United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest Service
Intermountain and
Northern Regions

Record of Decision

for the

Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness
Noxious Weed Treatment
Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement

* * * *

Salmon-Challis, Payette, Bitterroot, and Nez Perce National Forests
Idaho, Custer, Lemhi, and Valley Counties, Idaho

November 2007

Introduction

This Record of Decision explains our decision and rationale for selecting Alternative 2 as Modified of the Frank Church River of No Return (FC-RONR) Wilderness Noxious Weed Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (FSEIS). The selected alternative would supplement the existing management direction as described in the Record of Decision for the FC-RONR Wilderness Noxious Weed Treatment FEIS, August 1999. This alternative would clarify or modify existing standards, guidelines, or mitigations associated with weed treatment practices, including 1) treatment priorities, 2) treatment methods, 3) herbicide application methods, 4) non-treatment practices, 5) monitoring, and 6) mitigation measures.

There have been no changes in the scope of this analysis between draft and final publications of the FSEIS. Cited page numbers have been added and miscellaneous typographical and punctuation errors have been corrected. Appendix O (Public Involvement) and Appendix P (Biological Assessments & Evaluations) have been added. Publication of the FSEIS and Record of Decision has been delayed longer than expected due to ongoing consultations with the National Marine Fisheries Service.

Purpose and Need

As stated in the FSEIS, page iii, there is a need to supplement the 1999 FC-RONRW Noxious Weed Treatments FEIS (1999 FEIS) due to changed conditions that include weed expansion and the threat of new weed species within the Wilderness. Implementation of the Integrated Weed Management program prescribed in the 1999 FEIS, and the results of monitoring following herbicide treatments, indicate that minor changes to the standards and guidelines would make treatment methods more effective.

The 1999 FEIS discloses 1,775 acres on 293 sites were infested with noxious weeds at the time of the analysis. Updated inventories from 2002 identified 4,222 acres on 471 sites within wilderness are weed-infested. This increase in size and number of known infestations within the Wilderness indicates a need to review our chosen weed treatment alternative to ensure treatment within this expanded area does not lead to adverse effects. In addition, invasive weed inventories as of 2006 indicate 22,616 acres within wilderness are weed-infested (Appendix B). Inventories continue to reveal a greater extent of invasive weeds. This finding is a result of actual expansion of weeds due to their physiological traits and favorable site conditions following large wildfires, and because of the general increased awareness of invasive weeds and increased efforts toward weed detection.

The Record of Decision for the 1999 FEIS documents the Forest Supervisors' selection of a weed management alternative that combines manual, biological, and chemical practices to treat weeds wilderness-wide as quickly as possible. The results of implementation and monitoring of weed treatment activities during 1999 through 2003 indicate a need to clarify or modify certain standards and mitigations within the 1999 FEIS. Specifically, we need to: 1) clarify that the prioritization criteria for treatment of targeted weeds are intended to be guidelines, 2) clarify that the criteria for determining the type of treatment for specific weed infestations are intended to be guidelines, 3) clarify the use of jet boats as a "ground-based" application method, 4) modify the prescribed rate of approved herbicide application up to, but not to exceed, herbicide label rates, 5) clarify the purpose and timing for consultations with EPA and other Regulatory Agencies, including NOAA Fisheries and the US Fish & Wildlife Service, 6) clarify the role of calibration in herbicide application projects, and 7) clarify the integrated role and use of biological agents for noxious weed control.

An additional herbicide for use on annual grasses may benefit future restoration projects in the FC-RONRW. Cheatgrass, an exotic annual grass now dominates many areas within the wilderness. Restoration of these cheatgrass sites to native vegetation may be desirable and will require reducing the density of cheatgrass and other exotic annual grasses (Rice 2003). Herbicides presently authorized for use within the wilderness are not effective in control and management of annual grasses. Therefore, there is a need to analyze an additional herbicide that could be used to treat annual grasses, as well as other weed species, as a component of future restoration projects.

The 1999 FEIS deferred specific decisions related to non-treatment weed management practices to a later analysis, specifically the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness Management Plan, Final Environmental Impact Statement. The FC-RONRW Management

Plan Final Environmental Impact Statement focuses on wilderness issues other than noxious weed management, and defers the analysis of weed management to the Supplemental EIS. The Final Supplemental EIS describes non-treatment weed management practices including prevention, education, coordination, and inventory, which are to be integrated into the weed management program for the FC-RONRW.

Proposed Action

The Proposed Action (Alternative 2) is to continue authorization of Integrated Weed Management (IWM) components described in the 1999 Record of Decision for Noxious Weed Treatment in the FC-RONR Wilderness. The IWM program being proposed is very similar to the decision of 1999 presently being implemented. The goals and objectives for aggressive integrated noxious/invasive weed management throughout the wilderness continue to drive this proposed action. The Adaptive Management Strategy, Minimum Tool Guidelines, and the associated Decision Matrix described in the 1999 FEIS are incorporated into this alternative.

Specific details of the proposed action include:

Clarify or modify specific standards, guidelines or mitigations associated with treatment practices

1) Treatment Priorities

Treatment objectives and priorities by weed species identified in the 1999 FEIS will continue to guide decisions related to sites and species selected for treatment, and the method of treatment to be incorporated. District Rangers may modify treatment priorities and will consider recommendations from the Steering Committee for the FC-RONRW Cooperative Weed Management Area (CWMA) when establishing treatment priorities. In addition, new noxious/invasive weed species, and their relative priority, may be evaluated by the local District Ranger and identified for treatment. Recommendations from the Steering Committee will be considered prior to treating new weed species.

2) Treatment Methods

The selected methods for treatment of noxious and invasive weeds will continue to incorporate the concept of "minimum tool." Newly inventoried noxious/invasive weed sites and expansion of existing sites will be evaluated in accordance with the “Adaptive Management Strategy” described in the 1999 Record of Decision. Wilderness weed managers will strive for consistent application of “Adaptive Management Strategy” and analysis of new sites by using a common procedure for assessing new sites.

This alternative proposes to expand the role of biocontrol as a component of Integrated Weed Management. Biocontrol will be used strategically in combination with other control measures. Biocontrol is not necessarily exclusive of other management options, but rather one tool to be used when and where appropriate.

3) Herbicide Application Methods

Application Techniques Herbicide application will continue to be limited to "ground-based" methods. Aerial application has not been evaluated by this assessment and is not authorized in the FC-RONRW. "Ground-based" treatment methods include spraying with backpack pumps, hand sprayers, pumps mounted on pack and saddle stock, and properly mounted pumps in jet boats on the Main Salmon River.

The use of a pump and other spray apparatus properly mounted within a jet boat is considered "ground-based application." Actual spraying associated with a jet boat mounted system will be conducted by an applicator on land. All required buffers zones will be maintained (Mitigation Measures and Practices, pages–7-11). A certified applicator will operate and monitor the pump during the spray operation.

Application Rate: All pesticide label information and restrictions will be strictly adhered to for any herbicide and additive being applied. The rate of application of approved herbicides and associated herbicide additives, including surfactants and dye, may fully incorporate, but never exceed, label recommendations.

Consultation with EPA: Annual consultation with EPA, as described in the 1999 FEIS, is not a practical way in which to review the most current information regarding the safe and effective use of herbicides approved for use in the FC-RONRW. Rather than annual consultation with the EPA, FC-RONRW weed managers will contact the Idaho Department of Agriculture (IDA) to discuss the status of revised risk assessments and the details of completed assessments. In addition, IDA will be consulted regarding new information on the most effective treatment practices.

Calibration: The sequential assessment of the factors potentially influencing the rate of herbicide application is termed "calibration." The 1999 FEIS assumes calibration will be performed by herbicide applicators; however, it does not mention calibration specifically. The importance of calibration will be emphasized to herbicide applicators within the FC-RONRW as a part of this proposed action. Documented calibration will be required at the initiation of a herbicide application project, and periodically during herbicide application.

Authorize Use of Additional Herbicide (Plateau)

Plateau (imazapic) is a herbicide proposed for use in the FC-RONRW primarily to aid in future restoration projects. Plateau is particularly suited for restoration projects striving to reduce annual grass and to increase the density of native perennial bunchgrasses. Plateau acts on many species of broadleaf plants and grasses as a growth inhibitor. Many native forbs and grass species, including lupine, bluebunch wheatgrass and Idaho fescue, can be tolerant to Plateau at the prescribed rate and may increase as a result of reduced competition. Certain

target grass species and broadleaf weeds, including cheatgrass, downey brome, sandbur, thistle and toadflax are susceptible. Future restoration projects, such as tilling and/or seeding, which may or may not include the use of Plateau herbicide to aid in establishment of desired plant species, may require further analysis of potential site-specific environmental effects.

As technology advances, more effective and less toxic herbicides are being developed for specific uses. Additional herbicides may be considered for use within the FC-RONRW in the future. Only herbicides having a completed Human Health and Ecological Risk Assessment Final Report will be considered for use.

4) Non-Treatment Practices, Including Prevention

Prevention: It is more cost effective to prevent weeds from invading a site than to treat weeds once they are established. A noxious/invasive weed prevention plan that incorporates various State laws, Forest Service regulations and policies, and general practices appropriate for the FC-RONRW has been developed (FSEIS, Appendix I). This Prevention Plan is intended to be a "work in progress" and will be revised periodically with pertinent information, recommendations and guidance. Many prevention measures discussed in this plan have been, and continue to be, implemented in the FC-RONRW.

Coordination: A Cooperative Weed Management Area (CWMA) has been established for the FC-RONRW. Primary goals of this CWMA are to promote coordination among weed management participants, strengthen relationships and broaden partnerships. Steering Committee participants include representatives from each of four counties, private landowners from both the Main and Middle Forks of the Salmon River, commercial and private wilderness user groups, conservation organizations, Idaho Department of Fish and Game, and the four National Forests comprising the wilderness.

Education: The Forests are currently developing a specific Invasive Plant Education and Awareness Plan for FC-RONRW. The Steering Committee for the FC-RONRW Cooperative Weed Management Area will assist in the completion of this education strategy.

Inventory and Detection: The collection of noxious/invasive weed inventory information will be conducted in a consistent manner across the FC-RONRW. By working with existing volunteer groups and partners, such as the Student Conservation Association, and by seeking new partners and funding opportunities through the Cooperative Weed Management Area, inventory and invasive weed detection will remain a high priority.

5) Monitoring

Monitoring associated with the proposed action will continue to focus upon (1) trends in infestation number, size, and density, (2) the effect of noxious/invasive weed infestations on native vegetation and other wilderness resources, (3) the effect of treatments on target weeds and desirable vegetation, and (4) effectiveness of treatments as implemented. The Monitoring

Strategy associated with the proposed action describes methodologies and protocols to be used in conducting monitoring activities associated with noxious/invasive weed management.

6) Mitigation Measures

Mitigation measures associated with the proposed action will provide additional guidelines and safeguards. Additional mitigation measures include pre-treatment activities to plan for safe and effective projects, application, transport, and mixing of herbicides in a safe and effective manner, and potential spill abatement measures.

Approved Mitigation Measures and Practices (Alternative 2)

Pre-Treatment

- All sites considered for herbicide treatment will be evaluated for sensitive plant habitat suitability. Suitable habitat will be surveyed, as necessary, prior to treatment. Forest Botanists and/or Botany Program Manager will coordinate the need for field surveys based on factors including plant phenology at the time of treatment, species susceptibility to the herbicide, level of past disturbance, etc.
- Site-specific treatment guidelines will be developed in conjunction with the Forest Botanist and/or Botany Program Manager for herbicide application within or adjacent to known sensitive plant populations.
    - A procedure has been initiated for use in the FC-RONRW to assess potential risks associated with threatened, endangered and sensitive (T,E & S) plant habitat prior to herbicide treatment (Appendix C).
- Provide herbicide "awareness" information to wilderness users as opportunities arise. Treatment areas will be signed prior to and following herbicide applications within areas of special concern, as directed by the local District Ranger. Such areas may include mushroom and berry picking areas, trailheads, campsites, and other high use areas. Information on where and when spraying and other treatments will occur will be available to the public at the local Ranger District office**.**
- Adjacent landowners will be notified prior to treatment of noxious/invasive weeds on national forest lands.
- Ground disturbances resulting from noxious/invasive weed treatment activities will be evaluated for potential restoration. All seeding projects will be restricted to the use of certified noxious weed-free native seed. Seed originating from local native stock will be favored.
    - Managers will evaluate the need for restoration activity, including seeding, in compliance with Wilderness Management direction:
        - Maintain wilderness in such a manner that ecosystems are unaffected by human manipulation and influences so that plants and animals develop and respond to natural forces. Seed only species that are indigenous or naturalized to the area. Use broadcast seeding methods. Approve seeding only for areas where human activities have caused the loss or threaten the existence of indigenous plant species, and areas where human activities, including their livestock, have denuded or caused loss of soil, providing that the actions or activities responsible for the deterioration no longer exist and that natural revegetation is insufficient and/or ineffective**.**

- Seeding projects will first consider the use of seed sources collected from or near the project area. The Forests, in conjunction with their botany programs, will initiate a "bank" of native seed collected from various vegetative communities within the wilderness. This local native seed will be available for use in future restoration projects.

Herbicide Application

- Read and follow label instructions at all times. All herbicide use will comply with label restrictions and recommendations, and applicable laws, policy and guidelines. All Personal Protective Equipment required by the herbicide label will be used.
- Herbicides will be applied only when wind speeds are less than 8 miles per hour and when no significant precipitation is expected within 3 hours (light rain is acceptable with the use of Tordon 22K). Herbicides are most effective when applied when temperatures are below 85 degrees. No highly volatile herbicides are approved for use within the FC-RONRW.
- All herbicide application will be performed or directly supervised by a state licensed applicator.
- Appropriate safety and application information will be reviewed with all personnel involved in the handling of herbicides
- A dye solution will be used in the herbicide mix to visually detect uniform coverage of spray area. Diluted dye may be preferred in visually sensitive areas.
- Calibration will be conducted often enough to ensure proper amount of herbicide is being applied. Calibration should be conducted when changing to a different spray apparatus, changing nozzle size or setting, when the prescribed amount of chemical changes due to different site conditions or target species, when encountering different terrain or a change in speed of application, and by new applicators.
- All empty herbicide containers shall be triple-rinsed and the residue returned to the tank and sprayed on noxious/invasive weeds. All empty and rinsed herbicide containers shall be properly stored until disposed of at an appropriate site.

Use of authorized jet boat mounted spray equipment

The following safety practices and containment components are required for the use of jet boat mounted spray equipment:

Jet Boat Mounted Sprayer Safety Practices:

- Jet boat operator must be well qualified to operate the particular boat being used for herbicide treatment. Operator must be very familiar with navigating

the sections of river being traveled at the water levels to be encountered during the use period.

- A qualified person will be tending the pump at all times while in operation.
- Actual spraying of herbicide will take place only while applicator is on land, and all appropriate riparian buffer strips will be adhered to.
- Excess water in the hull of the boat will be pumped out prior to spray operations in order to lessen the volume of wastewater in the case of a spill within the hull of the boat.
- Chemical concentrate will be triple wrapped/sealed and placed in a watertight compartment or securely fastened watertight storage container during transport.
- The spray tank will be empty while traveling to and from the treatment area and the launch site, and prior to navigating any class III or higher rapids in the vicinity of the treatment area.
- Jet boat and spray equipment will be maintained in good running order. Spray hoses and gaskets will be replaced prior to reaching their expected operating life.
- If a spill should occur within the boat, spray operations will cease until the boat is returned to the launch site or other suitable location for thorough cleaning.

Jet Boat Mounted Sprayer Containment Components:

- The boat will be equipped with a manual bilge pump fitted to optionally pump contaminated wastewater in the boats hull back into the spray tank or into a separate container, and not back into the river.
- The boat will be equipped with a separate durable containment compartment for the pump and tank, capable of holding a volume in excess of the capacity of the spray tank.
- Empty collapsible containers sufficient to hold the capacity of the spray tank will be on board in case of a leak in the spray tank.
- An emergency spill containment kit will be on board (see *spill abatement* below).

Identified Sensitive Plant Locations

- Mechanical control or chemical control with backpack sprayer are preferred methods.
- Apply the appropriate herbicide and only when wind speeds are less than 5 miles per hour.
- Implement any site specific treatment guidelines in T, E & S plant habitats as identified by Forest Botanist and/or Botany Program Manager prior to and/or during treatment activities.

Riparian Habitats

- Only herbicides approved for use adjacent to water bodies will be used within a 50-foot streamside buffer or other riparian areas.
- When appropriately labeled herbicides are to be applied within a 50-foot riparian buffer, only hand spraying will be allowed.
- Herbicide will be applied within riparian buffers only when wind speeds are less than 5 miles per hour.
- Drafting equipment used for filling herbicide spray tanks will be equipped with back siphoning prevention devices.
- Precautions will be taken to insure no detectible herbicide residue enters a stream or water body during mixing operations. Mixing must take place in an area where accidental spill will not contaminate a stream or other body of water before it can be contained and removed. Mixing of herbicides will normally take place at a distance greater than 100 feet of streams, rivers or lakes.
    - Spray equipment properly mounted in a separate containment compartment located within the hull of the jet boat is considered effective double containment of the herbicide being used. Mixing herbicides is allowed within the confines of a jet boat by a licensed applicator, when a jet boat mounted sprayer has been authorized for use and containment components are in place (see above).

Transport of Herbicides

- Only those quantities of herbicides necessary for a project will be transported
- Herbicides transported by boat will be triple wrapped in plastic and stored in appropriate compartment, such as a designed water proof storage box or a secured plastic cooler. Storage box/cooler will be securely fastened.

Spill Abatement

- A spill cleanup kit will be accessible on site when within ¼ mile of the Main, Middle and South Forks of the Salmon River and at all sites when greater than 5 gallons of chemical concentrate is being used or stored. The spill cleanup kit will include at least the following: Shovel, box of large plastic bags, safety goggles, 10 pounds of absorbent material, rubber gloves, and protective overalls.

- A spill contingency plan will be developed prior to all herbicide applications. Individuals involved in herbicide handling or application will be instructed on the spill contingency plan and spill control, containment, and cleanup procedure.

Public Involvement And Issues

Public Involvement

The public was involved with noxious weed planning for the Frank-Church River of No Return Wilderness during the development of the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness Noxious Weed Treatments Final Environmental Impact Statement, August 1999. The August 2003 edition of *"Frankly Speaking"* announced the initiation of a Supplemental EIS for Noxious Weed Treatments in the FC-RONRW. Public awareness and participation in the development of a Supplemental EIS for Noxious Weed Treatments in the FC-RONRW was initiated with the Notice of Intent to prepare a Supplemental EIS, published in the Federal Register in September 2003. In November 2003 a public scoping letter was mailed to 460 potentially interested individuals and agencies inviting comments on the proposed action and identified issues, and a legal notice was published in the six newspapers of record for the FC-RONRW. Twelve comments were received during this scoping period. Comments were both supportive and critical of the proposed action. The comments received did not lead to the development of new issues.

In May 2004 a Notice of Availability was published in the Federal Register to announce the availability of the Draft Supplemental EIS for FC-RONRW Noxious Weed Treatments for public review and comment. Also in May 2004 a legal notice announcing the availability of the Draft SEIS was published in the newspapers of record for the FC-RONRW. A copy of the DSEIS was mailed to those individuals who made written response during the November 2003 scoping process, and to the Shoshone-Bannock and Nez Perce Tribes, the four Idaho Counties, and appropriate state and federal agencies. Seven comments were received during the comment period for the DSEIS. Three respondents were in support of integrated weed management in the wilderness and/or the proposed action, two respondents expressed concern about integrated weed management in the wilderness and/or the proposed action, and two comments from other agencies contained no specific comment.

Issues

The comments received during the initial scoping period and following review of the Draft SEIS indicate both support and concern over aspects of the proposed action. The majority of comments focus on elements of weed management that were analyzed in 1999. The comments received did not lead to the development of new issues. The issues developed following review of public comments during the 1999 EIS are:

Specific key issues

1. Effects of weeds and treatments on cultural resources.
2. Effects of herbicide application on fisheries including Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive fish species.
3. Effects on human health from the application of herbicides.
4. Effects of weeds and treatments on recreation.
5. Effects on vegetative diversity including (TES) plant species.
6. Effects on wildlife including (TES) wildlife species.
7. Effects on Wilderness and Wild and Scenic River values.

8. Visual effects of weed expansion.
9. Support for treatment, including biological control and manual/mechanical methods, but concerns over the use of herbicides.
10. Effectiveness of various weed control methods.
11. Issues addressed by adopting mitigation measures or design criteria

Alternatives Considered

Two alternatives were considered in detail for this project (see FSEIS Chapter 2):

Alternative 1: No Action - Existing noxious and invasive weed treatments would continue to be implemented under Alternative 1. The selected alternative from the 1999 FEIS forms the basis for this Alternative 1, (Appendix M).

Alternative 2: Proposed Action - Alternative 2 is the Proposed Action as described in Chapters 1 and 2 of the FSEIS. This alternative would continue to authorize Integrated Weed Management (IWM) components described in the 1999 Record of Decision for Noxious Weed Treatment in the FC-RONR Wilderness. This alternative would clarify or modify existing standards, guidelines, or mitigations associated with weed treatment practices, including: 1) treatment priorities, 2) treatment methods, 3) herbicide application methods, 4) non-treatment practices, 5) monitoring, and 6) mitigation measures.

Effects Summary by Alternative

Effects Summary by Alternative – Invasive Weed Expansion (Summarizes analysis found in FSEIS, page 24)

Alternative 1	Alternative 2
* Integrated Weed Management will maintain and protect existing native plant communities. * The extent of noxious and invasive weed invasion and expansion is largely dependant upon the availability of resources to combat weeds and implement prevention and education measures. * The effectiveness of treatments can significantly influence the attainment of Integrated Weed Management objectives. The prescribed rate of application (less than label recommendations) and constrained use of biological control may impede attainment of treatment goals.	* Integrated Weed Management will maintain and protect existing native plant communities. * The extent of noxious and invasive weed invasion and expansion is largely dependant upon the availability of resources to combat weeds and implement prevention and education measures. * Alternative 2 is very similar to Alternative 1, but strives to improve effectiveness of treatments, which will result in significantly greater mortality of noxious and invasive weeds, i.e. allows up to label recommended rate of herbicide application and expanded role of biological control.

Effects Summary by Alternative – Cultural Resources (FSEIS, pages 24-25)

Alternative 1	Alternative 2
* Far less potential impact to cultural resources than would uncontrolled and rapid expansion of noxious/invasive weeds.	* No effects to cultural resources in addition to those described for Alternative 1.

Effects Summary by Alternative – Fisheries (FSEIS, pages 25-29)

Alternative 1	Alternative 2
* Impacts of herbicide application (with appropriate mitigation measures) will be minimal. * Effects on aquatic organisms under normal use scenarios should not be detectable. * A spill may result in localized fish mortality, especially to young fingerlings, or mortality to the early developmental stages of other aquatic organisms. However, adherence to mitigation measures will reduce the likelihood of such a spill event.	* Impacts of herbicide application (with appropriate mitigation measures) will be minimal. * Effects on aquatic organisms under normal use scenarios should not be detectable. * A spill may result in localized fish mortality, especially to young fingerlings, or mortality to the early developmental stages of other aquatic organisms. However, adherence to mitigation measures will reduce the likelihood of such a spill event. * An increase in the scope and/or intensity of treatment methods is expected as more acres are detected and treated. It is also expected that annual acreage treated through herbicide control methods will increase as new infestations are detected. Although risks are anticipated to be minor, both the risks and benefits associated with herbicide control of noxious weeds will incrementally increase as treated acres increase.

Effects Summary by Alternative – Human Health (FSEIS, pages 29-32)

Alternative 1	Alternative 2
* Human health impacts from prescribed treatment of noxious/invasive weeds will be insignificant and small, even under a worst case situation. * Workers applying 2,4-D who failed to use protective equipment would be at the greatest risk, although this risk would still be very small.	* Human health impacts from prescribed treatment of noxious/invasive weeds including, application of herbicides at recommended label rates and the additional use of Plateau herbicide, will be insignificant and small. * The potential cumulative effects of herbicide treatment to people, including the use of imazapic, are within the range of potential effects analyzed for Alternative 1.

Effects Summary by Alternative – Recreation (FSEIS, page 33)

Alternative 1	Alternative 2
* Reductions of noxious weed populations will enhance recreation sites and the recreation experience. * Recreationists may encounter treatment crews and witness evidence of chemical and physical treatment such as wilted plants and weed piles.	* No significant effects to recreation resources in addition to those described for Alternative 1. * Protected or restored native plant communities resulting from more effective weed treatment will further enhance recreation sites and the recreation experience

Effects Summary by Alternative – Vegetative Diversity (FSEIS, pages 33-36)

Alternative 1	Alternative 2
* Impacts on native vegetation including TES plants from treatment methods, most notably herbicides, may occur. However, impacts will be of short duration and minimized by mitigation measures. * Ecosystem protection and enhancement will improve under this alternative.	* Impacts on native vegetation including TES plants from treatment methods, most notably herbicides, may occur. However, impacts will be of short duration and minimized by mitigation measures. * The proposed measures associated with Alternative 2, which are intended to improve the effectiveness of weed management, will allow for greater long-term protection and maintenance of native plant diversity and stability of plant communities. * The use of Plateau herbicide may contribute significantly to the success of future rehabilitation projects aimed at restoring native vegetation.

Effects Summary by Alternative – Wildlife (FSEIS, pages 36-38)

Alternative 1	Alternative 2
* Existing plant communities will remain intact and infested sites will be reclaimed. Subsequently, this alternative provides protection to wildlife habitat, including TES. * Potential risks of herbicides affecting wildlife species health are very small.	* Existing plant communities will remain intact and infested sites will be reclaimed. Subsequently, this alternative provides protection to wildlife habitat, including TES. * At the prescribed label rates of herbicide application, potential risks of herbicides affecting wildlife species health are very small. * Measures to improve the effectiveness of existing weed management practices will have the greatest potential to maintain wildlife habitats.

Effects Summary by Alternative – Wilderness & Wild/Scenic Rivers (FSEIS, pages 39-40)

Alternative 1	Alternative 2
* Halting the spread of and reducing existing exotic plant populations will best protect wilderness values as defined in the Wilderness Act and CIWA. * Treatment of noxious weeds, particularly with herbicides, may reduce the wilderness experience for some users.	* Halting the spread of and reducing existing exotic plant populations would best protect wilderness values as defined in the Wilderness Act and Central Idaho Wilderness Act. * Treatment of noxious weeds, particularly with herbicides, may reduce the wilderness experience for some users. * The somewhat expanded role of biological control to that of an activity used in combination with other treatments will enhance the effectiveness of existing treatments. * Restoration of weed sites, including the proposed use of Plateau herbicide, will better achieve the management goals of "preserving natural conditions". * Clarifying the intent of "ground-based" application methods to portray some use of pumps and equipment mounted in jet boats may seem to be an infringement on the "wilderness" experience of some users not anticipating this activity.

Effects Summary by Alternative – Visual Quality (FSEIS, page 40)

Alternative 1	Alternative 2
* The predominance of natural appearing landscapes will enhance the visual quality to some user groups. Visual effects of treatment may adversely affect the experience of others.	* No significant negative effects to visual quality in addition to those described for Alternative 1. * Protected or restored native plant communities resulting from more effective weed treatment will further enhance the visual quality to some user groups.

The Decision

Alternative 2, as Modified on page 21 of this document, is the selected alternative.

All of the modifications are to the Approved Mitigation Measures and Practices as a result of Recommendations or Terms and Conditions from consultations with the US Fish and Wildlife Service on June 23, 2003, and NOAA Fisheries on April 11, 2007. These modifications are designed to further reduce the potential adverse risk of herbicide treatments to Threatened, Endangered or Proposed (T, E, & P) species and do not result in changes to the effects analyzed in the Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement. All modifications are listed as mitigations below.

Under this alternative, the Integrated Weed Management (IWM) components described in the 1999 Record of Decision for Noxious Weed Treatment in the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness will continue to be implemented, with minor modifications and clarifications. The goals and objectives for aggressive integrated noxious/invasive weed management throughout the wilderness continue to drive this Alternative. The Adaptive Management Strategy, Minimum Tool Guidelines, and the associated Decision Matrix described in the 1999 FEIS are incorporated into this alternative (FSEIS, Appendix C & D).

The 1999 FEIS discloses that 1,775 acres on 293 sites were infested with noxious weeds at the time of the analysis. Updated inventories from 2002 identified 4,222 acres on 471 sites within the Wilderness are weed infested. This increase in size and number of known infestations within the Wilderness indicates a need to review our chosen weed treatment alternative to ensure treatment within this expanded area does not lead to adverse effects. In addition, invasive weed inventories as of 2006 indicate 22,616 acres within the Wilderness are weed infested (Appendix B). Inventories continue to reveal a greater extent of invasive weeds. This finding is a result of actual expansion of weeds due to their physiological traits and favorable site conditions following large wildfires and because of the general increased awareness of invasive weeds and increased efforts toward weed detection by the Forest Service and general public.

Newly inventoried noxious/invasive weed sites and expansion of existing sites will be evaluated in accordance with the “Adaptive Management Strategy” described in the 1999 Record of Decision (FSEIS, Appendix L). Anticipating that additional infestations would be discovered, Chapter 4 of the FSEIS analyzes herbicide effects on human health, fish, and wildlife for acreages greater than presently known within the Wilderness. Wilderness weed managers will strive for consistent application of the “Adaptive Management Strategy” and analysis of new sites by using a common procedure for assessing new sites. The type of treatment for new noxious/invasive weed sites will be determined utilizing the decision matrix “Treatments Incorporating Minimum Tool Approach” (FSEIS, Appendix C).

The goal of the integrated weed management strategy presented in Alternative 2 is to focus treatment efforts on invasive weed species that have the potential to invade and spread into native communities on a landscape scale, such as rush skeletonweed and spotted knapweed. These species will dominate native plant communities and alter the natural processes within the wilderness if left unmanaged. Plant species that are opportunistic by nature, such as bull thistle and common mullein, may invade small areas of disturbance and compete with other vegetation for a short period of time. These species generally pose no real threat to the surrounding plant community and are not the intended target for treatment within the Wilderness.

The selected alternative would supplement the existing management direction as described in the Record of Decision for the FC-RONR Wilderness Noxious Weed Treatment FEIS, August 1999. Alternative 2 would clarify or modify existing standards, guidelines, or mitigations associated with weed treatment practices, including: 1) treatment priorities, 2) treatment methods, 3) herbicide application methods, 4) non-treatment practices, 5) monitoring, and 6) mitigation measures.

Alternative 2, as Modified, includes a detailed noxious/invasive weed prevention plan (FSEIS, Appendix I) and a monitoring strategy (FSEIS, Appendix G) to include the monitoring of native plant communities, weed infestations and treatment areas.

Specific details of Alternative 2, as Modified, are described in the Proposed Action, pages 9-12 of this document. The following Approved Mitigation Measures and Practices resulting from consultation are to be implemented in addition to those described in the Proposed Action, Alternative 2. They are to be inserted into the list of mitigation measures described for Alternative 2 under the appropriate heading.

Mitigation Measures and Practices forming the modified Alternative 2:

Herbicide Application

- Avoid the use Tordon 22K (Picloram), Transline (Clorpyralid), and Escort (Metsulfuron Methyl) within annual floodplains where the water table is likely to be within 6 feet of the surface and soil permeability is high (silt loam and sand soils). (Biological Opinion, Terms and Conditions 1.e)

- Picloram has moderate-high persistence in the soil; therefore, it will generally not be applied to the same site on an annual basis. (US Fish and Wildlife Recommendation)

- Minimize the use of combining herbicides where practicable, particularly the combination of picloram and 2,4-D, which when used in combination has been demonstrated to damage gills of catfish. NMFS will be informed regarding implementation of this recommendation. (Biological Opinion, Conservation Recommendation 1)

Riparian Habitats

- Herbicides containing glyphosate without surfactants or toxic additives, such as Rodeo, shall be the product of choice under appropriate site conditions. Where glyphosate is not appropriate, 2,4-D amine salt may be used near streams and ditches. (Biological Opinion, Terms and Conditions 1.c)
- Mixing must take place in an area where accidental spill will not contaminate a stream (including perennial or intermittent waterways, an unprotected ephemeral waterway, or a wetland, [Biological Opinion, Terms and Conditions 1.d])
- Avoid broadcast spraying of products containing 2,4-D amine salt (Weedar 64 and Amine 4) within 15 feet of streams. (Biological Opinion, Terms and Conditions 1.d)

Spill Abatement

- A spill contingency plan will be developed
    - Spill plans will comply with current direction found in FSH 2109.14 Chapter 60, and will include; 1) the name and address of party(s) responsible for accomplishment of the herbicide spill plan; and 2) a description of the herbicide formulation, adjuvants, and surfactants that will be used (Biological Opinion, Terms and Conditions 1.a)

Treatment Records

- Each applicator will maintain a daily log of all weed treatments, and include the following information (Biological Opinion, Terms and Conditions 2.a) :

i. The number of acres treated within 100 feet of streams and greater than 100 feet from streams.

ii. The product names, herbicide formulations, including adjuvants and surfactants, used.

iii. The herbicide application rate.

iv. The application method.

v. The wind speed and air temperature at the time of application.

Rationale for the Decision

We have made our decision, to adopt and implement Alternative 2 as Modified, based on:

1. A review of the FSEIS, appendices, project file, and supporting information such as the Forest Plans.
2. Monitoring results associated with the ongoing noxious weeds program under the 1999 FEIS direction.
3. How well the various alternatives meet the projects Purpose and Need, and
4. Public comments we have received.

Invasive weeds continue to expand within the Frank Church River of No Return Wilderness (FC-RONRW). Even under management prescribed in the 1999 FEIS, and as presented in Alternative 1 of the FSEIS, noxious weeds expanded in both the number of infestations and in the extent of acres. Some of the expansion noted is the result of improved inventory, detection and quantification of existing sites. Other expansion of weeds are a result of new infestations moving into areas disturbed by extensive fires.

However, observations and experience of wilderness weed managers show that control of weeds could be more effective with minor changes to strategy, standards and guidelines, and overall implementation of an integrated weeds program. Alternative 2 as Modified is designed to make those changes and to improve the effectiveness of noxious weeds management.

Alternatives 1 and 2 would continue to authorize integrated weed management (IWM), including the use of herbicides, within the wilderness. However, Alternative 2 allows for minor changes to weed treatment standards and guidelines that would make treatment methods more effective. Alternative 2 as modified integrates the mitigation measures recommended from USFWS and NMFS consultation.

Integrated Weed Management:

The 1999 FEIS committed to an integrated approach to management of noxious weeds in the FC-RONR Wilderness. Even so, the associated analysis emphasized treatment strategy and priority. The Forest Service has taken this opportunity to strengthen the non-treatment strategy for noxious weed management in the FC-RONR Wilderness.

Alternative 2 as Modified clearly identifies our decision to integrate both treatment and non-treatment activities in the Integrated Weed Management program for the FC-RONRW. We believe prevention, coordination, education and inventory are all important management components to be integrated with actual weed treatment activities. Alternative 2 as Modified articulates how we intend to implement these activities (FSEIS, pages 9-14). In particular, Alternative 2 as Modified stresses the importance of noxious/invasive weed prevention. A noxious/invasive weed prevention plan has been developed that incorporates various State laws, Forest Service regulations and policies, and manual direction appropriate for the FC-RONR

Wilderness. This prevention plan is included as Appendix I of the FSEIS and discussed on page 12 of the FSEIS. In addition, the coordination of weed management activities within the wilderness will be achieved to a high degree by the continued support the four National Forests give to the newly established FC-RONRW Cooperative Weed Management Area (CWMA) and the funding of the FC-RONR Wilderness Weed Coordinator position. The Forest Service will be an active participant in the CWMA, and strive to maintain participation by other weed management agencies, private landowners and local weed management experts.

Herbicide approved for Treatment:

Alternative 1 analyzed a range of Herbicides for use.

In addition to herbicides approved for use under the 1999 FEIS and ROD, Alternative 2 as Modified also authorizes the use of Plateau herbicide. Monitoring has shown that herbicide treatment can be very effective at removing target species; however once the target weeds are removed the treated sites often become heavily re-vegetated with cheat grass. Cheat grass is an invasive exotic plant that competes with native plant species, ultimately displacing native vegetation. Since Plateau herbicide is particularly suited for use in treatment of many annual grasses, including cheat grass, it may be incorporated into future site restoration activities. The use of Plateau herbicide as a component of restoration projects outside of the FC-RONRW has improved the success of restoration activities. Similar success is anticipated for future restoration projects within the FC-RONRW.

Setting Priorities for Treatment:

Alternative 1 identifies “general priorities for weed treatment” (1999 ROD, page 11). The narrative discussion and corresponding Table 2.2 may have been interpreted by some readers as being a rigid standard for establishment of treatment priorities by weed category and/or weed species. Alternative 2 as Modified clarifies or modifies existing program standards, guidelines or mitigations associated with treatment practices. Alternative 2 as Modified makes clear our intention is to illustrate general priorities, which may guide District Rangers and weed managers in establishing treatment priorities.

In March, 2003 a formal Cooperative Weed Management Area (CWMA) was established for the FC-RONR Wilderness. Alternative 2 as Modified allows for the flexibility to consider factors on lands adjacent to Wilderness and the recommendations of local specialists, including the FC-RONRW CWMA Steering Committee (FSEIS Alternative 2, page 12). This will allow for the conditions of areas surrounding the FC-RONR Wilderness and the expertise of local authorities to play a role in setting treatment priorities.

In addition, Alternative 2 as Modified allows for newly detected weed species and their relative priority for treatment to be determined by the local District Ranger. This determination will be made following a review of the general priorities by weed category, and consultation with local weed managers, including the FC-RONRW CWMA Steering Committee.

Evaluation of new noxious weed sites:

Alternative 1 established an adaptive management strategy for management of newly discovered weed infestations. The 1999 Record of Decision states "As additional infestations are discovered, each would be evaluated to determine if it fits within the scope of this EIS relative to the issues analyzed and then prioritized for treatment," and "Determining treatment methods for each site would be similar to how existing infestations (weed species, infestation size, and proximity to susceptible habitats) are evaluated." However, there was not a standardized process for consistently documenting the analysis associated with newly identified weed infestations.

Alternative 2 as Modified maintains this adaptive management strategy concept and allows for more consistent assessment of new weed sites by the use of a common evaluation process (FSEIS, Appendix C). This evaluation process will ensure consistent application and consideration of new infestations, provide for specialist assessment as needed, and will result in more consistent treatment of new sites across the Wilderness.

Herbicide Application:

Alternative 1 analyzed ground-based application of herbicides. During implementation of the 1999 FEIS direction an effective system for treatment of weed infestations adjacent to the Salmon River was developed and tested using boat mounted and transported equipment. Observations and experience indicate this is a safe and effective method for herbicide application.

Alternative 2 as Modified clarifies our intention to use herbicide spray apparatus securely mounted within the hull of a jet boat in the FC-RONRW (FSEIS, page 10). Treatment activities using jet boat mounted equipment will require the herbicide applicator to be working on the ground and outside established safety buffer zones. In addition, a second worker will monitor the pump and spray equipment at all times while in operation. Appropriate safety precautions described in the detailed mitigation measures (FSEIS, Appendix E) will be employed. We consider this activity to be "ground-based" as stated in the Record of Decision for the FC-RONRW Noxious Weed Treatment FEIS, August 1999 (ROD, page 13). Jet boat mounted spray apparatus has proven to be an effective and efficient weed treatment tool within the river corridor for the previous four years.

The existing weed treatment strategy (Alternative 1) stresses the importance of following herbicide label instructions, requirements and recommendations. However, Alternative 1 also identifies specific herbicide application rates, which for some herbicides are less than label rates (1999 EIS, page 18 – 20). Application of herbicide at less than label rate is observed to sometimes result in less effective kill of target species. There is some concern that sub-lethal doses of herbicide may result in some plants developing a resistance to a herbicide. There is not a corresponding benefit to applications that are less than label rates.

Therefore, our decision is to implement Alternative 2 as Modified, which allows for the labeled rate of herbicide to be applied (FSEIS, page 11). Herbicide label recommendations provide for the most effective control of target weeds, while also providing for safety to workers, the public and non-target resources. Observations by weed managers, as well as recommendations from FC-RONRW CWMA Steering Committee and other experts, indicate application of herbicides at the labeled rate, and in accordance with all other requirements of the herbicide label, provides the most effective and safe control of target weeds.

Alternative 1 does not discuss calibration. Alternative 1 assumes that herbicides mixed according to label directions will be applied at the correct concentrations, which also implies a consistent rate of herbicide application. Failure to conduct calibration of equipment and personnel can lead to over or under application.

Alternative 2 as Modified addresses this shortcoming, and stresses the importance of calibration of equipment and personnel, by requiring documentation of field calibration exercises (FSEIS, page 11).

Mitigation and current information on the safe use of herbicides:

Alternative 1, includes the mitigation, "EPA would be consulted annually for new information about herbicides proposed for use. Recommendations will be followed to ensure the most safe and effective use" (1999 ROD, page 14). The Forest does not consult with EPA regarding herbicides, however EPA regulations are reviewed annually for any changes in approved herbicide use or herbicides approved for use.

Alternative 2 as Modified appropriately modifies the identified process for wilderness managers to seek updated herbicide information pertaining to risk assessment. The Idaho Department of Agriculture will be contacted periodically to determine the status of revised herbicide risk assessments, and to discuss effective treatment methods (FSEIS, page 11).

Monitoring:

Monitoring is a critical element of weed management in the FC-RONRW. Alternative 2 as Modified provides a detailed monitoring strategy (FSEIS, page 14, and FSEIS Appendix G) including: (1) trends in the number, size and density of weed infestations, (2) the effect of noxious/invasive weed infestations on native vegetation and other wilderness resources, (3) the effect of treatments on target weeds, (4) the effects of treatments on desirable vegetation, and (5) effectiveness of treatments as implemented. This monitoring strategy will aid managers in the prioritization of weed treatment activities, and will provide information necessary to determine if treatment practices should be modified to better meet objectives for effectiveness and safety.

Alternative 2 as Modified identifies a number of mitigation measures (FSEIS, Appendix E) to be implemented in association with weed treatment activities. These mitigation measures are all designed to ensure and/or improve the efficiency and safety of treatment activities.

Alternative 1 was not selected because the FSEIS reveals the clarifications and changes to existing weed treatment standards and guidelines proposed by Alternative 2 as Modified are appropriate, and provide for greater safety to the environment and to the public.

Purpose and Need.

Alternative 1 does not address the elements reflected in the current Purpose and Need.

Alternative 2 as Modified fully addresses each of the elements reflected in the Purpose and Need. Management direction found in Alternative 2 as Modified responds to the continued expansion of noxious weeds, as well as established infestations.

Alternative 2 as Modified meets the need for flexibility in setting priorities for treatment of weed infestations, and includes the recommendations of local experts and the CWMA representing adjacent land managers. Alternative 2 as Modified utilizes the expertise and recommendations of the CWMA rather than adhering to a rigidly set treatment priority based on species, infestation size and location.

Alternative 2 as Modified clarifies the intent of the 1999 decision to use jet boat-mounted equipment which improves the efficiency and effectiveness of weed treatment adjacent to the Salmon River. This treatment process has been used over a multi-year timeframe and has proven to be a safe option within the Wild River corridor.

Alternative 2 as Modified allows for herbicide mixtures to be applied at concentrations equal to the label recommendations. Combined with requirements for calibration of equipment and personnel, the effectiveness of weed treatment will improve with implementation of Alternative 2 as Modified.

Alternative 2 as Modified directs Forest Service Noxious Weed Managers to coordinate closely with the Idaho State Department of Agriculture in order to stay current with herbicide risk assessments and effective treatment methods.

Alternative 2 as Modified allows for greater flexibility in the use of bio-control agents. Bio-control is an important element of an integrated weed management program. As potential workload exceeds our capability to respond, bio-control is a viable tool that can effectively slow the spread of noxious weeds.

Findings Required By Other Laws And Regulations

Numerous laws, regulations and agency directives require that this decision be consistent with their provisions. We have determined that our decision is consistent with all laws, regulations and agency policy relevant to this project. The following discussion is not an all-inclusive listing, but is intended to provide information on the areas raised as issues or comments by the public or other agencies.

National Forest Management Act (NFMA) (Forest Plans)

Management activities are to be consistent with the Forest Plans [16 USC 1604 (i)]. The Forest Plans guide management activities [36 CFR 219.1(b)]. Consistency with the Forest Plans is discussed in Chapter IV of the FSEIS as appropriate by resource. Management activities associated with this action have been reviewed and are consistent with each of the Land Management Plans of the five national forests administering the FC-RONRW. These activities are also consistent with the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness Management Plan.

Wilderness and Wild and Scenic Rivers Direction

The Wilderness Act (1964), the Wild and Scenic River Act (1968), and the Central Idaho Wilderness Act (1980) provide direction for management activities within the FC-RONRW. The Central Idaho Wilderness Act mandates that the FC-RONRW be managed so its community of life is untrammeled by man, its primeval character is retained, and its natural conditions are preserved. Forest Service policy direction is to maintain wilderness in such a manner that ecosystems are unaffected by human manipulation and influences so that plants and animals develop and respond to natural forces (FSM 2320.2). It is also policy to control and eliminate exotic vegetation (FSH 24.21). In keeping with this mandate, Alternative 2 as Modified best controls expanding weed populations that can affect the natural setting and other wilderness values of the FC-RONRW.

Federal Noxious Weed Act of 1974 as amended.

Section 15 of the Federal Noxious Weed Act directs federal agencies to adequately fund an undesirable plants management program; establish integrated management to control or contain undesirable plant species; and, cooperate with State agencies in the management of undesirable plants. Alternative 2 as Modified fulfills the requirements of this Act.

National Forest Noxious Weed Management Policy (FSM 2080-2083)

Alternative 2 as Modified is consistent with the National Forest Noxious Weed Management Policy that requires District Rangers to prevent the introduction and establishment, and provide for the containment and suppression, of noxious weeds; and to cooperate with state agencies.

Forest Service National Weed Management Strategy

The Forest Service has developed a national strategy for managing noxious weeds on national forest system lands. The strategy is intended to implement national policy and provide guidance to local administrative units. The aggressive, integrated approach outlined in Alternative 2 as Modified, fulfills the Agency's strategy.

Executive Order 13112

In February 1999, the President issued Executive Order 13112 establishing the National Invasive Species Council. The EO also directs federal agencies to prevent the introduction of invasive species; detect and respond rapidly to control populations of invasive species; provide for restoration of native species and habitat conditions; promote public education on invasive species; and not to carry out actions that are likely to cause or promote the introduction or spread of invasive species unless the benefits clearly out weigh the harm and measures to minimize the harm are taken in conjunction with the proposed actions. Alternative 2 as Modified complies with this Order particularly to detect and respond rapidly to control populations.

Endangered Species Act (ESA)

ESA Wildlife

A Biological Assessment and Evaluation has been prepared to address the potential impacts of the selected alternative (Alternative 2 as Modified) on Threatened, Endangered and Proposed (T, E, & P) species (FSEIS, Appendix P). The determination of potential impacts of the selected alternative on these species is:

Gray wolf- **Not likely to jeopardize** the continued existence of the species
Bald eagle- **May Affect, Not Likely to Adversely Affect**
Canada lynx- **May Affect, Not Likely to Adversely Affect**

The US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) concurred with these determinations.

ESA Fish

A Biological Assessment and Evaluation (FSEIS, Appendix P) has been prepared to address the potential impacts of the selected alternative on T, E, & P fish species including Snake River spring/summer Chinook salmon, Snake River fall Chinook salmon, Snake River steelhead, the upper Columbia River population segment of bull trout, Snake River sockeye salmon and Westslope cutthrout trout. The determination of potential impacts of the selected alternative on these species is:

Based upon the full scope of proposed project design, the considered action **May Affect**, and is **Likely to Adversely Affect** (**LAA**) Snake River spring/summer Chinook salmon and its designated critical habitat, Snake River sockeye salmon and its designated critical habitat, Snake River steelhead, and the Upper Columbia River population segment of bull trout and its proposed critical habitat. This determination is based upon identified toxicity to macroinvertebrates and unknown and unmitigatable sub-lethal effects concerns associated with proposed application of the Weedar 64 formulation of 2,4-D within riparian zones, as discussed below. The project design will have **No Effect** on Snake River fall Chinook salmon in downstream reaches of the Salmon and Clearwater River drainages.

With the exception of application of Weedar 64 herbicide within riparian zones, all other herbicide-based components of the proposed noxious weed treatment program May Affect, but are Not Likely to Adversely Affect (NLAA) Snake River spring/summer Chinook salmon or its

designated critical habitat, Snake River sockeye salmon or its designated critical habitat, Snake River steelhead, and the Upper Columbia River population segment of bull trout or its proposed critical habitat.

Non herbicide-based components of the noxious weed treatment program, including manual control measures, biological control measures, rehabilitation, seeding and planting, have been determined to have No Effect (NE) on Snake River spring/summer chinook salmon or its designated critical habitat, Snake River fall chinook salmon and its designated critical habitat outside the project area, Snake River Sockeye Salmon or its designated critical habitat, Snake River steelhead, and the Upper Columbia River population segment of bull trout or its proposed critical habitat.

It has additionally been determined that the herbicide-based component of the proposed noxious weed treatment program is **Not Likely to Adversely Affect (NLAA)** Essential Fish Habitat for Snake River spring/summer Chinook salmon and will have **No Effect (NE)** on Essential Fish Habitat for Snake River fall Chinook salmon in downstream reaches of the Salmon and Clearwater drainages. All non herbicide-based components of the proposed program will have **No Effect (NE)** on Essential Fish Habitat for Snake River spring/summer Chinook salmon, and Essential Snake River fall Chinook salmon habitat in downstream reaches of the Salmon and Clearwater River drainages.

The US Fish and Wildlife Service and NOAA Fisheries have been consulted regarding this evaluation and concur with these findings and determinations.

NOAA Fisheries has also prepared a Biological Opinion which concludes the proposed action (Alternative 2) is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of Snake River spring/summer chinook salmon, Snake River steelhead, or Snake River sockeye salmon. In addition, NOAA Fisheries finds that the proposed action will adversely affect Essential Fish Habitat for Snake River chinook salmon.

Required mitigation measures as well as terms and conditions to implement the identified Reasonable and Prudent Measures from the Biological Opinion have been incorporated into the mitigation measures adopted as part of Alternative 2 as Modified (FSEIS, Appendix E).

ESA Plants

No known populations of any threatened, endangered, proposed or candidate plant species occur within the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness (FC-RONRW). **No effects should occur to any threatened, endangered, proposed or candidate plant species.** A Biological Evaluation for Sensitive Plants has been prepared (FSEIS, Appendix P).

Habitat for the sensitive plants Payson's milkvetch, (*Astragalus paysonii*), Giant helleborine (*Epipactis gigantea*), Puzzling halimolobos (*Halimolobos perplexa* var. *perlexa*), Davis stickseed (*Hackelia davisii*) pored lungwort (*Lobaria scrobiculata*), Bank's monkeyflower (*Mimulus clivicola*), Lemhi pentstemon (*Penstemon lemhiensis*), and Borsch's stonecrop (S*edum borschii*)

does occur within the FC-RONRW. The selected alternative **may impact sensitive plants, but is not likely to cause a trend to federal listing or a loss of viability.**

Clean Water Act

Based on the measures outlined in the FSEIS to protect soil and water resources, waters would not be degraded and beneficial uses would be protected.

Executive Order 12898 (Environmental Justice)

The effects of this project on low income and minority populations have been considered and conclude that this project is consistent with the intent of the Environmental Justice Act of 1994 (EO 12898). Representatives from low income and minority populations were notified of this project through the public participation process and no issues with the proposed action were identified in regard to low income and minority populations. Resource analysis disclosed no disproportionate effects to low income or minority populations.

Identification of the Environmentally Preferable Alternative

Alternative #2 as Modified in the Decision is the environmentally preferable alternative. It provides the most comprehensive treatment to limit the spread of noxious weeds and prevent new invaders that currently are threatening FC-RONR Wilderness ecosystems. Potential adverse effects from the use of herbicides on the environment will be negligible in comparison to the long-term adverse environmental and ecological impacts invasive weeds would have if not aggressively treated. The amounts of herbicide prescribed for use at each site and the safety measures taken will keep negative effects at undetectable levels.

Appeal Opportunities and Procedures

This decision is subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215, only by those individuals and organizations who provided comments or otherwise expressed interest during the 45-day comment period on the Draft SEIS. The appeal must meet the requirements at 36 CFR 215.14. Incorporation of documents by reference is not allowed.

The Appeal Deciding Officer is Harv Forsgren, Regional Forester, Intermountain Region. Appeals filed by regular mail, fax or express delivery must be sent to:

Appeals Deciding Officer
USDA Forest Service, Intermountain Region
324 25th Street, Ogden UT 84401
Telephone (801) 625-5605
Fax (801) 625-5277

Appeals may be hand-delivered to the above address between the hours of 8:00 AM and 4:30 PM Mountain Time, Monday through Friday, excluding holidays.

Electronic appeals must be submitted in a rich text (.rtf) format or Microsoft Word (.doc) format as an email message to: appeals-intermtn-regional-office@fs.fed.us. E-mailed appeals must include the project name in the subject line. In cases where no identifiable name is attached to an electronic message, a verification of identiy will be required. A scanned signature is one way to provide verification.

Appeals, including attachments, must be filed within 45 days from the publication date of this notice in *The Recorder Herald*, the newspaper of record, Salmon, Idaho. Attachments received after the 45-day appeal period will not be considered. The publication date in *The Recorder Herald*, newspaper of record, is the exclusive means for calculating the time to file an appeal. Those wishing to appeal this decision should not rely upon dates or timeframe information provided by any other source.

If no appeals are filed within the 45-day time period, implementation of the decision may occur on, but not before, 5 business days from the close of the appeal filing period. When appeals are filed, implementation may occur on, but not before, the 15th business day following the date of the last appeal disposition.

For more information, contact:

Howard Lyman
Project Team Leader
Salmon River Ranger District
304 Slate Creek Road
White Bird, ID 83554
(208)839-2111

Renee Snyder
FC-RONR Wilderness Coordinator
Salmon and Challis National Forest
Forest Headquarters Office
(208)756-5290

Please call us or visit the Forest Service offices listed above, if you have any question about this decision.

Approval

WILLIAM A. WOOD, Forest Supervisor **Salmon and Challis National Forests**	11/28/07 **Date**
SUZANNE C. RAINVILLE, Forest Supervisor **Payette National Forest**	12/4/07 **Date**
FOR **DAVID T. BULL, Forest Supervisor** **Bitterroot National Forest**	11/26/07 **Date**
JANE L. COTTRELL, Forest Supervisor **Nez Perce National Forest**	11/16/07 **Date**