

Wilderness.net's Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness Fact Sheet



Introduction

The United States Congress designated the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness in 1980 and it now has a total of 2,358,876 acres. All of the wilderness is in Idaho and is managed by the Bureau of Land Management and the Forest Service.

Description

Few places in America, and nowhere outside of Alaska, provide a Wilderness experience to match the sheer magnitude of the Frank Church-River of No Return, the largest contiguous unit of the National Wilderness Preservation System in the Lower 48. It is second in size only to California's Death Valley Wilderness, which consists of many non-contiguous pieces. This area combines the old Idaho Primitive Area, the Salmon Breaks Primitive Area, territory on six national forests, and a small swath of land managed by the Bureau of Land Management. Senator Frank Church played a key role in the passage of the Wilderness Act of 1964, and his name was added to the Wilderness in 1984, shortly before his death. It is a land of clear rivers, deep canyons, and rugged mountains. Two white-water rivers draw many human visitors: the Main Salmon River, which runs west near the northern boundary; and the Middle Fork of the Salmon, which begins near the southern boundary and runs north for about 104 miles until it joins the Main. Reaching 6,300 feet from the river bottom, the canyon carved by the Main Salmon is deeper than most of the earth's canyons--including the Grand Canyon of the Colorado River--and this fast-moving waterway has been dubbed the River of No Return. In the northeastern corner of the Wilderness, the Selway River flows north into the nearby Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness. Trout fishing usually rates from good to excellent. The Middle Fork, the Selway, and nearly all of the Main Salmon are Wild and Scenic Rivers. Unlike the sheer walls of the Grand Canyon, these rivers rush below wooded ridges rising steeply toward the sky, beneath eroded bluffs and ragged, solitary crags. The Salmon River Mountains dominate the interior of the Wilderness. Without a major crest, these mountains splay out in a multitude of minor crests in all directions, and rise gradually to wide summits. East of the Middle Fork, the fabulous Bighorn Crags form a jagged series of summits, at least one topping 10,000 feet. The Crags surround 14 strikingly beautiful clearwater lakes. Hiking up from the rivers into the mountains brings sudden elevation changes. Great forests of Douglas fir and lodgepole pine cover much of the area, with spruce and fir higher up and ponderosa pine at lower altitudes. The forests are broken by grassy meadows and sun-washed, treeless slopes. A dry country, as little as 10 inches of precipitation falls near the rivers. As much as 50 inches may fall on the mountaintops, but much of it is snow. Despite the dryness, wildlife abounds. As many as 370 species have been identified in a single year, including eight big game animals. Wildfire has been allowed to play a more natural role in the wilderness in recent years. Tens of thousands of acres have burned without the interference of humans, producing a mosaic of vegetation from severely burned timber stands in some areas to lightly burned grass slopes and understory in other areas. A network of 296 maintained trails (approximately 2,616 miles worth) provides access to this seemingly endless area, crossing rivers and streams on 114 bridges. This is a paradise for horsepackers. Thirty-two Forest

Service Roads lead to 66 trailheads. Despite the extensive trail system, an amazing 1.5 million acres remains trail-free. Small planes are allowed to land on several primitive airstrips dating back to the days before Wilderness designation. Jet boats are allowed on the Main Salmon. Dozens of outfitters offer float, jetboat, horsepacking, backpacking, and ski trips. For information, contact the Idaho Outfitters and Guides Association, P.O. Box 95, Boise, ID 83701; (208) 342-1438.

Leave No Trace

How to follow the seven standard Leave No Trace principles differs in different parts of the country (desert vs. Rocky Mountains). Click on any of the principles listed below to learn more about how they apply in the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness.

1. [Plan Ahead and Prepare](#)
2. [Travel and Camp on Durable Surfaces](#)
3. [Dispose of Waste Properly](#)
4. [Leave What You Find](#)
5. [Minimize Campfire Impacts](#)
6. [Respect Wildlife](#)
7. [Be Considerate of Other Visitors](#)

For more information on Leave No Trace, [Visit the Leave No Trace, Inc. website.](#)

Area Management

The Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness is part of the 110 million acre National Wilderness Preservation System. This System of lands provides clean air, water, and habitat critical for rare and endangered plants and animals. In wilderness, you can enjoy challenging recreational activities like hiking, backpacking, climbing, kayaking, canoeing, rafting, horse packing, bird watching, stargazing, and extraordinary opportunities for solitude. You play an important role in helping to *"secure for the American people of present and future generations the benefits of an enduring resource of wilderness"* as called for by the Congress of the United States through the Wilderness Act of 1964. Please follow the requirements outlined below and use Leave No Trace techniques when visiting the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness to ensure protection of this unique area.

Bureau of Land Management Information

Unless otherwise specified, no motorized equipment or mechanical transport, with the exception of wheelchairs, is allowed. This is generally true for all federal lands managed as designated wilderness.

Forest Service Information

General Wilderness Prohibitions

Motorized equipment and equipment used for mechanical transport is generally prohibited on all federal lands designated as wilderness. This includes the use of motor vehicles, motorboats, motorized equipment, bicycles, hang gliders, wagons, carts, portage wheels, and the landing of aircraft including helicopters, unless provided for in specific legislation.

In a few areas some exceptions allowing the use of motorized equipment or mechanical transport are described in the special regulations in effect for a specific area. Contact the Forest Service office or visit the websites listed below for more specific information.

These general prohibitions have been implemented for all national forest wildernesses in order to implement the provisions of the Wilderness Act of 1964. The Wilderness Act requires management of human-caused impacts and protection of the area's wilderness character to insure that it is "unimpaired for the future use and enjoyment as wilderness." Use of the equipment listed as prohibited in wilderness is inconsistent with the provision in the Wilderness Act which mandates opportunities for solitude or primitive recreation and that wilderness is a place that is in contrast with areas where people and their works are dominant.

Wilderness-Specific Regulations

Wilderness managers often need to take action to limit the impacts caused by visitor activities in order to protect the natural conditions of wilderness as required by the Wilderness Act of 1964. Managers typically implement 'indirect' types of actions such as information and education measures before selecting more restrictive measures. When regulations are necessary, they are implemented with the specific intent of balancing the need to preserve the character of the wilderness while providing for the use and enjoyment of wilderness.

The following wilderness regulations are in effect for this area. Not all regulations are in effect for every wilderness. Contact the Forest Service office or visit the websites listed on the 'Links' tab for more specific information about the regulations listed.

ALL VISITORS

- Group size is limited to no more than 20 people.
- Do not shortcut switchbacks.
- Storing equipment, property, or supplies (caching) for more than 14 consecutives within a 45-day period is prohibited.
- Do not place salt to attract wildlife.
- Do not dispose of debris, garbage, or other waste in the Wilderness. Pack it out.
- All visitors are required to use portable toilets and pack out all human waste.
- All visitors must use a fire pan for fires in the river corridors.
- Public nudity is not allowed in the Salmon River and Middle Fork River Corridors.
- As with all designated Wilderness, mechanical transportation (including wagons, game carts, and other vehicles) is prohibited.
- Landing aircraft, dropping, or picking up any supplies, materials, or person by means of an aircraft or helicopter is prohibited within the Salmon Wild and Scenic River corridor.

-- Open (uncontained) fire outside of a fire ring provided by the Forest Service or without using a fire pan is prohibited within a 1/4 mile of the Chamberlain airstrip.

OVERNIGHT VISITORS

-- Camping within a 250 yard radius of Barth Hot Springs is not allowed.

-- Camping in areas outside the river corridors is limited to no more than 14 consecutive days within 45-day period.

-- Camping in the Middle Fork Wild and Scenic River Corridor is limited to no more than 8 days.

-- Camping in the Salmon Wild and Scenic River Corridor is limited to no more than 14 days.

STOCK USERS

-- Groups are limited to no more than 20 head of pack or saddle stock in general and 12 head when camping.

-- All hay, grain, straw, cubes, pelletized feed, or mulch must be certified as being noxious weed free or noxious seed free by an authorized State of Department of Agriculture official or designated county official. Each individual bale or container must be tagged or marked as weed free and must reference the written certification.

-- Grazing or camping with pack or saddle stock for more than 3 nights within a 30-day period is prohibited within 200 feet of Crescent Meadows, Fish Lake Meadow, and Cougar Basin.

-- Riding, hitching, tethering, or hobbling pack or saddle stock is prohibited in the Chamberlain airstrip campground (except at designated sites).

-- Pack or saddle stock must either be led or ridden (no free-trailing of stock).

-- Pack or saddle stock must be must be led or ridden in single file.

-- Livestock salt should be fully contained off the soil surface.

WATERCRAFT USERS

-- A permit is required for all watercraft on the Middle Fork and Salmon River. A permit is required to enter or to be on the Salmon Wild and Scenic River with a power boat.

-- The possession or use of prohibited water craft (jet-skies, air boats, hover craft, etc.) in the Salmon Wild River Corridor is not allowed.

-- Solid waste must be removed from the Wild and Scenic River corridors.

Wilderness Permit System

A wilderness permit system has been implemented for this wilderness. This involves a use limiting permit system with quotas and reservations. Wilderness permit systems are implemented to collect information on use levels and patterns and as an education and information tool. Use limiting systems are implemented after monitoring has determined that current use levels are resulting in unacceptable impacts to the resource and/or to the wilderness recreation experience. These systems

help distribute visitor use throughout the season and help minimize crowded conditions at popular areas. People interested in visiting the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness should [contact the Forest Service office](#) or [view the 'Links' tab](#) for more information about this permit system, which may vary by location or time of the year.

Fees

The following user fee system(s) have been implemented for this wilderness: RIVER PERMIT. Fees are most often used to offset the operating costs of a permit system or to help fund management activities such as trail maintenance. Contact the national forest office or visit the websites listed below for more specific information on this fee system.

Contacts

West Fork Ranger District

6735 WEST FORK RD
DARBY, MT 59829

Phone: 406-821-3269

Phone: 208-935-2513

Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forest

903 3RD STREET
KAMIAH, ID 83536

Phone: 208-842-2245

Red River Ranger District

ELK CITY RANGER STATION
PO BOX 416
ELK CITY, ID 83525

Phone: 208-839-2211

Salmon River Ranger District

SLATE CREEK RANGER STATION
304 SLATE CREEK ROAD
WHITEBIRD, ID 83554

Phone: 406-363-7100

Bitterroot National Forest

1801 N FIRST
HAMILTON, MT 59840

Phone: 208-634-0600

Krassel Ranger District

500 NORTH MISSION STREET
MCCALL, ID 83638

Phone: 208-634-0700

Payette National Forest

800 W LAKESIDE AVE
MCCALL, ID 83638

Phone: 208-879-4101

Middle Fork Ranger District

PO BOX 750 HWY 93
CHALLIS, ID 83226

Phone: 208-865-2700

North Fork Ranger District
PO BOX 180
NORTH FORK, ID 83466

Phone: 208-756-5100

Salmon-Challis National Forest
1206 SOUTH CHALLIS STREET
SALMON, ID 83467

Links to Other Websites

[Salmon-Challis National Forest, Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness](#)

Links on Wilderness.net

[National, Regional and Local Wilderness Organizations \(NGOs\)](#)


A listing of societies, organizations, coalitions and other wilderness-related advocacy and stewardship groups.

[Career and Volunteer Opportunities](#)

A listing of sites providing information about wilderness- and environmentally-related career and volunteer opportunities.

Applicable Wilderness Law(s)


Law	Date	Acreage Change (in acres)
Public Law 96-312	July 23, 1980	2,239,000
Central Idaho Wilderness Act - Public law 96-312 (7/23/1980) To designate certain public lands in central Idaho as the River of No Return Wilderness, to designate a segment of the Salmon River as a component of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System, and for other purposes		

 [download 96-312](#) - Relevant legislation found on page(s): 2-3.

Public Law 98-231	March 14, 1984	0
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(No official title, renames River of No Return Wilderness) - Public law 98-231 (3/14/1984) To rename the "River of No Return Wilderness" in the state of Idaho as the "Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness"


NOTE: Name changed from River of No Return Wilderness to Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness to honor Idaho Senator Frank Church.

 [download 98-231](#) - Relevant legislation found on page(s): 1.

Public Law 111-11	March 30, 2009	0
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Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009 - Public law 111-11 (3/30/2009) An act to designate certain land as components of the National Wilderness Preservation System, to authorize certain programs and activities in the Department of the Interior and the Department of Agriculture, and for other purposes.

NOTE: +10/-10 acre land exchange.

 [download 111-11](#) - Relevant legislation found on page(s): 147-149.

Public Law 113-136

July 25, 2014

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Idaho Wilderness Water Resources Protection Act - Public law 113-136 (7/25/14) To authorize the continued use of certain water diversions located on National Forest System land in the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness and the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness in the State of Idaho, and for other purposes.

 [download 113-136](#)