

### **History of the land, the Lewis and Clark Expedition and Native Roots :**

The Salmon Challis National Forest has a rich, complex and long documented history beginning in the 1800s with Shoshone, Nez Perce and Flathead Native Americans. All three tribes inhabited areas of the forest nomadically using the lands for seasonal hunting and fishing grounds. These natives migrated through what is current day Montana and Idaho in pursuit of natural necessities and more favorable overwintering grounds utilizing the Nez Perce trail which can still be traveled today on foot at several different locations and trail heads throughout the landscape. The Sheepeater Shoshone, famous for their herding lifestyle maintained livestock across the Salmon-Challis river valley and were possibly the most established of tribes on forest, even helping explorers and famous expeditions navigate the unforgiving local terrain later on in history.

In late summer of 1805 with help of locally living Native, Sacajawea and her accompanying party the Lewis and Clark expedition arrived on forest at what is the mouth of modern-day Tower Creek. Lewis and Clark's arrival marked the first land exploration west of the Louisiana Purchase giving the United States the greatest claim to the Pacific Northwest territory. During the tenure of the Lewis and Clark expedition locally the party members engaged in numerous routes of exploration, even canoeing portions of the main Salmon River. In fall of 1805 after consulting and trading with the local Shoshone the Lewis and Clark party crossed over the mountains at Camp Creek leaving Idaho for Montana.

### **Westward Expansion and Human Industrious Influence:**

After the era of Lewis and Clark notably came the era of westward expansion and exploration. With this expansion Salmon and the surrounding areas experienced an influx of pioneers, fur traders, trappers, missionaries and miners. Many different trapping expeditions came through the Salmon Challis National Forest predominantly for the beaver and its pelts; however, there was also a discovery of an abundant number of buffalo, elk and salmon. By 1855 Thomas S. Smith had been sent by Brigham Young and The Mormon Church to create a settlement among the Shoshone, Bannock or Flathead people. With this official LDS order a Mormon population and influence became notable within the Salmon River valley. Mining and the associated settlements were the next wave in the Salmon area as we know it today. From 1866 to approximately 1870 the forest experienced somewhat of a gold rush with the first mining claim being established by five men in the Napias Creek drainage, a subsidiary creek of the Salmon River. By the time this original claim was bust most of its miners and equipment had been moved to the now infamous yellowjacket and Loon creek mines. This period is known as the "rush on loon creek" as noted in local newspapers at the time. In 1866 Salmon as a town was established as a "farming service center" to support the Salmon River diggings and mining settlements including Leesburge. Throughout the 1870s and 80s mines and miners around Salmon were responsible for producing a large amount of the nation's copper, cobalt, silver and lead. Lead being the resource mined in greatest quantities locally at the Viola Mine. In 1910 the railroad was extended down valley towards Leadore Idaho (now part of the Lost River Ranger District on the SCF) also in support of the new local industry. The gold rush and establishment

of the Railroad allowed ranching and farming communities to become more prevalent across the United States; this same principle allowed Salmon to flourish as a community.

### **Creation of the Salmon Challis National Forest:**

The Salmon Forest Reserve was established by Theadore Roosevelt on November 5<sup>th</sup>, 1906, via presidential proclamation. Between November 1906 and March 1907 lands were added and subtracted from the reserve and by March 4<sup>th</sup>, 1907, the name was changed to The Salmon National Forest via Executive Order. At this original dissection of lands our forest encompassed the same boundaries we boast today including some areas following the Salmon River and to the west of Salmon proper adding the middle fork. On July 1<sup>st</sup>, 1908, President Roosevelt created executive order number 841 which added the Challis National Forest as one of our nations protected lands. The next addition of land was the Frank Church River of No Return Wilderness in 1980. The Frank Church wilderness was also segmented through an executive order by use of the wilderness act and comprises around 80% of the modern Salmon-Challis National Forest. Where originally there were two separate National forests and a wilderness area, in 1998 through budget modernization and a national movement to condense government resources, the forests formally combined becoming the entity that is now the Salmon-Challis National Forest.

### **History of Fire and resources on the Salmon Challis National Forest:**

The Salmon Challis National Forest has a long and prevalent history of wildfire on the landscape. The infamous 1910 fires swept through the forest in August of that year due to a significant wind event causing widespread damage and destruction. After the devastation of the 1910 fires across the western United States the Weeks Law was passed in 1911 to allow for cooperation between state and federal resources in the protection of watersheds and forest resources in the event of natural disasters. Before the passing of the Weeks Law the Forest Service only truly had the authority and manpower to engage on wildfires that directly endangered towns, human life or critical infrastructure; however, the adjoining resources and cooperation allowed for a new policy of suppression forest service wide. 1911 not only brought about new firefighting tactics on forest but also the introduction of staffed lookout towers. The first staffed lookout tower being the Mt. Baldy lookout. Between 1911 and the 1940's the fire program Forest Service wide and locally grew and modernized considerably. Through the years the wildland fire workforce morphed from available local ranchers and loggers to highly trained and specialized wildland firefighters as we think of them today; the forest resources changing as well boasting several crew, engine and ground resource configurations over the history of years. Modernly Idaho's mountainous region as well as, Western Montana are prone to fires due to unique and hard to track weather patterns in conjunction with the geographical orientation of local mountain ranges. On the Salmon-Challis National Forest we also experience high indices of fire setting lightning strikes due to unusual tracts of weather patterns. Currently the Salmon-Challis National Forest hosts many fire resources including the Salmon Rappellers and their three aircrafts two of which are utilized for rappel missions on a normally moderate to heavy load of initial attack and extended attack fires locally and nationally.

### **Aviation and Rappelling history on the SCF and Nationally:**

Aviation has always been a prevalent resource on forest with smokejumpers making their first appearance fighting fires in 1945. The forest service made its first large purchase of helicopters in 1947 purchasing 17 rotor and fixed wing ships that were utilized around the country for aerial water delivery and recon missions. In 1950 helicopters were utilized on forest for the first time and quickly proved themselves an operational asset in the steep and rugged local terrain. Helicopters and their technology only continued to improve as 1954 brought about the use of chemical fire suppressants and, 1964 added the use of heat seeking technology from the air in fire suppression operations. In 1972 the Forest Service began developing a Rappel program via the Redmond Smokejumpers. This pilot/ test program ran from 1972 to 1983 ultimately being found useful but was cut due to budgetary reasons. In 1986 the Southwest Region began Rappelling out of Bell 206 helicopters and the success of this program largely allowed rappelling as an aerial delivery platform to take off. Throughout the 1990's the Forest Service had upwards of 45 rappel capable helitack bases making approximately half of all Forest Service exclusive use helibases supportive of a rappelling platform. Although the Salmon and Challis National Forests combined in 1998 they still maintained three separate Rappel platforms: Moyer Basin in the Challis zone, Indianola on the eastern portion of the forest and the salmon national Rappelers located most centrally. In 2008 the three bases condensed and officially moved to the Lemhi County Airport in Salmon proper making the "Salmon Airbase" a singular rappelling resource on forest. At its inception rappel platforms and Rappelers themselves were mostly regional resources and training including equipment was not standardized across all modules. Between 2007 and 2010 the Forest Service and Rappel bases began to push for and work towards a standardization. In February of 2010 following the rappel communities only recorded fatal accident in July of 2009 there was a national stand down to the Forest Service program. During the winter of 2010 the Forest Service conducted an extensive review of rappelling nationwide to understand the risks, costs, benefits and to make a national standard for rappelling and rappel training. The final version of the interagency helicopter rappel guide was completed in June of 2010 and tested in Region 6 during the 2010 fire season. During this standardization process rappel operations were restricted to type two helicopters with possible room to grow the program in the future. After slight modifications based on the region 6 test run in April 2011 the national rappel standard was completed just prior to the first National Rappel Academy hosted in Salmon Idaho. As of 2011 there are 14 Rappel capable platforms all hosted by the Forest Service with the largest program nationwide being based in Salmon Idaho. National Rappel Academy continues to be held each spring at the Salmon Airbase and, the rappel program nationally also continues to grow with a new rappel capable platform being stood up in 2023 as well as, the pilot program utilizing type one super puma helicopters as rappel ships being tested during the 2024 fire season.

citations:

- 1- "Salmon-Challis National Forest - about the Forest." *Forest Service National Website*, <https://www.fs.usda.gov/main/scnf/about-forest>
- 2- "Salmon-Challis National Forest - Special Places." Usda.gov, 2020, [www.fs.usda.gov/detail/scnf/specialplaces/?cid=stelprdb5360033](http://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/scnf/specialplaces/?cid=stelprdb5360033).
- 3- "A History of the Salmon National Forest (Part 4)." Npshistory.com, 2024 <https://npshistory.com/publications/usfs/region/4/salmon/history/contents.htm>
- 4- "Making a Comeback." Vertical Mag, 30 June 2016, <https://verticalmag.com/features/making-a-comeback-html/>
- 5- Grande. "Grande Ronde - Training." Granderonderappellers.com, 2022, [www.granderonderappellers.com/training](http://www.granderonderappellers.com/training). Accessed 28 Oct. 2024.
- 6- Passmore, Shawnte. "U.S. Forest Service Brings Back Rappel Team to Fight Northern California Fires." Cbsnews.com, CBS Sacramento, 22 Sept. 2023, <https://www.cbsnews.com/sacramento/news/u-s-forest-service-brings-back-rappel-team-to-fight-fires-in-the-region/>
- 7- "Staffing Summary Table - FireCrew." Firecrew.us, 2024, [firecrew.us/](http://firecrew.us/). Accessed 28 Oct. 2024.
- 8- Part, F, and C Part. Preface Dedication Geology OE T H E Salmon River Area Indians I N the Area Creation of T H E Salmon National Forest Personnel.
- 9- March 2023. "Forest Newsletter." ArcGIS StoryMaps, <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/e4448954970944e4b37f8ef53c2f263f>
- 10- "Fire Management Today ." Usda.gov, usda, 2007, [https://www.fs.usda.gov/sites/default/files/legacy\\_files/fire-management-today/67-2.pdf](https://www.fs.usda.gov/sites/default/files/legacy_files/fire-management-today/67-2.pdf)