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Wild and Scenic River Eligibility Report

Idaho Panhandle National Forests

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Introduction

The Panhandle of Idaho has no designated Wild and Scenic Rivers, and very few streams have been formally recognized as eligible for designation by the US Forest Service. To be eligible a stream must be free-flowing and have at least one “outstanding remarkable value” (ORV) that is regionally or nationally significant.¹ These ORV’s are specific place-based values associated with recreation, scenery, geology, history, fisheries, and other types of values. Eligibility is important as it ensures interim protection for these very special rivers and streams. American Whitewater conducted this eligibility inventory to determine which streams on the Panhandle National Forests are eligible for Wild and Scenic designation.

The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act was signed into law in response to the nation’s dam building efforts. Currently the Moyie, Kootenai, North Fork Clearwater, Spokane and Pend Oreille rivers, as well as Smith Creek are impacted by dams. Boulder Creek is threatened by a new hydropower proposal. Boundary Creek has also been the target of hydropower proposals. In short, the ample flows and gradient that make Panhandle streams spectacular recreational and ecological treasures also make them appealing to private hydropower developers. We thus believe that a robust inventory of each stream’s eligibility for Wild and Scenic designation is justified, as well as required by law.

To understand the regional and national recreational significance of the streams of the Idaho Panhandle it is critical to understand the geology of the region and recreational preferences of paddlers. Paddlers generally categorize rapids as bedrock or boulder. Boulder rapids are often continuous and require quick maneuvering, eddy hopping, and

¹ Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, § 1273 (b)

punching through hydraulics. Bedrock rapids are often characterized by ledges and slides alternating with pools. Both are desirable, but for paddlers preferring steep creeks and remote areas, bedrock provides the aesthetic experience of sliding over vertical and angled drops with the vastly enhanced safety provided by pools. They also require less water to paddle and are thus available later in the season after high elevation snow has melted sufficiently to allow access. In the northern Rockies, the preponderance of downed trees makes the safety of pools critical. On the preference scale of bedrock, polished granitic rock is the crown jewel because it provides smooth and fluid travel and additional safety. The Idaho panhandle offers some of the only consistent bedrock rapids within many hours of driving, and by far the smoothest. From a recreational perspective, the Idaho Panhandle is a unique treasure.

In addition to their recreational values these same stream corridors offer critical refugia for rare fish and wildlife species like bull trout, Canada lynx, mountain caribou, and grizzly bears. High rainfall creates unique botanical environments, and the aforementioned bedrock creates regionally rare geological conditions.

About American Whitewater

American Whitewater is a national non-profit organization dedicated to the protection and restoration of whitewater rivers, as well as their safe enjoyment. Our members are primarily conservation-oriented kayakers, canoeists, and rafters, some of whom recreate on the spectacular rivers and streams of the Panhandle National Forest.

About this Report

This report contains the streams we strongly believe meet or exceed the criteria for eligibility based primarily on recreational and scenic values. Each numbered stream name in the report is followed by the reach description and by a corresponding table with the following fields, described below:

| Tributary of: | Mileage | USFS Eligible | ORV's |
|---------------|---------|---------------|-------|
| A | B | C | D |

- A) This field describes the body of water which the eligible stream flows into. In cases where the stream flows into a tributary of a larger river, the field is filled out as follows: "Large River (tributary that the eligible river flows into)"
- B) This field describes the estimated length of the river reach
- C) This field indicates if the reach is currently protected as eligible under the existing forest plan and the NRI (Yes) or is not (No).
- D) This field indicates the Outstanding Remarkable Values (ORV's) associated with the reach. ORV's are abbreviated as follows: Fisheries (F), Recreation (R), Scenic (S), Wildlife (W),

We recommend the following rivers and streams be found eligible for Wild and Scenic designation.

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1. Kaniksu National Forest

1.1. Boulder Creek (FR 408 to Kootenai River)

| Tributary of: | Mileage | USFS Eligible | ORV's |
|----------------|---------|---------------|---------|
| Kootenai River | 3 | No | S,R,F,W |

- Recreation:** Boulder Creek is a recreational treasure for whitewater paddlers. The creek holds an incredible rarity: a moderate sized straightforward waterfall. Magnolia Falls is highly scenic and also a sought after experience by regional paddlers. It is the only clean waterfall of its size in Northern Idaho, Northwestern Montana, or



- In addition to Magnolia Falls, the river offers numerous high quality Class III, IV, and V rapids in a scenic gorge.
- Scenery:** An old road-bed above the canyon on river-right, as well as the river itself offer views of the impressive gorge, beautiful waterfalls, and tumbling rapids.
- Fisheries:** The downstream portion of Boulder Creek is listed as critical habitat for Bull Trout and likely provides refuge for other native species inhabiting the Kootenai River.
- Wildlife:** Boulder Creek is home to numerous nationally and regionally rare wildlife species including grizzly bears and lynx. Please refer to the USFS comments on the proposed hydropower project, linked below.

Additional Information:

- American Whitewater River Database page:
<http://www.americanwhitewater.org/content/River/detail/id/10359/>
- USFS comments on hydropower proposal:
<http://elibrary.ferc.gov/idmws/common/opennat.asp?fileID=12536543>
- American Whitewater comments on hydropower proposal:
<http://elibrary.ferc.gov/idmws/common/opennat.asp?fileID=12505268>
- FERC preliminary permit for hydropower studies:
<http://elibrary.ferc.gov/idmws/common/opennat.asp?fileID=12565850>

1.2. Boundary Creek (Saddle Pass Road at Canadian Border to Bridge at Westside Road)

| Tributary of: | Mileage | USFS Eligible | ORV's |
|----------------|---------|---------------|-------|
| Kootenai River | 7.5 | No | R |

- **Recreation:** Boundary Creek offers paddlers a classic 7.5 mile romp that drops 1670 feet through continuous medium-volume Class IV and V rapids flowing over polished granite boulders. All other regional rivers are bedrock controlled drop-pool rivers, making Boundary Creek regionally unique and significant. The entire run can be boat-scouted and there are no large portages or mandatory shore-based scouting – another unique facet of Boundary Creek. The loss of adjacent lower Smith Creek to hydropower development makes Boundary Creek extremely important as a large whitewater stream in the Selkirk Range and the larger region. Boundary Creek is also noteworthy because it has a USGS gage providing for real-time online flow information. The panhandle region is hydrologically flashy with very few gages, making Boundary Creek uniquely important.



Additional Information:

- American Whitewater River Database page: <http://www.americanwhitewater.org/content/River/detail/id/4596/>

1.3 Cow Creek (FR 2545 to Smith Creek)

| Tributary of: | Mileage | USFS Eligible | ORV's |
|---------------------------|---------|---------------|-------|
| Kootenai River (Smith Cr) | 3 | No | S,R |

- **Recreation:** Cow Creek offers paddlers a relatively short and easily accessible descent over Class IV and V bedrock drops and slides. Since Lower Smith Creek has been lost to a hydropower diversion Upper Smith has become very recreationally important. Cow Creek is often paddled in association with Boundary and Smith creeks.
- **Scenery:** Cow Creek has several small waterfalls that are extremely scenic and are featured in waterfall books and postcards from the region.
- **Wildlife:** Provides habitat for threatened and endangered grizzly bear and mountain caribou.



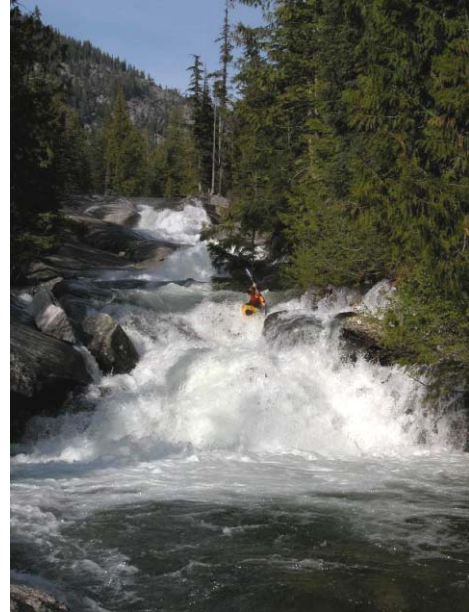
Additional Information:

- Montana Boater Blog: <http://montanaboater.blogspot.com/2008/08/idaho-panhandle-smith-iv-and-cow-creek.html>

1.4 Lion Creek (Headwaters to Priest Lake)

| Tributary of: | Mileage | USFS Eligible | ORV's |
|---------------|---------|---------------|-------|
| Priest Lake | 9 | No | S, R |

- Scenery:** The towering polished bedrock slides and emerald pools of Upper Lion Creek attract many visitors. Mountain goats negotiating the cliffs overhead and the occasional paddler provide additional scenic photograph opportunities. A popular trail provides viewing opportunities.
- Recreation:** Upper Lion Creek offers paddlers an incomparable high elevation “mix of unreal granite slides, kickers, pools, falls, cascades and cracks. The setting is much like the Sierra Nevadas with impressive granite domes and huge Ponderosas.” Upper Lion Creek is likely the steepest whitewater run in the region, with the smoothest bedrock, and some of the most dramatic drops. Lower Lion Creek offers paddlers a lower gradient and roughly roadside Class IV and V run. There are no other similar opportunities in the Priest Lake watershed or the region.
- Fisheries:** Lion Creek is critical habitat for bull trout.



Additional Information:

- American Whitewater River Database page:
<http://www.americanwhitewater.org/content/River/detail/id/4596/>

1.5 Long Canyon Creek (Headwaters to FS Boundary - See NRI)

| Tributary of: | Mileage | USFS Eligible | ORV's |
|----------------|---------|---------------|-------|
| Kootenai River | 13 | Yes | WW |

- Recreation:** A hiking trail gives the public viewing opportunities along Long Canyon Creek.
- Fisheries:** Long Canyon Creek is critical habitat for bull trout.
- Wildlife:** The watershed is free of roads and is otherwise undisturbed by human activity, unlike other adjacent watersheds. The watershed also provides habitat for threatened and



endangered grizzly bear and woodland caribou, and features old growth trees. (NRI)

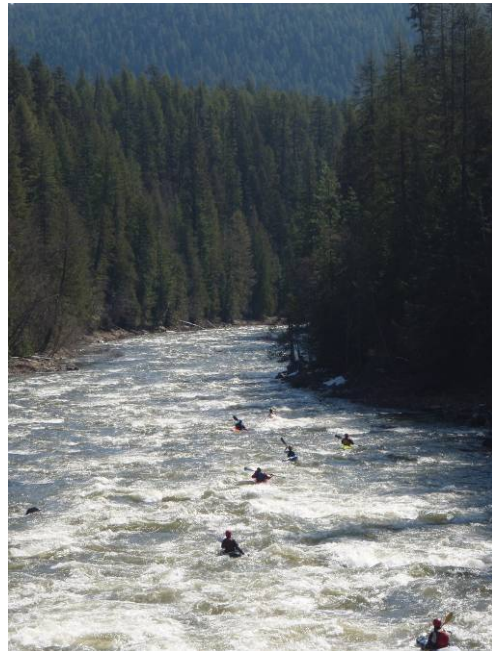
Additional Information:

- Summitpost.org web page: <http://www.summitpost.org/long-canyon/508280>

1.6 Moyie River (Meadow Creek to Reservoir)

| Tributary of: | Mileage | USFS Eligible | ORV's |
|----------------|---------|---------------|-------|
| Kootenai River | 8 | No | R,S |

- Recreation:** The Moyie River offers a remote and highly scenic whitewater rafting and paddling opportunity flowing through angled bedrock cliffs and intact forest. The reach is commercially rafted by ROW, and boasts a relatively long paddling season. The Moyie is Class II/III and is therefore attractive to a broad cross section of the river community.
- History:** The breached Eileen Dam is a dominant feature of this section of river. Built in 1923 the dam failed in 1925 because it was poorly cited. Serving as a reminder of the threats and limitations of dams, paddling through the breached Eileen Dam provides a regionally significant historical experience.



Additional Information:

- American Whitewater River Database Moyie page: <http://www.americanwhitewater.org/content/River/detail/id/179/>

1.7 Pack River (Headwaters above Grottoes through Lower Pack - See NRI)

| Tributary of: | Mileage | USFS Eligible | ORV's |
|-------------------|---------|---------------|-------|
| Lake Pend Oreille | 14 | Yes | R,F |

- Recreation:** The Pack offers paddlers a wide range of easily accessible paddling opportunities set in a scenic canyon, including the Class V Grottos Section, the Class IV/V Slides Section, the Class IV/V Gorgette Section, and the Class I-III Lower Section.



The Pack is the most accessible and relatively low elevation whitewater run in the area, and also features fun bedrock rapids, resulting in a long season and considerable use. Numerous hiking trails begin along the Pack River and offer hikers views of the tumbling river.

- **Fisheries:** The Pack River is critical habitat for bull trout.

Additional Information:

- American Whitewater River Database Grottoes page: <http://www.americanwhitewater.org/content/River/detail/id/4521/>
- American Whitewater River Database Slides page: <http://www.americanwhitewater.org/content/River/detail/id/4522/>
- American Whitewater River Database Gorgette page: <http://www.americanwhitewater.org/content/River/detail/id/4523/>
- American Whitewater River Database Lower Pack page: <http://www.americanwhitewater.org/content/River/detail/id/584/>

1.8 Priest River (Canadian Border to Upper Priest Lake)

| Tributary of: | Mileage | USFS Eligible | ORV's |
|--------------------|---------|---------------|---------|
| Pend Oreille River | 18 | Yes | R,S,F,W |

- **Recreation and Scenery:** The Upper Priest River is bordered by the Idaho State Centennial Trail, which provides hikers with spectacular views of the stream, the Selkirk and Purcell mountains, towering old growth cedars, and Canadian and American Falls.
- **Wildlife:** Provides habitat for threatened and endangered grizzly bear and woodland caribou, as well as lynx and other species. This remote and un-roded valley is likely core US habitat for a number of species.
- **Fisheries:** The Upper Priest River has superb water quality, an intact watershed, and is critical habitat for bull trout.



Additional Information:

- American Whitewater River Database Upper Priest page: <http://www.americanwhitewater.org/content/River/detail/id/603/>

1.9 Smith Creek (Headwaters to Diversion Reservoir)

| Tributary of: | Mileage | USFS Eligible | ORV's |
|----------------|---------|---------------|-------|
| Kootenai River | 10 | No | R |

- **Recreation:** Upper Smith Creek is the remnant of the once classic Smith Creek, which is now virtually impossible to paddle due to a hydropower flow diversion. This flow diversion not only eliminates significant periods of optimal and acceptable flows, but makes predicting the regulated in-stream flow virtually impossible. It also makes Lower Smith Creek unavailable when other nearby rivers are in their optimal range, including Upper Smith Creek. While Lower Smith Creek was once the highlight of the region, Upper Smith Creek remains a high quality bedrock whitewater run in close proximity to Cow Creek and the very different Boundary Creek. Upper Smith offers clean, aesthetic, and fun bedrock rapids and small falls. The reach is easily accessible by Forest Service roads.



- **Wildlife:** Provides habitat for threatened and endangered grizzly bear and woodland caribou, as well as lynx, wolverine and other species.

Additional Information:

- Montana Boater Blog: <http://montanaboater.blogspot.com/2008/08/idaho-panhandle-smith-iv-and-cow-creek.html>

2. Coeur d'Alene National Forest

2.1. North Fork Coeur d'Alene (Big Meadows to FS208)

| Tributary of: | Mileage | USFS Eligible | ORV's |
|---------------|---------|---------------|-------|
| Spokane River | 20 | Yes | S,F,R |

- **Recreation:** The upper North Fork offers many recreational opportunities including, hiking along National Recreation Trail FT20, kayaking and canoeing, and wildlife viewing. The upper North fork also offers excellent recreational fishing in a remote and secluded setting.
- **Scenery:** The North Fork canyon contains many unique, and highly scenic geologic features including Cathedral Rocks, a formation comprised of sheer canyon walls with large rock spires atop.
- **Fisheries:** This reach of the North Fork is some of the most critical bull trout habitat in the Coeur d'Alene drainage, and also holds a healthy West Slope Cutthroat fishery.



Additional Information:

- American Whitewater River Database North Fork Coeur d'Alene page:
<http://www.americanwhitewater.org/content/River/detail/id/3917/>

3. St Joe National Forest

3.1. Little North Fork Clearwater River (Headwaters to Dworshak Reservoir)

| Tributary of: | Mileage | USFS Eligible | ORV's |
|-----------------------------|---------|---------------|---------|
| North Fork Clearwater River | 30 | Yes | S,R,F,W |

- **Recreation:** The Little North Fork Clearwater Gorge contains a diverse range of unique and challenging rapids, rated from class II to Class V. In its upper reaches, the river has continuous class II-III boulder garden style rapids. Lower down, the river drops into several distinct canyons with rapids formed by exposed bedrock ledges, constricted canyon walls and large boulder fields. In



- its last three miles, the river offers nearly continuous class III/IV whitewater, punctuated by large and challenging class IV+ and V drops. The Little North Fork also offers paddlers the only opportunity in the Idaho Panhandle for a multi-day river trip in a remote and roadless setting. The canyon also offers superb opportunities for recreational fishing, as well as hiking and wildlife viewing.
- **Scenery:** The Little North Fork flows through a deep, rugged, roadless river canyon, predominated by scenic groves of mature Western Red cedar. The canyon is rimmed with scenic views of the surrounding peaks of the Mallard Larkins Pioneer area and Snow Peak Wildlife Management area.
- **Fisheries:** The Little North Fork Clearwater has superb water quality, an intact watershed, and is critical habitat for Bull Trout, and holds an exceptional fishery of West Slope Cutthroat. Several Anadromous fishes also use the Little North Fork for spawning.
- **Wildlife:** The Little North Fork provides habitat for several threatened species including Grizzly Bear, Canadian Lynx, Fisher Wolverine and Harlequin Ducks.

Additional Information:

- American Whitewater River Database Little North Fork Clearwater Creek page: <http://www.americanwhitewater.org/content/River/detail/id/3248/>

3.2. *Marble Creek (Headwaters to St. Joe River)*

| Tributary of: | Mileage | USFS Eligible | ORV's |
|---------------|---------|---------------|-------|
| St Joe River | 25 | No | R,S,W |

- **Scenery:** From its headwaters in the Widow Mountain Wilderness Study Area to its junction with FS321, Marble Creek flows through a highly scenic roadless canyon.



- **Recreation:** From the Camp 3 Historic Site to its confluence with the St. Joe River, Marble Creek offers 18 miles of high quality whitewater. Marble Creek is a favorite among local kayakers due to its extremely consistent and steep gradient, which forms nearly non-stop rapids.

Marble Creek's many large boulders create opportunities for paddlers to perform "boof" moves, where they launch airborne from partially submerged, smooth rounded granite boulders.

- **Wildlife:** The upper reaches of Marble Creek, near the St. Joe / Clearwater divide, is habitat for wolverine.

Additional Information:

- American Whitewater River Database Marble Creek page
<http://www.americanwhitewater.org/content/River/detail/id/575/>

3.3. *Slate Creek (Headwaters to St. Joe River)*

| Tributary of: | Mileage | USFS Eligible | ORV's |
|---------------|---------|---------------|-------|
| St Joe River | 11 | No | R,S |

- **Recreation:** Slate Creek offers paddlers a spectacular whitewater boating experience unique to the region. The Creek is characterized by sparkling blue water flowing over and through a dramatic and remote gorge of light colored bedrock. Numerous unique and high



quality Class IV rapids bookend the Class V triple falls. Slate Creek's scenic beauty and high quality unique rapids support a recreation ORV.

- **Scenery:** An old road-bed above the canyon on river-right, as well as the river itself offer views of the impressive gorge, beautiful waterfalls and tumbling rapids.

Additional Information:

- American Whitewater River Database Slate Creek page:
<http://www.americanwhitewater.org/content/River/detail/id/4153/>

Conclusions:

The Idaho Panhandle National Forests contain some truly exceptional rivers and streams. This report highlights thirteen of these waterways that have regionally or nationally significant values that render them eligible for Wild and Scenic designation. These rivers and streams represent the last best rivers in the region, and each is a recreational and ecological treasure. This report is intended to document the values of these special rivers and streams and ultimately to inform a formal eligibility inventory by the US Forest Service.