



United States Department of Agriculture

Salmon-Challis National Forest 2023 Annual Report



Forest Service

SALMON-CHALLIS NATIONAL FOREST 2023 ANNUAL REPORT

The dedicated employees on the Salmon-Challis National Forest accomplished a wide range of projects in 2023; all while balancing a post fire recovery workload as well as the 2023 wildland fire season. I am proud of all of our accomplishments in 2023.

The Salmon-Challis National Forest is a landscape of vast diversity, incredible scenery, which includes abundant wildlife, fish, bird, and plant species. The Forest Service mission is captured by the phrase "To sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the Nation's forest and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations. "The employees of the Salmon-Challis National Forest accomplish their mission through their work and by carrying out our motto of, "Caring for the Land and Serving People."

Please enjoy this summary of our work in 2023. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact your local District Ranger.

Challis-Yankee Fork/Middle Fork District Ranger, Heath Perrine, 208-879-4100

Challis-Yankee Fork/Middle Fork Deputy District Ranger, vacant, 208-879-4101

Lost River District Ranger, Johnathan LeBlanc, 208-588-3400

North Fork District Ranger, Chris Waverek, 208-865-2700

Salmon-Cobalt/Leadore District Ranger, Bobbi Filbert, 208-756-5200

Sincerely,

/s/ Heather DeGeest

Forest Supervisor

Photo: Camas Creek

2023 Forest Accomplishment Summary

- ◇ Restored 17,006 acres of wildlife habitat
 - ◇ Restored 14,760 watershed acres
 - ◇ Restored 31 miles of stream habitat
 - ◇ Administered 625,664 acres of range
 - ◇ Treated 17,391 acres of invasives
- ◇ Completed 1,134 acres of pre-commercial thinning
- ◇ Completed 23,000 acres of reforestation surveys
 - ◇ Sold 6 commercial timber sales
 - ◇ Sold 10,000 cords of firewood
 - ◇ Sold 24,433 gallons of mushrooms
- ◇ Completed 2,294 acres of prescribed fire
- ◇ Completed 15,864 fuels reduction acres
 - ◇ 25 fires totaling 25,395 acres
- ◇ Administered 108 Recreation Special Use Permits
 - ◇ Maintained 1,440 miles of trail
 - ◇ Issued 20 mineral material permits
- ◇ Administered or processed 39 minerals plans
- ◇ Implemented 5 times the number of partnership agreements than in FY22
 - ◇ Administered 259 non-recreation Special Use Permits

Challis-Yankee Fork and Middle Fork Districts

South Zone Fire and Fuels



The South Zone fire staff had another busy year. Staff maintained a great safety record in daily operations, project work, and fire response. Staff worked to increase capacity for public outreach and education, continuing to build strong local relationships with the county economic development and local school districts. Crews actively assisted other zone functional areas with projects with their specialized skills and abilities. Zone project work highlights

include Yankee Fork housing remodel, repurposing and remodeling the old telecommunication building into the new fire ready room, Bonanza cutting project, building new wire and buck/pole pasture fence on the Challis compound and the Wildhorse AML project. The zone had a light Initial Attack load this year but capitalized on training opportunities for our personnel. Resources exhibited successful fire management while being staffed at 50% of capacity.

- Maintaining appropriate Initial Attack response while being very short staffed.
- Long term local Management of the Chilcoot Fire.
- Supported fire suppression and prescribed fire at the regional and national levels.
- Assisted wildlife, fisheries, recreation, minerals, facilities, trails, timber, fuels, and communications with projects throughout the summer.
- Instructed fire related courses for fire and militia personnel.
- Bolstered and continued to build local fire prevention program.
- Maintained strong relationships with cooperative agencies.

South Zone Timber and Silviculture

In 2023, Timber sales occurred across three of the ranger districts of the South Zone of the Salmon-Challis Nation Forest. The zone timber program administered a total of fifteen timber sales. Two additional sales, Iron Bull and Deadwood Salvage, were sold this year. Sales varied in total volume and product type to provide opportunity for both industry mills and local loggers. Six of these timber sales were completed and closed at the end of the season, while nine sales remain active. In addition to commercial sales, the south zone provided five designated areas for personal use post and pole removal and administered the zone personal use fuelwood program. Approximately 3,800 cords of firewood have been sold for this year. Lastly, the zone silviculture program also prepared 280 acres for thinning contracts and completed 10,260 acres of post fire regeneration surveys.



South Zone Botany, Invasive Species, and Pollinators

The Invasive Species management program treated a total of 4,857 acres. Continued support, assistance, and partnerships with, Blue Mule, Idaho Fish and Game, Lemhi County Weeds, Custer County Weeds, Montana Conservation Corps (MCC), Salmon Valley Stewardship (SVS), Middle Fork Lodge, and other Forest Service staff facilitated excellent work on the ground, including:

- 163 pesticide applications.
- 8 mechanical control activities.
- 4,440 acres restored on the South Zone of the forest.
- 760 acres treated in sage grouse habitat.
- 4 backcountry airfields were inventoried and treated.
- Over 60% of all the Middle Fork Salmon River boater camps were checked; almost half of all the camps were treated and then monitored later in the season; some received follow-up treatments.
- Maintained one pollinator garden at the Challis Districts office.
- Worked with Helitack to do aerial reconnaissance of cheatgrass infestations.
- Completed a 200-acre contract in the Frank Church Wilderness associated with an old homestead.
- Worked with MCC to complete Burned Area Emergency Response work associated with the Boundary Fire.
- Worked with SVS to inventory cheatgrass.

South Zone Heritage

The South Zone Heritage Program worked on approximately 40 Section 106 Cultural Resource reviews in support of Range, Facilities, Engineering, Fisheries, Timber,



Recreation, Fuels, Minerals, and Fire programs. Work included field inventories covering approximately 1,000+ acres. Fieldwork included documentation of 10 new cultural sites and monitoring of numerous existing sites.

- Hiring a new permanent-seasonal Archaeologist in August.
- Evaluating 20 previously unevaluated sites outside of and within the Frank Church River of No Return Wilderness.
- Condition monitoring of several priority heritage sites, including Big Springs Pictographs and sites along the Middle Fork River Corridor.
- Staff hosted the YCC Crew and several other district staff in a fence replacement project around the Bonanza Cemetery.
- Assisted with the Second Grade Tours and presented at the Natural Resource Day at the High School.

South Zone Recreation

- Completed Condition & property surveys at 25 sites.
- Hired 6 new permanents.
- Developed a comprehensive Trail Sign Plan and purchased 34 metal signs from UNICOR.

- Rebuilt fence around Bonanza Cemetery.
- Replaced 50+ cracked/rotted boards in picnic tables and benches.
- Cleaned/emptied out 308 fire rings across South Zone.
- Opened, water tested, collected fees, and cleaned 22 recreation sites on the Challis-Yankee Fork/Middle Fork Ranger Districts that brought in \$23,500.
- Opened, water tested, collected fees, and cleaned 14 recreation sites on the Lost River Ranger District that brought in \$15,600.
- Between the Custer Townsite and the Yankee Fork Dredge they hosted over 19,000 visitors and contributed approximately 7,000 volunteer hours.
- Volunteer at Loon Creek Guard Station contributed 880 hours.
- Reopened Copper Basin Guard Station for rental.
- Prepared Cape Horn for Winter rental – cleaning, changing over, and cutting/splitting/stacking 2-3 cords of firewood.
- Collected and removed 200 plus bags of trash left by visitors on roads and in campgrounds.
- Replaced numerous signs and posts throughout the south zone.
- Strengthened partnerships, with both the Land of the Yankee Fork Dredge Association and the Townsite of Custer Volunteers.
- Coordinated with the Land of the Yankee Fork Historical Association in the organization of Custer Day on July 8th.

- Made multiple public contacts: 3,000+
- Put out approximately 10 unattended campfires.
- 30+ dispersed sites across South Zone: checked and removed trash and emptied fire rings.
- Removed numerous dispersed sites/fire rings in poor locations.
- Normal maintenance in campgrounds like replacing toilet seats, painting, replacing hardware.
- Began removing problem trees and foliage that have obstructed signs and campsites on the South Zone.



South Zone Trails

- The crew developed a trail maintenance reporting tool with the help of the recreation planner. The tool inputs trail maintenance data into a database that can be used to generate reports and track statistics. The total miles maintained by the crew this season was 391 miles. Some trails were worked on multiple times through the season, so this number does not reflect unique trail miles. Still, this was an impactful work effort conducted by a crew of 2 people, and occasionally 3 personnel.
- Improving trail signage was a major priority of the local recreation staff this season. The crew worked hard on trail signage with an emphasis on the motorized trail network. We installed and replaced dozens of composite signs at trailheads and trail junctions. Much more work remains in the signage realm, and it will continue to be a program focus going forward.

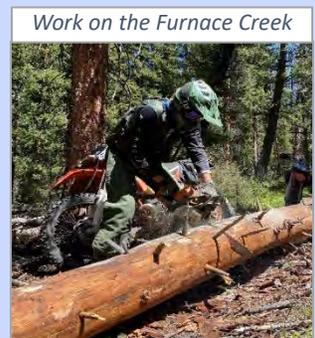


- The crew constructed 4 trail bridges on the forest. Two on the Lola Creek trail (#4024), one on Little Basin Creek trail (#4042.1), and one on the Ramey Creek Trail (#4163). All bridges were constructed using locally sourced materials and built by hand. All the bridges were constructed with help from either the YCC or Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation partners.
- We conducted 4 Off-Highway Vehicle trainings for employees of the Sawtooth and Salmon-Challis Forests. They included one ATV training, one UTV training, and two Motorcycle trainings with a total of about 20 participants.
- Partnerships with community and volunteer organizations are extremely important for the trails program because they foster community engagement in public lands. Our crew partnered with the Wood River Trails Coalition, the Youth Conservation Corps, the Challis Community Trails Coalition, and the Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation to carry out work projects.



South Zone Facilities

- Routine quarters maintenance to 37 quarters facilities on the SZ. Work included minor electric repair, plumbing and drain maintenance, flooring, service to faucets and showers, doors and door latch repair, general maintenance, and upkeep to facilities.
- Turned on, maintained, and winterized 30 water systems for season of use.
- Continued maintenance of two chlorinated water systems to ensure proper operation. Installed one new chlorinator on the Bonanza system that was more appropriately sized for the volume that was being pushed through the system.
- Installed pump handles and campground signage to ensure timely opening of recreation facilities.
- Completed housing inspections prior to tenants moving into quarters facilities. Fixed various issues as needed.
- Completed roofing project over the Copper Basin water system tank.
- Pumped four septic tanks on the Yankee fork Work Center compound. In addition, the main office tank, Red House, Green House, and Blue House septic tanks were all located and pumped out.
- Excavated, setup and poured concrete entryway at the Fire Operations Building front door sidewalk and step.
- Excavated, set, and poured two helpads behind the Cape Horn Guard Station.
- Removed old concrete entryway to the Road Crew Shop. Excavated, structural fill brought up to compaction, set and installed/poured an approximate 25X33 slab off the back of the Road crew building.



- Reworked the entire Yankee Fork Work Centers potable water pump house. Replaced two pressure tanks and added two more to the system for a total of 476 gallons of capacity. Replaced all the old plumbing and installed new chlorinator tank and new injector. All new valves were installed as well.
- Worked with Fire, Fuels, and SZ Road Crew remodeling the Fire Operations building.
- Worked with our Fire, Fuels and SZ Road Crew to remodel the Blue House at the Yankee Fork Work Center. Removed the old flooring, taped and textured walls, repainted, trimmed and installed flooring.
- Replaced water heaters at Yankee Fork Work Center, Bonanza Guard Station and Bunkhouse, FOS Office, and at the Loon Creek Guard Station, Bunkhouse and Packer cabins. (7 water heaters total)
- Replaced old sewer line from the Helitack office to the sewer main at the Hwy. 93. (Approximately 146 feet and two risers installed.)
- Completed Garden Creek Irrigation Diversion Project in early October. Site now ready for upcoming season.
- Worked in four different campgrounds refurbishing approximately 20 different picnic tables. Replacing 40 benches or table-top boards.
- Removed old table and burned-out fire pit at Buster Lake. New picnic table and ADA fire ring installed.
- Removed old table and fire ring at Little Bayhorse Lake Recreation site (out on the point). Replaced with new table and fire ring, as well as adding one new daytime use site at the boat ramp.
- Cleaned and inspected all chimneys in facilities across SZ.
- Worked closely with our Fuels crew on the Bayhorse Lakes dock replacement project.
- In FY 2023 we worked with an incredible bunch of folks and accomplished so very much. Completed approximately 80 reportable projects. Some of these were construction but most were deferred maintenance, totaling approximately \$140,000 for the FY 2023 field season.
- Primary support to Recreation and Engineering Programs, while routinely providing support to all programs across the SZ of the Forest.

Challis-Yankee Fork and Middle Fork Range



The Challis-Yankee Fork and Middle Fork Ranger Districts range program authorized 4,301 cow/calf pairs and 148 horses during the 2023 grazing season. A total of: 9 multiple indicator monitoring sites were read, 26 riparian end of seasons conducted, 43 upland utilizations, 22 compliance checks, and 88 site visits were made.

Range staff prioritized rangeland management responsibilities for the 11 Endangered and Threatened Species allotments including the submission of a Biological Assessment and the collection of mandatory data for legally required reporting. The Keystone Fence project was signed this year ready for implementation in the near

future. Program growth and development was provided with the support and training of 3 new permanent employees, 1 seasonal, and 1 emergency seasonal hire.

Challis-Yankee Fork and Middle Fork Fisheries

The Fisheries Program accomplished multiple projects throughout Fiscal Year 2023 within the Middle Fork and Challis-Yankee Fork Ranger Districts.

- Implemented Biological Assessment/Biological Opinion monitoring/reporting for livestock grazing, diversions, and Middle Fork Salmon River recreational floating.
- Removed a diversion structure and partial ditch on Knapp Creek; completed stream and riparian restoration.
- Collected 57 eDNA samples for allotment management, and fish and mussel presence/absence studies.
- Collaborated with Idaho Department of Fish and Game, collecting Bull Trout DNA genetic samples from multiple streams.
- Conducted a Chinook Salmon Redd Survey Training for Salmon Challis and Sawtooth National Forest's fisheries personnel.
- Completed fish population assessments at 32 sites for allotment management, various projects and at long term Bull Trout monitoring sites that are conducted annually.
- Completed 12 Bull Trout, 10 Chinook Salmon and 4 steelhead redd surveys for allotment and river management.
- Completed 13 various resource (aquatic, angling, forestry, etc.) surveys within the Soldier Lakes Research Natural Area (RNA) for RNA assessments and management.
- Completed diversion ditch fish salvage 43 times on 5 diversions within the Morgan Creek and Challis Creek watersheds and one effort in the Pahsimeroi watershed. A total of 288 native fishes were returned to their respective streams.
- Completed stream temperature monitoring at 12 sites for allotment management and natural condition site management.
- Completed field assessments for the Copper Mountain Road Reroute, Winnemucca Bridge Installation, and Challis Creek Watershed Improvement Projects.
- Completed a Biological Assessment for the Morgan Creek-Prairie Basin Allotment.
- Assisted other programs with building trails, building fences, fish salvage, fishing derbies, allotment inspection, sediment core sampling, road guards, and the opening/closing of the town of Custer.

Work on the West Fork Yankee Fork Trail



Range

- Completed Multiple Indicator Monitoring (MIM) on 20 sites.
- Completed end of season monitoring on 80 pastures.
- Working on 7 permit renewals.
- Supervised 5 (YCC) Youth Conservation Corps Members.
- Maintained Antelope Guard Station Pasture, Iron Bog Exclosure, Fairview Guard Station Pasture, Pass Creek Admin Pasture Fence, Wet Creek Exclosure approximately 30 miles.



YCC

- Maintained fences around campgrounds, trailheads, exclosures, and administrative pastures for Recreation and Range.
- Trimmed brush and tree limbs along Bear Creek Road and the main road along Leadbelt Creek.
- Assisted with Range Multiple Indicator Monitoring (MIM), end of season monitoring, and range improvement inspections.



- Maintained approximately 30 miles of trails on the district.
- Assisted the Fisheries program in numerous angling surveys, electroshocking, stocking fish, and mark-recapture methods for various fish population studies.
- Helped the wildlife biologist remove old fences on the Mine Hill.
- Helped Heritage reconstruct the post and rail fence around the Bonanza Cemetery.

Fish

- Conducted maintenance work on 63.4 miles of trail to improve access to our incredible national forest lands.
- Conducted substantial reconstruction work on the northern portion of the Long Lost-Wet Creek Trail. In August, 13 people were flown by helicopter to the ridge between Big Creek and Hell Canyon in the Little Lost River Basin where they reconstructed 0.8 miles of trail between the ridge and Shadow Lakes. This was a two-day effort through difficult terrain.
- Relocated the southern portion of the Long Lost-Wet Creek Trail.



This involved constructing 0.7 miles of new trail and closing 1.0 miles of existing trail. This improved the users experience and reduced the overall length of trail. This project also improved the condition of the trailhead.

- Completed the Bellas to Broad Connector Trail. In 2022, construction began on a 1.5 mile-long trail to connect existing

trails in Bellas Canyon and Broad Canyon to increase recreation access in the area. In 2023, 17 people worked to complete the final 1,500 feet of the new trail which included some challenging sections of construction. The trail is now ready for the public to enjoy.



- Conducted significant clearing on the Fall Creek Spur #1 Trail. A chainsaw crew, accompanied by a horse to pack equipment, cleared numerous large trees from the upper section of the trail. This eliminated a long-standing access issue and left the entirety of the trail clear for users.

- Worked with the Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation to complete maintenance and improvement projects on numerous trails.

- Continued efforts to protect and restore native Mountain Whitefish populations in the Upper Big Lost basin.

- Continued a long-term fish population monitoring effort in the Little Lost River basin.

- Continued a long-term fish population monitoring effort in mountain lakes.

- Assisted the Idaho Department of Fish and Game by stocking fish in several mountain lakes.



- Continued a project with the Idaho Department of Fish and Game to improve the size structure of the fish population at Angel Lake.
- Continued a joint study with the Idaho Department of Fish and Game evaluating reproduction strategies of Brook Trout and the use of Myy Brook Trout to control induced Brook Trout populations.
- Continued efforts in the Little Lost River basin to reduce the impacts of non-native Brook Trout populations. This included work on Sawmill Creek, Iron Creek, Warm Creek, and Wet Creek.

- Conducted stream temperature monitoring.
- Completed several information and education projects.
- Completed several community outreach projects.
- Assisted the Idaho

- Continued an evaluation of an experimental horizontal fish barrier in Pass Creek.

- Completed annual sage-grouse lek counts.
- Pulled 3 miles of fence up on Mackay Mine Hill.
- Materials and supplies were purchased (Range) to replace Freighter Springs fence. The fence will be replaced in FY24.
- Hired new wildlife technician.
- Bear proof storage containers and trash cans were acquired from Craters of the Moon. They will be installed in FY2024.

on the forest, Challis RD compound help, and completed fence projects at Bayhorse Lake and Morgan Creek.

- Hired most of the crew and retained and promoted a few employees on the engine crew.

- Staffed Ruffneck, Pinyon, and Twin Peaks Lookouts. Project at Pinyon was to finish painting and work on the inside of lookout. 1 fire was called in by Pinyon Lookout this season.



Department of Fish and Game with stocking Lehman Reservoir.

- Conducted Bull Trout redd surveys.

- Assisted the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes with Chinook Salmon incubator boxes in Panther Creek.

- Continued efforts to determine fish species occurrence and distribution in the Big Lost River basin.

- Continued an evaluation of an experimental horizontal fish barrier in Pass Creek.



Recreation

- Filled in rutting near Coal Creek washout in Copper Basin.
- Repaired Wild-horse Guard Station fence in multiple locations.
- Painted tables at Park Creek Campground.
- Performed yard maintenance and problem weed removal within the Guard Station and Lost River Ranger District properties.
- Removed signs across the district for winter painting and repair.
- Organized and maintained recreation shed on the forest service property in Mackay.
- Maintenance of fire rings (Removing ash beds, trash, cleaning) within the campgrounds on the Lost River Ranger District.
- Removed multiple temporary



manmade lean-to structures and camp structures that were hazardous.

- Removed visitor-made, hazardous rock campfire rings in multiple dispersed sites across the district (under heavy foliage, brush, etc.).

- Began to remove problem trees and foliage that has obstructed signs and campsites on the District.

- Removed downed trees and debris on multiple trails - Fall Creek Waterfall Trail (Right Fork), Wildhorse Creek Trail (Right Fork), Squib Canyon Trail (only 2 Small Trees).

- Removed multiple snags and "barber chair trees", broken posts within Lorstica Campground.

- Removed 100+ bags of visitor-use litter from the Lost River District roads, dispersed campsites, etc.



Wildlife

- Completed acoustic bat surveys (Grid 100103) following established protocol (NaBat). Efforts will be made in FY2024 to survey an additional Grid on the Middle Fork or Challis-Yankee Fork Ranger District.



- Completed annual sage-grouse lek counts.
- Pulled 3 miles of fence up on Mackay Mine Hill.
- Materials and supplies were purchased (Range) to replace Freighter Springs fence. The fence will be replaced in FY24.
- Hired new wildlife technician.
- Bear proof storage containers and trash cans were acquired from Craters of the Moon. They will be installed in FY2024.

2023 Accomplishments Lost River Ranger District





North Zone Salmon-Challis National Forest FY2023 Accomplishments



Developed Recreation Highlights:

As part of the Burned Area Emergency Response to the 2022 Moose Fire, Wallace Lake Campground underwent the first phase of restoration efforts. This included removing thousands of burned trees in the campground, planting seedlings, rebuilding a jack fence around the spring, and assessing the needs of phase 2 work including the repairs of picnic tables, signage, and the water system. Water system hand pumps were repaired at Corn Creek, Stoddard, and Spring Creek campgrounds.



Timber Program Highlights

Sold 2,350 CCF (1,200 MBF) of decked timber cut during the Moose fire.
 Developed the Stormy Diamond project in response to the Moose fire.
 Laid out, marked, and cruised the 1,200 ac. Bob Stormster sale which includes an estimated 12,000 CCF (6,000 MBF) of timber.
 Assisted researchers from the Missoula Technology and Development Program to develop a system of estimating decked timber volume using Unmanned Aerial Systems
 Supported the Hayden Fire by providing Timber Staff Resource Advisors
 Administered five active timber sale contracts.



Wilderness Trails Program Highlights:

The forest wide Wilderness and Trails Program had a busy season to say the least! 15 seasonal employees with support of 6 Lead Wilderness Ranger supervisors and 3 pack strings worked to complete over 450 miles of trail maintenance. Staff also worked alongside 7 partnership groups performing trail work across the entire Wilderness area.

Hazardous Fuels Program Highlights:

The North Zone Fuels Program completed 864 acres of broadcast burning within the Upper North Fork Ecosystem Restoration Project area. Additionally, pile burning was completed on 536 acres zone wide. Montana Conservation Corps, Student Conservation Association, and Fuels personnel completed 93 acres of thinning/piling and lop n' scatter. Idaho Department of Lands administered a mastication contract in the Salmon Municipal Watershed and completed approximately 100 acres. Two thinning contracts were awarded for over 4,000 acres at the Phelan-Sharkey and Grizzly Hill project areas. Fuel moisture samples were collected every two weeks to aid fire managers and Incident Management Teams in decision making. Thru the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy these projects succeeded in enhancing fire resilient ecosystems while promoting firefighter and public safety. These projects also benefited watershed, wildlife and fisheries habitat, recreation sites, roads, and range resources.

Heritage Program Highlights

This year the Heritage team worked on building partnerships. Attended Regional Heritage Conference in Ogden Utah where they lead discussions on 3-D Printing/ Scanning and its applications in Archaeology. Both for outreach and field application, the Heritage team worked with the resource advisor group to come up with a new guideline for the forest. The Heritage shop participated in Archaeology Day working together with the Idaho Archaeological Society. Working with Recreation, the Heritage shop was able to receive funding to improve signs and interpretation along the Salmon River Road. Heritage also worked with (and a big thank you to) Recreation and Law Enforcement to stabilize and repair Granite Lookout and Colson Creek Guard station.



Silviculture Program Highlights

Completed hazard tree assessment on seven campgrounds, including Wallace Lake CG, on the North Zone to maintain public safety in the campgrounds and applied silvicultural methods to reduce future tree mortality.
 Completed silviculture prescriptions for 4 projects on the North Zone, including Salmon Municipal Watershed prescribe burn.
 Inspected hand thinning and masticator work from partners and contractors on the zone.
 Accomplished forest inventory surveys for 5 projects and assisted with planning efforts on projects.
 Applied pheromones in 2 campgrounds on the North Zone.
 Worked with various partner groups and other agencies to achieve program accomplishments on the Forest.
 Completed 25,000 acres of wildfire reforestation planning surveys and 10,000 acres of natural regeneration surveys.
 Accomplished approximately 2,500 acres of thinning layout for fuels and silvicultural targets.

Salmon River Program Highlights:

The Corn Creek Checkers had a very successful season issuing 1,318 float boat permits totaling 12,249 salmon river floaters. They conducted gear checks and gave orientation talks before floaters went down river.



Salmon-Cobalt/Leadore Ranger District FY 2023 Accomplishments

2023 NORTH ZONE FISHERIES ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- **Stream Restoration-** Panther Creek Beaver Dam Analogs, Canyon Creek restoration, Cutler Exclosure Fence
- **Education & Outreach-** Pioneer 2nd grade field day, Hyde Pond Derby & Kids free fishing day
- **Partnerships & Collaboration-** Assisted the Idaho Department of Fish and Game with collecting genetic data. Assisted the Shoshone Bannock Tribes in status and trend monitoring as well as BDA construction in Panther Creek. Assisted the Environmental Protection Agency and Idaho Department of Environmental Quality with water and soil sampling associated with the Blackbird Mine.
- **ESA consultation, Environmental DNA (eDNA) surveys, Stream temperature monitoring, Backpack electrofishing, Redd surveys, and Biological Opinion Monitoring Reports**



2023 North Zone Wildlife Accomplishments

- Successfully continued a partnership with Idaho Fish and Game to construct approximately 3,100 feet of fencing. The wildlife-friendly fencing will protect important amphibian habitat and Salmon's municipal water supply from livestock grazing.
- Removed fencing around three unused research study exclosures that created a potential hazard to wildlife. These fence pulls resulted in the removal of approximately 4,800 pounds of fence material from the landscape.
- Repaired the Ransack Meadows exclosure to exclude cattle from grazing in the meadow.
- SCA crew removed encroaching conifer from sage-grouse habitat in the Negro Green area south of Leadore.

2023 NORTH ZONE RANGE ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Monitoring: 21 long-term trend (MIM), 51 annual indicator (LUM) reads, and 150 end of season utilization surveys.
- Improvements/Other Field Projects: Completed the Cutler Extension Fence Project. Assisted Idaho Department of Fish and Game with the Salmon Municipal Watershed Fencing Project. Assisted the Wildlife Program with removal of old wire exclosures. Worked with partners to implement a virtual fencing project on the Forest.
- Other Accomplishments: Completed 2 Biological Assessments related to Endangered Species Act listed fish species. Developed partnership and Memorandum of Understanding with Idaho State Department of Agriculture. Hired 3 local student interns for the season. Supported Salmon-Challis Fire program. Participated in Leadore and Salmon elementary school kid's days. Participated in the 4th of July parade and education booths.



2023 North Zone BIP Accomplishments

- Held 8 Awareness and Education events, including the Rangeland Resiliency Workshop
- Started the Restoration Coordination project with a pilot year of native seed collection and seedball distribution.
- Aerially treated 5,000 acres for invasive annual grasses as part of two Joint Chiefs' projects
- Awarded a 9,000 acre Disaster Relief contract for the Moose Fire area.
- Accomplished the Moose Fire ground weed treatment Burned Area Emergency Repair project.
- Completed the outstanding Burned Area Emergency Repair work on the Mudlick and Trail Creek Fires
- Completed work on the Sourdough Gulch Cheatgrass Challenge project.



2023 NORTH ZONE ADMINISTRATION ACCOMPLISHMENT

- Hosted Pioneer Elementary School 2nd grade field day
- Transitioned storage space into office space to host new employees.
- Created new storage space for all programs.
- Filled a permanent Customer Service Representative & Support Services Specialist position.
- Participated in 4th of July Parade representing Salmon Challis National Forest

FUELS & FIRE 2023

FIRES BY CAUSE:

Lightning: 20 Fires – 688 acres
Human: 5 Fires – 24,707 acres

AVIATION



- 🛩️ **16 Fires IA by Aerially Delivered Firefighters** – Salmon Heli-Rappellers & Challis Helitack *10 of these fires rappelled, 26 total rappellers delivered 2023 on Salmon-Challis NF.
- 🛩️ **Salmon Airbase:** Hosted Nat'l Rappel Training sessions for pilots, spotters, 168 rappellers and 82 rookies; Hosted S-270/271 course & assisted with S-131; Staffed 2 Type 2 Helicopters: one on Forest 120 days, one off Forest 114 days - responded to 26 fires with 63 operational rappels.
- 🛩️ **Challis Helitack:** Hosted courses- chainsaw and crosscut certification, and PLDO Plastic Sphere Dispenser Operator; assisted with Fire School, S-131, S270/271; Supported Payette NF utilizing Helicopter 7TD for PSD operations on 17 prescribed fires.

E-621 & E-681

- ✓ Provided instructors for S-131 and chainsaw initial and re-certifications.
- ✓ Supported R3 IA/fire suppression 35 days
- ✓ Assisted Payette NF with fall prescribed fire and fire suppression 40 days

25 FIRES ON FOREST

25,395 acres

LARGE FIRES:

HAYDEN FIRE 24,706 acres
CHILCOOT FIRE 685 acres

PRESCRIBED FIRE & FUELS

2,294 RX Burn Acres

15,864 Acres Fuels Reduction

RX BURN UNITS – broad cast

- North Zone – 864 acres using Helitorch & PSD
- South Zone – 1,000 acres (500 acres Patterson Wildfire met RX fire objectives within project area)

RX PILE BURNING – hand and mechanical

- North Zone – 815 acres (468 acres Mudlick Piles)
- South Zone – 115 acres

OTHER FUELS TREATMENT

- North Zone – 4,314 acres thinning, lop and scatter and piling; 100 acres mastication; 11,316 acres herbicide treatment cheatgrass fuels reduction.
- South Zone – 134 acres thinning.

FIRE PREVENTION & EDUCATION

28 Days in Stage 1 Fire Restrictions

(July 28 – August 24)

- 🛩️ **NZ & SZ each hired PFT Prevention Techs.**
School Programs and Community Events
- 🛩️ 4th of July Parades, County Fairs, Farmer's Markets, summer camp learning booths, music festivals, Leave No Trace event at Goldbug, and school visits (K-12) with Smokey Bear.
Fire Prevention Education Team (FPET)
- 🛩️ SCNF hosted 10 team members in further development of Prevention program and with post fire community support/outreach, and education strategy for future Rx Fire on forest. Team prompted 2200 interactions over 21 days.
Severity Resources
- 🛩️ R8 cooperators sent 8 personnel for 67 shifts patrolling 6500 miles on the NZ. Severity T6, T4, and T2IA crews were hosted on NZ for over 25 days.
- 🛩️ **SZ Fire – received regional grant to complete Fire Prevention & Education trailer.**

PROJECT WORK COMPLETED

- ✓ Wallace Lake hazard tree removal - cut dead, fire affected, brown and red needle hazard trees along roads, campsites, and facilities, making it possible to open rec site to the public.
- ✓ Supported R8 fire suppression and RX over 74 days January – April.
- ✓ Assisted with fuels reduction projects - prep burn units, burn piles, implement RX utilizing hand ignitions and aerial ignition helicopter – heli-torch and PSD.

Salmon-Challis National Forest Partnership Office FY23 Highlights

- Volunteers:

- SCNF reported 10,622 volunteer hours in 2023, nearly 3,000 more than our 5-year average.
- All SCNF ranger districts received volunteer support in FY23
- Volunteer accomplishments included:
 - Leadore facilities improvements
 - Education and outreach at the Mackay Saturday Market
 - Wilderness trail maintenance
 - Historical interpretation at the Yankee Fork Dredge and Custer Town Site
 - Continental Divide Trail reroute at Big Hole Pass



Idaho Dept of Parks and Recreation installs a width restrictor on the Bull Creek Trail on the Lost River Ranger District.

- Partners:

- Funding sources such as Central Idaho Resource Advisory Committee (Secure Rural Schools), Great American Outdoors Act, Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, and the Inflation Reduction Act allowed the Salmon-Challis NF to invest 5 times as much in partnership agreements as compared to FY22
- Formal partnership agreements with 4 state agencies: Idaho Department of Lands, Office of Species Conservation, Idaho Department of Fish & Game, Idaho Department of Agriculture, and successful informal partnership with Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation.
- All SCNF ranger districts received partner support in FY23



Continental Divide Trail Coalition volunteers helping to complete the Big Hole Pass reroute.

- Agreements continued to expanded support in areas such as:
 - Post-fire reforestation surveys
 - Salmon Municipal Watershed thinning
 - Conservation education
 - Forest road maintenance
 - Campground improvements
 - Trail maintenance
 - Rangeland management through virtual fencing
 - Native plant seed collection for restoration efforts



Salmon Valley Stewardship intern recording data during a reforestation survey.

2023 Watershed Accomplishments

- Protecting the Soil, Water, and Air on the Salmon-Challis National Forest -



Watershed Staff

David Deschaine— Hydrologist / Program Lead | Bill Macfarlane—Hydrologist | Deanna Stever—Soil Scientist
Carolyn Knaack—Hydrology Technician | Joel Shier—Hydrology Technician

Groundwater Dependent Ecosystem Monitoring



60

New GDEs
Surveyed

The SCNF landscape encompasses an abundance of **springs, seeps, and wetlands**. These common features support important and sometimes threatened ecosystems. Surveys of these **groundwater dependent ecosystems (GDEs)** on our forest began in 2019 to help with pre-project planning and to develop an inventory of these valuable resources. This year, the watershed crew identified and mapped **26 new GDEs** across our forest. An Enterprise team worked in the Salmon Municipal Watershed area for 2 weeks this summer and surveyed an **additional 34 GDEs**.

Stream Sediment Monitoring



36

Sites Monitored

Since 1993, the SCNF has been monitoring streams across the forest for **fine sediment (< 1/4") and streambank erosion**. This year, the Watershed crew monitored **36 sites** with help from NZ and SZ Fisheries crews and local YCC. Our crew digs up sediment within the stream and then uses a tower of sieves and beakers to **determine the volumetric percentage of fine sediment** in representative spawning areas. This information is valuable to our forest since the **amount of fine sediment in streams directly relates to the survival of fish eggs**.

Cave & Karst Resource Management



9

Caves
designated as
Significant

Three SCNF employees attended **Orientation to Cave Rescue** and practiced small-party cave rescue techniques. In coordination with the Minerals & Geology department, Watershed staff held a **cave monitoring and exploration training** for YCC and new employees. During this training, temperature and humidity data for the past two years was collected from a data logger and photo monitoring was conducted. This year, **9 more caves in the SCNF became designated as Significant for protection** under the Federal Cave Resource Protection Act.

Watershed Improvement Projects

31,779

Acres Restored

Departments across the forest completed **9 projects** that protected, maintained, or improved water or soil resources. These include fuels and timber projects, weeds management, fisheries projects, watershed projects, and wildlife projects. In addition, **over 31 miles of stream habitat were restored or enhanced** through similar projects.



Program Support & Outreach

- ◆ Educated Pioneer Elementary 2nd graders about cave ecosystems and watersheds
- ◆ Taught Summer Creek Summer Camp students about watersheds and water quality impacts
- ◆ Partnered with Salmon Valley Stewardship during their Hands on the Land program to educate local 8th graders about springs, geology, and riparian areas
- ◆ Surveyed 13 sites to support NRCS's Ecological Site Inventory
- ◆ Assisted NZ and SO Fisheries with electroshocking and crossing surveys
- ◆ Built beaver dam analogs (BDAs) and post assisted log structures (PALs) with Shoshone-Bannock Tribe members, contractors, and NZ Fisheries in the Bonucelli Project Area
- ◆ Helped NZ Range and Fisheries construct an enclosure fence in the Cutler Allotment along Moccasin Creek

CYFRD & MFRD Range

- The Challis-Yankee Fork and Middle Fork Ranger Districts range program authorized 4,301 cow/calf pairs and 148 horses during the 2023 grazing season.
- A total of 9 multiple indicator monitoring sites were read, 26 riparian end of seasons conducted, 43 upland utilizations, 22 compliance checks, and 88 site visits were made.
- Range staff prioritized rangeland management responsibilities for the 11 Endangered and Threatened Species allotments including the submission of a Biological Assessment and the collection of mandatory data for legally required reporting.



Program growth and development was provided with the support and training of 3 new permanent employees, 1 seasonal, 1 emergency seasonal hire, and 4 YCC (Youth Conservation Core) members.

- The purchase of 1 new horse to the range program.



SCNF Rivers Program Report

2023



River patroller checking on pictographs along the Middle Fork.
Look, but don't touch!



Corn Creek Checkers excited to open the office in March.



Planes lined up along the Indian Creek airstrip in late August.

River Checkers

Indian Creek was staffed May 3 – Sept 27 & Boundary Creek was staffed June 8 – Sept 3

Staffing at these launch sites was a challenge. We didn't have a full crew to staff both launch sites the entire season and had to piece it together as the summer went on. Regardless of the staffing challenges, the program was still successful in managing over 12,000 visitors and issuing 783 permits; amongst various road delays, road closures, and debris flows that impacted operations. The crew consisted of USFS staff Chip, Sarah, Ian, Jarod, and Elaine, MCC intern Ben, and Barry who detailed in as the crew lead.

Project work at Boundary Creek included cleaning all the fire pits, clipping trees around signage, deep cleaning the office, bunkhouse, and pit toilets, replacing a few steps on the boat ramp, and painting the bunkhouse.

Project work at Indian Creek included troubleshooting shooting the solar and battery connections for the compost toilet operation. With the heavier use at Indian Creek after the debris flows in the upper river, the compost toilet was used a lot. Both bins were emptied towards the end of the season.



Middle Fork float boat use 2023

	Control Season	Pre and Post Season	Administrative	Grand Total
People	10897	1055	115	12067
Permits	605	158	20	783

Corn Creek was staffed March 8 – November 15



Seasonal hiring was a challenge, but we were able to creatively staff the launch site with two full time river checkers (Cathy and Codi), two employees that alternated hitches with the wilderness trail crew (Megan and Alyssa), and one employee hired on as a “critical” hire (Nancy). Jen Bill supervised the crew and filled in at the launch site when needed.

It was another great season with employees that showed their passion about educating the public and interpreting the values of Wilderness and Wild & Scenic Rivers. The Corn Creek Checkers were recognized by multiple members of the public through written letters and emails this season, for being great stewards of the river and helpful to visitors in stressful situations. This season they managed and educated almost 10,000 visitors and issued 780 permits.

Project work consisted of maintaining upkeep on facilities, working on the Wheat Creek water system, cleaning fire rings in campground, pulling noxious weeds, assisting with hazard tree removal, installing and removing boat docks, and assisting developed recreation with cleaning the Cache Bar bathrooms daily.

Main Salmon float boat use 2023

	Control Season	Pre and Post Season	Administrative	Grand Total
People	7829	2027	19	9875
Permits	514	261	5	780

River Patrol

It was another exciting and productive season packed with patrols on the Middle Fork and Main Salmon Wild & Scenic Rivers. Five patrollers returned and two new patrollers were hired.

The Elkhorn Fire started July 24 around river mile 41 on the Main Salmon. Launches from Corn Creek were not permitted from July 31 to August 3 due to extreme fire behavior in the river corridor. The closure forced a scheduled river patrol trip to switch from a Main Salmon to a Middle Fork.

On August 2 heavy rains fell within the Boundary Fire burn scar of the upper river, causing a debris flow around Velvet Creek and Sulphur Creek. This rain event created new log jams and muddy river conditions. Due to the multiple new log jams in the upper river, patrol flew into Indian Creek for the remainder 5 trips of the season; to conduct redd surveys. Redd surveys on the MF were largely unsuccessful due to water clarity for a second year in a row, but on the last trip of the season 3 redds were found!

Stats

- Conducted 16 river patrol trips: 12 Middle Fork, 2 Wild Salmon, 2 Recreation Salmon.
- Supported Weeds, Fisheries, and Heritage mission work.
- Checked river camps as often as possible; 365 camps were “naturalized” on the Middle Fork and 68 on the Main Salmon. (see table below)

Count of camps checks resulting in site found clean, with trash, pet or human waste, stacked firewood, fire rings or scars

River Stretch	Checked	Clean	Trash	K9 Waste	Human Waste	Stacked Wood	Fire Rings /Scars	Naturalized
Middle Fork	542	74	377	1	3	292	10	365
Main Salmon	112	22	72	2	0	52	2	68
Total	654	96	449	3	3	344	12	433

Photos of various trash items cleaned up at camps and along the river throughout the season



Additional Photos



Overview of the Sulphur Creek debris flow after August 2



Corn Creek Checkers talking to visitors



Spring thaw along the Salmon River at Corn Creek



Pack string heading down the Salmon River for a spring bear hunt



River patrol using their crosscut skills to aid in trail work



35 rafts in the Boundary Creek eddy!



A clear Loon Creek flowing into a muddy Middle Fork

Wilderness TRAILS

2023

588 trail miles maintained!

Partners and hours worked:

Idaho Trails Association: 1,245

Montana Conservation Corps: 4,000

National Smokejumpers Association: 320

Pulaski User Group: 1,304

Selway Bitterroot Frank Church
Foundation: 2,328

Student Conservation Association: 1,000

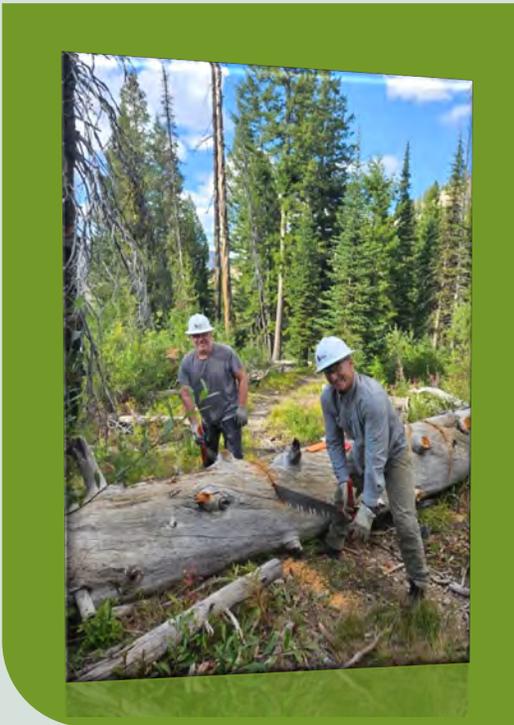


Packing into the Bighorn Crags



SEASON HIGHLIGHTS

- Loon Creek Guard Station fence installation and repairs.
- Brush Creek avalanche debris clearing project.
- Sulfur Creek trail is now cleared in its entirety. It has been over 15 years since this trail has been cleared in the upper reaches.
- Conducted trail maintenance and camp inventories in the Jim McClure – Jerry Peak Wilderness with a dedicated Ranger.
- Instructed a Crosscut Saw Course for 11 SCNF employees using the new “Developing a Thinking Sawyer Curriculum”.
- Performed annual maintenance on the Mahoney Airstrip in April. This involved crew leader training, clearing 40 miles of trail and 80 miles of travel by horseback, grading with the mule team, and moving and painting markers to ensure compliance with state airstrip inspections.
- Provided stock safety training to SCNF staff and other neighboring Forests.



*Pulaski User Group volunteers
working in the Loon Creek area*



Before and after, trail Clearing on the Pole Creek Trail

Timber and Silviculture Program Highlights 2023

In 2023 the silviculture group accomplished 1,134 acres of pre-commercial thinning with an additional 1,500 acres laid out for accomplishment in 2024.

Through the use of a partnership with Salmon Valley Stewardship, the Forest completed more than 23,000 acres of reforestation surveys resulting in more than 2,959 acres of natural regeneration certifications.

The silviculture group is preparing for 2025 planting by completing 120 acres of unit layout in 2023. The north zone also planted 150 trees in Trail Creek Fire as part of a training exercise and planted trees in Wallace Lake Campground as part of a restoration effort.



In FY23 the SCNF sold approximately 5,000 CCF between six sales. More than 2,000 acres of timber units were laid out for sales that will be sold in 2024.

In 2023 the SCNF provided over 10,000 cords of firewood permits and 24,433 gallons of mushrooms!

