

APPENDIX B - RIVER HISTORY

Two rivers of national importance, the Middle Fork of the Salmon River and the Salmon River, run through the FC–RONRW and are specifically recognized by Congress in the W&SR Act and the CIWA. The Middle Fork of the Salmon River begins at the confluence of Marsh Creek and Bear Valley Creek and ends 106 miles north at its confluence with the Salmon River. The Salmon River flows 425 miles from upper Stanley Basin to its confluence with the Snake River. Both rivers are free flowing for their entire lengths.

In the legislation, Congress clearly specified and intended that there be differences between the Middle Fork and the Salmon River. The Middle Fork is designated a “wild” river, and the Salmon River is split with segments designated “recreational” and “wild.” The Middle Fork is managed under the Wilderness Act or W&SR Act; whichever is more stringent in regards to wilderness standards. The Salmon River is managed under the W&SR Act, with additional wording included in Section 9(b) of the CIWA (PL 96-312), to “*ensure that wilderness requirements would not prohibit certain uses, such as motorized vehicles, motorized boats, aircraft landing strips, commercial lodges or heavy recreational use.*” (Legislative Records as quoted in Hunger 1996)

Just as Congress declared that the Middle Fork was unique for its wilderness qualities, it also declared that the Salmon River was to maintain a diversity of recreation activities. An example is the provisions of the CIWA allowing continued use of motorboats on the Salmon River at not less than 1978 levels. Further, the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources stated in 1979 that motorized access by boat and plane were necessary to penetrate the wilderness. “*Because of the vastness of the new wilderness, the management plan is to specifically address ways in which this region can be accessed for use and enjoyment. Without the access provided by the roads running up to (but not within) the boundaries, and access by aircraft and motorboat, few people could see and enjoy this splendid wilderness.*” (Senate Report 96-414, 1979, p.28)

Congress intended the provisions of the W&SR Act to apply to the entire Salmon River corridor designated as a component of the W&SR system and not simply to the wetted surface of the Salmon River. Thus the provisions of the W&SR Act apply to both the river itself and to the related adjacent land area located within one-quarter mile of the bank of the river. Therefore the use of motorized or mechanized equipment within the terrestrial portion of the Salmon River corridor designated a component of the W&SR system by the CIWA is governed by the terms of the management plan for the river corridor, but is neither expressly prohibited nor permitted by the relevant legislation.

As stated in both Acts and their legislative history, Congress gave latitude to the Secretary of Agriculture to manage visitors and conflicting uses on the Middle Fork because these were acknowledged as threats to its significant qualities. Hearings on the W&SR Act recorded comments from the Bureau of Land Management supporting exclusion of motorized forms of travel, from the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation defining a “wild” river as having no development, and from the U.S. Forest Service stating that for a “wild” river to retain its character, “...*capacity*

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will be limited to that which is consistent with the management objectives of the area.” (Cornell Law Review, 55:707; May, 1970, p. 720)

In contrast, Congress gave specific guidance to the Secretary of Agriculture that the Salmon River was to be managed under the W&SR Act, with exception to Section 10(b) which otherwise guides the agency to use wilderness standards where appropriate. This prevents the 79-mile “wild” section of the Salmon from being managed as a wilderness river on those stretches where it parallels or crosses designated wilderness. It protects the river from impoundments, the corridor from ecological degradation, and the existing private and commercial uses from condemnation. (Legislative History as quoted in Hunger 1996)

Most of the recreation use within the FC–RONRW occurs within the river corridors and is primarily associated with white water float boating and motorboating, fishing and big game hunting activities. Most of the use of aircraft landing strips located in close proximity to the Middle Fork and Salmon rivers is associated with river activities. The landing strips provide aircraft access for commercial and noncommercial river recreation during low water time periods (mid to late season on the Middle Fork) or takeouts (i.e., Mackay Bar on the Salmon River).

The Middle Fork and the Salmon Rivers offer a broad range of floating opportunities. Both rivers offer Class IV white water opportunities that are, on a regional and national basis, very significant. These two rivers provide unique scenery, natural hot springs, steep canyons, wildlife viewing, cultural resource viewing, and white water thrill opportunities for several thousand river runners each year. Float fishing is a popular mid-season through late-season activity on the Middle Fork. Steelhead fishing, both from float and motorboats, is popular early spring and late fall on the Salmon River. Fishing, big game and bird hunting, locally called “cast and blast” trips, are also popular within the river corridors and are facilitated by both float trips and motorboat trips. It is not unusual to encounter dual-purpose float trips where both hunting/fishing and white water boating are taking place. Bird and big game hunting is most popular in the fall but some spring bear hunting does occur using float boating and motorboating access.

Comments received from river and wilderness managers, researchers, and the public indicate that the two rivers are presently managed to provide a “river through wilderness” experience, versus a true “wilderness river” experience. In other words, under current management direction, river recreation experiences on the two rivers could be categorized as what would be obtained by floating almost any similar trip located in a nonurban natural setting. However, these two rivers happen to pass through the wilderness. Since the river recreation experience is not consistently a “wilderness” experience, some visitors have stated that more solitude is important to the quality of their river experience. For such visitors, this means that the opportunity should exist for each party to float, camp, and enjoy the river experience in a reasonably isolated and pristine space and/or time period.

On both rivers, areas of concentrated use occur where users are either launching or taking out on the rivers at boat ramps, landing strips, and trailheads. Concentration also occurs at points of

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interest such as historic or prehistoric sites, hot springs, in holdings and areas for scouting rapids. There is a growing concern about the frequency of encounters and interactions with visitors while on the water and especially at camp. The probability of user conflict occurring in the wilderness is greatest in areas such as in the river corridors where recreationists concentrate and where the diversity of use is greatest. Here the visitors' differing needs and perceptions can result in conflicting encounters among user groups. Some of the specific conflicts include groups taking a long time to pass other float crafts, delays at rapids, large numbers of crafts, and inappropriate conduct.

The FC-RONRW has a rich history of use. Archeological records indicate that the earliest inhabitants of the Salmon River canyons were here between 8,000 and 8,500 years ago. Prior to the arrival of European explorers in the early 1800's, the Shoshone, Nez Perce, and the Sheepeater Indians lived here. Despite the fact that the Indians had traveled these canyons for centuries, the Lewis and Clark expedition in 1805 was convinced that the canyon was impassable for canoe, foot or horse travel due to the narrow, steep, rocky canyons and the large rapids. They turned back to find a different route through to the Pacific Ocean. Fur trappers and miners during the 1800's eventually made their way into this area and added to the rich history of the canyons.

In the late 1800's, explorers of the Salmon River rapids and falls offered greatly demanded floating services to move miners, prospectors, trappers and their supplies into this vast roadless country. These adventuresome explorers ran the river canyons in scows or wooden flatboats steered by large sweeps. A new boat was built for each trip and dismantled at downstream destinations. The timber from these boats was then used in constructing buildings in many river canyon mining camps and other settlements. Freight packers and cargo aviators also used the wilderness to bring provisions and supplies to miners, ranchers, homesteaders and outfitters.

The early attempts to navigate upstream on the Salmon River were unsuccessful. The first occurred in the late 1930's using an aircraft propeller coupled to a motorcycle engine mounted in a canoe. Later attempts with other airboats also failed. Upriver travel became possible and river navigation during high water runoff periods was made easier through the application and use of outboard boat motors in the 1940's and then by motorized jet pumps in the 1950's. In the first two decades following World War II, rubber rafts replaced the wooden flatboats for float trips. Outboard motors (called kicker motors) were fixed to rafts to allow quicker maneuvering in high water and across slow water sections of the river. By the mid 1960's there were wooden, fiberglass, rubber, and aluminum boats with inboard and outboard props and jets traveling both up and down the river.

Motorized boating outfitters offered fishing, big game hunting, sightseeing and photography trips up and down the river. The historical motorized river use was recognized in the CIWA and is one reason for the allowances made for the use of motorboats (including motorized jetboats) on the Salmon River.

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Heavy rubber World War II surplus rafts were used in the 50's and 60's. Float boat technology has improved making them more maneuverable in white water and more transportable off the river. Improved float boat technology has also contributed to the current popularity of white water float boating. Often float boat parties transport themselves and their equipment via aircraft into backcountry landing strips adjacent to floatable rivers.

During the 1960's, local outfitters recognized that the Middle Fork and Salmon Rivers offered a variety of unique river floating and boating opportunities that included challenging multi-day white water river trips. Early operations attracted relatively low numbers of adventuresome visitors, but the use steadily grew. By the early 1970's, river running skills and experience had increased, and the popularity of floating these rivers spread. Improved river running equipment made river running safer and more attractive to larger numbers of commercial and noncommercial boaters. As a result, river use levels increased dramatically. In response to increased use and resulting resource and recreation experience impacts and to meet requirements under the CIWA and W&SR Act, management plans imposed restrictions on uses.

More and more people came to the wilderness seeking solitude or primitive unconfined recreation. Today, the wilderness provides opportunities for people to achieve primitive unconfined wilderness experiences while participating in a wide variety of recreational activities including motorized and nonmotorized white water boating.

From the 1930's to wilderness designation in 1980, the area was managed according to primitive area regulations as the Idaho Primitive Area and the Salmon River Breaks Primitive Area.

In 1968, Congress established the National W&SR System, with eight initial components. The Middle Fork of the Salmon and the Selway Rivers were two of the original eight designated in this system. Reports to Congress also named additional rivers to be studied for potential designation as "wild" or "scenic" rivers. The 237-mile stretch of the Salmon River downstream from North Fork was one of these. The study was accomplished in conjunction with the wilderness potential studies of the adjacent Idaho and Salmon River Breaks Primitive Areas. These studies were completed in 1974, with the recommendation that the Salmon River be included in the National W&SR System. In addition to establishing the FC-RONRW, the CIWA of 1980 amended the W&SR Act to add the part of the Salmon River between North Fork and Long Tom Bar to the system, as "recreational" and "wild" river segments.