



Forest Service  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

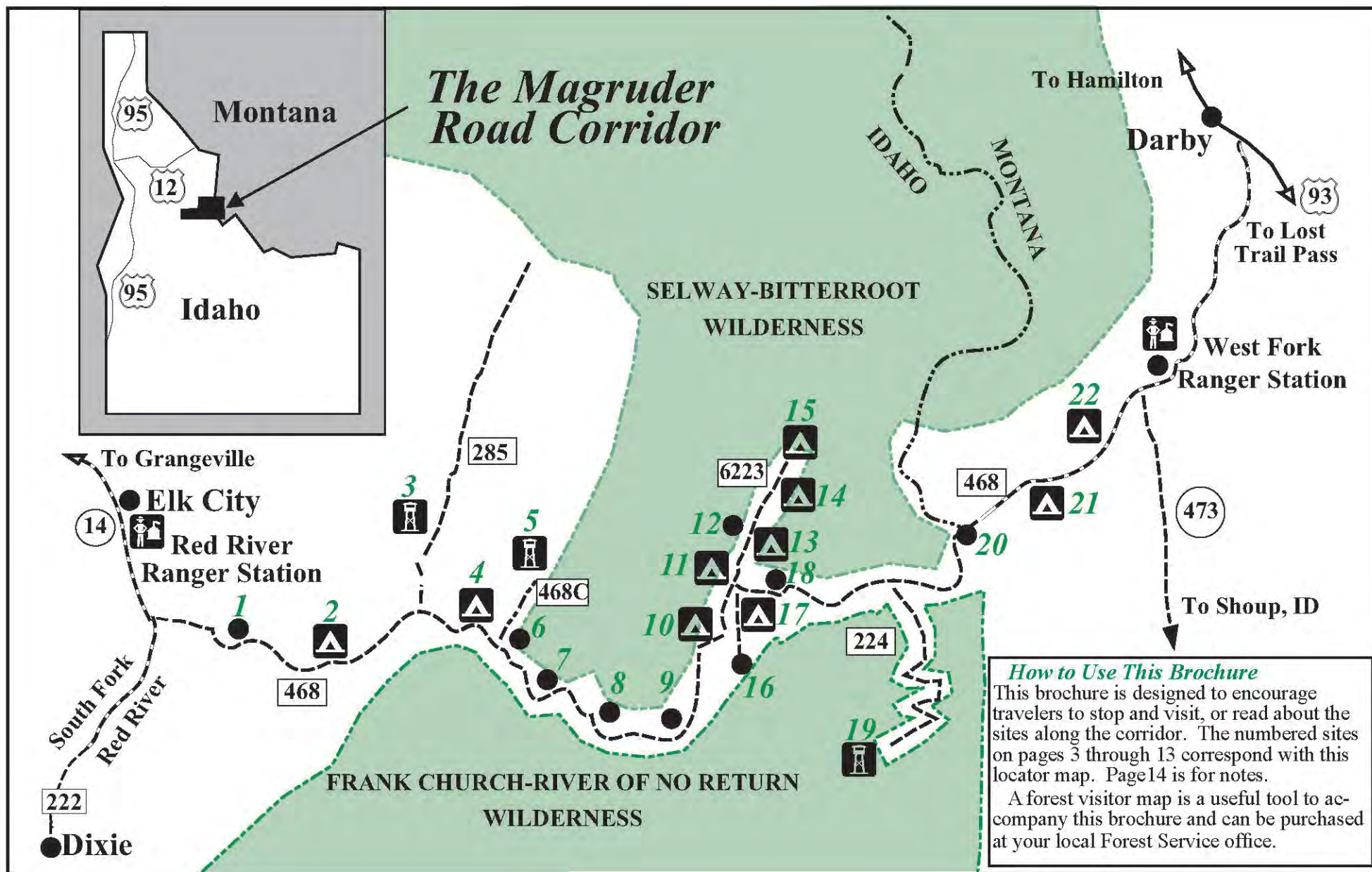
Northern Region | R1-23-23 | April 2023

**NEZ PERCE-CLEARWATER AND  
BITTERROOT NATIONAL FORESTS**

# ***MAGRUDER ROAD CORRIDOR***



A guide to the  
historic Magruder Road



## *Introduction*

The 101-mile Magruder Corridor Road winds through a vast undeveloped area, offering solitude and pristine beauty as well as expansive mountain views.

This area is the traditional homeland of the Nez Perce Tribe and the Corridor has had limited impacts from post-contact/euro-american construction and industrialization.

The road has changed little since its construction by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) in the 1930s. It has also been known as the Southern Nez Perce Trail, Elk City to Darby Road, Montana Road and the Parker Trail.

## *Wilderness*

The corridor was created in 1980 when the Central Idaho Wilderness Act was passed, leaving a unique road that enables a traveler to drive between two wildernesses: the 1.2- million-acre Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness to the north, and the 2.3-million-acre Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness to the south.

Together, they represent the largest unroaded block of land in the lower 48 states and are nearly twice as large as the combined states of Delaware and Rhode Island.

To help safeguard the nature of the wilderness, practice

“leave no trace” techniques to ensure the country you came to enjoy will remain intact for future generations.

Another safeguard is the use of weed-seed-free-feed products. Since 1996, all feed used on national forest lands in Idaho and Montana must be certified weed-seed-free. It is encouraged to feed weed-seed-free feed to stock at least 72 hours before visiting a national forest.

Remember the use of motorized or mechanized equipment or vehicles is not permitted in designated wilderness areas.

## *Fire on the Landscape*

Throughout the Magruder Corridor you will see effects of natural fire, some from very large fires and some from small creeping fires.

In 1973, the Bitterroot National Forest began testing the Wilderness Fire Policy when a lightning-caused fire was allowed to burn naturally in the White Cap drainage.

Over 50 years of successful wilderness fire management in the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness followed, leading the way for wildland fire management. By carefully choosing which fires to suppress and which to actively manage for resource benefit, managers can return forests to a more natural, resilient and healthy condition.

Fire experts and research findings agree that fire has played a crucial role in shaping our wildlands for thousands of years and is vital for the survival of many plants and animals.

### **Road Conditions**

This one-lane dirt road is rough, steep and winding, with few turnouts for passing oncoming vehicles. It is suitable for high clearance vehicles, pickup trucks, motorcycles and mountain bikes. The Forest Service does not recommend towing trailers because there are several hairpin turns along the route. Motor homes with low clearance should not travel the road.

Snow begins to fall in early October and persists into July; however, snowstorms are possible at any time. Four-wheel-drive is recommended when the road is snow covered or muddy.

Remember you are traveling through an extensive undeveloped area with no services for 117 miles. Be sure you start with a vehicle in good operating condition, a full tank of gas and a spare tire. At all times be alert for other traffic, washouts, fallen trees and other debris on the road.

The road is becoming more popular for ATV travel during the summer months and can be very busy during the Idaho hunting season (mid-September through mid-November).

### **Travel Time**

Travel time varies, but it takes eight to ten hours to travel from Red River to Darby without rest stops. The average speed will be 12-15 miles per hour. A two-day trip is ideal with an overnight stay at one of the dispersed or primitive campsite locations.

Take your time, absorb the solitude and enjoy the remoteness far from the hassles of crowded highways.

### **Camping**

When camping at primitive locations, please follow these guidelines:

- *Choose a site 200 feet from trails and water.*
- *Use existing fire grates and fire rings when building campfires.*
- *When going to the bathroom, do as a cat: dig a hole and bury human waste. Maintain a distance of 200 feet from water and trails.*
- *Make sure your campfire is dead out when you leave.*
- *Pack out all trash, both yours and that of others.*
- *Leave no trace of your stay.*

### **Drinking Water**

Water from springs, lakes, ponds and streams should not be consumed without proper treatment (boiling for more than five minutes or using a water filter) as giardia could be present. It is a good idea to carry extra water.



## *Red River Ranger Station to Granite Springs*

### *Elk City Ranger Station*

Visitors are encouraged to stop at the Elk City Ranger Station on the Red River Ranger District in Elk City and ask questions about maps, road conditions, weather and any other concerns. After office hours, visitors can obtain limited information at an interpretive sign at the old Red River Ranger Station (now closed) that briefly describes the southern Nez Perce Trail. It is located just south of the ranger station along with an RV dump station. Magruder Road #468 begins on the left side of Road #222.

Electronic Tour Sites(ETS) are located at the old Red River Ranger Station, Dry Saddle, Magruder Massacre trailhead, Magruder Ranger Station, Nez Perce Pass and Darby Visitor Center. These digital kiosks allow information such as brochures and podcasts to be downloaded to a smart device. These sites cannot access the internet nor will they allow for cell coverage to make calls.

The first eight miles of road are a steady climb. Oregon Butte Lookout and Buffalo Hump are visible to the west.

### *#1 - Mountain Meadows*

The headwaters of Meadow Creek lie directly north of the road.

Visitors will find the Mountain Meadows campsite in this vicinity.

At 14-Mile Tree, the trailhead begins for Trails 501 and 508, which lead into the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness. There is an information board, toilet and stock facilities.

### *#2 - Granite Springs Campground*

Granite Springs Campground lies on both sides of the road. It has a pit toilet, stock ramp and water for stock.

The Southern Nez Perce Trail parallels a portion of the Magruder Corridor Road. The Nez Perce found a practical hunting/gathering route that followed the South Fork of the Clearwater River to the rolling country and lush meadows near Elk City and the upper Red River drainage. The trail went south of the extremely difficult terrain of the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness, and also avoided the more rugged portion of the deep, narrow Salmon River canyon.



*Green Mountain Lookout*

## ***Elk Mountain Road to Burnt Knob Lookout***

### ***#3 - Elk Mountain Road #285***

The road continues to climb from the Granite Springs Campground. Elk Mountain Road #285 branches to the northeast, a driveable 4-miles to the Green Mountain Lookout, with views of the Red River drainage. From the #285 junction, the Magruder Road winds steeply down into Bargamin Creek. Drive slowly and watch for brakes heating up.

### ***#4 - Poet Creek Campground***

Poet Creek Campground lies north of the Magruder Road. It has four camping units with tables, fireplaces, parking spurs, and pit toilets. There is no developed water source. Because stock is not permitted in the campground, four mangers are located south of the road.

Here in the Magruder Corridor and adjacent wildernesses, diverse plant communities fill habitat needs for a variety of mammals, birds, reptiles and amphibians.

Large mammals include black bear, sheep, goats, whitetail and mule deer, elk and moose. Deer are the most commonly seen animals.

Wolves were introduced into Idaho in 1995 and may be seen or heard throughout the corridor.

There are many smaller mammals, such as badger, wolverine, pine marten, mink and weasels, but count yourself lucky if you see one.

However, you'll see ground squirrels, golden-mantle squirrels, red squirrels and two kinds of chipmunks. You can differentiate between chipmunks and golden-mantle squirrels, as the chipmunk's white stripes extend onto its head. Be alert while traveling to increase your chances of seeing wildlife.



***Ground Squirrel***

### ***#5 - Burnt Knob Lookout Road***

From Poet Creek Campground, the road climbs steeply for eight miles with a few sharp curves. Burnt Knob #468-C branches off to the north. This road is recommended for 4-wheel-drive only and ends at the historic Burnt Knob Lookout. Three Prong Trail #539, which starts in the saddle below the lookout, accesses McArthur, Stillman and Burnt Knob lakes.

## ***Dry Saddle Trailhead to Horse Heaven Saddle***

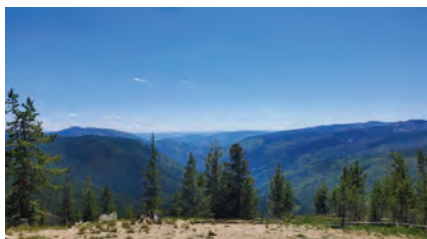
### ***#6 - Dry Saddle Trailhead***

Dry Saddle Trailhead lies both north and south of the road and has a vault toilet, a loading ramp and graveled parking area. Elevation at the trailhead is 7920 feet. It provides access to many high mountain lakes along Sheep Hill Trail #575. It is a ten-mile hike to Sheep Hill fire lookout tower.

### ***#7 - Sabe Vista***

From Dry Saddle, the rough and winding road drops down to Sabe Saddle and then climbs back up again to Sabe Vista, which offers many scenic views. Elevation is 7490 feet at the vista. This portion of the road is very narrow and sometimes very steep. There are few places to pass another vehicle.

Many old fire scars can be seen from the vista and along the corridor where fires dating back from 1988 to most recent years can be seen. Fire is a natural process which rejuvenates the environment.



***Looking South from Sabe Vista***

### ***#8 - Horse Heaven Saddle***

Horse Heaven is named for its lush grazing grasses. Elevation at the saddle is 7070 feet.

Horse Heaven Cabin was built in 1939 at a CCC Camp near Darby, MT. It was then disassembled and transported more than 60 miles west where it once functioned as a firefighter's cabin.

The cabin is south of the road on the spur road marked for Trail #028. The one-room log cabin can accommodate up to four people. Check for availability of this cabin and others on [www.recreation.gov](http://www.recreation.gov).



***Horse Heaven Cabin - Bitterroot National Forest  
Archival Collection - McGregors***



***Horse Heaven Cabin***

## *Salmon Mountain Area to Observation Point*

### *#9 - Salmon Mountain Area*

The Old Salmon Mountain Ranger Station site was established in 1911. Nearby is the Salmon Mountain base camp, a very popular trailhead during hunting season. It has stock facilities. A one-mile trail leads to the Salmon Mountain lookout tower which is staffed by volunteers during fire season. The elevation is 8944 feet. Mountain goats are often seen on the rocky crags and talus slopes of Salmon Mountain.

This area is one of the few places in America where you can see the subalpine larch. The larch is the only deciduous coniferous tree, meaning that its needles turn yellow and drop off in the fall.

"Ribbon forests" are visible on the slopes in this area. These are elongated narrow forest strips growing perpendicular to prevailing wind directions and alternating with narrow bands of moist-wet subalpine meadows called "snow glades."

Also, you can find good examples of "ghost" trees on the mountain. These whitebark pines were killed by a combination of mountain pine beetle and blister rust attacks. They became bleached from the summer sun, giving them a ghost-white appearance.



*Fireweed is abundant on the landscape after a wildfire*

Near the peak of the mountain are "banner" or "flag" trees and stunted trees called "krummholz," which are often hundreds of years old and only two feet high.

### *# 10 Observation Point*

Observation Point Campground has nice camping spots and a toilet. The elevation is 7620 feet and visitors can view the southern portion of the Bitterroot Mountain Range, especially El Capitan. The point also offers vistas of subalpine/alpine wilderness.





## Magruder Crossing

### #11 - Magruder Crossing Bridge

The only place in the upper Selway drainage you can drive across the Selway River is at Magruder crossing. This steel pony-truss bridge was built by CCCs in 1935.

The campground has picnic tables, toilet and stock facilities.

### #12 - Magruder Massacre Site

Gold was discovered near Elk City, Idaho, in 1861 and near Bannack, Montana, in 1862. Many miners and traders used the Southern Nez Perce Trail as the most direct route from Elk City, Idaho, to Bannack or Virginia City, Montana.

In 1863 Lloyd Magruder and companions were returning along this route from Virginia City after making a handsome profit of gold dust from selling supplies to miners. Four other travelers joined the Magruder group.

A few days later, the travelers attacked, murdered and robbed Magruder and his companions in the dark of the night.

The murderers rolled the dead men over a cliff, burned and buried the remaining evidence of their crime and fled to San Francisco with their stolen booty. Hill Beachey, Magruder's friend, pursued the murderers and brought them back to stand trial in Lewiston, Idaho. Three of the men were found guilty and were hung on the 4th of March, 1864.

Lloyd Magruder had been a successful California merchant. He was a well respected man and had many friends. Prior to his ill-fated trip, he had agreed to represent the Idaho Territory in Congress.

As a result of this event, many places bear the name "Magruder," among them the road on which you are traveling.



*Beargrass along the corridor*

## ***Paradise Road to Paradise***

### ***Paradise Road #6223***

Travelers on this narrow one-lane road will enjoy a pleasant 12-mile drive along the Wild and Scenic Selway River. The river flows through a deep, beautiful canyon with some stands of western red cedar along its banks. There is a pack bridge for the trail to Spot Mountain Lookout.

### ***#13 - Raven Creek Campground***

Raven Creek is a campground with two sites and a toilet along the Selway river & corridor road.

### ***#14 - Indian Creek Campground & Hatchery***

The campground has a toilet, several campsites and hitch rails. Visitors at the primitive Indian Creek Campground may easily walk to the hatchery.

Indian Creek hatching channel was constructed in 1964 so that spring chinook salmon eggs could be planted in the Selway River drainage. Fish had been unable to reach the Selway since the construction of the Lewiston Dam in 1929.

A total of approximately two million eggs were planted each year from 1965 to 1981 and again in 1985. In the spring the emerging fry were trapped and distributed in the upper Selway by vehicle, stock and aircraft.

This supplemented the naturally spawning Chinook Salmon in the Selway River. Chinook salmon are found throughout the Selway River, however, they are usually seen during peak spawning activity in late August and early September.

### ***#15 - Paradise***

The elevation at Paradise is 3067 feet. A launch site for river rafting is located near the end of Paradise Road #6223. Permits are required from May 15 to July 31 to float the 47-mile section of the Selway River from Paradise to Selway Falls. Information can be obtained from the West Fork Ranger Station.

Paradise Campground is 1/4 mile up White Cap Creek road. The campground has several sites, with toilets, picnic tables, stock facilities and meat racks. This is a very heavily used trailhead during hunting season.

A Forest Service administrative site is adjacent to the campground with a cabin, barn and corrals.



***Rafters at Paradise***

## ***Magruder Ranger Station to Hells Half Acre***

### ***Magruder Ranger Station- Deep Creek Ranger Station 1930's***



*Bitterroot National Forest Archival Collection*

The station is on the National Register of Historic Places. The structures are excellent examples of rustic log construction and interior craftsmanship.

Check for rental availability of the Magruder Ranger House and make reservations through [www.recreation.gov](http://www.recreation.gov)

### ***#16 -Magruder Ranger Station***

The Magruder Ranger Station, previously Deep Creek Ranger Station, is located 1/2 mile from Road #468. The elevation is 4100 feet. No services are available at the unstaffed remote station.

After the widespread forest fires of 1910 and 1919, the Forest Service built many low-standard roads into the area. The road along Deep Creek was first surveyed in 1919-1920 and the road was constructed to the newly established tent camp known as Deep Creek Ranger Station. The name was later changed to Magruder.

The CCC improved the original road in 1936 and finished constructing a one-lane road from the station to Elk City.

The office and residence and ranger's house were built by Ole Tangen, a forest Service employee. The CCC constructed the barn, corral and woodshed.

### ***Deep Creek Bridge***

The Deep Creek bridge is a beautiful example of arched native cut-stone construction. It was built by Lithuanian stone masons who were assisted by CCC enrollees in the 1930's.

### ***#17 - Deep Creek Campground***

The campground has three sites with picnic tables, toilet, hitch rails and feed bunks.

### ***#18 - CCC Camp***

This was a spike camp used by the CCC enrollees during construction of the road. The stone water fountain, an incinerator and several rock foundations, remnants of the camp, are still visible along both sides of Deep Creek.

### ***#19 - Hells Half Acre Rd.#224***

The road to Hells Half Acre Lookout is 11 miles long and extremely steep, narrow and rocky.

## *Nez Perce Pass to West Fork Ranger Station*



*Water Fountain Built by CCCs*

The Hells Half Lookout is an administrative site which is staffed during fire season.

### *Paved Road*

Before the 1980 Central Idaho Wilderness Act was passed, some of the area was prepared for timber sales. This 14-mile section of the road was paved in the 1970's in anticipation of those sales. If you are hiking in the area, you may notice trees marked for cutting. Timber harvest is not allowed in designated wilderness areas.

### *#20 - Nez Perce Pass*

The elevation at Nez Perce Pass is 6598 feet. An information board at the pass interprets the history of the area and provides visitors with general information about this spectacular area. There is a large parking area, toilet and stock facilities.

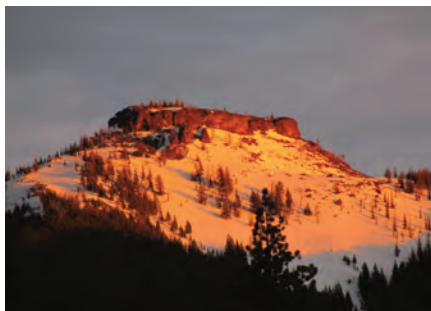
A helicopter landing site is located at the pass. Please do not park on the landing zone.

### *#21 - Fales Flat Campground*

This campground is named for Wesley Fales, a trapper, woodsman and early Forest Service employee, who located a homestead on the flat around 1914. He built a cabin there which burned about 1940. Since he did not complete the patent process on his homestead, the entry was cancelled in June, 1929. Fales Flat was also the site of a CCC camp in 1933. A group site can be reserved on [www.recreation.gov](http://www.recreation.gov)

### *#22-Little West Fork*

The elevation is 4580 feet. Segments of the original CCC road are often visible about 25 feet north of the present day road. Remnants of the historic bridges are visible at Watchtower Creek and Little West Fork Creek. In the winter, the plowed parking lot is used by snowmobilers and skiers.



*Castle Rock located east of Nez Perce Pass*



## ***Little West Fork to West Fork Ranger Station***

### ***West Fork Ranger Station***

Visitors are encouraged to stop and ask questions about maps, road conditions, and weather. After office hours, a map is available for viewing outside the office.



## For More Information

### **Nez Perce -Clearwater National Forest**

1008 HWY 64  
Kamiah, ID 83536  
(208) 451-5585  
Website: [www.fs.usda.gov/nezperceclearwater](http://www.fs.usda.gov/nezperceclearwater)

**Red River Ranger District**  
Elk City Ranger Station  
300 American River Road Elk  
City, ID 83525  
(208) 842-2245

**Bitterroot National Forest**  
1801 North 1st Street  
Hamilton, MT 59840  
(406) 363-7100  
Website: [www.fs.usda.gov/bitterroot](http://www.fs.usda.gov/bitterroot)

**West Fork Ranger District**  
6735 West Fork Road  
Darby, MT 59829  
(406) 821-3269

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