



Frankly Speaking

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

Fall 2024

Restoring Fire-Damaged Trail Along the Salmon River

Last year, the Elkhorn Fire along the Salmon River burned approximately 26,000 acres on the Nez Perce-Clearwater, Payette, and Salmon-Challis National Forests. The fire altered the landscape and impacted trails within the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness. As part of the fire recovery, Nez Perce-Clearwater trail specialists and Selway-Bitterroot Frank Church Foundation volunteers worked together to repair fire-damaged Trail #96 along the river earlier this year. Crews restored over five miles of trail, built rock retaining walls and a turnpike with a rock culvert drain, and repaired over 7,000 feet of tread. Thank you to those who helped with this important work!



Above: New rock culvert at Bailey Creek along Trail #96.



Left: Trail #96 with new tread.

Middle Fork Salmon River Report 2024

The 2024 season on the Middle Fork of the Salmon River reaffirmed the area's status as a crown jewel of the American wilderness experience. With 806 permits issued and more than 12,200 visitors experiencing the river's unique combination of thrilling whitewater, remote beauty, and ecological diversity, the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness continues to be a vital destination for adventurers seeking solitude and challenge in an untamed landscape. As visitor interest remains high, ongoing efforts by the USDA Forest Service to balance recreation with resource management will be critical in preserving the river's wild character for future generations.

The Forest Service implemented new management strategies to address growing concerns about cultural and environmental impacts at high-use campsites. River checkers informed boaters about new procedures for 10 restricted-use camps: Rock Island, Cow Creek, Hospital Bar, Camas Creek, Sheep Creek, Grassy Flat I, Survey Creek, Wilson Creek, Tumble Creek, and Stoddard Creek. These camps were intermittently unavailable for reservation, which reduced the number of days used by up to 50 percent. Monitoring at the campsites will continue with the hope that reduction in use will allow for regeneration of vegetation and reduction in erosion caused by human activity. Our goal with restricted use management is that recreational use will find a balance with resource management.

Along with the new campsite procedures, river checkers also faced new challenges and protocols in



Survey Creek Camp, one of 10 restricted-use camps along the Middle Fork in 2024.

the 2024 season. Fires and slides from previous seasons threatened to make the top section of the river impassable, flight availability was limited, and the program was short-staffed all season.

The questionable status of the upper section of the Middle Fork threatened to limit launches to Indian Creek. That situation paired with a shortage of river checkers led staff to issue all permits from Indian Creek. Checkers Elaine McHard and Tony Smith worked at Indian Creek and issued permits as boaters arrived. If groups launched from Boundary Creek they were met by volunteers Jeff Van Hooser and John Harden, who put in a full season of long hitches to keep Boundary Creek launch site in running condition. To accommodate the situation, staff used a Starlink system to hold virtual camp selection meetings with boaters launching from both Indian Creek and Boundary Creek.

Salmon-Challis National Forest River Patrol Accomplishments

- 2 hitches on the Main Salmon and 6 on the Middle Fork
- 314 camp checks
- 2 river rescue assists involving pinned boats on the Middle Fork
- 600+ pounds of trash removed from river corridors, including one bathtub on the Main Salmon
- Coordinated with partner groups, trail and weed crews, patrollers from the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forest, river checkers, admin staff, fisheries personnel, and the Rocky Mountain Research Station



River Rangers (left to right) Loren Cognetti, Colleen Pennington, Crosby Crevelt, and Max Ley.

Volunteer Spotlight

A Heartfelt Thank You to Jeff Van Hooser and John Harden for their Professionalism and Dedication on the Middle Fork of the Salmon River

The Salmon-Challis National Forest would like to extend the deepest gratitude to Jeff Van Hooser and John Harden for their exceptional professionalism and unwavering commitment as volunteer river checkers at the Boundary Creek Boat Launch on the Middle Fork of the Salmon River. With over 1,200 hours of volunteer service, Jeff and John have been a critical part of ensuring visitors have a safe, enjoyable, and well-informed experience on the beloved river.

Throughout their time in this role, Jeff and John demonstrated the highest level of professionalism. They consistently greeted each boater with a friendly, knowledgeable approach, ensured compliance with regulations, and answered questions with expertise and patience. Their thoroughness and attention to detail ensured that every visitor was well prepared to enjoy their journey while protecting this amazing resource.

Their professionalism went beyond just their interactions with visitors—it was evident in their tireless work ethic, reliability, and dedication to the success of the program. They not only helped maintain the integrity of the Boundary Creek Boat Launch, but they also ensured that safety

standards and environmental protections were upheld, all while creating a welcoming and positive atmosphere for everyone who passed through.

Jeff and John's contributions have been invaluable to the Middle Fork of the Salmon River community, and their commitment reflects the core values of stewardship and professionalism that are essential to preserving this incredible resource.

Thank you, Jeff and John, for your outstanding service and for exemplifying the highest standards of professionalism. Your efforts have made a lasting difference, and we are truly grateful for your dedication.



11,314

**Floaters in 2024
on the Wild
Main Salmon River**

12,200

**Floaters in 2024
on the Middle Fork
of the Salmon River**

Partnership Spotlight

Idaho Trails Association

“Remote” takes on a new meaning in central Idaho’s wilderness complex. There are places out here a full day’s walk from even the nearest dirt airstrip, never mind the nearest road or store. There are iconic peaks and mountain lakes, but there are also hundreds of square miles of rolling lodgepole hills, willow-choked meandering streams, and open bunchgrass slopes steep enough to compare to a cow’s face. There are high mountains with rocky tops but not what many would call spectacular if compared with more popular cousin ranges a bit further southeast.

Some ask if it’s worth keeping trails open where only a handful of people (or in some years, no people at all) might use them? Why the effort to cut out trees and brush when a summer thunderstorm might knock down more on the heels of the departing trail crew?

Trying to quantify the value of some of the most remote trails in the lower 48 is tough. How does one measure the feeling of being completely alone, part



ITA volunteers Pam Bond and Melodie ViaFranco near Meadow of Doubt in Chamberlain Basin on ITA's three-week Wilderness Immersion project.

of something vast and powerful and big, against the number of trail users in a season? Can a solitude multiplier be used to calculate the value of a sunset seen from Bear Creek Point or a breeze felt topping the ridge on a hot day or on a descent to cool Meadow of Doubt or the shock of a cold water crossing over smooth granite cobbles on Pistol Creek? In our eyes, yes!

Idaho Trails Association (ITA) volunteers work tirelessly on trails in “the Frank” because being able to access solitude and vastness and witness nature’s power and humbling disregard for human comfort is food for the soul. For many of us, emerging from time in remote wilderness areas makes us feel whole again and delivers us back to our everyday lives stronger, with our priorities in clear perspective.

When asked why they devote time to lead trail crews in the remote Frank, a few of our leaders had ready replies.

Leslie Anderson said, “I wanted to do a project in the Frank to honor my dad; he LOVED this area, and hunted it every fall on horseback, beginning when it was known as the Idaho Primitive Area. Working on trails in this special place was my way of commemorating my father and recognizing his gift to me of treasuring and immersing oneself in the wild places of the West.”

When Leslie was asked what she loved about her recent weeklong volunteer trip working trails in the Cold Meadows area, she said, “Absence of sound... Being anywhere off the beaten path can be quiet yet I experienced the perfection of absolute silence for many moments while deep in the Frank. We were a group of five, and each of us were blessed to sit along a meadow at dusk in such silence, and then to have it ruptured with the howls of a wolf pack. The wolves serenaded again during the night and then literally sang to us at daybreak the next morning.”

Trails of the Frank are quiet. Even in the company of others, one can find solitude and, as Leslie says, the perfection of absolute silence. And in that silence, one can feel the presence of those who lived on and loved the land before them. Pam Bond, who helped lead ITA's first three-week Wilderness Immersion trail project in Chamberlain Basin last summer said, "I love going into the Frank because of all the history you can still find evidence of— old trail blazes, telephone insulators still tacked up on trees (or downed trees), fruit trees or farm implements on long abandoned homesteads, fire lookouts maintained or left in pieces, backcountry ranches still in use and educating visitors, pictographs or shallow wikiup depressions...I could go on and on. I can't help but wonder and imagine what it was like hundreds or thousands of years ago. It inspires me to learn more about the people who used to live on the lands I have traveled through."

It's not easy working in remote areas. Especially with the average remote project length of a week, getting volunteers to and from a project requires costly flights, the skills of a packer, or an arduous backpacking trip just to get to the work. From there, volunteers often face hundreds of downed trees, thick brush, or collapsed trail tread washed out by spring runoff or buried by winter avalanche debris.

Yet we find we have regulars, people who sign up for trips in the Frank year after year, honing their skills with a crosscut saw and axe, embracing the "type-two fun" of a tough hike followed by days of clearing trail. They laugh together (because what else can you do) when they hike back to the trailhead and find a rootwad the size of a Smart Car in the tread they'd restored to perfection the day before. To the uninitiated this may seem like some form of punishment; to lovers of the Frank, it just means they are part of something bigger than a summer season.



An ITA volunteer works to cut a ponderosa pine snag from the Big Creek Trail downstream of Cabin Creek.

Idaho Trails Association, along with the Forest Service and many other partner groups, is dedicated to the remote, beautiful, sometimes harsh, and always humbling "Frank." We've worked trails from Chamberlain Basin to Big Creek, from the Magruder Corridor to Marsh Creek, and when each season is over we start our Frank list again, eyeing the next season with anticipation of another chance to connect volunteers with the perfection of absolute silence, punctuated only by the serenade of wolves and birds and the faint echo of the past.

Written by Melanie Vining, Executive Director Idaho Trails Association

Interested in supporting ITA's work?
Visit www.idahotrailsassociation.org to become a member or volunteer for a trail project!

Old and New Stock at Big Creek



New mustang Garcia at Big Creek Ranger Station.

Pack stock are a crucial resource at Big Creek Ranger Station on the Payette National Forest, and about 19 animals live and work out of the remote station during the summer months. The herd ranges in age and experience and spends the season transporting supplies in the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness. "We are constantly cycling through the herd, retiring some and replacing others, so there is always a broad range of experience. We want the older ones to teach the new ones the established routine and how things are done," said Patrick Brown, Wilderness Recreation Specialist.

This year, Johnie and Tina found greener pastures in retirement. Johnie, a 28-year-old mule who worked for 19 years, joins Bonnie (another Big Creek mule who retired last year) on a large conservation easement ranch in Montana, with unlimited and excellent grazing. Tina, a 25-year-old horse who worked for 18 years will spend her days outside Missoula, as a companion to another horse.

New additions to the Big Creek pack stock this year are Roman and Garcia. Roman is a 6-year-old horse born on the South Fork Salmon River and trained on a ranch in Mackay. Garcia is a 10-year-old mustang from Bozeman, who was trained as an outfitter horse. Brown looks forward to getting the new animals into the mix and letting them learn the ropes from their older and wiser counterparts.



Johnie meeting friends at his new retirement home in Montana.

1,198.5 miles
of trails maintained in
the Frank Church-River
of No Return Wilderness
in 2024

WANTED...

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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

Preserving Lantz Bar and Its Orchard Legacy

Last spring, the Leadership Working Group held their biannual meeting amidst the picturesque surroundings of the Salmon River and the apple orchards of Lantz Bar, where fresh air and hands-on work set the stage for an enriching experience. The trip was filled with valuable insights and collaborative efforts that will help guide future management of the area.

The journey began with an exhilarating boat ride down the Salmon River, thanks to the efforts of the Salmon-Challis National Forest, who secured passage with Arctic Creek Outfitters. After meeting at Corn Creek Boat Launch on the first day, members from all four forests managing the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness got acquainted and loaded jet boats with gear, tools, and food for the three-day adventure. Under the seasoned guidance of Captain Jim O'Conner, the group traveled downriver approximately 12 miles to Lantz Bar.

The meeting began with an enthusiastic overview of orchard maintenance and a shift in focus toward practical orchard work. The group, happy to be in the wilderness and away from the office, rolled up their sleeves to prune apple trees—a task that not only fostered teamwork, but also emphasized the importance of maintaining the Lantz Bar orchard.

Accompanying the group were two distinguished guests: Zach Miller, Professor of Horticultural at MSU Western Ag Research Center, and Sean Smyth, Contract Stone Mason whose expertise was graciously provided by the Northern Region Historic Preservation Team. Zach shared his expertise on orchard care and best practices for maintenance. He provided the group with knowledge to help legacy apple trees remain in good health. It was decided that the orchard would be best managed for longevity opposed to fruit production. Pruning the trees properly would deter bears from climbing into them and breaking the branches out as they collect their winter harvest.

Another point of discussion was the 1965 hastily built Lantz Bar cabin. Sean Smyth's detailed report painted a vivid picture of a structure teetering on the edge of salvageability. While he outlined the numerous hurdles—ranging from lack of accessible funding to long-term maintenance—it became abundantly clear that any decision regarding the cabin's future must involve consultation with the Idaho State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), a process now in the works that could extend 2 to 5 years. Sean advocated for the



Zach Miller explains pruning methods in the orchard.

preservation of the root cellar, recognizing its dry-stone masonry as a unique and valuable historical asset that should be protected.

Additionally, invasive plant species were identified during the meeting, particularly rush skeleton weed. Invasive species specialists are planning to address this issue, and a robust weed management strategy will be included in the management plan.

While initial plans included a structured leadership meeting, the allure of hands-on orchard work took precedence. The trip fostered a shared understanding of Lantz Bar's current state and potential future. The team will work to develop a Lantz Bar management plan that outlines three distinct zones:

- Zone 1: The original orchard and structures, earmarked for comprehensive maintenance.
- Zone 2: Overall site managed for aesthetics for visitors arriving at the site from the Salmon River.
- Zone 3: The overall historical footprint of Lantz Bar managed for control of invasive species and unchecked rogue apple tree growth.

Written by Jake Long, Recreation Program Manager, Wilderness, Trails, Special Uses Bitterroot National Forest

Partnership Spotlight

Selway Bitterroot Frank Church Foundation

It's no secret that the trails within the Frank Church-River of No Return can be difficult to access. Getting quality information about the conditions of these trails in the heart of the wilderness matters a great deal to the public and the agency alike. The Selway Bitterroot Frank Church Foundation (SBFC) had an opportunity during the 2024 field season to help monitor trail conditions.

SBFC Crew Lead Berkeley Loper spent her season hiking dozens of trails and hundreds of miles in remote sections of the Frank to provide Salmon-Challis National Forest (SCNF) program managers detailed GIS data via Survey 123 applications on her field tablet. SCNF Wilderness Program Manager Eric Geibelstien had this to say: "The trail survey work that SBFC completed this season was nothing short of impressive. I was impressed with the staff's ability to make safe, thoughtful decisions in the field and the sheer volume of trail surveys completed surpassed our expectations. The surveys will help the Salmon-Challis Wilderness Trails Program identify and prioritize work for 2025 and get projects that require more planning into the hopper for future years."

Loper spent many seasons on trail crews before taking on this lead surveying role. "It was hard to climb over hundreds of trees without carrying a saw and without having the power to maintain any of the trails, knowing the scale of the work I was leaving behind me. It was also hard to navigate on beautiful trails that hardly exist anymore, not knowing if or when they would receive the work and love they deserve!" said Loper. "On that note, I LOVED walking trails that don't see much use, and going several days without seeing another human. It felt special to share space with wildlife and to oscillate between the canyon floor and peaks standing 5,000 feet above the river. I enjoyed covering so much ground and began to understand how all the drainages connected and centered around the Middle Fork of the Salmon River."

SBFC is the primary partner of the Salmon-Challis National Forest for wilderness stewardship in the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness. This program was made possible through funding from Region 4 for wilderness stewardship performance.



Berkeley Loper during her summer monitoring trails in the wilderness.

Where'd You Learn How to Do That?



The Northern Rockies Wilderness Skills Institute!

From May 20 to 24, 2024, new and seasoned wilderness professionals from the Northern Rockies and beyond gathered at Powell Ranger Station on the edge of the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness for the fourth annual Northern Rockies Wilderness Skills Institute. The week began with greetings from Nez Perce-Clearwater Forest Supervisor, Cheryl Probert, followed by keynote addresses from Nez Perce Tribal Executive Committee member *(continued on next page)*

Left: Participants examine the holding wood and outcome of a cut plan after felling a hazard tree with a crosscut saw.

(continued from previous page) Samuel Penney and Tribal Natural Resource Manager Aaron Miles, who both stressed the importance of conservation work to the Nez Perce Tribe and how co-stewardship honors the Tribe's history and culture as they exercise the rights reserved on their homelands by treaty.

Participants included field-going partners, and National Park Service and Forest Service staff, including many who work within the Frank Church Wilderness. Over the course of the week, students ate together, built trail together, made music together, and built relationships that will benefit wilderness programs well into the future.

In addition to on-the-ground, experiential classes in basic and advanced trail maintenance, crosscut saw skills, and horsemanship, attendees also studied wilderness first aid and field leadership, and delved into the theory and practice of wilderness management. Mark Himmel, national chairman of Backcountry Horsemen of America, was one of a cadre of over 40 instructors who shared their knowledge with participants during the week. Having helped instruct sessions for three years, Mark explained that this training “makes an impact on the next generation, by getting the participants the skills they need to have a career in the wilderness. Working with traditional tools puts you in a different spirit. It’s important to get that spark lit.”



Northern Rockies Wilderness Skills Institute participants on the banks of the Lochsa River in May 2024.

For Brenda Yankoviak, National Trails Program Manager for the Forest Service, the week of classes was not just “an investment in field going staff and partners to keep skills alive and build community,” it was also a homecoming, to the district where her decades of Forest Service experience began. Bob Beckley, a technical expert in wilderness skills and former smokejumper on the Moose Creek Ranger District, explained how the institute represented a change in mindset from his early years when “my mentors thought it was strange that I wanted to learn about crosscut instead of chainsaw use.” He lamented how many traditional skills were lost from that mindset but, “This is where we can reinvent the wheel” so that traditional skills are sustained into the future.

Mid-week, students woke up to snowy tents from late spring storms, but that didn’t stop their spirit. They got out and took to the trails, where they put their newfound skills to work clearing trails, practicing horsemanship, and thinking about how to steward an enduring wilderness resource.

As the attendees departed for their summer work in wilderness areas throughout the Northern Rockies and beyond, they took with them a spark created by a dedicated wilderness community, built along with the skills, spirit, and knowledge gained during the week’s training. Their hard work will continue to provide present and future generations the opportunity to enjoy their time in some of America’s wildest places!

Outfitter and Campsite Inspections

In September, Bitterroot National Forest employees Kelsey Dyer, Outfitter and Guide Permit Administrator, and Nikki Kupfner, Forest Animal Packer, spent four days and a total of 50 miles in the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness performing outfitter inspections and campsite monitoring. Based out of Swet Cabin (approximately 12 miles south of the Salmon Base Camp Trailhead), the trip included inspections of campsites and outfitter camps along Harrington, Eakin, and Waugh Ridges. A highlight was navigating through many downed trees to Lost Packer Meadow, which sits near the southeastern boundary of the Bitterroot. From the top of Waugh Ridge, Kelsey and Nikki attempted to reach Lost Packer Lakes by foot; however, due to extreme downfall from the 2012 Mustang Fire, they lost the trail and did not complete the mission. Accompanied by good weather and trusty four-legged friends, they were able to explore some lesser-travelled areas of the Wilderness with a beautiful home base to return to each night.



Packer Nikki Kupfner in Lost Packer Meadow during a wilderness monitoring hitch.

Mayfield Drainage Trail Work



Selway Bitterroot Frank Church Foundation East Mayfield Women's project volunteers and project leaders in the East Mayfield drainage.

Over the course of the summer, crew leaders, interns, and community volunteers from the Selway Bitterroot Frank Church Foundation (SBFC); wilderness rangers from the Salmon-Challis National Forest; and a trail crew from the Montana Conservation Corps (MCC) worked shoulder to shoulder to clear the East Mayfield-Yankee Fork Trail (Trail 114) on the Middle Fork and Yankee Fork Ranger Districts in the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness. The trail follows the East Fork of the Mayfield from the trailhead on Loon Creek Road (Road 172), up to the pass, into the Trapper Creek drainage, out of Trapper Creek, and down the headwaters of the Yankee Fork to the Custer Motorway (Road 070).

(continued on next page)

(continued from previous page) Although the first 7 miles to Ibex Meadows had been maintained annually since 2022, the full trail had not been cleared since 2010. In an effort to improve access to the area, work began in July by the Selway Bitterroot Frank Church Foundation (SBFC) as they cleared the trail from the Yankee Fork into the Mayfield drainage. Work continued from the Mayfield trailhead during SBFC's women's project week, working from Ibex Meadows. A total of 1,400 trees were cleared from the trail over the two weeks. Montana Conservation Corps and Forest Service wilderness rangers returned in September to clear the interior 6 miles and an additional 650 trees. All the work was completed with traditional tools, such as crosscut saws, axes, and handsaws, to preserve the wilderness character of the Frank. The Forest Service often works with partners handsaws to preserve the wilderness character of the Frank. The Forest Service completed trail projects in the Frank Church-River Of No Return Wilderness and across the Salmon-Challis National Forest. The Forest Service's connection to communities and visitors was broadened and diverse funding sources were acquired to increase capacity for work on the Salmon-Challis. This access and deferred maintenance project was funded in part by Secure Rural Schools Act funding, administered by the Central Idaho Resource Advisory Committee, private donations to SBFC, and the Great American Outdoors Act.

If you'd like to give back to trails and volunteer in the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness, reach out to Eric Giebelstein, at the Salmon-Challis National Forest or to the Selway Bitterroot Frank Church Foundation's volunteer coordinator, Krissy Ferriter.

eric.giebelstein2@usda.gov

kferriter@selwaybitterroot.org

Back in Time: Frankly Speaking 1993

Read an excerpt from the seventh issue of the Frankly Speaking newsletter, from 31 years ago...

Edna Mule - Minimum Tool

Wilderness Rangers rely heavily on their mules to pack stuff in and out of the Wilderness. Mules are often the minimum tool. On long hitches Wilderness workers will talk to their mules. If they have been out long enough, the mules may start to talk back. Here is Edna's story of a Wilderness season - as told to Charley Mabbott.

It was another wild and hectic year for us mules. Just when I think I've seen about everything they can throw on me they really start getting creative. Maybe the rain gets things to growing in those big brains like it gets the grass growing at Storm Creek Flat. It's not the brains but those opposable thumbs that lets them be in charge the way they are. That's how they lock up the grain and stack the hay. That's how they tie knots and put on the saddles and everything.

Anyway Harvey the packer comes up with this great idea to built waterbar carriers with chainlinks that go through the rings on our Decker packsaddles. Takes him about one minute to tie on a waterbar now. I hate waterbars! We packed a lot of them though. I guess you can get used to almost anything.

Waterbars were nothing compared to the culvert I packed out of the Wilderness. It was two feet around and five long and weighed way over a hundred pounds. Most mules would've rolled their saddles with a load like that. (These Wilderness rangers are full of surprises.) First he put up the off side - 100 lbs. of pipe and junk that used to be part of a spring development but now it's just garbage. Then he sets the front end of the culvert in the front barrel hitch loop, gets his shoulder under the back and, it's groaning time again...

A week later and everybody (except Jack - that little old sandbagger) is at the Sweet Lake/Elkhorn 2nd annual cement packing reunion. A good time was had by all, even when the snow blew in. Hey, it wasn't dusty.

September was like going to Heaven without having to die first. Banjo and Charley and I coverin' country like no tomorrow. I like hunters. When we find any we stop and while Charley chats, we graze for awhile, unless they're in a beat down mud hole where we get to do penance by skipping lunch.

Then there was the time the jet streamed over so close I couldn't stand it. I bolted right when one side of the 6 foot crosscut saw was being untied and ended up bangin' against my legs as I ran...that was nerve racking or, nerve wrecking. But, it was interesting to hear those colorful expletives usually directed towards us equines being shouted into the sky instead.

That covers most of the excitement for 1993. Keep your grain dry.

One Wilderness Supports Another



Elite Wilderness Strike Team on Boulder Pass above Fish Lake.

In late July on the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forest a wind event occurred that impacted several front-country campgrounds, as well as large swaths of the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness. The damage was hit-and-miss with some areas seeing very little impact, and others with hundreds of trees down per mile. A call for assistance was sent out to other forests and crews from the Payette, Lolo, and Flathead National Forests responded, along with the Trapper Creek Job Corps crew. “The response from other forests was amazing and we were so grateful for these highly skilled crews,” said Alex Totoiu, Nez Perce-Clearwater Trails Program Specialist.

The Frank Church wilderness rangers on the Payette formed an “Elite Wilderness Strike Team” comprised of six of the best backcountry sawyers: Kaylee Fritchen, Elijah Martineau, Tate Corbridge, Enzo Santarone, Lyle Kruse, and Benjamin Cartwright. The crew flew from their respective stations in the Frank Church to Grangeville and then drove to the trailhead at Wilderness Gateway. The crew had 14 days to clear trails of new downfall from the wind event, working along Boulder Creek, Wounded Doe Creek, and Rhoda Creek. “This hitch was beneficial to our crew to learn what expectations and standards are practiced on another forest. We also developed stronger ties and experiences as a team of wilderness rangers. Exploring new areas in another wilderness area was a great adventure for our team,” said Benjamin Cartwright, Payette wilderness ranger.



Skilled wilderness rangers from the Frank Church tackle massive trail problems on the Wounded Doe Trail after a wind event.