



# SALMON-CHALLIS NATIONAL FOREST CURRENT PLAN EVALUATION SUMMARY

## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this document is to summarize direction in the current forest plans and how that direction interplays with major changes and key management issues facing the Salmon-Challis National Forest. The Salmon Plan was written in 1987 and has been amended 19 times, and the Challis Plan was written in 1988 and has been amended 10 times.

This document does not describe every issue but provides a summary evaluation of the current plans and how those factors inform whether the Salmon-Challis National Forest should amend, revise, or take no action on their forest plans.

For a complete understanding of the issues addressed in this document, stakeholders should familiarize themselves with the [Administrative Changes Influencing Forest Plan Implementation](#) document produced in April 2020.

## KEY ISSUES IDENTIFIED IN THE CURRENT PLANS

### Rangelands, Grazing & Noxious Weeds

Livestock grazing on the Salmon-Challis National Forest has been an important part of the landscape, local economy and culture for over a century.

Livestock grazing direction in both the current plans aims to:

- improve rangelands that are in poor condition;
- improve or maintain those that are in fair or better condition;
- improve riparian conditions;
- provide adequate forage to support livestock and wildlife grazing while considering other resources;
- improve livestock distribution by using a variety of cultural treatments, such as seeding, prescribed fire, herbicide application to sagebrush, or development of water; and
- provide for habitat improvement and structural range improvements.

Both forest plans include direction for increases in the total number of animal unit months. Both plans provide direction to optimize production and use of forage for livestock and wildlife in many management areas. In some cases, cultural treatments are

acceptable to implement this direction. The plans also provide direction for improving riparian conditions forestwide and in many management areas.

Contemporary range management science doesn't change these approaches. However, implementation of some forest plan grazing direction has been significantly affected by the listing of three fish species as threatened and endangered in 1995 and 1997, the biological opinions associated with those listings, and the subsequent [Pacific Anadromous and Inland Native fish strategies](#) (PACFISH and INFISH) forest plan amendments. Grazing indicators and desired conditions in riparian areas have also indirectly affected livestock distribution and use of the uplands in many allotments.

Both plans also recognize the importance of controlling noxious weeds, but only minimally so. Concern about the expansion of invasive species on the Salmon-Challis, particularly after fires, was a major concern raised by stakeholders during the Assessment Phase of forest plan revision.

## Timber Resources

Timber production is the purposeful growing, tending, harvesting and regeneration of regulated crops of trees. Timber production on the Salmon-Challis National Forest contributes to social, economic, and ecological sustainability for surrounding communities.

The current forest plans identify approximately 507,000 acres, or 32 percent of forested area outside wilderness, as land suitable for timber production or where timber production is the emphasis. Suitable lands constitute the land base for determining the allowable sale quantity and the vegetation management practices associated with regulated and scheduled timber production. Under the current forest plans, an average annual allowable sale quantity has been established at 21 million board feet and 3 million board feet for the Salmon and Challis forests, respectively.

When the current forest plans were written, milling capacity within the local communities and demand supported harvest of sawtimber-sized trees. Beginning in the early to mid-nineties, however, several local and regional mill closures effectively shifted large milling capacity further from the forest boundary. Haul costs are currently prohibitive to traditional timber sale offerings within much of the suitable timber base across both forests.

According to the current plans, timber values are to cover the costs of road construction necessary to access additional undeveloped areas within the suitable timber base. As distance to sawtimber markets extended, with subsequent mill closures, relative timber values have not supported new road construction. Consequently, there has been no new permanent road construction on the forest since 1999. Large portions of the suitable timber base, established in the current plans, are still not accessible by road.

Laws that restrict active management have also impacted timber production on the Salmon-Challis National Forest. One example is new species listings under the [Endangered Species Act](#), which have had implications for fuelwood gathering and timber harvest projects. In 2001, the State of Idaho adopted a roadless rule, which was

updated in 2008. The roadless rule restricts the amount of road building and timber harvest that can occur within roadless areas, and a significant portion of the suitable timber base falls within these areas. In addition, even if timber production was allowable in roadless areas, these lands are typically difficult and costly to access because they are steep, remote, and unroaded.

Success of both forests in awarding commercial timber sales is also being influenced by:

- fluctuating market conditions for tree species on the Salmon-Challis National Forest;
- what is left of the local processing infrastructure is primarily configured to handle products other than sawtimber;
- relatively low site productivity and wood quality on much of the forest; and
- large-scale wildfire and insect activity, which has reduced per acre timber value on suitable lands through substantial reduction or elimination of growing stock.

## Minerals & Energy Resources

The Salmon and Challis forest plans contain direction for mineral resources that is primarily tied to law, regulation and policy. The [mining law of 1872](#) established statutory mineral rights for U.S. citizens. The [1897 Organic Administration Act](#) established the National Forest System and the purposes for which it would be managed. The act authorizes the Forest Service to establish reasonable rules to regulate the adverse effects of mining on national forests. In 1974, the U.S. Department of Agriculture adopted regulations in the [Code of Federal Regulations, Title 36 Chapter II, Part 228](#). The [Forest Service Manual 2800 - Minerals and Geology](#) provides further clarity and interpretation of that regulation.

Changes in recent decades that affect implementation of mineral activities include delays in approvals due to the appeals, objections, litigation and mitigating impacts for activities within streams and riparian zones. Because mining activities are largely directed through the authorities listed above, the current forest plans do not greatly influence mineral or energy resource development.

Outside of mineral and energy resources, the current plans do not address geologic areas of interest, particularly cave, karst, and fossil resources. The plans also lack direction for geologic hazards, such as hazardous minerals, mass wasting, radon, and abandoned mine sites.

Generally, direction provided in both of the forest plans is sufficient for mineral and energy management. Despite potential for improvements, current management direction has been adequate to reduce the potential for large-scale unacceptable resource effects while providing mineral resource opportunities.

## Recreation

The Salmon-Challis National Forest provides a broad range of recreation opportunities to area residents and visitors. Known for remoteness, the forest is nationally-renowned

for its designated wild and scenic rivers, wilderness areas, high alpine lakes, and tall rocky mountain peaks.

Both the current Salmon and Challis forest plans contain a significant amount of direction for recreation. However, current direction can be confusing, unclear, and either too vague to be useful or too specific to allow for the flexibility needed to adapt to changing conditions or desires over time. Neither of the current plans account for new recreation opportunities that have emerged since the plans were written, such as mountain biking, motorcycles, side by sides, or larger recreational vehicles.

Direction in both plans that is overly specific tends to focus more on project-level outcomes rather than landscape-scale recreation opportunities. One example of this in the current Salmon plan is the plan component calling for a boat ramp at Owl Creek. During implementation of this desired future condition in the early 2000s, the Owl Creek site proved an unsuitable location due to cultural resource concerns, project design concerns, and stakeholder feedback.

Recreation direction that is written with the bigger picture in mind is no longer relevant due to evolving public interests and changes in recreation uses. In 1995, nationwide the Forest Service adopted a new system for assessing scenery resources, rendering current scenery resource direction in both plans obsolete. Additionally, some plan components prevent outfitting and guiding in certain management areas with no clear indication as to why.

The recreation opportunity spectrum, a system for categorizing and managing recreation opportunities on a forest, in the current plans is outdated. Current plan direction also lacks winter recreation opportunity spectrum direction, which would help inform winter travel planning.

The current forest plans do not specifically prohibit or impede forest staffs from doing anything, but they also do not provide direction to guide recreation planning. Because both plans provide direction in ways that are too vague or too specific, operating under the current plans is like operating without plans at all. Providing current management direction to accurately reflect the recreation opportunity spectrum would increase the likelihood that site-specific decisions meet the needs of the recreating publics that use the Salmon-Challis National Forest.

## Social & Economic Considerations

The Salmon-Challis National Forest makes up a significant part of Lemhi and Custer counties and adjoins several others. National Forest System lands contribute socially, economically, and culturally by providing opportunities for recreation, grazing, logging, and mining. Socially and culturally, the mountains, forests, rangelands, and waterways provide connections between the land and residents, and many people choose to live in the area for these reasons. The fate and health of the forest and the sustainability of surrounding communities is not easily separated.

The current forest plans are mostly silent when it comes to shared stewardship or relationships with county commissioners, state government, tribes, permittees,

nonprofit organizations, schools, businesses, neighboring landowners, rural fire departments, forest visitors, and public land management partners, like the Bureau of Land Management and neighboring national forests. Excellent customer service, visitor information, communication, intergovernmental cooperation and coordination, effective partnership and collaborative efforts are essential components to achieving the Forest Service mission, yet these components are often overlooked in planning documents. Given the Forest Service's emphasis on shared stewardship, direction addressing these concerns would demonstrate our commitment to working with stakeholders and partners across boundaries.

The current Challis plan includes a brief Human and Community Development section. It contains goals and objectives that are mostly generic and reference outdated programs and internal Forest Service workforce issues. Plan direction related to socioeconomics is neither opportunistic, visionary or prohibitive.

The current Salmon plan describes Community Stability as Planning Issue 13 and does include some visionary language: "The forest influences community stability primarily through outputs from National Forest System lands that are related to timber, grazing, and recreation-related activities." Factors influencing how the forest achieved these outputs are discussed in the timber, range, and recreation sections.

Like the Challis plan, the Salmon plan's Human and Community Development section addresses internal workforce issues and refers to outdated human resource programs and does not address emerging socio-economic issues in the region.

## Cultural & Tribal Resources

The current Salmon and Challis forest plans direction for cultural resources relies heavily on law, regulation and policy. Federal laws obligate land management agencies, including the Forest Service, to protect and manage cultural resource properties.

The long and progressive history of laws governing the protection of archeological and historical resources include:

- [the Antiquities Act of 1906](#);
- [the Historic Sites Act of 1935](#);
- [the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966](#), with its 1992 and 2000 amendments;
- [the Archaeological and Historic Preservation Act of 1974](#);
- [the Archaeological Resources Protection Act of 1979](#); and
- [the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990](#).

Regarding tribal concerns, the current forest plans are virtually silent. Laws, regulations, and policies enacted since the current plans were written are now available to provide guidance. Most important is the requirement for meaningful consultation with tribes prior to federal undertakings.

Some of the laws that address the agency's requirement for Government-to-Government consultation include:

- [the American Indian Religious Freedom Act](#),
- [the Archaeological Resources Protection Act](#),
- [the National Forest Management Act](#),
- [the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act](#),
- [the National Environmental Policy Act](#),
- [the National Historic Preservation Act](#),
- [36 CFR Part 800 Protection of Historic Properties](#), and
- [the Religious Freedom Restoration Act](#).

Executive Orders, such as [E.O. 13175 – Consultation and Coordination with Indian Tribal Governments](#) and [E.O. 13007 – Indian Sacred Sites](#), also speak to the agency's responsibilities.

## Fire & Fuels

Wildland fire affects nearly all beneficial forest uses: quality of life in communities, air quality, water quality, recreation, wildlife, and plants. Wildland fire is the primary ecosystem driver on both the Salmon and Challis forests, and its influence is apparent across the landscape.

Since the current plans were written, three major concerns prompted land management agencies to reexamine national fire policy:

- the significant increase in the number of acres burned by wildland fire,
- increased concerns for firefighter safety, and
- increased coordination necessary beyond the boundaries of federally-managed lands.

Over the course of decades, multiple federal agencies and stakeholder groups worked together to develop a policy that allows land managers and communities to prepare for and manage large, complex fires. This effort, detailed in our [Administrative Changes Influencing Forest Plan Implementation](#) document, resulted in the 2014 release of the [National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy](#).

Because current forest plans were written before the review and revision of this strategy document, current plan direction does not account for fire management techniques addressed within it. In fact, much of the current fire and fuels management direction conflicts with national fire policy:

- Current direction in both plans is written around the concept of suppressing all escaped fires. National fire policy, on the other hand, calls for land managers to use fire management activities to help achieve ecosystem sustainability and to integrate ecological, economic, and social interests when making decisions about wildfire.

- While the current Challis forest plan contains some direction to manage unplanned ignitions to meet resource management needs, there are few objectives in either forest plan that guide management response to wildland fire. This is not consistent with current national fire policy, which identifies fire as a critical natural process.
- The current plans direct Forest Service personnel to write fire management plans. National policy now instructs agencies to include wildland fire direction in land management plans so that direction is based on a well-vetted, risk management approach that includes stakeholder input.
- Current plan direction for hazardous fuels treatments is not in line with national fire policy, which identifies prescribed burning as an important tool to reduce fuels and to make the landscape more resilient to fire disturbance.

The lack of consistency with national fire policy means that fire incident management teams and forest leadership are left to independently identify and prioritize social, economic and resource values under significant time constraints without much, if any, stakeholder input. Clear objectives for managing risk, protecting values, prioritizing where wildfire and prescribed burning can safely occur would be beneficial for both forests.

The current forest plans call for evaluation and a change in fire management direction if the number of wildland fire starts and acres burned were to increase by 20-30% over a 5-year average. Both forests have exceeded these numbers five times over in the last couple of decades. However, management direction has not changed.

While the current plans lack overall direction for hazardous fuels treatments, they do not preclude the fuels reduction activities of thinning, piling, lop and scatter, and prescribed burning in most areas outside of designated wilderness.

Other amendments to the current plans, including the [Idaho Roadless Rule](#), [PACFISH and INFISH](#), and the [Greater Sage-grouse Draft Record of Decision and Land Management Plan Amendments for National Forest System Land in Idaho](#), do place some constraints on how fuels reduction is achieved by specifying tree felling requirements or prescribed fire objectives. Additionally, the Idaho Roadless Rule does not allow timber harvest in many areas, which is one tool that can be used to both reduce hazardous fuels and restore and maintain healthy forests.

Overall, resource specialists have found current fire management direction unhelpful in both forest plans. Current direction limits landscape approaches that are necessary to address vegetation condition imbalances and uncharacteristic fire. Current plan direction also does not address spatially-explicit resource objectives necessary to manage fire. As far back as the [September 1999 Salmon-Challis Monitoring and Evaluation](#) report, resource specialists identified the need to re-evaluate current plan direction in light of “new understanding of exotic species, natural ranges of live and dead fuels, focus wildlife species and habitats, air quality, water quality, fuel management in the expanding urban areas, risk trends for ecosystem health, and trends for natural disturbance regimes.”

## Riparian Ecosystems

Water is essential to economic, social, and ecological values. Aquatic and riparian areas provide important water supply and support recreation, boating, and fishing. Riparian ecosystems also have concentrated ecological value because they occur in a limited portion of the landscape. They are areas in high demand for many uses, such as road building, grazing, and recreation.

Prior to the [PACFISH and INFISH](#) amendments, the plans contained limited direction for the management of riparian and aquatic systems. In the current Challis plan, direction is specific to management areas and focused on sediment standards, bank stability thresholds, and protecting instream flows. Much of the direction in the Challis plan consists of inventory and monitoring in high value riparian and aquatic areas.

The current Salmon plan, in contrast, does have more forestwide direction for aquatic and riparian systems. However, lack of clarity in the direction makes it difficult to implement. The Salmon plan, prior to the 1995 PACFISH amendment, did include a grazing amendment that addressed forage, use, and desired conditions of riparian areas and vegetation. That amendment could result in long-term beneficial effects to riparian systems.

What the Salmon and Challis plans lacked with regard to aquatic and riparian direction has been addressed with the development and subsequent plan amendments of PACFISH and INFISH. Originally starting out as interim direction, these strategies were adopted to ensure that agency actions did not further endanger anadromous and resident fishes while long-term management strategies were developed and implemented.

While the strategies were not meant to be applied for more than 18 months, the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management requested in 1996 that the strategies continue indefinitely until the long-term strategies were developed at the Columbia River basin level. Due to changing administrations, that strategy was never completed, but, in accordance with the [Updated Interior Columbia Basin Strategy](#), science from that effort has been retained to guide plan revisions for forests covered by PACFISH and INFISH.

The Salmon-Challis National Forest is still bound by the strategies, which have been periodically updated through the years to address adverse impacts and to provide for greater consistency. All areas of multiple-use management are included in PACFISH and INFISH to protect all riparian habitats and the lands surrounding them from management actions that pose an unacceptable risk to those systems and processes.

One of the biggest challenges with PACFISH and INFISH is the application of riparian management objectives. Riparian management objectives were designed to define good habitat and to establish a way of measuring whether or not an area is meeting the riparian goals spelled out in the direction. However, science around the applicability of the riparian management objectives has changed considerably over the years. Regulatory frameworks in use today identify several indicators and set numerical ranges to define healthy habitat. PACFISH and INFISH both outlined a process in which the riparian management objectives could be tailored to specific watershed conditions or

modified as a result of Endangered Species Act consultation. Since 1995, the Salmon-Challis National Forest has not conducted watershed analyses to refine the objectives.

Another challenge with the implementation of PACFISH and INFISH riparian management objectives is the scale at which they have been applied. The strategy and the science consider these metrics to be landscape scale, and the indicators are not expected to be met on every place across the national forest. In some cases, project implementation has resulted in an expectation, that all riparian management objectives be met, at all times, in all situations. As a result, there is a lack of flexibility to conduct fuels treatment and prescribed burning actions in riparian habitat conservation areas.

PACFISH and INFISH were based on the best available scientific information at the time and defined activities that were allowed or prohibited in riparian habitat conservation areas. While the employment of these strategies has largely been effective in halting the loss of old growth and preventing damage to aquatic systems in the Intermountain Region, many people believe the strategies have brought undue social, economic, and even ecological costs. New and emerging science has been conducted to review the role of buffer areas and their effects on the ecological processes within riparian areas.

Overall, aquatic and riparian direction within the plans and its amendments has been sufficient to protect those systems and the anadromous and resident fish that reside in them. Because the strategies and subsequent Endangered Species Act consultation with the regulatory agencies in 1995 and 1997 provide guidance for modifying aspects of the direction, management of riparian areas on the Salmon-Challis National Forest is not overly restricted or prohibited by PACFISH or INFISH.

## Wildlife and Terrestrial Threatened & Endangered Species

Wildlife is another key beneficial use of the Salmon-Challis National Forest. Maintaining wildlife diversity and sustainability provides benefits for wildlife viewing, hunting, and contributes to healthy ecosystems for communities and visitors.

Direction for wildlife in both current plans focuses on several themes:

- providing habitat to maintain target populations of vertebrates,
- providing for a diversity of vegetation structure for wildlife,
- collaborating and coordinating with the Idaho Department Of Fish And Game,
- using prescribed fire for range and wildlife habitat improvements,
- managing translocation of game species, and
- conserving greater sage-grouse.

Between the plans, there are differences in the scale at which wildlife related direction applies. While roughly half of the Salmon wildlife direction is prescribed at the forestwide scale, this is the case for only 20 percent of the Challis wildlife-related direction. In addition to forestwide direction, the Salmon wildlife direction occurs across 14 different management prescriptions, while the Challis has 25. The Challis

forest plan contains more specific wildlife resource direction, in part, because it contains more management areas.

The [Greater Sage-grouse Draft Record of Decision and Land Management Plan Amendments for National Forest System Land in Idaho](#) is a potential impediment to 12 and 33 pieces of wildlife relevant direction in the Salmon and Challis forest plans, respectively. This amendment adds further direction to consider when implementing the forest plans within designated areas and habitat. Considering wildlife resource direction only, the amendment has the greatest potential to constrain direction for big game habitat where it overlaps with greater sage-grouse habitat.

When the current plans were written, prescribed fire was a common tool for maintaining and improving range habitat conditions for livestock and big game. Both plans emphasize this approach. However, today, fire in less than desirable range conditions can promote invasion by annual grasses – primarily cheatgrass – and these invasions also promote uncharacteristic wildfire. Wildland fire and the habitat loss that results from the fire and invasive species feedback loop have been identified as a threat to greater sage-grouse populations and their habitat.

Large scale fires and high tree mortality from mountain pine beetle infestations are also potential impediments to 24 pieces of wildlife resource direction in the Salmon forest plan and 20 in the Challis forest plan. This direction is largely centered around old growth and big game habitat. Disturbance ecology, in particular the size, severity, landscape context, and age of a disturbance, affects how wildlife use and benefit from a given area. After a disturbance, some wildlife may benefit while others may be harmed.

Recent large fires likely reduced the amount of old growth forest. Fires can increase forage for big game, but they also can reduce thermal and escape cover. Intense fires can damage soils and, as a result, reduce forage. Alpine and other thin soils are especially vulnerable. While forage for big game can improve in mountain pine beetle outbreaks, downfall can impede access to that forage and reduce thermal and escape cover.

## Land Status

Located in one of the most remote areas of the lower-48 states, the Salmon-Challis National Forest is comprised of large contiguous tracts of National Forest System lands.

The current Challis forest plan indicates that the ability of the forest to produce goods and services is unrestricted by ownership patterns.

The plan prioritizes acquisition of lands within designated areas, such as in wilderness. Other priorities listed for land acquisition are for lands needed to:

- protect wetlands and floodplains,
- protect threatened and endangered species habitat,
- protect highly sensitive big-game habitat,
- protect cultural resources or provide developed recreational facilities,
- resolve public access needs to the forest,

- protect municipal watersheds, and
- consolidate forest lands through transfer, exchange, acquisition, donation, and disposal to provide for the most economical and logical land management units.

The current Challis plan states that lack of access is a problem in some areas. Without specifying exactly where, the plan notes that easements on 60 existing roads and trails are needed. Ensuring general public access and wilderness access, including across private inholdings and on roads and trails, are goals and objectives in the Challis forest plan, along with obtaining rights-of-way for public access.

The current Salmon forest plan noted several impacts of the current land ownership pattern. In cases of private lands situated in canyon bottoms, administrative and public use of the forest lands located upstream may be restricted depending on landowners and existing agreements. In some cases, private owners trespass across landlines and build structures on forest land. An increase in areas of interior lands being approved and developed for recreational subdivision resulted in an increase in road use and maintenance. Requests for “support type” special use permits for use of areas adjacent to forest lands increased along with these subdivisions.

On the flipside the Salmon forest plan noted that over 98 percent of the land area within the administered forest boundary is National Forest System lands.

Overarching Salmon forest plan direction for lands was to:

- achieve an optimum land ownership pattern to provide for resource uses and to meet the needs of the public now and in the future;
- acquire rights-of-way, easements, or other agreements needed to provide for use and protection of forest resources;
- be responsive to public and private needs for uses; and
- authorize occupancy by special use permit when determined to be in the public’s interest.

The Salmon forest plan estimated 270 road or trail rights-of-way easements to be acquired and further specified that the forest had a need to acquire access for roads or trails leading to forest lands in the Beaverhead and Lemhi Ranges.

Implementation of land status direction, outlined in both of the current plans, has been limited by funding and capacity.

## Facilities

Administrative facilities require considerable time and money for operation and maintenance, and the Salmon-Challis National Forest has invested heavily in this infrastructure to efficiently administer the forest.

Many administrative sites are old and have outlived their intended life. The current forest plans cited the need for an aggressive program of replacement, maintenance, or disposal.

The current forest plans also contain high level goals and objectives to:

- maintain and implement a facilities maintenance plan for the economic and efficient administration of the forest;
- construct, maintain, and manage facilities to meet the needs of resource management activities;
- replace substandard facilities and ensure that new site plans or redesigns of existing facilities include provisions for Americans with Disabilities Act accessibility;
- develop site plans and evaluate for potential developed recreation facilities, and trailhead facilities at popular locations on both forests; and
- identify and mitigate visually unacceptable conditions of facilities as opportunities arise.

## Roads & Trails

Both plans emphasize a roads and trails program that provides for a safe, functional and environmentally-sound transportation system that serves resource management needs. Direction in both forest plans for roads and trails plan includes: inventorying, planning, and design of the system; construction standards; acquisition of rights-of-way; and objectives for annual road construction or reconstruction.

Road-specific direction includes: identifying, treating, and closing roads not needed; entering into advantageous road maintenance agreements as opportunities arise; and maintaining the visual quality of the highway viewing corridors. Direction specifies route corridor density limits in certain management areas. In addition, direction calls for road construction or reconstruction targets.

In the current Salmon plan, planning and design of the transportation system is determined by necessity, and new road construction is intended primarily for timber harvest areas. As timber harvest on forest became less feasible, so did new road construction. In addition, implementation of roads related direction in both plans has been influenced by funding levels.

The opening and closing of roads for public use is primarily done through a separate process – the travel management planning process. This process is used to identify a transportation system that is environmentally and financially sustainable while meeting public needs. The travel management process requires national forests to identify the minimum road system needed for safe and efficient travel and for administration, use, and protection of National Forest System lands.

The current Forest Plans provide very broad direction on trail use. Direction can be summarized as providing for a range of trail opportunities in coordination with other Federal, State and municipal jurisdictions and private industries. Direction also calls for using existing roads for trails where feasible. Similar to road maintenance, implementation of trail-related direction has been limited by funding and capacity.

## Designated Areas

Both forest plans include direction on designated wilderness and wild and scenic rivers. In summary, these designated areas are managed in accordance with their management plans and enabling legislation. Specific direction addresses the management of proposed wilderness and eligible wild and scenic rivers to protect and retain the wilderness characteristics, free-flowing nature, ecological integrity, and outstanding resource values of these areas. Some direction on how to manage prescribed fire and natural ignitions occurring near or within these areas is also included.

Additional areas are proposed for wilderness in the current plans, as well as a potential national natural landmark and national recreation trails. Current plan direction for potential and recommended designated areas on the forest seems generally adequate and provides for protection and retention of the remarkable qualities of the areas.

The Salmon-Challis National Forest contains all or part of 57 roadless areas designated in the 2008 Idaho Roadless Rule and accounts for approximately 2.3 million acres on the Salmon Challis National Forest. The 2008 Idaho Roadless Rule includes prohibitions with exceptions or conditioned permissions governing road construction, timber cutting, and discretionary mineral development for these areas.

The current Salmon forest plan stated as a desired condition that none of the existing inventoried roadless areas would be designated wilderness. The Salmon forest plan also has direction to protect the segment of the Salmon River determined to be eligible for addition to the Wild & Scenic Rivers System. Approximately 9 miles long, the segment stretches from North Fork upstream to the Forest boundary in the vicinity of Tower Creek.

The current Challis forest plan recommended no new wild, scenic, or recreation rivers be designated on the forest.

## KEY FINDINGS

Even after 30 years, the current Salmon and Challis forest plans continue to provide useful management direction. Both plans provide direction that:

- optimizes production and use of forage for livestock and wildlife;
- allows for harvesting of timber resources;
- calls for a change in fire management direction based on the average increase of wildland fire starts and acres burned;
- permits fuels reduction activities in most areas outside of designated wilderness;
- seeks to improve riparian conditions forestwide; and
- provides for mineral entry and energy management.

In addition, the current plans allow for a wide range of management actions to occur and few actions are prohibited. However, while the current plans are very permissive, much of the direction is outdated and, in many ways, it is like operating without a plan at all and can complicate project level analysis.

While the current plans continue to provide valuable management direction, they were written 30 years ago and land managers at that time could not predict all of the events and conditions that have transpired since they were written. Some of those regulatory or policy changes included:

- interagency adoption of the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy,
- the U.S. Department of Agriculture's adoption of the 2008 Idaho Roadless Rule, and
- the Endangered Species Act fish listings' impact on many of the rivers and streams on the Salmon-Challis National Forest.

In addition to regulatory and policy changes, our experience using the current plans and public involvement daylights opportunities to modernize forest plan direction.

Examples of modernization opportunities include:

- increasing the pace and scale of fuels reduction by identifying priority areas to protect communities, people, infrastructure, and other values;
- updating the recreation opportunity spectrum to provide managers better direction for addressing emerging recreational uses such as side by sides, mountain bikes, and larger RVs;
- encouraging cooperative and adaptive management with grazing permit holders;
- managing for cellular towers and utility or broadband corridors;
- recognizing and managing for cobalt or other strategic minerals;
- identifying priority watersheds for restoration; and
- providing additional visitor services, such as current trail and road conditions.