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United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Nez Perce
National
Forest

Rt. 2, Box 475
Grangeville, ID 83530

REPLY TO:

DATE:

Everett E. Loomis
Box 205
Donnelly, Idaho 83615

Dear Mr. Loomis:

Following is the information you requested concerning the history of the Salmon River road. Much of the information came from the files of the Nez Perce and Payette National Forests, and the remainder came from Mr. Ace Barton, a Forest Service retiree who lives in Riggins, Idaho.

In the 1880s a wagon road was built that ran from Mt. Idaho through Florence, down to French Creek, across the Salmon at Knott's Ferry (French Creek), and back up to the Burgdorf/Warren area. Soon after, local residents constructed a trail up the north side of the Salmon River from Riggins to Robbins Creek, which is just upstream from the ferry crossing. At Manning Crevice, the trail was inundated for about 3 months each year during high water, and a detour had to be made up and over Kelley mountain, which added about an extra six hours to the journey with loaded pack animals. In the 1890's, a bridge was constructed at the Knott's Ferry site. The bridge fell down 3 or 4 years after it was built, and travelers went back to using a ferry to cross the Salmon. During this time there were various unconnected short stretches of trail along the south side of the Salmon River.

The road that eventually became U.S. 95 from White Bird to Riggins was originally built in 1906 to 1908. It became the major north-south transportation route, and the Burgdorf to Florence route received little use after that. The trail up the north side of the Salmon continued to provide access to the Forest and for residents along the river.

In 1908, a wagon road was built from Riggins along the south side of the Salmon to Short's Bar, about 2 miles up the main Salmon from its junction with the Little Salmon River. The present road, however, was largely constructed by the CCC from 1934 to 1939. The original intent was to construct a road along the Salmon River from Riggins clear through to Salmon, Idaho. The road was surveyed in approximately its present location from Riggins to French Creek in 1934. The six miles of road south of the Salmon River between Riggins and Lake Creek were built by the Riggins CCC Camp 106 in 1935 and 1936. In 1937, that portion was surfaced with crushed rock and the trail north of the river between Lake Creek and Manning Crevice was widened, again by the Riggins CCC.

CCC Camp 1348 was established at French Creek in the mid-30s. After reworking the road from Burgdorf to the Salmon, the French Creek CCC began construction on the road south of the Salmon from French Creek to Manning Crevice. The French Creek CCC camp was largely supplied by pack string traveling the trail north of the river from Riggins. Supplies crossed the river at French Creek on the tram which is still in place today. Riggins and French Creek were connected by road in 1938. The river was spanned at Lake Creek and Manning Crevice by cable suspension bridges.

Work continued from French Creek on up the river, but by 1940 the CCC camps had been disbanded. The road had been built to within about a mile of the present terminus at Vinegar Creek, a "far piece" from Salmon, Idaho. The Lake Creek Bridge was destroyed by fire July 25, 1947, and was replaced by the present steel and concrete structure. In 1962, the last mile of road was completed to provide another boat launch and pick-up site above the Vinegar Creek rapids. The road was dedicated as a Federal Forest Highway from Riggins to Carey Creek in 1981. Maintenance and some upgrading work has continued on the Salmon River Road by the Nez Perce and Payette National Forests and by Idaho County. Idaho County now maintains the full length of the road. Currently, the Federal Highway Administration is considering reconstructing the lower portion from Riggins to Allison Creek.

Attached are some copies of historical documents relating to the Salmon River Road's history. Future plans for improving the road will be handled jointly by the Forest Service and Idaho County. If you have any further questions about the road's history, they could probably best be answered by some of the area "old timers" such as Mr. Barton.

Sincerely,

TOM J. KOVALICKY
Forest Supervisor

cc: M.Cook
D.Mullinix
B.Stata: Payette N.F.