Clearwater Defender

News of the Big Wild

A Publication of Friends of the Clearwater

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How hatchery fish threaten our wild salmon and steelhead

Katie Bilodeau

This summer, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) solicited public comments on potential environmental impacts that might arise from approving fifteen Snake River Basin hatchery-operation plans. The agency issued an environmental assessment, which is a document that analyzed whether the proposed hatchery operations had the potential to significantly impact wild, ESA-listed salmon and steelhead. Under the National Environmental Policy Act, if NMFS finds a potential for significant impact, it must analyze those impacts with a more detailed document, an environmental impact statement. If NMFS finds no potential impact, it could issue a "finding of no significant impact" and approve hatchery operations. Friends of the Clearwater submitted comments that articulated the need for an environmental impact statement because hatchery operations impose risks to conserving and recovering wild fish populations.

Wild Clearwater Country, FOC File Photo

The reason Idaho has hatcheries is so Idaho can have a salmon and steelhead fishery. There are two kinds of hatcheries: integrated and segregated hatcheries. Integrated hatcheries use broodstock (mature fish used to breed the next generation) from the wild fish population. Even though integrated hatcheries are often aimed at conserving and recovering the fish species, integrated hatcheries can negatively impact the genetics of the wild populations if not operated carefully. Segregated hatcheries, however, use hatchery (not wild) broodstock, so fish are genetically distinct from their wild counterparts. Segregated hatcheries are intended to supplement rivers and streams with salmon and steelhead that anglers can catch and keep. Most of the hatcheries in Idaho are segragated hatcheries. While either

See more about hatcheries page 4

The return of the great bear: History, politics and recovery

Gary Macfarlane

This past summer and fall, it appears there were at least three confirmed grizzlies in the Nez Perce and Clearwater National Forests. That exciting news was confirmed by a radio collar on a bear and trail cameras, the photos from which quite conclusively revealed grizzly bears. However, this news is not all positive. Most of the cameras were set up for bait stations to hunt black bears in Idaho. The grizzlies were attracted to the human food in the bait stations. Bear baiting in Idaho and Wyoming is the subject of a lawsuit (see the *Summer 2019 Defender* for more details) because of the threat it poses to grizzlies and because it habituates bears to human food. This article discusses the history of grizzlies and their recovery in what the US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) terms the Bitterroot Ecosystem (which includes the Clearwater Basin), the three (maybe more) grizzlies that were found in the Nez Perce and Clearwater National Forests this summer and fall, and recent activities by Friends of the Clearwater (FOC) and others (Tribal organizations, other conservationists, scientists, and agencies) to promote grizzly recovery across the Bitterroot Ecosystem and US northern Rockies.

I - Some History

Part 1-A The Grizzlies

Prior to the 2000s, the last grizzly confirmed in the Clearwater, Salmon, Bitterroot (Montana), and other adjacent drainages was in 1956 or 1946, depending on the source. Until the relatively recent advent of trail cameras and DNA analysis from hair snagging, confirmed usually meant killed,

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WISH LIST

We are seeking the below items to assist us with field work and community outreach:

GPS Navigation Unit (New/Used)

Pop-up Shelter/Canopy (New)

Portable Movie Screen (New)

THANK YOU TO THE INDIVIDUALS THAT DONATED BINOCULARS AND DIGITAL CAMERAS TO US THIS SUMMER!

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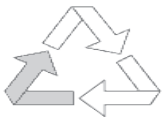

Friends of the Clearwater

Keeping Idaho's Clearwater Basin Wild

The Clearwater Defender
is a publication of:

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Friends of the Clearwater, a recognized non-profit organization since 1987, defends the Clearwater Bioregion's wildlands and biodiversity through a Forest Watch program, litigation, grassroots public involvement, and education. The Wild Clearwater Country, the northern half of central Idaho's "Big Wild," contains many unprotected roadless areas and wild rivers and provides crucial habitat for countless rare plant and animal species. Friends of the Clearwater strives to protect these areas, restore degraded habitats, preserve viable populations of native species, recognize national and international wildlife corridors, and bring an end to industrialization on public lands.

The *Clearwater Defender* welcomes artwork and articles pertaining to the protection of the "Big Wild." Articles and viewpoints in *The Defender* do not necessarily reflect the views of Friends of the Clearwater.

Friends of the Clearwater is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. All contributions to Friends of the Clearwater are tax-deductible.

Publication

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A book review by Ashley Lipscomb

In *This Land: How Cowboys, Capitalism, and Corruption are Ruining the American West,* Christopher Ketcham weaves personal tales with historical context, leading the reader on a journey to understand the current public lands quick-draw standoff we find ourselves in today. Sometimes he does it with a beautiful woman, sometimes as a solo nude dude. His goal — compile the issues and find out who's to blame. According to Ketcham, it's cattle barons spreading bovine with serious munchies across the West, an unusual sect of U.S. Constitution-carrying Mormons and their minstrel militia, the spineless federal government (both its land management agencies and several administrations to boot), and big pseudo-conservation organizations. It's a pill of a message, but we must swallow.

Ketcham's book serves as a compilation of first-hand accounts of landscape desecration from biologists, law enforcement officers run off of the front lines, citizens, and often overlooked regional activists. Traveling from Escalante, UT, up to northern Idaho and everywhere in between, Ketcham witnesses the Bureau of Land Management dragging decommissioned naval anchors and chains across prime sage grouse habitat, gains a birds-eye view of road building and logging across the Payette, Nez Perce - Clearwater, and Colville National Forests ultimately for corporate gain, and howls for Echo, the first wolf to return to Arizona in 70 years, only to be shot and killed by a hunter. This is only some of the atrocities driven by capitalism, free-range enterprise, or hate in the case of Echo.

It all seems to be happening so fast, but according to retired federal employees and certain activists that Ketcham interviewed, this erosion has been occurring for decades. These former employees warn of the networks federal agencies create to get around the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the fundamental law that allows citizens a say in proposals on federal public lands. The former employees also despise collaboratives, noting that these secretive groups operate outside of the public's purview — a clear violation of NEPA. In fact, politicians often assemble the collaborative players, and taxpayers fund it!

Ketcham's conclusion to the deterioration of the West: remove cows from public lands. While this could stop sage grouse extinction, protect biodiversity, and end the senseless carnivore slaughter, the answer may not be that simple for other wildlands. For example, the Nez Perce and Clearwater National Forests contain few grazing allotments. However, eliminating politics from public lands policy, and replacing federal land management agencies with new ones (sans the line officers), are big-picture solutions. We need to create new legislation to replace our hollowed-out laws. These are all bold moves for sure. I think we realize, though, that what's happening now, can't continue into the future.

Editor's Note: Starting in November, Ashley will be working for Buffalo Field Campaign in West Yellowstone, Montana. Ashley was our first ever Membership & Development Director, and she filled that position with great care and passion over the past four years. Her personal touch with members and the public-at-large will be missed, and we wish her nothing but the best in her new job. Thank you Ashley!

Great news! We have been chosen to participate in this year's market, which will take place on Thursday, December 5 from 5:00 - 8:00 pm in the Great Room of the 1912 Center in Moscow. The on-line giving portion of the market begins on Friday, November 29. The mission of the Alternative Giving Market of the Palouase (AGMP) is to "give residents of the Palouse meaningful alternatives to holiday gift giving and an opporunity to support local nonprofits." Stay tuned for FOC's holiday cards — all proceeds from our cards go directly back to us. Learn more about the AGMP and other groups that are participating at agmpalouse.org.

FOC File Photo

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type of hatchery impose risk, segregated hatcheries cause larger negative impacts on wild fish.

Hatchery fish threaten the survival of wild fish for ecological and genetic reasons. Ecologically, if habitat is limited and hatcheries release too many fish, those hatchery fish will compete for the limited space and resources needed by vulnerable and recovering wild fish populations. High densities of fish can inhibit individual growth, cause premature emigration, increase competition for food, and cause increased mortality.

Additionally, studies have found that hatchery fish are more aggressive or dominant juveniles. When hatchery fish are released in larger numbers, those higher concentrations of fish can attract predators. Aggressive behavior can augment this dynamic, leading to increased predation. Increased predation sweeps up wild fish mixed into areas with hatchery fish, resulting in higher predation rates of wild fish as well. Instead of creating a path to recovery where the offspring of wild fish outnumber their parents and survive to successfully reproduce, pressures such as these merely allow wild offspring to replace the parents. Competition therefore prohibits the growth of wild salmon or steelhead populations, and growth is critical to any eventual recovery. But, hatchery fish pose more than just ecological risks to wild fish—there are genetic risks as well.

To appreciate how segregated hatchery fish and their genetics might adversely impact wild fish, it is useful to understand the genetic concepts of "fitness" and "selection." "Fitness" is the reproductive success of an organism with a specific genetic makeup (a "genotype"); "fitness" is how many offspring a genotype leaves behind that survive and reproduce. Offspring production can fail (and lead to reduced fitness) at many points: when eggs do not hatch, when fish do not survive their early life stages, when fish do not return from the ocean, or when fish do not mate. "Selection" is the process where certain traits become more prevalent in a species than other traits. Both fitness and selection inform why fish from segregated hatcheries pose potentially significant risks to wild salmon and steelhead.

Researchers have found that selection in hatcheries favor different traits than the selection that occurs in the wild. Selection in hatcheries produce fish that thrive in hatcheries, but perform poorly in natural stream environments. And, research has found that these underlying traits can be passed onto the next generation. This is a problem when returning hatchery fish escape anglers' hooks, return to spawn in streams, and cross-breed with genetically wild salmon and steelhead. Because hatcheries in Idaho transport many hatchery smolt to area streams to release them, spawning adults return to either the hatchery or the stream where they were released. Returning hatchery fish migrate upstream at the same time that the wild fish do, so there is a risk of interbreeding. A wild-hatchery hybrid or a stream-hatched offspring of two hatchery parents will look wild because it is not tagged or has a clipped adipose fin. But, genetically this offspring will have reduced fitness and its hatchery ancestry will reduce its ability to survive and breed, even if those genetic variants might eventually be weeded out.

And of course, where there are larger releases of hatchery fish or smaller populations of wild fish, the above factors can have increasingly potent impacts. For example, we have recently seen some all-time lows for ESA-listed steelhead. Last year, according to the Fish Passage Center, there were only 53,536 steelhead that passed Lower Granite Dam. Of that number, only 12,135 (roughly 23 percent) were unclipped; yet this fact does not reveal the genetic makeup those fish have.

These concerns were the type of comments that Friends of the Clearwater submitted to NMFS about the potentially significant environmental impacts of the Snake River Basin hatcheries. While some of our comments applied to all hatcheries, we did focus on impacts to wild steelhead. The Conservation Angler, Snake River Waterkeeper, and The Wild Fish Conservancy joined our comments. Please email the office if you are interested in reading what we submitted, and we will keep you updated with whether NMFS decides to analyze these impacts in an environmental impact statement.

A more thorough discussion of the science summarized can be found in the following academic papers:

*Araki et al. 2007. *Genetic Effects of Captive Breeding Cause a Rapid, Cumulative Fitness Decline in the Wild,* Science 318: 100-103.

*Kostow 2009. *Factors that contribute to the ecological risks of salmon and steelhead hatchery programs and some mitigating strategies*, Rev. Fish Biol Fisheries 19:9-31.

Dworshak Fisheries Complex on the N. Fork Clearwater
USFWS Photo Credit

Learn more about the issues at
friendsoftheclearwater.org

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though agency ideology seems to play a major role in whether good evidence is considered definitive or not. The late Bud Moore, a famous ranger in the Lochsa District in the mid-1900s, was credited in written accounts of seeing the last grizzly track in 1946 in the upper Lochsa. Some written accounts state a Ranger Puckett or Bud Moore as killing the last grizzly in 1956 in the Lochsa, a charge Bud Moore claimed was inaccurate.

Dr. David Mattson has proposed that even though central and north-central Idaho, and the eastern fringe of the Bitterroot Range in Montana, have significant wild country, the fact that grizzlies ate salmon was perhaps the major factor in their demise. In essence, it was easy to locate the bears along streams and shoot them. The roadless lands in the *Big Wild* (also known as the Greater Salmon - Selway or Greater Salmon - Clearwater Ecosystems) are greater in terms of acreage than what is found in Greater Yellowstone or Northern Continental Divide Ecosystems, which boast by far the most grizzlies in the lower 48 states. Other factors in the great bear's demise in the *Big Wild* includes the lack of a large protected area similar to Yellowstone or Glacier National Parks. Sheepherders were also hostile to grizzlies; many thousands of sheep grazed over much of the Clearwater and portions of the Salmon River drainages in the first half of the 1900s.

In the latter half of the 1900s, several reports of grizzlies were documented in the 70s and 80s from the Clearwater or Salmon drainages, although none of them were considered confirmed. *The Clearwater Story: A History of the Clearwater National Forest* (an official Forest Service publication) by Ralph Space claims a photo of a grizzly was taken in the upper North Fork Clearwater in 1977. Studies by W. Melquist and C. Groves of the Idaho Fish and Game Department (IDFG) in the 80s turned up good evidence, including a track seen by one of them in the North Fork Clearwater. Camera tracking in 1990 and 1991 reportedly turned up no grizzlies. It is unlikely those cameras were as technologically advanced as the readily available and more modern trail cameras. Only 559 photos of wildlife were taken in those studies and of that number, 265 were considered bear photos. FWS's 2000 Environmental Impact Statement on grizzly recovery in the Bitterroot does not state whether any of those 265 bear photos showed what might be a grizzly.

In spite of skepticism from the FWS and other agencies, there were fairly reliable reports of grizzlies in the Clearwater Basin throughout the last few decades of the 1900s and in the early 2000s. For example, Gene Eastman, a retired IDFG conservation officer for the North Fork stated in a letter he believed grizzlies were never completely extirpated in the Clearwater country, essentially the land north of the Salmon River in the Selway - Bitterroot Wilderness and points north in the Clearwater.

Upper North Fork Roadless Area, Clearwater National Forest
Fred Rabe Photo Credit

There are also persistent rumors of grizzlies killed illegally in the Clearwater country. In the early 2000s, a bear was known to be in the Bitterroot Valley in Montana, possibly headed for the Bitterroot Range, according to information from Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks. A couple of documentation efforts were undertaken by conservationists, one by Friends of the Bitterroot and one by Alliance for the Wild Rockies, Great Bear Foundation, Friends of the Bitterroot and Friends of the Clearwater to document bears in the region in the early 2000s.

The skepticism from agency heads seemed to change a bit in 2007, when a grizzly was illegally killed in Kelly Creek, a wild North Fork Clearwater tributary, over bait. That bear was related to those in the Selkirk, which was somewhat of a surprise as most expected such a bear to come from the continental divide population north and east of Missoula, Montana.

Friends of the Clearwater filed a Freedom of Information Act request to the Nez Perce and Clearwater National Forests office to discover if there were any sightings since 2007. We found some intriguing, though not entirely conclusive photos from the Mallard - Larkins, as well as a report from an expert agency biologist along the South Fork Clearwater.

Last year, a grizzly was found in the Bitterroot Valley, not far from the eastern flank of the Selway - Bitterroot Wilderness, on a golf course that abuts a wildlife refuge along the Bitterroot River. This bear was trapped and moved far to the north even though he was just eating earthworms and posed no threat to people. Unfortunately, he was killed this year because he was attracted to chicken coops and other unsecured food sources in northwest Montana.

The upshot is grizzlies are moving into the Wild Clearwater. As David Mattson has pointed out, their range expansion may not necessarily be due to an increase in numbers, but rather bears dealing with the vagaries of food supply in the northern Rockies in light of climate change and other human factors. His studies also show there is excellent habitat in the Clearwater Basin and surrounding ar-

eas, perhaps some of the best. According to a 2001 study by World Wildlife Fund Canada, the biggest concentration of good grizzly habitat in the Rockies of the US and southern Canada is centered on the Clearwater Basin.

Part I-B Agency Grizzly Bear Recovery Efforts

Grizzly bears were listed as threatened in the US outside of Alaska in the 1970s. Recovery Areas were identified near Yellowstone, the Northern Continental Divide, the Selway - Bitterroot Wilderness, the Cabinet Mountains and the Yaak River in Northwest Montana (including some land in the far northeast Idaho Panhandle), the Selkirk Mountains in Idaho (also including the northeast part of Washington), and the North Cascades. The recovery area now termed the Bitterroot Ecosystem encompassed the Selway - Bitterroot Wilderness, and included the breaks of the Salmon River north of the Main Salmon (Nez Perce and Bitterroot National Forests), Meadow Creek, the Lochsa, the upper North Fork Clearwater, and land in Montana east of the Bitterroot Crest on the Lolo and Bitterroot National Forests.

However, the seriously flawed Environmental Impact Statement and Record of Decision (2001) for a grizzly bear reintroduction program in the Bitterroot readjusted the core recovery area to only include the Selway - Bitterroot and Frank Church - River of No Return Wildernesses. While this expanded the original recovery south of the main stem Salmon River, it excluded some of the best grizzly habitat in the North Fork Clearwater and upper Lochsa outside of the Selway - Bitterroot Wilderness. It even excluded habitat in the Gospel - Hump and Sawtooth Wildernesses. This was the result of a deal cut by two conservation groups (the National Wildlife Federation and Defenders of Wildlife) and the timber industry in Idaho. Further, any reintroduced bears would be considered experimental/non-essential and would be subject to a citizens committee.

FOC supported an alternative effort led by the Alliance for the Wild Rockies, which was based upon science, created protective measures in the form of biological corridors to encourage natural recovery, and included a recovery area of all the immense wildlands in central and north central Idaho and contiguous wildlands in western Montana. In the hearings in Lewiston, it was this alternative that received the most citizen support. In any case, the final decision by the federal government was a slightly modified version of the deal, mentioned above, that was agreed to by the timber industry and a couple of wildlife groups. Even that proved too much for Idaho Governor Dirk Kempthorne, who sued the FWS. The Bush Administration then reached an out of court deal with Idaho that essentially put any recovery in the Bitterroot and Clearwater in limbo. Kempthorne later became Bush's Secretary of the Interior.

II - The 2019 Bears

The first of the three bears was a young male that was captured and collared for augmentation of the Cabinet - Yaak Ecosystem. This bear was from the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem. He was first spotted in the North Fork Clearwater and spent much of the summer in and around the Selway - Bitterroot Wilderness, in both Idaho and Montana. He was also photographed at various locations in the North Fork Clearwater and upper Lochsa this spring and fall, usually from cameras placed where hunters left bait for bears. The US Fish & Wildlife Service provided us with photos. At last report, he had moved north of Lolo Pass onto the Montana side of the Great Burn/Kelly Creek/Hoodoo Recommended Wilderness. It is not yet known whether he will den there or make the long trek north back to where he was released in the Cabinet Mountains.

Bear #2 near black bear baiting site, USFWS Photo Credit

We found out about the second bear at a meeting with the FWS in Missoula. The citizens at the meeting — FOC, Friends of the Wild Swan, Western Watersheds Project, Flathead-Lolo-Bitterroot Citizens Task Force, Yaak Valley Forest Council, Friends of the Bitterroot, and other citizens—were surprised to learn that a grizzly had been spotted near White Bird, ID, presumably on the Nez Perce National Forest. The consensus of the experts who viewed the picture was that it was a grizzly. Again, it was photographed near a black bear baiting area and the FWS kindly supplied us with the photos. A DNA sample was taken but the analysis won't be available until next year as the testing lab has many orders. This is exciting news as the location of this bear is near the Greater Hells Canyon Ecosystem and on the western edge of the Big Wild Ecosystem.

The third bear (maybe more?) came from trail cameras in the upper Lochsa, again mainly associated with baiting sites for black bears. These photos show that there is a bear without the ear tags or collar that the young male who traveled from the Cabinet's had. Due to the fact that some of the photos are of a night-vision type, it is hard to tell if there is more than one bear without a radio collar and/or ear tags. The FWS provided us with these photos, too.

Again, all of this points to the fact that grizzlies are on the move. They are coming into the Clearwater from the north and possibly the east. In the case of the bear in the White Bird region, nobody yet knows where the bear traveled from. White Bird Creek flows west to the lower Salmon from the divide between the Salmon and South Fork Clearwater drainages. One can hope the grizzly bears without collars will survive and won't be illegally killed.

III - Recent Actions

The recent legal victory by Tribes and conservation groups that prevented delisting of grizzlies in the Yellowstone region underscored the importance of biological connectivity of grizzly populations. The Clearwater region, being the northern half of the *Big Wild*, plays a key role as both a potential source populations for grizzlies as well as a connecting habitat bridge between bears in the Yellowstone area and those bears to the north and east of the Clearwater.

FOC had the privilege of facilitating a 2018 meeting in Missoula of concerned citizens about grizzly conservation. We have also authored three letters to various agencies and entities, discussing recovery of grizzlies and problems with bear baiting, which several organizations joined with us. Both the existing Clearwater and Nez Perce National Forests' forest plans have grizzly recovery as a goal. However, the Forest Service has been reluctant to embrace grizzly recovery and has, in fact, been hostile to any measures to protect grizzlies in the upcoming forest-plan revision.

This summer FOC completed a food safety inventory of about 40 campgrounds and a few others sites in the Nez Perce and Clearwater National Forests. What we found, unfortunately, is that most of the bear proof dumpsters at campgrounds are no longer working. The good efforts begun in the early 2000s have fallen into disrepair. Educational materials about grizzly bears are more prevalent, though not available at all sites. We provided this study to the FWS. The agency expressed interest in the possibility of funding future efforts by other conservation groups, in conjunction with officials from the Bitterroot and Lolo National Forests, to produce similar reports. Our inventory report can be found at friendsoftheclearwater.org/our-reports/.

Citizens can also engage in the upcoming Nez Perce and Clearwater forest-plan revision process by insisting that the Forest Service adopt meaningful protections for grizzlies and their habitat. We will be sending out information once the draft plan is released, which the Forest Service claims will be late this year. Stay tuned, there is much work that needs to get done!

Editor's Note: The website grizzlytimes.org continues to be the leading source of information for grizzly bears in the West.

Brief Clearwater Update

Despite the Clearwater region possessing amazing habitat for steelhead, the Forest Service is doing its best to ensure that the roaded and "managed" drainages on the forests never recover, and that the roadless habitat also gets logged and degraded. Had the agency kept its timber sales to the average volumes of the 2000s, the situation would not be so dire, though, even that past amount of logging did not result in recovery in most "managed" watersheds.

The Forest Service has recently shown a propensity to shorten public comment periods, and "forget" to provide notification of decisions. Here is an update on some of the more egregious problems.

End of the World: A proposal to produce ¼ of a billion board feet. Yes that is right. FOC is filing a formal objection. The public did not even have an opportunity to comment on the environmental assessment document. Yes that is true.

Pete King: Logging an already degraded stream that flows into the Lochsa, supposedly in the name of elk. The Forest Service is abusing the process by trying to shoehorn in a few thousand acres of logging plus ten miles of new roads into the category of creating wildlife habitat by girdling a few trees. This is a way to evade full analysis and public involvement.

Lolo Insects and Disease: The Forest Service made a decision this past summer and is in the process of selling one of the sales.

Stray Creek: This is a proposal to log in the same place as the Lolo Insects and Disease analysis area. It should have been included in that proposal to fully consider the impacts.

Antone Holmquist Photo Credit

Circle your calendars on January 25 - 26, 2020 for the *6th Annual Winter Outing* with Palouse - Sierra Club. We will be returing to the Palouse Divide Lodge. Contact us at foc@friendsoftheclearwater.org for details.

Notes from the trail
Brett Haverstick

FOC File Photo

I took the above picture this summer in the beautiful Fish Creek drainage on the Clearwater National Forest. I remember it being a hot day, and all I wanted to do was get up the trail and seek shade among the ancient cedars. A little ways up my dog, Cayuse, and I poked around the old Obia Cabin and observed the flow of nearby Hungery Creek before continuing along Fish Creek. It is spelled *Hungery* because that is how Lewis & Clark spelled it in their journals while passing through the area over two hundred years ago. How's that for a history lesson. Pretty amazing when you think about it. I spent the rest of the afternoon hiking into the drainage in pursuit of the cedars, which indeed, provided relief from the heat. After eating a late lunch, we took a long dip in the braided waters of the creek. It was beautiful, peaceful, and wild.

The undeveloped Fish & Hungery Creek wildland, which deserves to be designated Wilderness, is part of the larger 118,000-acre North Lochsa Slope Roadless Area. The roadless area starts west of Fish Butte and extends east a few drainges beyond Weir Creek. Its northern boundary is the Lolo Trail or motorway and its southern edges are Highway 12. Fish Creek is the most important B-run steelhead tributary in all of Idaho. It also provides crucial winter habitat and abundant summer range for elk.

FOC File Photo

The above picture is also from the Fish Creek trail. It's a shame the Forest Service permits motorcycles to travel much of the trail deep into Fish Creek. The solitude and silence of the area is magnificent unless you encounter the piercing scream of a motor.

For years I've wanted to hike up Kelly Creek and camp under the stars at Kid Lake. It's about twenty-three miles to the headwaters and the Bitterroot Divide. Longtime FOC supporter and Advisory Board Member Chuck Pezeshki always raves about this roadless wildland. A picture of Hansen Meadows that he took, which is within the drainage, also sits above my desk at work. When August arrived, I decided to drive to the trailhead.

The first ten miles of the trail has a pretty mellow grade. The creek parallels the trail for many of those miles and offers lots of exposure to the sun from the south facing benches. On this day, however, dark clouds were quickly approaching from the west. When I reached the confluence with Bear Creek, I laid down my pack to see if I needed to quickly pitch my tent. Fortunately, the soft rain ceased in a matter of minutes so I decided to head up to Hanson Meadows and seek camp. After a friendly discussion with volunteers from the Great Burn Study Group, I passed the meadows and found an abandoned outfitter camp further up the trail near the confluence with Deer Creek (below).

FOC File Photo

The next morning I woke to blue skies and scampered up the trail into the lodgepole pine forests. The great fires of 1910 burned throughout Kelly Creek over a century ago, but fire scars are still easy to identify. After lunch at the South Fork/Middle Fork trail junction, I swung north and then east and labored towards the headwaters and divide. I was told by someone on the trail that there is an abandoned snowmobile above Kid Lake (yuck), and I wanted to photograph it before nightfall. Another two thousand feet in elevation gain and a few hours later, I arrived at the placid and serene lake. I realized that the sun would be setting within an hour or so, and that it would be best to make camp, swim and eat. After pitching the tent, I stripped down and did the backstroke across the crystal clear waters. The lake was mine, and mine alone, and my mind drifted towards grizzly bears, wolverines, and mountain goats. I was finally in the headwaters of the world-famous Kelly Creek. The last rays of the sun drifted west over the ridge, and it was time to dry off and cook. I climbed into my tent and rested. The howl of wolves soon rocked me to sleep.

Nimiipuu River Rendezvous
Brett Haverstick

Christine de Villier Photo Credit

The idea to have a water protest aimed at raising awareness to the extinction crisis that wild salmon and steelhead face due to the deadbeat four lower Snake River dams started around 2015. In October of that year, approximately two hundred people paddled to the base of Lower Granite Dam with chants of "Free the Snake." So many participants enjoyed the event that organizers decided to do it again. In fact, a flotilla or river rendezvous has occurred annually for the past five years. The *2019 Nimiipuu River Rendezvous* took place on September 20 - 22 at Hells Gate State Park in Lewiston.

Under warm sunny skies, about two hundred people launched their canoes, kayaks, rafts, and SUP's (stand up paddle boards) into the reservoir known as the Snake River between Lewiston, ID and Clarkston, WA. More boats, including hand-carved tribal canoes, simultaneously entered the water upstream near Asotin, WA. Everyone eventually met on the slackwater to pray for the return of a free-flowing lower Snake River. It was a beautiful sight.

Along with water festivities, there was also a lot of programming that took place at the park throughout the weekend. We would like to thank Nimiipuu Protecting the Environment and members of the Nez Perce Tribe for coordinating drummers, dancers, and speakers. The film *A Healing Journey: The Nimiipuu Canoe Project* was also screened and very inspirational. It is a must see.

The second film screened at the river rendezvous was *Dammed to Extinction*. The documentary focuses on the Southern Resident Orcas and "the four obsolete lower Snake River dams and the thousands of miles of river they block access to." Thank you to Steven Hawley and Michael Peterson for allowing us to show their film. We also screened it in Moscow to a packed-theatre two weeks earlier.

We would also like to acknowledge EarthJustice, Save our Wild Salmon and other event sponsors and organizers for putting together the event. Not to be forgotten, thank you to Judy Oatman of the Nez Perce Tribe for feeding the crowd, yet again! When the river is restored and the salmon are recovered, it will be a great day for all species. Free the Snake! (The graphic to the right appeared in the *Lewiston Tribue* the day before the rendezvous).

Editor's Note: Learn more about the new documentary *Dammed to Extinction* by visiting dammedtoextinction.com.

Christine de Villier Photo Credit

FOC File Photo

Fish runs are dying
Zack Williams, Swing the Fly

Reopening last year's steelhead season to help local economies was a short-term Band-Aid on the economic end of a deeper issue — there simply are not enough steelhead returning to the rivers of Idaho. Without long-term recovery of our fish populations, the economic Band-Aid of an open season will not stick for long.

After the past two dismal seasons, and with a third in a row expected, I recently made a tough decision to walk away from a guiding career on the Clearwater River and move away from the river I love — the fish population is not capable of enduring the added angling pressure, nor capable of supporting my guiding career financially.

In leaving, I took with me clients who came from all over to fish the world-famous catch-and-release season on the Clearwater. They stayed multiple nights in hotels, ate at local restaurants and bought licenses and gasoline. I may be small potatoes, but each and every case like me adds up.

In past years, if we didn't have many fish, we at least had a peaceful, enjoyable angling experience. The fall chinook season proposed by Idaho Fish and Game will destroy that — replaced by snagging rotting fish off spawning redds and loud motors — and what will we have left?

If we and Fish and Game want a robust local economy and healthy license sales, we need to protect and restore our steelhead runs, not further exploit a dying river.

Editor's Note: Zack is a FOC member. His letter originally appeared in *The Lewiston Tribune* on August 20. We admire his ethics and the decision he made, though it is very unfortunate. In September, Idaho Fish and Game Commissioners voted to close the steelhead season throughout the Clearwater, including a short stretch of the Snake River above Lewiston. They did not close other portions of the Snake or the Salmon River, which lends itself to the temporary economic Band-Aid that Zack spoke of. Fish and Game also extended the fall Chinook season, which may also result in the bycatch of steelhead.

Thanks to everyone that attended our recent program about declining steelhead populations

FOC File Photo

Summary of 2019 Clearwater Dredging
Pat Finnegan, Bluwater Solutions, LLC.

I monitored suction-dredge mining activity in the South Fork of the Clearwater River (SFCR) again throughout the 2019 season, which ran from July 15 - August 15. I am pleased to report that activity was relatively light, and miners operated with a full complement of permits and appeared to comply with all specified conditions. Although there were fifteen permits approved (the maximum number allowed by the US Forest Service (FS) under the 2016 NEPA Decision), only nine different dredges operated this season. All of these operated under the full complement of permits, with separate permits required from the Idaho Department of Water Resources (IDWR), the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and FS. On most days no more than five dredges were in operation.

2019 dredging along the S. Fork Clearwater

Pat Finnegan Photo Credit

After documenting multiple scofflaw miners and their associated depredations during the 2018 season, it was a relief to see a high level of compliance during 2019. The contingent of miners who operated without federal permits during 2018 elected not to return until the lawsuit, brought by the Idaho Conservation League against Shannon Poe, the President of the American Mining Rights Association, is resolved. However, it was brought to my attention that a new group of miners who intended to operate without federal authorization (EPA Permits and Plans of Operation filed with the FS) during 2019 were unable to obtain IDWR permits because they missed the application deadline. These miners arrived in the SFCR drainage and set up camp at the beginning of the season, but elected to leave after failing to obtain state authorization. Thus, by our good luck, these potential outlaws did not add to the damage we observed during 2018.

Despite a higher level of compliance on the SFCR, a handful of miners applied for permits to dredge SFCR tributaries that are critical habitat for species listed under the Endangered Species Act, including Bull trout and steelhead, and sensitive species including spring Chinook, Pacific lamprey, and pearlshell mussel. The FS attempted to categorically exclude these applications from environmen-

tal analyses. FOC, Trout Unlimited, and others responded with effective comments that stopped the immediate approvals so that habitat degradation was avoided on these critical streams this year.

Although the number of miners on the SFCR was lower during 2019, more permits were issued for Lolo Creek than in recent years. I was unable to monitor there, but learned from several sources that miners operated in compliance with all the necessary permits.

Illegal suction-dredge mining on the Salmon River is an emerging problem. Such unauthorized mining has been ongoing, but there was an uptick during 2019 with at least six illegal dredgers operating between Slate Creek and Hammer Creek. These operations are completely illegal - operating on a navigable river that also contains critical habitat for steelhead, salmon and Bull trout.

Editor's Note: Thanks to Pat for continuing to lead the charge concerning suction-dredge field monitoring. We worked with Pat and his son Kevin to produce a short film titled *Dirty Gold*, which captures the attitudes and illegal behavior of certain miners that have refused to get necessary permits in the past. You can watch it at friendsoftheclearwater.org/clearwater-videos.

Pat's reports are also being used by the Idaho Conservation League (ICL). On Oct. 1, a federal judge rejected Shannon Poe's request to dismiss the lawsuit brought against him by ICL for 2018 Clean Water Act violations.

N. Fork Graffiti

Thank you to FOC member John Thomas for alerting us to the graffiti (below) that he observed while recently fishing on the N. Fork Clearwater. We immediately contacted the Forest Service to make sure they are aware of it. The agency promptly replied saying that they did not know about it but that they would remove it before winter sets in. From what we understand, the graffiti is along the road just upstream from the Orogrande/N. Fork confluence.

John Thomas Photo Credit

FOC Internship
Bryce Poplawsky

Bryce near Weitas Butte. Just kidding; we assume this is in the Cascade Range of Washington. Weitas Butte is about 6,000 ft. elevation. This photo is most likely taken above 10,000 feet.

Poplawsky Photo Credit

My experience as an intern at Friends of the Clearwater was eye opening, inspiring, and very enjoyable. I was able to spend most of my summer in the outdoors, a passion of mine. I took pictures of botched slash burns, ineffective bear-safe containers, and potential timber sale areas around the beautiful Gospel - Hump Wilderness. I enjoyed my internship an incredible amount, and I learned a lot about the politics and details of designated Wilderness and unprotected roadless area management. I also was able to explore areas of Idaho that I had never been to and see places that I was unaware of. Many of these need to be protected!

Through this experience, I gained a lot of insight into how important organizations like FOC are. I realized that if such a small organization can have such a big impact on timber sales, grizzly bear recovery efforts, and education about conservation, there really is a lot of hope for the environment. Working for FOC inspired me and helped me realize that we can make a bigger difference than we think.

Editor's Note: Bryce is the son of long-time FOC members Diane Prorak and Al Poplawsky. Diane is a former board member and Al serves on the Executive Committee of the Palouse group - Sierra Club. Both of them have been working to protect the Clearwater for decades. We greatly appreciated working with Bryce this summer. He spent more than two months with us and helped complete a lot of field monitoring work. Our door is always open for Bryce, and we wish him the best in his academic pursuits.

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