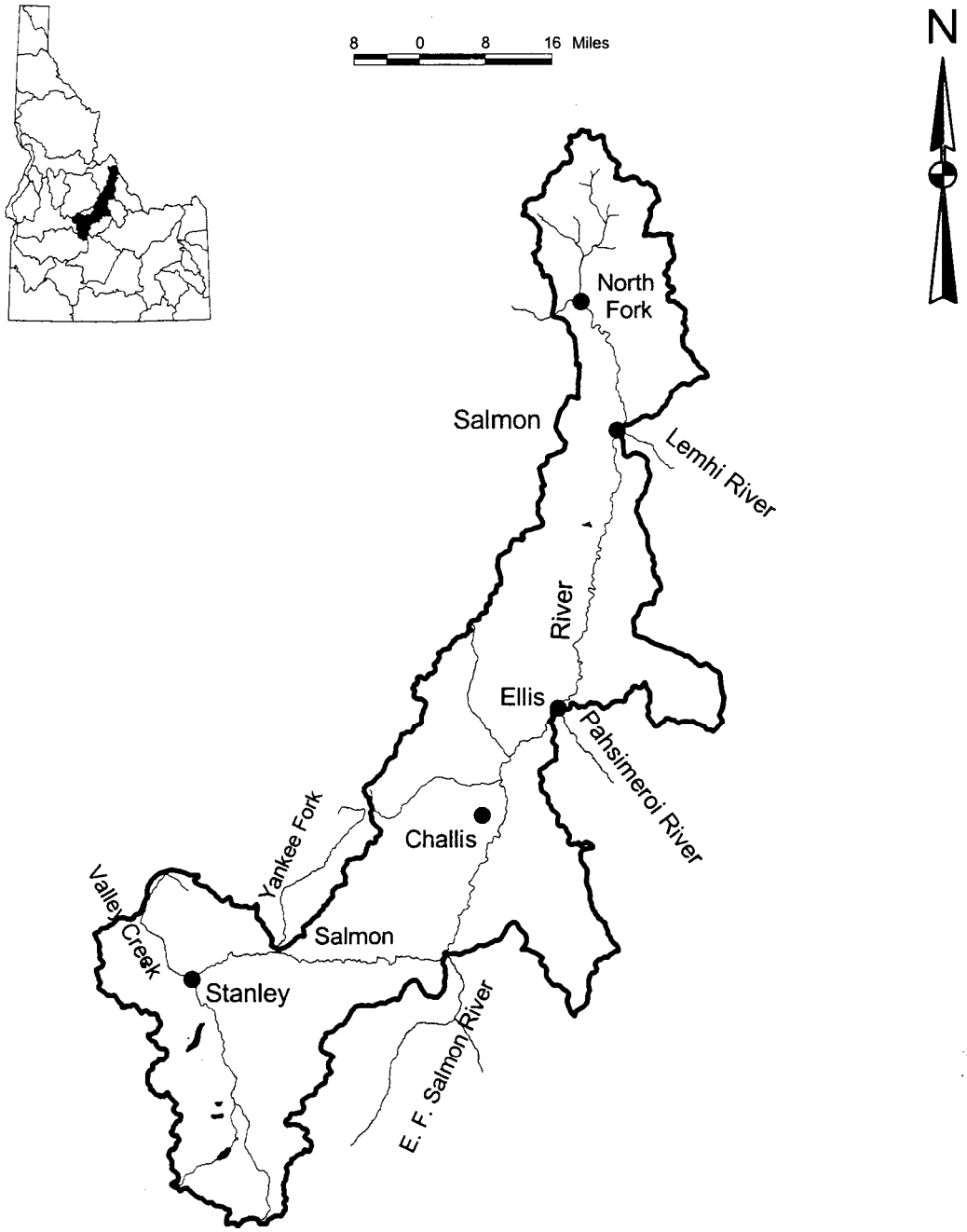
Salmon River Drainage

North Fork to Headwaters



12. SALMON RIVER – NORTH FORK TO HEADWATERS

A. Overview

The portion of the Salmon River between North Fork and the headwaters is 173 miles long and drains approximately 6,000 square miles. Highways 93 and 75 border the entire stretch of river. The headwater area, upstream from Thompson Creek, is within the Sawtooth National Recreation Area, which is administered by the USFS. Major tributaries include the Lemhi, Pahsimeroi, East Fork Salmon, and Yankee Fork Salmon rivers, which are reported separately following this section.

The drainage is characterized by mountainous terrain bisected by river valleys. Major mountain ranges include the Bitterroot Range along the Idaho/Montana border; the Lemhi Range, southwest of the Lemhi River; the Lost River Range, southwest of the Pahsimeroi River; the White Cloud Peaks, east of the upper Salmon River; and the Sawtooth Range within the Sawtooth Wilderness, west of the upper Salmon River. Numerous lakes with roaded access in the Stanley area provide significant recreational opportunity. They include Stanley, Redfish, Little Redfish, Yellowbelly, Pettit, Alturas and Perkins lakes. Also, hundreds of lakes within the Sawtooth Wilderness and White Cloud Peaks areas provide fishing opportunity in a secluded, wilderness setting for backpacking enthusiasts. Salmon, Challis and Stanley are the only population centers in the upper Salmon River drainage. Mining, ranching and recreation are the major industries in the area.

Many recreationists are attracted to the scenic beauty and recreational opportunities of the Sawtooth National Recreation Area. The granitic watershed yields few nutrients to the upper Salmon River and the large moraine lakes. Sterile waters and a short growing season render the lakes and streams incapable of producing the fish necessary for a large consumptive harvest under general fishing rules. Therefore, approximately 80,000 hatchery rainbow trout are stocked into popular waters in the upper Salmon River drainage. Furthermore, fishing rules prohibit harvest of wild trout in an effort to reestablish native resident stocks. Early in the season the fishery is primarily supported by hatchery steelhead smolts.

Anadromous management action in the Salmon River from North Fork to the headwaters will emphasize maintaining existing natural spawning populations of chinook and preserving and enhancing habitat quality. The mainstem Salmon will continue to be managed for exploitation of hatchery steelhead. The reach of Salmon River from the East Fork to Yankee Fork contains habitat for mainstem spawning chinook. Many of the Salmon River headwater tributaries are meandering meadow streams in a subalpine valley, which are critical spawning and rearing areas for spring chinook. Access to some of these tributaries is impeded by irrigation diversions and dewatering. The Department will screen all identified irrigation improvement projects in the Five-Year Plan to improve access to these spawning and rearing locations.

At one time, large runs of sockeye salmon returned to spawn along the shorelines and inlets of the Stanley Basin lakes. In 1910, Sunbeam Dam was constructed across the Salmon River, just upstream from Yankee Fork. Fish passage was

improbable until a fish ladder was completed in 1920. Even then, fish passage was very limited. In 1934, the dam was breached and fish passage was restored. Sockeye runs rebounded somewhat but declined steadily from 1960-1990. In 1994, trapping on Redfish Lake Creek captured only one adult fish. Redfish Lake is the only Stanley Basin lake that supports natural sockeye production. Redfish Pettit, and Alturas lakes support kokanee populations. Research will be continuing on sockeye captive brood/rearing and sockeye, bull trout and kokanee interactions and enhancement in these lakes. Additional efforts will be directed into improving native fish angling opportunities.

Broodstock for hatchery steelhead stocked into this portion of the river are trapped in two places. A-run steelhead are trapped at Idaho Power Company's Pahsimeroi Hatchery and Sawtooth Hatchery, a Lower Snake River Compensation Project facility. The fish are reared at steelhead hatcheries in the Hagerman Valley and smolts are trucked back to the upper Salmon River.

B. Objectives and Programs

1. Objective: Maintain existing natural spawning populations of salmon.

   Program: Allow natural production to sustain existing naturally produced populations. Limit outplanting of hatchery fish, other than direct hatchery releases, to support supplementation research and areas devoid of naturally producing populations of salmon. Continue smolt monitoring to gain natural production and survival information.

2. Objective: Increase access and facilities for steelhead and salmon anglers.

   Program: Acquire additional public fishing access with purchases or easements, develop boat launches, parking sites and sanitation facilities.

3. Objective: Improve the quality of resident trout fishing in the mainstem Salmon River during the summer months.

   Program: Continue protective fishing regulations on cutthroat trout, bull trout and rainbow trout.

4. Objective: Reestablish sockeye runs to historic areas of Pettit and Alturas lakes.

   Program: Evaluate benefits and feasibility of lake fertilization to enhance kokanee/sockeye production. Evaluate introductions of sockeye back into Redfish, Alturas and Pettit lakes.

5. Objective: Maintain and improve habitat quality of mainstem and tributary production areas.

   Program: Work cooperatively with willing landowners through the Upper Salmon River Model Watershed Project, in priority areas, to maintain and enhance critical spawning and rearing areas for resident and anadromous

fishes. Encourage land management activities on public and private properties that further improve the quality of natural production areas. Participate in grazing allotment management plan review. Encourage implementation of grazing management plans that eliminate negative grazing impacts to fishery productivity and survival. Participate in interagency mining oversight committees to review operating plans and work with regulatory agencies to require strict compliance with mining laws to protect water quality and fish populations. Develop monitoring programs for fish populations and fish habitat relative to mining activities, if needed. Continue to monitor and evaluate benefits from habitat projects.

6. Objective: Continue improving the return rate of stocked, catchable sized rainbow trout to the creel.

   Program: Maintain high stocking frequency in heavily used areas between Hell Roaring Creek and Rough Creek bridge. Pursue the construction of a fishing pond in the Stanley vicinity to outplant catchable trout for better return to the creel.

7. Objective: Improve anadromous juvenile and adult fish passage in the Salmon River.

   Program: Work with Federal Land Managers and private irrigators to alleviate passage problems in main river and tributaries due to irrigation diversions and dewatering. Screen and consolidate identified irrigation diversions by 2003.

DRAINAGE: Salmon River: North Fork to Headwaters					
Water	Miles/acres	Fishery			Management direction
		Type	Species Present	Management	
Mainstem	172/	Coldwater Anadromous	Rainbow trout	Put-and take trout	Harvest restricted to adipose fin-clipped hatchery rainbow trout and residual hatchery steelhead. Open all year.
			Whitefish Brook trout	General	Maximize whitefish and brook trout harvest by year around fisheries.
			Bull trout Cutthroat trout Steelhead Chinook salmon	Conservation	Closed to harvest. Closed to adult harvest.
			Hatchery steelhead	Anadromous	Provide maximum harvest of fish surplus to escapement goals.
Tributaries between North Fork and headwaters (excluding N. Fork, Lemhi, Pahsimeroi, E. Fork, Yankee Fork rivers, and Valley Creek)	466/	Coldwater Anadromous	Rainbow trout Cutthroat trout Whitefish Brook trout	General	Provide harvest fishery for naturally produced trout. Maximize whitefish and brook trout harvest.
			Steelhead Chinook salmon Bull trout	Conservation	Closed to adult harvest. Closed to harvest.
Valley Creek from mouth to headwaters	21/	Coldwater Anadromous	Rainbow trout	Put-and-take trout	Harvest restricted to adipose clipped hatchery rainbow trout
			Whitefish Brook trout	General	Maximize whitefish and brook trout harvest.
			Bull trout Cutthroat trout Steelhead Chinook salmon	Conservation	Closed to harvest. Closed to adult harvest.
Lake Creek upstream from Williams Lake	5/	Coldwater	Rainbow trout	Quality	Maintain spring closure to protect rainbow trout spawners.

Williams Lake	/180	Coldwater	Rainbow trout	General	Yield fishery supported by natural production. Work with other agencies, local sewer district and homeowners association to identify sources of nutrient loading and propose solutions. Enhance fishery accordingly. Develop preservation plans.
			Bull Trout	Conservation	Closed to harvest.

Wallace Lake	/10	Coldwater	Rainbow trout	Put-and-take trout	Stock hatchery rainbow trout of catchable size to provide put-and-take fishery.
Iron Lake	/18	Coldwater	Rainbow trout	Put-and-take trout	Stock hatchery rainbow trout of catchable size to provide put-and-take fishery.
Mosquito Flat Reservoir	/37	Coldwater	Rainbow trout Brook trout	Put-and-take trout General	Stock hatchery rainbow trout of catchable and fingerling size to provide a harvest fishery.
Bayhorse Lakes	/22	Coldwater	Rainbow trout	Put-and-take trout	Stock hatchery rainbow trout of catchable size to provide put-and-take fishery.
Stanley Lake	/182	Coldwater Anadromous	Rainbow trout Brook trout Lake trout Kokanee	General	Continue stocking catchable rainbow trout. Enhance kokanee populations.
Redfish Lake	/1,502	Coldwater Anadromous	Rainbow trout Kokanee Sockeye salmon Bull trout	General Conservation Conservation	Provide harvest fishery with catchable rainbow trout. Develop management plan focused on kokanee management. Closed to harvest. Continue efforts to prevent extinction of sockeye salmon. Closed to harvest.
Yellowbelly Lake	/188	Coldwater	Cutthroat trout Rainbow trout Brook trout	Quality Wild	Manage as a catch-and-release fishery. Allow harvest of brook trout.
Pettit Lake	/389	Coldwater	Rainbow trout Brook trout Cutthroat trout Kokanee Sockeye	General Conservation	Provide harvest fishery supported by natural production. Develop management plan. Experimental reintroduction. Closed to adult harvest.
Valley Creek Lakes 1 and 2	/20	Coldwater	Cutthroat trout	Trophy	Catch-and-release trophy westslope cutthroat trout.
Alturas Lake	/838	Coldwater Anadromous	Rainbow trout Kokanee Sockeye salmon Bull trout	General Conservation Conservation	Provide harvest fishery with catchable rainbow trout. Develop management plan with emphasis on kokanee management. Experimental reintroduction. Closed to adult harvest. Closed to harvest
Perkins Lake	/51	Coldwater	Rainbow trout Whitefish Bull trout	General Conservation	Provide harvest fishery with catchable rainbow trout and some natural production. Closed to harvest.

Alpine Lakes	/5,000	Coldwater	Rainbow trout Cutthroat trout Golden trout Brook trout Grayling	General	Provide diversity of angling opportunity. Provide yield fisheries in lakes where effort is relatively low and access is restricted to trails. Aerial stock fry in selected lakes every three years. Begin evaluating program.