



## Resolution

December 2019

### Restoration of Wild Chinook Salmon to the Middle Fork Salmon River

The Middle Fork Outfitters Association (MFOA) is a non-profit business trade organization established in 2011 for these purposes: To provide information that will enhance the experience of visitors to Idaho's Middle Fork of the Salmon River; to provide information about access to Idaho's Middle Fork of the Salmon River; to improve general business conditions and promote the interests of its members who provide river trips, fishing and other recreation opportunities on Idaho's Middle Fork of the Salmon River and to work in partnership with other organizations and government entities to help conserve and protect the resources and attributes of the Middle Fork of the Salmon River and Canyon.

The MFOA represents all 26 outfitter businesses that are licensed by the State of Idaho and special use permitted by the Salmon-Challis National Forest to conduct float boating, fishing and other related recreational activities for the public that chooses a guided trip on the Middle Fork Salmon River.

The Middle Fork of the Salmon River is world renowned for offering approximately 10,500 annual visitors consistent high quality and memorable multi-day wilderness experiences.

WHEREAS, historically the Columbia River basin which includes the Salmon and Snake River basins was the most productive Chinook salmon habitat in the world with an estimated 2-6 million Chinook salmon annually return to the Snake River basin and,

WHEREAS, habitat is not limiting in that the Middle Fork of the Salmon River (MFSR) lies within the Frank Church River of No Return Wilderness (FCRONRW) and supports abundant high quality, connected spawning and rearing habitat for Chinook salmon and,

WHEREAS, there are no hatchery reared salmon released into the MFSR and,

WHEREAS, harvest rates are nonexistent as the sport fishery for the MFSR salmon has been closed since 1978 notwithstanding a minimal annual Tribal fisheries harvest and,

WHEREAS, the Rocky Mountain Research Station (RMRS) scientists of the United States Forest Service have identified several critical and sustainable characteristics of Chinook salmon populations including genetic diversity, and have further identified desirable habitat conditions including high elevation spawning conditions in cold water, as necessary to the future recovery and restoration of Chinook salmon in all of the Columbia River basin, particularly the Middle Fork of the Salmon River and its tributaries in the largest contiguous wilderness in the lower 48 states, the FCRONRW, and,

WHEREAS, in 1951 the main stem of MFSR upstream to the confluence with Marsh and Bear Valley creeks was aerially surveyed by Idaho Department of Fish and Game biologists in mid-September with 425 total Chinook redds observed and,

WHEREAS, from 1995 to 2016 biologists observed an average of 11 Chinook redds per year via helicopter aerial based surveys and,

WHEREAS, in 2018 and 2019, biologists observed Chinook 4 redds in the mainstem of the MFSR and,

WHEREAS, the National Marine Fisheries Service of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration in September 2010 through Endangered Species Act Section 7 formal consultation with the Salmon-Challis National Forest (SCNF) concluded in a biological opinion that 10-year commercial floatboat permits and private permits issued via a lottery system for the MFSR can continue with specific modifications in float boat activities for the Chinook spawning period of August 15 to September 15 and,

WHEREAS, a number of conservation measures were applied resultant to the September 2010 biological opinion including, but not limited to the following for the August 15 to September 15 Chinook spawning and float boating period: Chinook Redds are located, identified, mapped by the SCNF River patrol and include avoidance measures applied for float boaters to safely avoid floating over redds; the number of craft per party is limited to 12 and cancelled permits are not reissued and,

WHEREAS, the MFOA initiated a Redd Alert volunteer program in 2018 to supplement SCNF education efforts to avoid Chinook spawning redds that was instrumental in increasing the compliance rate of float boaters avoiding redds from 58 % to 86 %. Middle Fork outfitters and guides are in the forefront of enhancement of redd avoidance education and protection of the habitat for spawning Chinook and,

WHEREAS, a 2015 *Economic Significance of Middle Fork of the Salmon Floater Spending on Local Economies* report by Resource Economist Chris Neher, concluded that total economic impact of MFSR float boating spending was estimated to be between \$8.0 and \$15.1 million in two rural counties, Custer and Lemhi, that this spending supports between 107 and 202 full time equivalent jobs in the two counties and that Middle Fork related employment constitutes between 20 and 38 % of all travel tourism related employment in the two counties and,

Whereas, a recent Outdoor Industry Association analysis of outdoor recreation/tourism in Idaho is a \$7.8 billion with 78,000 direct jobs, \$2.3 billion in wages and salaries and \$447 million in state and local tax revenue and,

WHEREAS, over \$16 billion has been spent by the federal government to recover endangered and threatened fish including Chinook Salmon in the Columbia Basin River Basin and,

WHEREAS, dams, four on the Columbia River and four on the Lower Snake River, affect the survival of salmon stocks from the Snake River basin,

THEREFORE IT BE RESOLVED, that the Middle Fork Outfitters Association (MFOA) supports efforts by Idaho Governor Brad Little's collaborative Salmon Work Group and by Idaho Congressman Mike Simpson to identify solutions to move away from the status quo so that endangered Chinook salmon can be returned to healthy populations in Idaho and,

THEREFORE IT BE FURTHER RESOLVED, that the MFOA understands that there are and continue to be many variables in play that contribute to low and unstainstable populations of endangered Idaho Chinook salmon and,

THEREFORE IT BE FURTHER RESOLVED, that the MFOA understands that keeping all interests economically whole may or may not be possible and may include significant economic mitigation and,

THEREFORE IT BE FURTHER RESOLVED, that the MFOA supports Lower Snake River dam breaching as the most significant way to restore sustainable wild Chinook salmon to the Middle Fork of the Salmon River.