

WSR Suitability Summary Report for Salmon-Challis National Forest

CIPLC Wild & Scenic Rivers Taskforce



Introduction

This report is compiled by members of the Wild and Scenic River (WSR) Taskforce within the Central Idaho Public Lands Collaborative (CIPLC). The CIPLC is an organized group of diverse stakeholders whose mission is to develop recommendations for the management of public lands that reflect the needs and desires of the general public and to then provide those

recommendations to the relevant land management agencies. Since 2017, the CIPLC has been engaged in the plan revision process on the Salmon-Challis National Forest (SCNF). In the fall of 2018, the SCNF announced their intention to proceed with a formal wild and scenic river suitability process as part of the forest plan revision, following the eligibility process that is required by the 2012 Planning Rule. Accordingly, the CIPLC decided to move through our own iterative process to provide our recommendations to the Forest Service, drawing upon the considerable personal and professional expertise of CIPLC members.

The purpose of this report is to summarize the work the WSR Taskforce has done since November 2018. This report is not intended to provide any official recommendations from the CIPLC at this time since the plan revision is currently in flux. Nonetheless, we find significant value in presenting the work we've done thus far as a foundation for future work on wild and scenic rivers on the SCNF.

Our Process

When the CIPLC first convened the WSR Taskforce in November 2018, we discussed several different approaches for how to develop suitability recommendations for the Forest Service. The first idea that arose from the group was to establish a set of suitability 'filters' that we could apply across the board to the eligible stream segment list. Proposed filters for excluding river segments from further suitability consideration included >50% private ownership, overlapping wilderness protection, and presence of active grazing allotments. While this approach generated constructive discussion, we decided not to pursue this approach further, in large part because each river segment could have unique considerations to take into account.

The Taskforce also solicited external guidance from the Clearwater Basin Collaborative, which had done a similar suitability exercise for rivers on the Nez Perce-Clearwater NF in north Idaho. We found value in their method of comparing other streams to the rivers already designated as Wild and Scenic - the Clearwater, Lochsa, and Selway. For waterways on the Salmon-Challis NF, that would entail comparing river segments to the Main and Middle Forks of the Salmon River,

something we kept in mind throughout our process. It is no surprise that all of the river segments we honed in on for potential suitability are tributaries of those designated WSRs.

Through some trial and error, we ultimately developed a multi-phase approach whereby we started with the SCNF draft eligibility list (96 river segments in total) and worked our way through the river segments one-by-one, several times through. This approach, while time-consuming, allowed us to have specific enough discussions about each river segment to a) generate a shared group knowledge of the rivers in question, and b) make informed decisions on what might be suitable and what might not be. In our first cut, we removed 48 out of 96 river segments from further suitability consideration (exactly 50%). The most common reasons for dropping segments off the list at this initial stage were: 1) insufficient length or connectivity to other segments, 2) significant manageability concerns, and 3) lack of exemplary characteristics compared to other eligible rivers in the same geographic area.

In Phase 2, with less river segments to work with, we were able to take an even closer look at suitability, honing in on the importance of separating river segments by geography and comparing them to others in their region. For example, when looking at all of the river segments in the Lost River Range, it became clear to us that Mahogany Creek did not hold a candle to the Pahsimeroi River, a few drainages over. At the conclusion of this stage, we whittled our list down to 31 river segments (32% of total) within five distinct river systems.

Following Phase 2, we had narrowed our list down enough to identify specific segments that we would like to get out in the field and examine in more detail. In August 2019, members of the WSR Taskforce, staff from the Salmon-Challis National Forest, congressional staffers, ranchers, and other stakeholders joined up for a two-day field tour in which we toured the upper headwaters of the Middle Fork, stream segments in the Pioneers Mountains, and the Pahsimeroi River and its forks. In Phase 3, we incorporated what we learned in those summer field tours to narrow down our recommendations further (eight river segments were removed). We also adopted a tiered approach to reflect priority of suitability within our remaining stream segments (Tier 1 = top priority).

In Phase 4, we honed in on the remaining segments within the Camas, Loon, and Horse Creek drainages, where we had not yet refined our list of what tributaries to include. In October 2019, after months of discussions and refinements, we presented our suitability work to the full collaborative group. At that meeting, it was decided that we should develop this summary report to capture the work done by the WSR Taskforce while waiting to see what direction the SCNF is heading for forest planning before proceeding further.

Ultimately, the WSR Taskforce defined eligibility similarly to the Forest Service - any river segment that is free-flowing and has one or more outstandingly remarkable values. Suitability is naturally more fuzzy, but we coalesced around a definition of “an eligible river segment that is exceptional compared to those around it (or is part of an exceptional larger system), and does not present immediate or notable management conflicts with existing uses.”

Summary of River Segments By Region

Here we will summarize our discussions and rationale for different river segments by geographic region. Please reference our [suitability evaluation spreadsheet](#) for additional details. **In total, we have identified 100.1 miles of river and streams (all tributaries of the Middle Fork, a designated WSR) that remain on our preliminary suitability list out of the 708 river miles included within the SCNF’s draft eligibility report.**

Upper Headwaters of Middle Fork Salmon River

A significant portion of our WSR suitability discussions centered around the upper headwaters of the Middle Fork of the Salmon. The Middle Fork is a gold-standard wild and scenic river, one of the original eight rivers designated by Congress with the passage of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1968. So naturally, through our discussions and field trips, we turned our attention to the headwater streams that coalesce to form the Middle Fork: Bear Valley Creek, Marsh Creek, Cape Horn Creek, Elk Creek, Knapp Creek, and Beaver Creek.

At first glance, each of these streams, when considered individually, may seem similar to many other streams on the SCNF (with the possible exception of Marsh Creek). However, their

importance derives not as much from the nature of each individual stream, but rather as a part of a larger system. This system of creeks and streams provides cold, clean water to the Middle Fork downstream, crucial spawning habitat for ESA-listed steelhead and Chinook salmon, and excellent opportunities for fishing and boating (on the larger stream segments). We drew our inspiration for this systems approach from the WSR designation of the upper headwaters of the Snake River in Wyoming in 2009, which similarly included multiple smaller river segments that feed into an already-designated Wild and Scenic River.

Our group also noted that this set of streams was mostly devoid of potential management conflicts; there are no active grazing allotments or private inholdings along these stream segments, and these segments are all connected to the Middle Fork Salmon River, which has been managed as Wild and Scenic for over 50 years. Thus, we did not identify any notable management barriers to WSR suitability in this region.

At this stage of our work, we have identified 62.2 miles of rivers and 10 river segments in this region that remain on our preliminary suitability list.

Frank Church Wilderness & Surroundings

Many of the stream segments included in the draft WSR eligibility list are located in and around the Frank Church Wilderness. Throughout our process, the question of whether or not we should recommend suitable segments within designated wilderness areas remained an active topic of discussion amongst the group. On the one hand, wilderness and wild and scenic designations have many overlapping protections, begging the question of whether a WSR designation in wilderness would add value. On the other hand, the intent and focus of the two protections is fundamentally different; importantly, the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act prohibits the use of presidential powers to authorize federal energy projects (i.e. dams) whereas the Wilderness Act does not. Our group never reached consensus on a blanket approach to WSR suitability in wilderness, so we ultimately just addressed the question on a segment-by-segment basis.

Early on in our process, we removed stream segments that were relatively minor in size (e.g. Cabin Creek 4), have active mining and/or restoration efforts underway (e.g. Yankee Fork), or

had extensive private inholdings (e.g. Panther Creek). In the subsequent phases of our process for this region, we were generally left with tributaries of the Middle Fork and Main Salmon. Through extensive conversations with agency staff, river guides, salmon biologists, and others who know the region well, we narrowed down our suitability list to two major tributaries that clearly stood out above the rest to nearly everyone we talked to - Loon and Camas Creeks. Not only are these the two biggest tributaries to the Middle Fork (a gold-standard Wild and Scenic River), they were identified as being the most important tributaries from fish and recreation perspectives. We ultimately chose to remove Camas Creek segments A and B from our list because of the management problems presented by having a wild and scenic river that starts out as wild, exits the wilderness to have a recreational classification, and then re-enters the wilderness with a wild classification once again. Segment B also includes a number of private inholdings. If those management complexities could be addressed in a reasonable manner, and the private landowners along segment B gave a potential designation their blessing, then we would consider including all three segments on our suitability list.

At this stage of our work, we have identified 37.9 miles of rivers and 3 river segments (Loon Creek A and B + Camas Creek C) in this region that remain on our preliminary suitability list.

Pioneer Mountains

The Pioneer Mountains contain a small but impressive suite of alpine rivers and streams, several of which we visited on our August 2019 field trip. Many of these waterways are located within a recommended wilderness area established in the 1987 Challis Forest Plan. The east side of the Pioneers, especially the Wildhorse Creek and Copper Basin areas, are grazed heavily under several different active allotments.

The streams in this region proved to be some of the hardest for our group to evaluate. On the one hand, we could generally agree that the area is home to some objectively spectacular rivers, such as Wildhorse Creek. On the other hand, we recognized that the significant historical grazing presence in this area meant that successful management of these rivers would likely require

significant buy-in from the permittees. Our group had several spirited discussions regarding the compatibility of grazing and wild and scenic suitability. While grazing is not incompatible with either a recreational or wild classification WSR, our group still recognized that ideally the permittees would be on board with any potentially suitability classification in this area for management to be successful. Going forward, we want to continue having discussions with local ranchers in the Pioneers to see if there is a zone of agreement we could reach regarding WSR suitability, as was achieved in the Owyhees in the 2000s.

At this stage of our work, we did not identify any rivers in this region that remain on our preliminary suitability list, though a couple were right on the bubble (e.g. Wildhorse Creek).

Eastern Ranges (Lemhis + Lost Rivers)

Rivers and streams in the Lemhi and Lost River Ranges are characterized by relatively short and steep gradients coming out of the steep mountains out into high and dry sagebrush valleys. Many of these segments were too small, intermittent, or similar to one another to be carried forward very far in our process. The one waterway that did stand out in this region was the Pahsimeroi River (and its forks) on the east flank of the Lost River Range. We had the opportunity to visit this beautiful river during our August 2019 field trip along with agency staff and a number of local ranchers. While out in the field, we had a thought-provoking discussion amongst the field trip attendees where it became clear that the local ranchers would not be supportive of a WSR designation in that area. The Pahsimeroi, they argued, is a special place in large part due to the lack of people and corresponding human impact. We agreed that there was no obvious benefit that a WSR designation would bring to this particular river at present. This determination is not intended to take away from the spectacular country in that area and the beautiful Pahsimeroi River; our conclusion is merely that the 'tool' of WSR designation is not currently necessary to protect the river values of this particular area.

At this stage of our work, we did not identify any rivers in this region that remain on our preliminary suitability list.

Next Steps

The CIPLC Wild and Scenic Taskforce wrapped up the bulk of our suitability evaluation process in October 2019, when we presented our work to the full collaborative to general agreement to those in attendance at that meeting. We did not ask the collaborative to provide formal consensus on a potential recommendation at that time due to the Forest Service putting the planning process, and thus WSR suitability, on hold for the time being. Given the significant amount of work that the CIPLC members put into WSR suitability, we decided at that October meeting to create this summary report to share our preliminary findings with the Forest Service and the general public. If and when the Forest Service resumes the planning process on either the Salmon or Challis forests, we may bring this topic back up within the collaborative for review and potential recommendation pending member consensus.

Even if the forest plans are not revised in the immediate future, the WSR Taskforce still sees a lot of value in the work that we have done on suitability. It is rare to develop consensus recommendations across a wide range of stakeholders on anything, let alone potential wild and scenic rivers, so we do not want to see our hard work go to waste. We hope that the Forest Service can use this information to prioritize careful management while we wait to see if the suitability process resumes. Looking down the road, this work could serve as the foundation for a collaboratively-driven wild and scenic river designation campaign that respects local values towards land management and permanently protects some of the most ecologically and recreational important rivers in the region.

Please direct any questions on this report to Josh Johnson of the WSR Taskforce at

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Add in some maps?? Or other photos?

Eligible Segments in SCNF Based on 2017 Draft Eligibility Report

(Segments that remain on our suitability list are highlighted in yellow)

River Segment	Mileage	River Segment	Mileage
Alder Creek 2	2.4	Lower Cedar Creek	4.6
Bear Creek 6 A	3.0	Mahogany Creek 3	3.5
Bear Creek 6 B	1.6	Main Fork A	1.9
Bear Valley Creek 1 A	5.3	Main Fork B	3.5
Bear Valley Creek 1 B	4.4	Marble Creek	14.2
Bear Valley Creek 2	1.6	Marsh Creek A	6.0
Beaver Creek 1 A	2.7	Marsh Creek B	4.0
Beaver Creek 1 B	13.4	McKey Creek	2.0
Big Creek 2 A	4.1	Mill Creek 3	10.6
Big Creek 2 B	1.5	Muldoon Canyon	11.8
Big Timber Creek A	7.4	Muskeg Creek	1.9
Big Timber Creek B	6.7	North Fork Big Lost River	24.0
Cabin Creek 4	5.4	North Fork Salmon River	24.8

Camas Creek A	11.2	Pahsimeroi River	1.5
Camas Creek B	11.9	Panther Creek	47.6
Camas Creek C	10.9	Pass Creek	2.8
Cape Horn Creek A	2.3	Patterson Creek 1 A	7.3
Cape Horn Creek B	7.5	Patterson Creek 1 B	1.3
Cherry Creek 1	5.3	Pistol Creek	18.6
Clear Creek 1	18.1	Rapid River A	8.6
DeWitt Creek	1.3	Rapid River B	8.1
East Fork Big Lost River	27.4	Rush Creek	3.8
East Fork Pahsimeroi River	6.9	Salmon River	8.9
East Pass Creek	12.6	Sawmill Creek 4	2.4
Elk Creek 1	8.1	Sheep Creek 8 A	4.0
Fall Creek 1	8.1	Sheep Creek 8 B	2.8
Firebox Creek	3.1	Smithie Creek	3.8
Ford Creek 1	1.0	Soldier Creek 1	1.3
Hayden Creek A	5.9	Star Hope Creek A	5.6
Hayden Creek B	6.4	Star Hope Creek B	11.4
Herd Creek	2.6	Sulphur Creek 3	15.5
Horse Creek 4 A	12.2	Summit Creek 1 A	4.3
Horse Creek 4 B	14.1	Summit Creek 1 B	7.6
Indian Creek 4	20.5	Tenmile Creek 2	4.3
Kane Creek	8.7	Warm Spring Creek 2 A	1.6
Kenney Creek	5.4	Warm Spring Creek 2 B	1.6
Knapp Creek A	4.5	Warm Spring Creek 2 C	6.1

Knapp Creek B	12.1	Warm Spring Creek 3	19.9
Lake Creek 2	8.7	West Fork Camas Creek A	4.5
Lightning Creek	8.1	West Fork Camas Creek B	5.5
Little Basin Creek	5.3	West Fork Pahsimeroi River A	3.1
Little Ditch Creek	3.0	West Fork Pahsimeroi River B	2.6
Lola Creek A	3.9	West Fork Yankee Fork	13.7
Lola Creek B	0.2	Wildhorse Creek A	6.9
Long Lost Creek A	6.0	Wildhorse Creek B	8.1
Long Lost Creek B	2.7	Yankee Fork A	13.5
Loon Creek A	6.5	Yankee Fork B	15.9
Loon Creek B	20.5	Yellowjacket Creek	22.6