USDA Forest Service

Salmon-Challis National Forest

June 2002

SALMON INTERFACE WATERSHED ASSESSMENT ~SIWA~

WHAT IS IT, WHY WE'RE DOING IT, AND HOW YOU CAN BE INVOLVED

Welcome to the Salmon Interface Watershed Assessment (SIWA). A watershed assessment is a planning tool the Forest Service uses to characterize and assess the condition of an area, and recommend projects. **Decisions on whether or not to implement the projects are not made in a watershed assessment.** If adopted, a recommended project would go through the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analysis process that involves additional public involvement and more analysis before a decision on implementation can be made.

SIWA was initiated to increase our understanding of the natural resources and human uses of the area we've defined as the **Salmon Interface Watershed Assessment Area** (see enclosed map). The assessment will identify the current conditions, issues, risks and opportunities that are specific to the area, and provide recommendations for future projects. One goal of SIWA is to assess the need to reduce the risk of wildland fire within the Salmon Interface Assessment Area.

We need you...

The following pages describe some of the important characteristics the Forest Service has identified for the Salmon Interface Watershed Assessment Area. In order to do an accurate assessment, we need to hear about what is important to you in the area—for instance, what are your concerns? Are there places or resources that you feel are special or need attention?

South of Salmon with smoke plume from the Clear Creek Fire in the background, July 27, 2000.

Do any areas hold opportunities not yet explored? What information, historic or current, can you give us about the area?

Please read through this brochure and give us your comments so that our assessment can reflect your concerns.

The Many Faces of the Salmon Interface

The wildfires of 2000 served as a wake-up call for the city of Salmon regarding the risk of wildfire within the wildland/urban interface, or the area where wildland fuels meet human development. The threat to human health, safety, personal property, and the city's water supply became all too real in 2000 for the Salmon wildland/urban interface. The ***Salmon Interface Watershed Assessment Area*** *(see enclosed map) was defined in response to such threats from wildfire. The area includes 205,455 acres under USDA Forest Service, USDI Bureau of Land Management, Idaho State Lands, and private ownership, with SIWA focusing on the federal lands within the area. The area boundaries extend west of the Salmon River from North Fork south to the Lake Creek drainage. The western boundary includes the entire Napias Creek drainage, and the southeast boundary crosses the Salmon River to include the 12-Mile Creek drainage, heading north to encompass the Salmon Hot Springs drainage. Nearly 32%, or 65,372 acres of the assessment area are in designated Inventoried Roadless Areas. The Fenster Fire, 12-Mile Fire, and part of the Clear Creek Fire, burned a total of 20,888 acres of the assessment area in 2000. The following pages contain snapshots of the many different resources found in the assessment area.*

Cultural Heritage

The assessment area is rich in both prehistoric and historic resources spanning the last several thousand years. Prehistoric Native Americans established temporary encampments along many of the drainages. They also hunted game, gathered plant resources and procured the distinctive rock used to manufacture their stone tools within the assessment area.

Remnants of intensive load and placer mining dating to the 1860's are visible within the assessment area. Evidence of communities, such as the ghost towns of Leesburg and California Bar, scattered homesteads, refuse dumps, and abandoned wagon road segments can still be found throughout the area. Early 20th century agriculture and ranching is visible in various structures and landscape features at the lower elevations. The Civilian Conservation Corps lived and worked throughout Lemhi County in the 1930s and evidence of their construction efforts can be seen in several roads and facilities within the assessment area.

The Land and Watershed

The Salmon River watershed is formed by numerous streams that feed into the Main Salmon River directly and indirectly. Natural mountain lakes located in the assessment area include Williams Lake, UP Lake and Wallace Lake. Williams Lake was formed 8,000 to 10,000 years ago when a massive landslide dammed Lake Creek in the steep-sided canyon. Jesse Creek, located due west of Salmon, and its tributaries, Turner Gulch, Chipps and Pollard Canyon, supply the municipal water for the town of Salmon.

The terrain in the area is characterized by mountain slopes and basins ranging in elevation from the valley floor at 3,800 feet to Mt. Baldy at 9,100 feet. Unstable landforms and active landslides occur on volcanic parent materials especially along the Salmon River Face. The geology includes quartzite, granitic and volcanic rocks.

Wallace Creek, July 2000.

Forest, Range & Riparian

The vegetation within the project area has changed during the past century due to natural succession and forest management activities that include fire suppression, cattle grazing and timber harvest. Some park-like areas of Douglas fir with an understory of grasses, forbs and shrubs, have changed to mixed conifer forests with dense thickets of smaller diameter trees and fewer grasses, forbs and shrubs.

Rangelands occupy the drier, lower elevations of the area between the Salmon River and the timbered slopes. The dominant vegetation includes a variety of sagebrush species mixed with several species of bunch grasses. Grasslands are also common vegetative features where shrubs are relatively sparse and bunch grasses dominate. Sagebrush "parks," or openings, are common sights within the timbered mountainous country. Often the dominant grass in the parks is the native bunchgrass, Idaho fescue.

Non-forested riparian plant communities are commonly found in the lower sections of the streams where the ground is flatter and the streams flow slower. Wetlands include areas that are saturated by surface water or have shallow water tables, most commonly associated with springs, seeps, lake shores, and bogs, in addition to sites adjacent to perennial streams. These areas may support a variety of shrubs but are commonly dominated by grasses and grass-like species.

Noxious weeds, primarily spotted knapweed and bull and musk thistle, are scattered throughout the assessment area. The largest concentrations are found in the Diamond, Fernster, Wallace, and Deriar drainages.

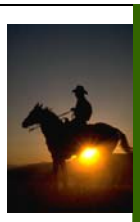
Fish & Wildlife

Wildlife habitat within the project area includes a variety of forest, grassland and riparian community types. Habitat exists for elk, deer, gray wolves, Canada lynx, mountain lion, black bear, moose, grouse, owls, raptors, migratory birds and many other species. The changes in vegetation due to fire suppression and other forest activities, mentioned above, have changed the amount and distribution of wildlife habitat. The change in habitat has both positive and negative effects for wildlife species that utilize the area.

Other than in the Main Salmon River, Chinook Salmon, Sockeye Salmon, and Steelhead trout habitat is limited within the assessment area. Bull trout habitat, however, is abundant. Rainbow trout are a main attraction for recreationists at Williams Lake.

Human Uses

The human uses that occur within the assessment area include both recreational and commercial uses. Recreationists enjoy the area in diverse ways, including a variety of motorized and non-motorized uses. Mining occurs within the area both recreationally and commercially. Livestock grazing within the area is authorized through grazing permits with the BLM and USFS. Commercial timber harvesting has occurred in the area, and cutting timber for personal use, such as firewood, is common.



Roads

An inventory of roads within the assessment area, required by national policy, will identify needed and unneeded roads for management and access; environmental and public safety risks; priorities and opportunities for improvements; areas of special sensitivity or unique resource values; and other information that could influence road management in the area.

Please see the insert on the back of the enclosed map for more information.

USDA Forest Service
Salmon-Challis National Forest
Salmon Interface Roads Analysis June 2002

Although the majority of forest roads were initially constructed for timber harvesting, today the Forest Service road system constitutes an important component of the nation's rural road system. Nearly 99% of all traffic within the national forests is for recreation activities. These include such things as hunting, fishing, skiing, camping, and driving for pleasure. In addition, forest roads provide access for resource protection and for commercial activities, such as recreation outfitting, mining, timber harvesting, and grazing.

The shift in public uses of national forests, changes in user expectations, and a backlog of non-funded road maintenance have led the Forest Service to new approaches for the management, use, and maintenance of the national forest road system. The Forest Service road policy requires us to do a roads analysis on all roads within watershed assessment areas. It emphasizes local, science-based decisions designed to maintain a road system that is safe, responsive to public needs, environmentally sound, and affordable to manage. This includes assessment of problems and risks for all roads in the watersheds; specific opportunities to change the system, such as designating roads open and available for use or closed to motorized traffic; areas of special sensitivity, resource values, or both; and suggested priority locations for site-scale evaluation and project National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analysis. **Roads analysis in itself is not a decision-making process.** It provides information to managers who make decisions through the NEPA process.

The policy is intended to ensure that the Forest Service road system meets current and future land and resource management objectives, provides for public uses of National Forest lands, allows for economic and efficient management, and minimizes and begins to reverse adverse ecological impacts associated with the current road system. Decisions to reconstruct, decommission, and build new roads will be made only upon completion of a roads analysis and with local public involvement. The policy addresses all existing and future roads that the Forest Service has jurisdiction over. The intended effect is to help ensure that additions to the road system are essential for resource management and use; that construction, reconstruction, and maintenance of roads minimizes adverse environmental impacts; and that unneeded roads are taken out of service (decommissioned). It is important to note that decommissioning includes a number of methods ranging from effectively blocking the entrance with earthen barriers to full recontouring; the appropriate method proposed will depend on site-specific characteristics.

The attached map shows the roads we know exist in the area. This summer we will be collecting data throughout the area to make our current records more accurate and identify new roads, regardless of how they were created. Once this is completed, we will begin to address the needs for the area with the participation of interested groups.

The policy does not affect current Forest Service regulations governing private property access provided by statute, treaty, or pursuant to reserved or outstanding rights. It also does not directly affect use of off-road vehicles or access rights for existing permit holders or for projects already under contract.

We would like your help in identifying areas where you know there are problems with roads and also in identifying roads that are important to you. For more information on the Salmon Interface Roads Analysis or to send in your comments, please complete and mail the enclosed postcard, specifying that your comment is related to the Roads Analysis, or contact:

Thank You!

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PROJECT TIMELINE

Focus Group Discussions **June-July, 2002**

Public Meeting,
Salmon Valley Center,
7:00-9:00 p.m. **July 2, 2002**

Public Comments Due **July 16, 2002**

Final Assessment Report
Completed **Fall, 2002**

For more information on SIWA or to send in your comments, please complete and mail the enclosed card (using letter postage) or contact:

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Your comments will be most helpful if we receive them before July 16, 2002.

Visit our website at **http://www.fs.fed.us/r4/sc/** and click on Current Projects & SOPA for more information on SIWA and other Forest projects.

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