderness in the lower 48 states at 2.4 million acres. The FC-RONRW provides outstanding opportunities for primitive recreation experiences, with over 2600 miles of trails linking the various airfields, rivers, trailheads and perimeter access roads. The condition of these access roads varies significantly; some are not suitable for trailers, others are passable only to high-clearance, 4-wheel-drive vehicles or ATVs. The best opportunities for solitude are in the trailless areas, which total 1.5 million acres in the Wilderness. Maintenance of this large, remote wilderness trail system is challenging. Large fires, short field seasons, limited access, and Mother Nature (wind, rain, slides, etc.) all contribute to the difficulties of keeping these trails open. Most of the trails were built before 1930; many are steep, rocky, eroded, poorly located and poorly drained. Numerous trails are in primitive condition.



The Middle Fork also manages the recently designated [Jim McClure-Jerry Peak Wilderness](#).

[Trail Condition Report](#)

Some trails do not receive regular maintenance and may be difficult to navigate or find. Note the date last maintained when reviewing the last known conditions, then read the Notes to see if the entire trail was maintained or just a portion. This trail is not recommended for pack stock travel from the Middle Fork of Indian Creek and Kiwah Meadow, due to narrow out sloping tread and multiple landslides.



Sunrise over Indian Creek

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Mule Hill and Indian Creek Trails, August 6-13, 2020

On August 6, Middle Fork Ranger District employee Harriss and three Montana Conservation Corps (MCC) Fellows departed the Challis office enroute to trail #219, the Mule Hill Trail. This connects Thunder Mountain Road to the Indian Creek Trail #225. Work began the next morning and that trail was completed the morning of August 9.



The crew continued downstream from Kiwah Meadows onto the Indian Creek Trail, where they encountered a large landslide that was discovered last year. After attempting to cut across the landslide that afternoon and the following morning, efforts to make a repair on this spot were abandoned.

Monday, August 10th, the crew worked further downstream from Little Indian Creek on the Indian Creek Trail about a mile before encountering another much smaller avalanche. Tuesday, August 11th the crew finished clearing this section before packing up camp and hiking back to the trailhead. On August 13, they returned to Challis.

In summary, 4 miles of trail were cleared. The crew conducted solitude monitoring throughout the trip and cleaned 3 fire rings. This trail is not advised for stock below Kiwah Meadows.

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### **Trail work in the Big Baldy area, July 2020**

On Wednesday July 22nd Middle Fork Ranger District employee Harriss and three Montana Conservation Corps (MCC) Fellows departed the Challis office enroute to the Big Baldy Ridge Trail #227. This section of trail spans from the wilderness boundary to Big Baldy lookout, joining trail #228 at Little Pistol Creek.

On Thursday the 23rd, the crew loaded up daypacks and set out on trail #090 from the road clearing to the confluence with trail #088. There were several large complex log cuts and extensive drainage work in this section.

The next day, Friday the 24th, the crew loaded up overnight packs and headed down trail #090, continuing clearing on trail #088 to trail # 227- Big Baldy Ridge trail. They continued clearing a mile down the Baldy Ridge Trail before heading to Buck Lake to base camp.





On Saturday the 25th the crew worked out of the Buck Lake basin, clearing approximately ½ mile in each direction. The following day, Sunday the 26th, the crew headed back along trail #227, clearing another mile of steep heavily logged terrain.

On Monday the 27th, an additional mile of trail #227 was cleared.

Tuesday the 28th, the crew finished clearing an additional mile of trail before hiking back to the trailhead.



*Before and After photos of Big Baldy Trail #227*

In summary, trail #009 was cleared 0.6 miles from road #479, trail #088 was cleared an additional 3 miles. Most of trail #227 was cleared between Pistol Rock and Buck Lake, with the exception of a heavily logged one mile section. The crew will return to the area later this season to attempt to finish clearing that in addition to the rest of the section between Buck Lake and Big Baldy Lookout.

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More trail work in the Rapid River drainage, July 2020

On July 22, Middle Fork Ranger District employee Taylor and Montana Conservation Corps. (MCC) Fellows Hild, Elgart, and Rothschild departed the Challis office enroute to the Rapid River Trail, #4007. The Rapid River trail starts at the edge of the “Seafoam bubble” near the confluence of Float Creek and Rapid River. It is one of the major tributaries to the Middle Fork of the Salmon River and a historic route to access the Middle Fork. The crew would spend this hitch continuing efforts from their last hitch clearing the Rapid River trail.



The first day, the 22nd, the crew hiked about 6.5 miles to Sheep Creek to set up a camp to base out for the next few days.

Designation of a road, trail, or area should not be interpreted as an implication that the road, trail, or area is passable, actively maintained, or safe for travel. Seasonal weather conditions and natural events may render designated roads, trails, and areas impassable for extended periods. Some trails have been significantly affected by fire and natural events and may no longer exist or be extremely difficult to find. Maintenance of designated roads, trails, and areas will depend on available resources, and many may receive little maintenance.

Forest visitors should carry a saw and a shovel, as wind or other weather events may cause trees to block roads and/or trails at any time. Appropriate clothing and additional food and water are also advised.

Allowed uses of trails within the wilderness are limited to pedestrian and stock use. The use of bicycles, game carts, motorbikes, ATVs, UTVs, etc., is not allowed within wilderness. Drones may not be operated within the wilderness.

Over 271 miles of trail were maintained by the District in 2019. To see the mileage summary by trail, click [here](#). For details about the last known condition of each trail, click [here](#).

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2020 Wilderness Trails

Clearing trails in the Indian Creek drainage, August 20-26, 2020

On Thursday, August 20th, Middle Fork Ranger District Employees Parker, Phillips, Taylor and Harriss, accompanied by 5 MCC crew members, flew into Indian Creek Guard Station from Challis to head up the Indian Creek Trail #225. This trail connects the Middle Fork Trail #001 to Trail #088 on the wilderness boundary. Phillips, Taylor, and MCC crew members Deepchandi, Adase, and Elgart cleared up the Indian Creek Trail from Indian Creek's confluence with the Middle Fork of the Salmon. They encountered some light logging, a few retread sections and primarily spent time brushing the thick riparian vegetation in this lower portion of the trail, ending the day at the Middle Fork of Indian Creek.



Photo: Indian Creek Trail

Harriss, Parker, Sparling and Rothschild spent the afternoon brushing and pulling knapweed around the airstrip.

Friday the 21st, the entire crew loaded up overnight packs and headed up the Indian Creek trail to the Middle Fork of Indian Creek. They left overnight gear at the confluence and continued clearing up the trail.

Saturday the 22nd, Phillips, Taylor and crew worked primarily on brushing and removal of loose rock that has accumulated over the years. They also had time for some retread in certain spots. The trail is consistently on a steep side hill very high above the creek and can be narrow in many sections between the Middle Fork of Indian Creek and Kwiskwis Hot Springs. Parker, Harriss and crew worked ahead doing some light logging and removing large rocks from the trail.

Sunday the 23rd, Phillips plus four worked on reestablishing about a 300 foot section of trail where several landslides/blowouts were impeding navigation. They also spent time brushing a long choked out section of trail about a half mile above Kwiskwis Creek. Parker plus two hiked past Little Indian Creek to finish clearing several log piles that were still there from the last hitch.

Monday the 24th, Parker, Harriss and the 5 MCC crew members hiked back to the Middle Fork of Indian Creek, improving the thin areas of tread on the way. Phillips and Taylor sawed 10-12 remaining trees around Kwiskwis Creek in the morning and then hiked and removed rocks as well behind the rest of the crew back towards the Middle Fork of Indian Creek.

Tuesday the entire crew loaded up gear and headed to the confluence of Indian Creek and the Middle Fork of the Salmon. Parker, Harriss, Sparling and Rothschild continued downriver from the confluence working on a section of the Middle Fork Trail #001. After returning to the Indian Creek Guard Station, Phillips, Taylor, Deepchandi, Adase, and Elgart scraped and repainted the corner markers on the upriver side of the airstrip. They also removed additional brush and grasses around the markers and pulled some knapweed.

In summary, the group cleared 11.5 miles of trail and conducted solitude monitoring throughout the trip. Two fire rings were naturalized on this trip and three were cleaned of garbage and excess ash. In total, 45 person-hours were spent on airstrip maintenance.

The next day, July 23rd, the crew split up into a saw team and a team that would focus on improving trail tread. The work was focused in the mile above Sheep Creek and the mile downstream of Sheep Creek. The saw team cut several large and complex downed Douglas Fir trees. The digging team re-established the trail tread and the back slope in several long landslide sections, as well as brushed the trail in areas that needed it. The crew experienced heavy rains and thunderstorms on and off throughout the day.



Friday the 24th, the crew continued working downstream from Sheep Creek. The crew spent a significant amount of time brushing in several long sections of trail choked out with riparian shrubs and trees. The trail corridor was indistinguishable in many of those sections before the work was completed. The crew also cut several complex logs and re-established tread in several side hill sections. The crew made it about 1.5 miles below Sheep Creek this day. That evening, Middle Fork employee Gaspar joined the crew to work for the next few days.



Saturday the 25th, the crew continued downstream with the logging, brushing and tread work. The crew made it to about a half mile above Spruce Creek.

Sunday the 26th, the crew bumped their camp downstream about two miles down canyon to a camp between Spruce Creek and Chet Creek. They continued with the clearing downstream the rest of the day.

On Monday the 27th, Gaspar and Hild hiked out to the trail head and the rest of the crew continued working downstream. The crew ultimately made it to Cabin Creek with the clearing. The trail is now passable for stock up until this point when accessed from the Seafoam

area.



The next day the 28th the crew packed up camp and spent more time bushing the trail corridor out to standard as well as widening tread in certain spots and re-cutting a large tree that was digging into the trail tread. The crew camped at Bruin Creek, about four miles from the trailhead that night.

The next day the 29th the crew hiked out and drove back to Challis.

The work was slow as many trail sections required extensive brushing to keep the trail passable and visible. The canyon is very steep so many side hill sections had slid over the tread and tread had to be re-dug and established again. The logging was fairly light but nearly all the trees encountered were quite complex and time consuming because they were large and on steep

slopes.



The crew naturalized and cleaned garbage out of two fire rings.

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## Trail work in the Rapid River drainage, July 2020



On Tuesday, July 7th, Phillips, Knudson and Dopp traveled to Cape Horn Guard Station with 11 head of horses and mules for the annual re-supply trip to Ruffneck Lookout. On July 8th, they made the loads, and had a smooth trip to the top of the mountain with around 650 pounds of food, water and gear for the lookout. Trash and other items were backhauled. Thanks to the Ramshorn Fire Module for clearing the trail! Phillips took 5 head of horses and mules to Seafoam and headed on to meet the crew working on the Rapid River trail.





Also on July 8th, Middle Fork District employee Taylor, along with three of the Middle Fork's MCC trail crew members, Rothchild, Elgart, and Hild drove from the Challis office to the Rapid River trailhead with the goal of clearing trail #4007 as far as they could by early the next week. The trail follows the Rapid River drainage about 15 miles to its confluence with the Middle Fork of the Salmon River. The crew cleared the first 1.5 miles of trail that first day and camped at Bruin Creek 4 miles down canyon from the trailhead where they would base out of for several days.





*Before and After photos*

The next day the 9th the crew connected the trail clearing from where they left off the prior day to close to their camp about 4 miles in at Bruin Creek. This consisted up sawing blow downs, shoveling rock slides, retreading trail surface and some brushing. Taylor departed on the 10th, and Phillips rode in to join the crew and continue working downstream. On the 11th, the crew encountered large landslides that would make up the bulk of the work for the next few days. The crew traveled out on the 14th and back to Challis.





The trail is clear and passable to Sheep Creek. Several narrow rocky spots could be hazardous to pack stock below Lucinda Creek. The MCC crew worked hard on the trail and they were all able to do a little bit of riding and help out with the horses and mules.

Rapid River Canyon is scenic, steep and dynamic. The prevalence of rockfall and landslides made it slow going this year. We intend to go back in the fall and hopefully finish clearing the trail through to the Middle Fork.

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Trail work in the Seafoam area, July 8-14, 2020



The above photo is an unnamed lake above Float Creek.

On July 8, Middle Fork District employees Harriss and Parker, accompanied by 3 MCC crew members, departed for the Josephus Lake Trailhead.

After arriving late that afternoon, the crew was able to begin clearing Soldier Lakes Trail #4013. In addition, they removed trash from popular trailhead campsites and fire rings around Josephus Lake.

The morning of the 9th, the crew loaded up overnight packs with plans to camp around Helldiver Lake. They headed up trail #4013, clearing trail the additional 2 miles to Helldiver Lake. They spent most of the day logging out the trail as well as brushing and removing debris from water bars and culverts. The crew also spent time removing trash from popular campsites around Helldiver Lake.



On the morning of the 10th, after camping near Helldiver Lake and cleaning campsites around some of the smaller lakes in the area, the crew continued clearing trail from Helldiver on trail #4013 towards the Soldier Lakes. After removing trash from fire rings at popular campsites around several of the Soldier Lakes, the crew continued logging the trail and removing rocks and debris from the many water bars for approximately 2 miles until the junction of trail #4013 and #4019, the Cutthroat trail. The crew then continued clearing down trail #4019 for an additional 2 miles to Cutthroat Lake to camp for the night.

The morning of the 11th, the crew loaded up overnight packs and continued clearing up trail #4019, the Cutthroat trail, to the junction with trail #4018, the Muskeg Creek trail, approximately $\frac{1}{2}$ mile away from camp. Trail #4018 was then cleared from that junction to the junction with trail #4013, two miles west. The Big Soldier Lookout trail was logged to the lookout, approximately one mile from the junction of trail #013 and trail #018. The crew then returned from the lookout and continued in the opposite direction down Patrol Ridge on trail #4013, clearing most of that section back to the Soldier Lakes to camp for the night.



Above photo: Patrol Ridge.

On the morning of the 12th, the crew loaded up tools and finished clearing logs and rock from the trail on the section of trail #4013 that had not been cleared the day before. They then packed up camp and continued on to check the remaining campsites at the Soldier Lakes for trash. They continued on trail #4013 back over the section that had already been cleared, proceeding to cut several trees that had come down in the previous night's windstorm.

On the 13th the crew loaded up day packs and continued clearing from Helldiver Lake on trail #4014 to tie in with work done by the Selway Bitterroot Frank Church Foundation (SBFCF). After tying in that trail, they continued back to their camp for the night.

On the 14th they packed up all gear and hiked back to the trailhead from above Helldiver Lake along trail #4013, logging out an additional 10 trees that had blown down in the windstorm during the hitch.

In summary, the crew cleared 16.5 miles of trail, removing approximately 180 trees, completing the intended route and tying in to work done by the SBFCF crew. Public contacts were made with 17 people. Twenty-three wilderness campsites were cleaned of trash and several were naturalized.

Trail work in the Loon Creek and Langer Lake areas, late June 2020



On June 24, Middle Fork Ranger District employees Parker, Harriss, Taylor, Sammer, Phillips, and six Montana Conservation Corps (MCC) interns travelled to the Phillips Creek Transfer Camp to work on the Loon Creek Trail



#101.

They shovelled loose rock off the trail and dug retread where slides had occurred over the winter, sawing blowdowns and clearing trail for about 10 miles, down to Falconberry Guard Station. This section of trail receives a high amount of use and requires significant annual maintenance due to the terrain. nature of the terrain.





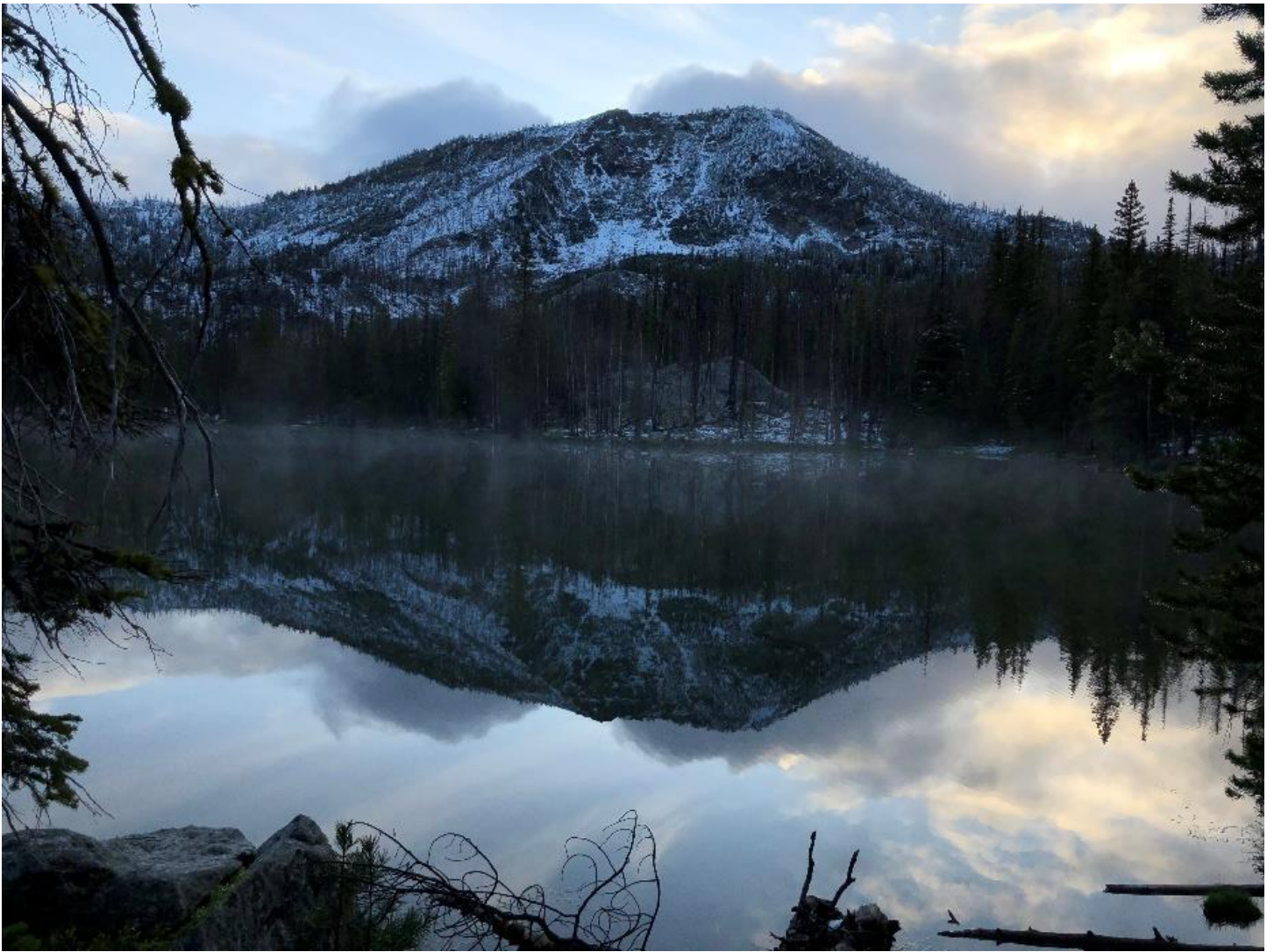
Training objectives were accomplished as long-time Middle Fork employees Sammer, Parker and Phillips covered a wide range of trails and wilderness stewardship topics and skills for the crew. The crew also cleaned several campsites and packed out garbage.

On June 29th, Sammer and Parker met up with Loon Creek Guard Bond and they headed for Seafoam Guard Station to open it for the season.

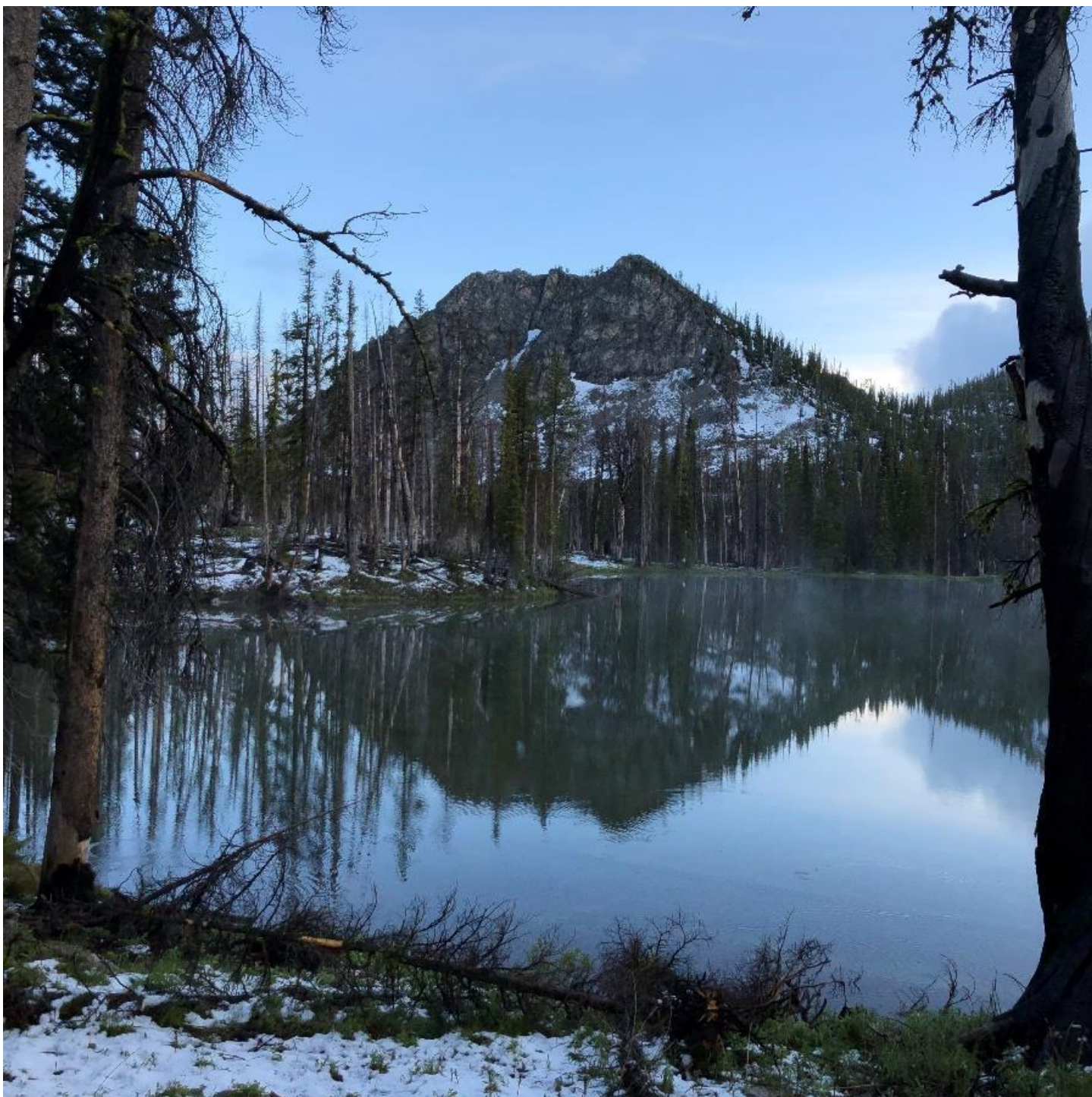


Taylor and the six MCC crew members headed to Langer Lake to do trail work, clean campsites and get training on campsite and solitude monitoring.

On Trail #014, the crew cleared 23 water bars of debris and sediment and did some light logging too.



While at Langer Lake, the crew naturalized 3 fire rings and also cleaned 3 other fire rings of ash and garbage. The crew packed out about 15 pounds of trash from campsites including glass, clothing, human waste, and a variety of other micro trash.



The crews returned to Challis the afternoon of the 30th.

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### **First patrol of 2020**

To start the field season, Middle Fork District employees Taylor and Cognetti headed to Boundary Creek on June 9 to clean the bathrooms at the launch site, the campgrounds, and at the transfer camp/trailhead. These facilities are scheduled to be cleaned twice a week to benefit public health and experiences while recreating in these areas. The crew wore additional PPE and took extra precautions while performing these duties to prevent the spread of COVID-19.



That same day, two people from the Selway-Bitterroot Frank Church Foundation (SBFCF) started from the Marsh Creek Trailhead, clearing downstream on the Marsh Creek Trail #111. They logged out the trail for the first 2 miles and cleaned debris out of water bars and culverts as well as re-establishing the trail tread in some landslide sections.

On June 10, Taylor and Cognetti drove from Boundary Creek to the Marsh Creek Trailhead; they first had to spend a few hours clearing trees off the Boundary Creek Road due to a recent storm. They met Volunteer Dorr at the trailhead and headed down the trail to meet up with the SBFCF staff. The five of them worked the rest of day to clear about 3 miles of trail, logging out trees, shoveling out landslides and pushing large boulders off the trail.

They were then joined by Rangers Parker and Phillips and everyone headed down the trail to Big Hole, clearing trail and cleaning trash and fire rings on the 11th.

The two SBFCF staff headed back to their duty stations on the 12th, and the remaining crew of five (Taylor, Cognetti, Dorr, Parker & Phillips) worked downstream from Big Hole on the upper Middle Fork Trail, #001.



The crew spent time clearing large rockslides from the trail and removing blow downs. In the afternoon, they hit a section of trail almost 2 miles downstream of Big Hole that was badly damaged by the earthquake and avalanche events that occurred in the area this winter; it was deemed too hazardous to pass with the current water level. A blasting crew will have to revisit this section in the



future. The crew packed up camp, hiked out and drove to Boundary Creek to stage themselves to work up from the Dagger Falls Trailhead on the 13th.

The next day, the crew spent the day clearing from Dagger Falls up to Chicken Creek on the Middle Fork Trail #001 a total of three miles, encountering heavy to moderate logging and some rainy weather.

The following day, three members of the crew, Cognetti, Taylor, and Dorr, spent the morning clearing down the Bear Valley Creek Trail #012 to the first ford, about 2 miles total.



There were some large and destructive rockslides and landslides in this section, likely triggered by earthquakes this winter as well as numerous avalanche events. The crew was able to address most of the impacts from earthquake/avalanche events but for some sections, the crew will have to make blasting plans and come back out with different and more powerful tools to address these issues. Marsh Creek canyon and the upper Middle Fork of the Salmon River is a fine showcase of how young and dynamic the mountains of the Salmon River Range are. High water, avalanches, fire, earthquakes are just a few of the landscape-changing events that create constant challenges for the people responsible for maintaining these historic trails that access the lands surrounding the Middle Fork of the Salmon River.

Stock users: It is not recommended to take stock on this section of trail from the Marsh Creek trailhead #111 to the Dagger Falls trailhead #001.



Before and after photos of a rock slide:







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