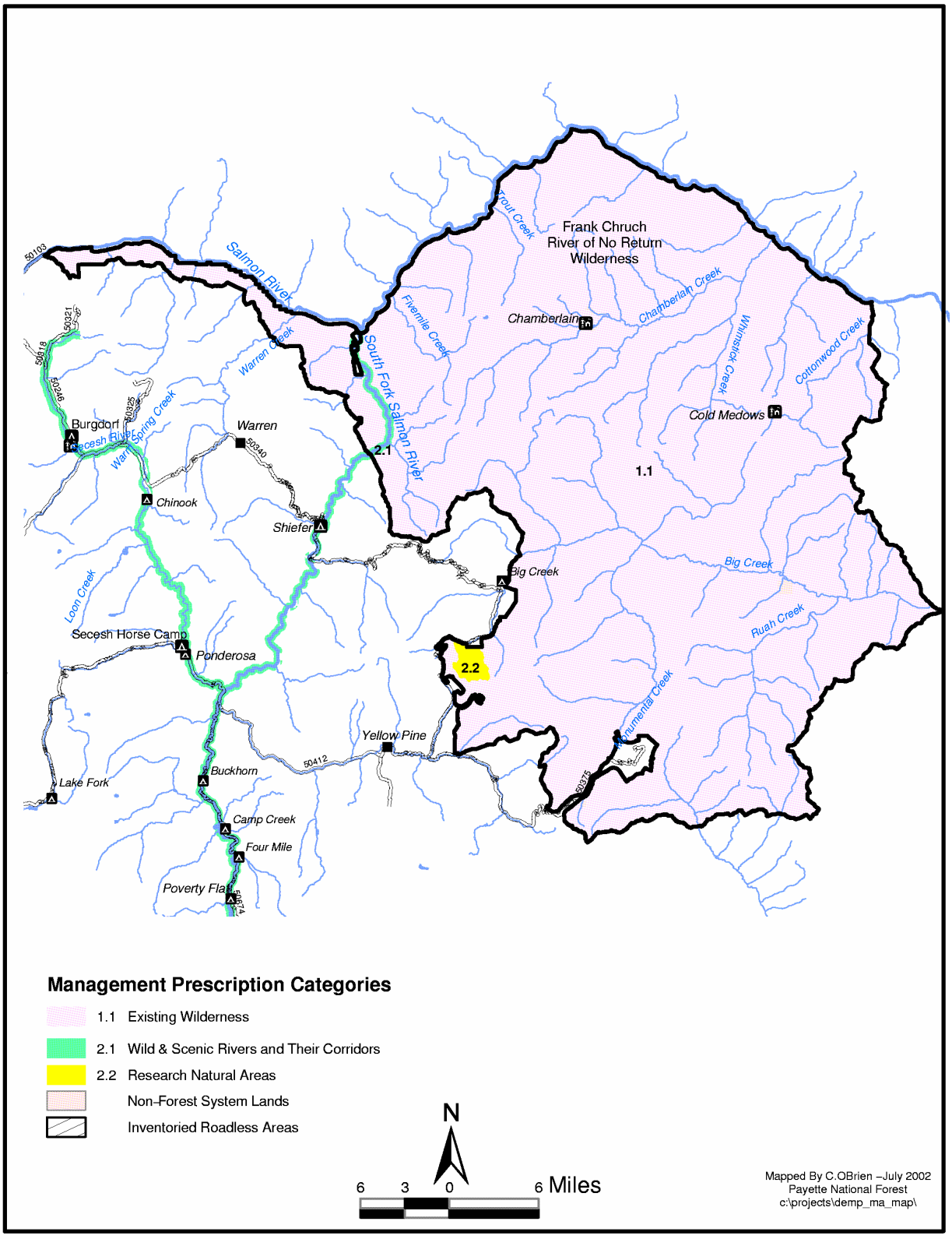
Management Area 14 –Frank Church–River of No Return Wilderness –Location Map



Management Area 14
Frank Church--River of No Return Wilderness

MANAGEMENT AREA DESCRIPTION

Management Prescriptions - Management Area 4 has been assigned the following management prescriptions (see map on preceding page for distribution of prescriptions).

Management Prescription Category (MPC)	Percent of Management Area
1.1 – Designated Wilderness	99.6
2.2 – Research Natural Areas	0.4

General Location and Description - Management Area 14 is comprised of lands administered by the Payette National Forest within the Frank Church--River of No Return Wilderness (see map, preceding page), hereafter referred to as the FC--RONR Wilderness. The area lies in Idaho and Valley Counties, and is part of the McCall and Krassel Ranger Districts. This management area is an estimated 774,100 acres, which includes several private land inholdings that, together, make up less than 1 percent of the entire area. Most of the inholdings are ranches and airstrips along the Salmon River or in Chamberlain Basin. This management area does not include the Salmon River Wild and Scenic River corridor (roughly 7,500 acres), which is managed by the Nez Perce National Forest. Management Area 14 is bordered by the Salmon River Wild and Scenic River corridor to the north, more FC- RONR Wilderness to the east and south, and the Payette National Forest to the west. Past uses in this area have included hunting, mining, grazing, and homesteading. The primary current use is primitive, wilderness-oriented recreation.

Established by Congress in 1980, the entire FC-RONR Wilderness (2,417,932 acres) is located on portions of six National Forests, and administered by four Forests, including the Payette. Management direction for the entire area is included in the FC-RONR Wilderness Management Plan, approved in March 1985, and currently being revised. Each National Forest has incorporated that Management Plan into its own respective Forest Plan. Management Area 14, therefore, only covers the portion administered by the Payette.

Access - The main access to this portion of the Wilderness is by Forest Road 340 to Big Creek, by Forest Road 375 to Thunder Mountain, by jet boat or raft on the Salmon River, and by small aircraft to one of several public landing strips that are maintained by the Forest Service, including Chamberlain Basin, Cold Meadows, Cabin Creek, and Soldier Bar.

Special Features - The FC-RONR is the largest Forest Service wilderness area within the continental United States. The area is bordered on the north and east by the Salmon and Middle Fork Salmon Rivers, which are both designated Wild and Scenic Rivers. In addition, the South Fork Salmon River has been found suitable for inclusion in the Wild and Scenic River system. Segment 2 lies within the management area. Segment 2 is 10 miles, 2,700 acres, and classified as "Wild". The Belvidere Creek Research Natural Area (2,920 acres) was established for its

good representation of high-elevation subalpine fir types, outstanding aquatic features with associated wetland plant communities, and spectacular geomorphic setting.

Air Quality - Portions of this management area lie within Montana/Idaho Airsheds ID-15 and ID-16 and in Valley and Idaho Counties. Particulate matter is the primary pollutant of concern related to Forest management. There are two ambient air monitors located within Airshed ID-15 to evaluate current background levels, trends, and seasonal patterns of particulate matter. These are in McCall and Garden Valley. Airshed ID-16 contains no monitors. Four Class I areas are within 100 kilometers of this management area: Hells Canyon, Sawtooth, Selway-Bitterroot, and Anaconda-Pintlar Wildernesses. Visibility monitoring has been expanded for these areas.

Between 1995 and 1999, emissions trends in both counties improved for PM 10, while PM 2.5 emissions remained constant. The most common sources of particulate matter in the counties were wildfire, prescribed fire, and fugitive dust from unpaved roads. In addition to Forest management activities, crop residue and ditch burning also contribute to particulate emissions. Agricultural-related burning was very low in Valley County (less than 600 acres) and moderate in Idaho County (about 13,500 acres). There were no point sources in either county.

Soil, Water, Riparian, and Aquatic Resources - Elevations range from about 2,000 feet on the Salmon River to 9,545 feet atop Mormon Mountain. Management Area 14 falls primarily within three subsections: Salmon River Canyonlands, Red River-Chamberlain Basin, and Profile Peak-Monumental Summit Mountains. Much of the area features steep canyonlands that drain into the Salmon, Middle Fork Salmon, or South Fork Salmon Rivers, although Chamberlain Basin contains a large area of frost-churned uplands. Slope gradient is dominantly 40 to 80 percent in the canyonlands, and 10 to 40 percent in the uplands. The surface geology is dominated by granites of the Idaho batholith, with scattered inclusions of volcanic and quartzitic soils. Soils generally have moderate to high surface erosion potential, and moderate productivity. Subwatershed vulnerability ratings range from low to high (see table below). Geomorphic Integrity ratings for the subwatersheds vary from high (functioning appropriately) to moderate (functioning at risk) to low (not functioning appropriately), with the majority being high (see table below).

This large management area spreads across portions of the Middle Salmon-Chamberlain, Lower Middle Fork Salmon, Upper Middle Fork Salmon, and South Fork Salmon River Subbasins. The major drainages within the area are Chamberlain Creek, and portions of Big Creek, Marble Creek, Monumental Creek, and the South Fork Salmon River. Small alpine lakes occur in glacial cirque basin, and the largest concentrations can be found in the Sheepeater Mountain and Pinnacles/Cougar Basin areas. Water Quality Integrity ratings for the subwatersheds vary from high (functioning appropriately) to moderate (functioning at risk) to low (not functioning appropriately), with the majority being high (see table below). Currently, there are no impaired water bodies listed under Section 303(d) of the Clean Water Act, and no TMDL-assigned subwatersheds associated with this management area.

The management area has designated critical habitat for chinook salmon. Spawning, rearing, and migratory habitat occurs for chinook salmon, steelhead, and bull trout in many area streams, including Chamberlain, Big, Marble, Monumental, Cabin, and Belvidere Creeks. Aquatic integrity is considered high, and habitat conditions are generally good, although non-native species (brook and rainbow trout) have been introduced in some areas. This management area is one of the most important aquatic strongholds for threatened salmonids in the entire Columbia River Basin. Aquatic habitat is considered at low risk due to the increasing risk of uncharacteristic fire in some of the potential vegetation groups that historically have non-lethal or mixed severity fire regimes. The Upper Big Creek, Cabin Creek, and Lower Crooked Creek subwatersheds have been identified as important to the recovery of listed fish species, and as high-priority areas for restoration.

Subwatershed Vulnerability			Geomorphic Integrity			Water Quality Integrity			No 303(d) Subs	No. Subs With TMDLs	No. Public Water System Subs
High	Mod.	Low	High	Mod.	Low	High	Mod.	Low			
29	31	14	67	5	2	45	25	4	0	0	0

Vegetation - Vegetation at lower elevations is typically grasslands, shrublands, ponderosa pine and Douglas-fir on south and west aspects, and Douglas-fir and grand fir forests on north and east aspects. Mid elevations are dominated by forest communities of Douglas-fir, grand fir, and subalpine fir, with pockets of lodgepole pine and aspen. Subalpine fir and whitebark pine are found at upper elevations.

The main potential vegetation groups in this area are Warm Dry Subalpine Fir (26 percent), High Elevation Subalpine Fir (17 percent), Warm Dry Douglas-fir/Moist Ponderosa Pine (15 percent), Warm Moist/Hydric Subalpine Fir (11 percent), and Cool Moist Grand Fir (6 percent). Grasslands, shrublands, rock, and water comprise an estimated 13 percent of the area.

The Warm Moist/Hydric Subalpine Fir and Warm Dry Subalpine Fir groups are at properly functioning condition, although they are at increasing risk to uncharacteristic fire due to decades of fire exclusion. However, these groups historically have a lethal fire regime. The Cool Moist Grand Fir group is at risk because fire exclusion has allowed grand fir to dominate stands and increase the risk of uncharacteristic fire. This group historically had a mixed severity fire regime and is now moving toward a lethal regime. The Warm Dry Douglas-fir/Moist Ponderosa Pine group is also functioning at risk also due to fire exclusion, which is increasing stand densities and fuel loadings, and moving this group from a non-lethal fire regime to a mixed severity or lethal regime.

Seeding of non-native grasses and forbs and introduction of noxious weeds have altered Perennial Grass Slopes and Perennial Grass Montane groups to the point that they are functioning at risk in some areas. Riparian vegetation is properly functioning.

Botanical Resources – Cascade reedgrass is the only current Region 4 Sensitive species known to occur in this area. Proposed Region 4 Sensitive species in this area include bent-flowered milkvetch, Payson's Milkvetch, Pored lungwort, Davis' stickseed, Borsch's stonecrop, and Blandow's helodium. Although no federally listed or proposed plant species are currently known to occur in the area, potential habitat for Ute ladies'-tresses, Spalding's silene, and slender moonwort may exist. Spalding's silene, a Threatened species, may occur in fescue grassland habitat types up to 5,500 feet. Ute Ladies'-tresses, a Threatened species, may have moderate to high potential habitat in riparian/wetland areas up to 7,000 feet. Slender moonwort, a Candidate species, may occur in moderate to higher elevation grasslands, meadows, and small openings in spruce and lodgepole pine.

Non-native Plants - A number of noxious weeds and exotic plants have been introduced into the management area, particularly along main travel ways. An estimated 23 percent of the area is highly susceptible to knapweed invasion and spread. The main weeds of concern are spotted knapweed and rush skeletonweed, which currently found in small, scattered populations within the area. A number of subwatersheds have an inherently high risk of weed establishment and spread, including Lower Big Creek, Canyon, Coxy-Buck, Lower Monumental, Little-Ramey-Gold, Hogback-McFadden, Disappointment Creek, Middle Chamberlain, McCalla, Lower Whimstick, and Lower Warren Creek. This risk is due to the amount of drainage area that is highly susceptible to noxious weed invasion and the exposure from recreation and trail use in this area.

Wildlife Resources - A wide range of elevations and vegetation types in the management area provide a variety of wildlife habitats. The Salmon and South Fork Salmon Rivers historically provided foraging habitat for migrating bald eagles. Bighorn sheep, mountain goats, golden eagles, and bats use the rocky bluffs that extend up steep canyonlands. Much of the lower elevation grasslands and shrublands is important winter range for elk, deer, and bighorn sheep. Area forests provide habitat for a number of Region 4 sensitive species, including northern goshawk, flammulated owl, white-headed woodpecker, great gray and boreal owls, three-toed woodpeckers, wolverine, lynx, migratory landbirds, as well as summer range for mammals such as elk, black bear, and mountain lion. Gray wolves were re-introduced near here in 1995 and 1996, and populations are increasing in the area, which is part of the Central Idaho Wolf Recovery Area. Extensive lodgepole pine stands, recent fires, and low levels of human disturbance in the Chamberlain Basin/Cold Meadows area combine to provide good potential lynx habitat. Overall, terrestrial habitat is functioning properly in high elevation areas, though recent fires have converted thousands of acres of old forest to an early successional stage. Forests at lower elevations are functioning at low risk due to the increasing risk of stand-replacing fire in some of the potential vegetation groups that historically have non-lethal or mixed severity fire regimes.

Recreation Resources - Dispersed recreation such as hunting, fishing, hiking, sightseeing, and camping occurs throughout Management Area 14. The area is in Idaho Fish and Game Management Units 19A, 20A, 25, 26, and 27. The area is a national attraction, and much of the use is limited to the summer and fall seasons due to the remoteness and high elevations. Over 660 miles of trail are maintained in the area, and all are closed to vehicle use. Portions of the Idaho Centennial Trail lie within this management area.

Recreation emphasis is to maintain and protect wilderness values, while still allowing for the recreational enjoyment of the area. Outfitter and guide opportunities are supported. Trails with the highest use receive priority maintenance.

Currently, most of the Payette portion of the Wilderness provides opportunities for a Primitive recreation (ROS) experience, with the exception of several motorized corridors or airstrips that provide Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized, Semi-Primitive Motorized, or Roaded Natural experiences. Adjustments to these corridors are currently being addressed in the revised Wilderness Management Plan. The ROS classes are not likely to change in the future because this is a designated Wilderness, and the Wilderness Act would not permit the type or extent of development that could cause a change in ROS.

Scenic Environment – Because this is a designated wilderness, all lands currently have a visual quality objective of Preservation, which provides the highest possible protection of scenic quality. This level of protection is not likely to change for this area in the future due to its wilderness status.

Cultural Resources – Cultural themes in this area include Prehistoric, Settlement, and Forest Service Administration. Numerous prehistoric and historic heritage resources exist in the area. Indian rock art, rock shelters, and activity areas can be found, as well as the ruins of old mines, homesteads, and town sites. Arctic Point Fire Lookout and Cold Meadows Guard Station are listed on the National Register of Historic Places, and the Chamberlain Basin Guard Station is eligible for listing.

Timberland Resources - There are no tentatively suited acres in this management area because wilderness designation prohibits the management of forest vegetation for timber production.

Rangeland Resources - This area is closed to cattle and sheep grazing and open to limited pack and saddle stock grazing.

Mineral Resources - Two areas have had past mining activities, and these activities could continue. Most of the Thunder Mountain mineralized zone was excluded from the Wilderness, but the zone does extend into the area. The Big Creek mining activity zone also extends into the Wilderness. The Wilderness was withdrawn from further mineral entry, effective December 31, 1983. Validity examinations are completed as mining proposals are received.

Fire Management – Although there are areas where wildfire has been actively suppressed, there are also areas where wildfire has been allowed to burn and play its natural role in the ecosystem. From 1988 to 2000, an estimated 108,900 acres of wildland fire were recorded, the largest amounts in the Sliver Creek Fire of 1988 and the Chicken Fire of 1994. In 2000, over 275,000 acres of wildfire were recorded. The largest fires were Diamond (149,770 acres), Flossie (75,000 acres), Three Bears (15,040 acres), and a portion of the Burgdorf Fire (20,000 acres).

Mackay Bar is a National Fire Plan community, and Mill Station is considered a wildland-urban interface subwatershed due to residential development adjacent to the Forest. Historical fire regimes for the area are estimated to be: 15 percent lethal, 61 percent mixed1 or 2, and 24 percent non-lethal. An estimated 19 percent of the area regimes have vegetation conditions that are highly departed from their historical range. Most of this change is in the historically non-lethal fire regimes, resulting in conditions where wildfire would likely be much larger and more intense and severe than historically. In addition, 36 percent of the area regimes have vegetation conditions that are moderately departed from their historical range. Wildfire in these areas may result in larger patch sizes of high intensity or severity, but not to the same extent as in the highly departed areas in non-lethal fire regimes.

Lands and Special Uses - The University of Idaho has a water diversion system off of Pioneer Creek serving the Taylor Ranch field station. The University has submitted an application for this water system, requesting a permanent conditional easement is issued per Public Law 99-545 commonly known as the "Colorado Ditch Act". The Sheepeater designated communications site is located in this area, and is designated for Forest Service or other government agency use only.

MANAGEMENT DIRECTION

Follow management direction in the Frank Church--River of No Return Wilderness Management Plan and the Wilderness Fire Management Plan.

The Pinnacles