



**NEWS
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Forest Service Crews Reduce Hazards at River Camps

Forest Service crews have treated 31 hazard trees at 13 camps on the upper reaches of the Middle Fork of the Salmon River making the camps available to float boat parties on the popular Wild & Scenic River in the Frank Church – River of No Return Wilderness. To protect wilderness values the crews were made up of trained specialists using only traditional, non-motorized tools, according to Middle Fork District River Manager John Haugh.

Fires that scorched nearly 40 miles of the Middle Fork of the Salmon River corridor last year burned through a number of the river camps. A total of 16 camps were impacted by the 2007 fires, leaving behind standing burned trees that were weakened and at a higher risk of falling in high winds or wet conditions. In May of this year Salmon-Challis National Forest Supervisor Bill Wood announced that five camps would not be available for use this season because of hazardous conditions. Four of those were heavily used camps on the stretch of river above Indian Creek Guard Station.

“During the week of June 9th Forest Service personnel composed of river rangers and hazard tree specialists floated the Middle Fork and performed detailed evaluations of river camps for existing hazard trees including those that resulted from 2007 wildfires,” Haugh said. Only hazard trees identified as being in imminent threat of failure with the next 3 years were selected for felling. A total of 23 camps were evaluated with emphasis given to camps that had been burned over and to the more popular and heavily used camps. The crew was able to identify and remove 5 hazard trees at the Elkhorn and White Creek camps using traditional means – two-man and one-man crosscut saws and axes. This allowed these camps to be declared “reasonably safe” for river and corridor users.

During the week of June 16th specialized crews were assembled and flown into Indian Creek Guard Station. These crews were composed of smokejumpers from the McCall and Missoula jump bases – experts in falling large hazard trees with traditional non-motorized equipment. river

rangers, fire suppression fallers, packers, archeologists and fishery biologists were also part of the team. Several of the crew members were certified blasters.

From Indian Creek one crew was sent down river and another crew upriver to fell the hazard trees. Archeologists were present at every camp that was also a sensitive cultural site to ensure that falling operations did not damage cultural resources. The downriver crew was able to fall 3 hazard trees at 3 camps and then return to Indian Creek to join the upriver crew.

“The upriver crew had the majority of camps to treat with longer distances and was supported by a pack string with two packers,” Haugh noted. This crew also had 2 blasters attached and a fishery biologist. This crew treated eight camps dropping 23 hazard trees. Most stumps were “low stumped” using traditional tools to blend in with the wilderness environment. There were a total of seven large stumps deemed too large to low stump and these were “fuzzed” using explosives to mimic a natural fracture. Due to sensitivity of endangered fish species in the Middle Fork, a fishery biologist was present to assist in designing the blasting techniques and approving the amount of explosives used. The key was to limit the blast overpressure as calculated by the amount of explosives and distance to the Middle Fork.

The crews traveled to most of the camps by trail, however three camps were accessible only from the river. The Salmon-Challis River Patrol composed of three river rangers rendezvoused with the upriver crew and ferried them across the river to treat Greyhound, Johns Camp and Lake Creek camps. These three sites that had initially been evaluated as too severely burned to open to the public are now available. Dome Hole, also initially listed as unavailable, was also treated and is open for use.

At the completion of the hazard tree operations the crews returned to Indian Creek Guard Station and cleared approximately 12 large logs blocking the Indian Creek boat ramp using traditional tools only. This will allow boaters improved safety in launching boats into the river. Horsetail, a seldom-used camp that was burned by the Red Bluff Fire, is the only camp that remains closed because of hazards caused by last year’s fires. The area near this camp was significantly burned, especially the drainage around the camp, which puts the camp at high risk of a blow-out during any localized rain events.

“This was a highly successful operation involving complex logistics and lots of people having a wide range of specialized skills. The result is campsites that are ‘reasonably safe,’” said Haugh. “However, the wilderness environment still has risks and should not be considered absolutely safe. Trees may still fall, debris flows may happen and rocks may roll off hillsides into camps.”

