



THE WILDEST PLACE

NEWSLETTER OF THE SELWAY BITTERROOT FRANK CHURCH FOUNDATION



SUMMER 2023

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The Wildest Place is the membership newsletter of the Selway-Bitterroot Frank Church Foundation. With the support of members, local businesses, and generous grantors, the Selway Bitterroot Frank Church Foundation assists the Forest Service in providing stewardship for the Selway-Bitterroot and Frank Church-River of No Return Wildernesses and surrounding wildlands through boots on the ground work, public education, and partnerships.

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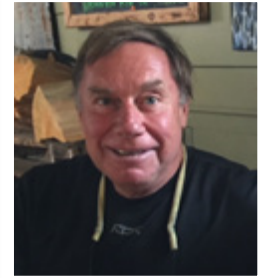
COVER IMAGE: SBFC Wilderness Project Liaison, Karlissa, working in the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness.

The Selway-Bitterroot Frank Church Foundation is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization.

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LETTER FROM THE BOARD CHAIR



The dust has settled. Our 2023 Wilderness Ranger Fellows have completed their training and are on the trail. The seasonal staff are also out working on trails with the Fellows and our Forest Service partners. The SBFC board of directors is moving ahead and has some new, young, energetic members to keep us on our toes. This allows me to write about the activity that initially connected me with SBFC: volunteer trail work!

About 15 years ago, I was lucky enough to be involved with the very first volunteer trip of the Selway Bitterroot Foundation - before we started working in the Frank. By the end of the week, I was sore, tired, and couldn't wait to do it again next summer - and the next, and the next... I'm unsure how many volunteer trips I have done now, but it is over 20.

The main features of the volunteer experience are these: you spend several nights in one of our beautiful wilderness areas with a group of like-minded people. Unlike most backpacking experiences, there is usually a pack team that carries all the food and kitchen equipment and someone who prepares the meals (although some kitchen help is always appreciated). There is no internet! That means no one is staring at their phone. There is no texting or checking your email—just pleasant, relaxing conversation around the campfire.

The work is demanding, no question about that. But everyone does what they can, and at the end of the week, the team has made a few more miles of wilderness trail accessible. There are no expectations or requirements of any individual. The collaboration, teamwork, and support from others make this a wonderful experience. Consider signing up for one of our volunteer trips. I'd love to see you out on the trail.

JIM HEIDELBERGER
Board Chair

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



If you've supported SBFC for a long time and read our newsletters religiously, you know I will give you the inside scoop on what our crews, fellows, and volunteers are doing in the Wilderness this summer. To be sure, I will, but you need a little more than that from me.

I had a great conversation with a long-time SBFC supporter a few months back, and he said: "We are managing these places for people." Wilderness is about people. We made up the idea and drew the lines on the maps. There is nothing "real" about Wilderness. It's simply an idea but an incredibly profound one that has changed hundreds of landscapes and the people who are lucky enough to see them firsthand.

The few hundred people we have the privilege of sending into this massive landscape this year will come out different people than they went in, and the trails will be different too: far better! As I write you this letter, our six crews of fellows and leaders and our twenty professionally-led volunteer projects are making a monumental impact.

People need access to these places today and forever. Our efforts, time, and money are being spent towards that end so that now and for generations to come, we can find solitude, adventure, and refuge from an ever-changing world in America's Wildest Place.

On page 6; you will find a more in-depth look at the SBFC mission and what's at stake.

Thank you so much for your support.

Wilderness Forever and for Everyone,

RYAN GHELFI
Executive Director

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

ZACH MOSS

2018 WILDERNESS RANGER FELLOW

WHY DID YOU WANT TO JOIN SBFC AS A WILDERNESS RANGER FELLOW?

I was seeking a deeper immersion in a huge wild place. In Iowa (my home state), 99.9% of our original tallgrass prairies have been destroyed, 15 out of 2,617 waterbody segments meet all their designated uses, we rank 48th out of 50 states for public land, and we have zero federally-designated Wilderness Areas. I wanted to develop my sense of place in my Geography of Hope, so I could return back to Iowa and have the strength to fight the good fight of natural resource conservation and education in my home state.

I was also excited to return to my roots in conservation, give back to this place and the SBFC organization, and grow in my Wilderness skills and knowledge. When I was a high school student in 2012, I participated in the IDAWA project with Dallas County Conservation Board here in Iowa, where we traveled to the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness. I was led on this trek by Chris Adkins and Connie Saylor Johnson.

During this pilgrimage, I uncovered a new level of intimacy with the natural world, and I began to see my role in the universe differently. My short time in the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness changed who I was as a person and changed the trajectory of my life. I felt that I owed a debt to repay the gifts I had received.

WHAT EXPERIENCES STOOD OUT TO YOU THE MOST DURING YOUR TIME AS AN SBFC FELLOW?

One of my favorite things to tell people is that I got to see a wolverine on my very first hitch to start the summer! It's rare to spot these elusive mustelids, and even rarer to see one as low in elevation and as close-up as we did.

My hitch in the beautiful Soldier Lakes area was my favorite of the summer. I fondly recall hopping around the Soldier Lakes complex clearing trail and naturalizing campsites, fishing and enjoying sunsets in the evening, spotting a small wildfire in the distance from the Big Soldier Lookout, seeing a rainbow of wildflowers blooming on Patrol Ridge, and seeing a double rainbow in the sky while hiking down off Patrol Ridge to our camp.

WHAT WAS THE MOST IMPORTANT LESSON YOU LEARNED DURING YOUR TIME WITH SBFC?

I had an "ah-ha!" moment about public land and Wilderness during a volunteer group hitch along the Middle Fork of the Salmon River. We were a larger group supported by packers from the Treasure Valley Backcountry Horsemen, dozens of rafters and kayakers passed us on the river daily, and there were airplanes flying in and out of nearby Wilderness airstrips. At first, it got on my nerves that this was partially degrading the Wilderness Character of the



Zach working as a Fellow in 2018

area. Slowly, however, I started to change my mindset. I came to understand these other people were operating within the bounds of the Wilderness Act to get out and experience the Frank in various ways. I needed to get out of my own worldview to grow in my understanding that these public lands are meant for everyone, even if they use them differently than I do.

WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR CAREER PATH SINCE YOUR TIME WITH SBFC?

I returned back to Iowa after finishing with SBFC, and I started out working in a corporate office, overseeing outdoor operations (prairie management, lawn care, landscaping, snow removal, etc.) for all the HOAs of a Des Moines real estate company. After working there for a short bit, I spent two years coordinating volunteer water quality monitoring in the state of Iowa for the nonprofit Izaak Walton League. Currently, I've been an environmental educator and natural resource manager for the Dallas County Conservation Board since July 2021.

HOW HAS WHAT YOU LEARNED WHILE BEING A FELLOW INFORMED YOUR CURRENT POSITION, OR YOUR JOURNEY TO WHERE YOU ARE NOW?

Learning more about and living out Leave No Trace has helped shape my view of how humans interact with the natural world and public lands. Spending time doing hard challenges and learning new things in new places as an intern was a great confidence builder for me personally, and it's encouraged me to push myself out of my comfort zone to earn rewarding experiences. Additionally, in my current position in Dallas County, I'll be co-leading the IDAWA trek to volunteer with SBFC in the Selway, and I would not have the skills or confidence to do that without the cumulative Wilderness backpacking experiences and trainings I had as an intern with SBFC.



Zach working in Iowa today



SBFC's 2023 Camptender trail crew: Jersey, Alex, and Heather



TRAIL SPOTLIGHT: CAMPTENDER



Certain trails in the Frank and the Selway become especially meaningful to SBFC, and the Camptender Trail #4027 in the Salmon-Challis National Forest is one of them. The Camptender Trail burned in the Boundary Creek Fire of 2021, leaving the first few miles scorched and covered with fallen trees. SBFC staff worked on this trail in 2022, clearing the first 2 miles of 161 downed trees, and our crews headed back this season to progress further down the trail.

The Camptender Trail is 13 strenuous miles long. It starts along the Dagger-Boundary Creek Road and ends at the junction with the Sulphur Creek Trail (another SBFC multi-year trail work project!). Hikers should be prepared for an uphill battle (literally!) as the trail gains over 1,500 feet of elevation in the first 2.5 miles without switchbacks.

Jersey Hoover, a 2023 Wilderness Ranger Fellow who worked on the trail this year, found it challenging but very rewarding. "All in all, the hike is worth it," she said. "For every foot in elevation you gain, another beautiful ridge view awaits you in the distance. The views are unreal. You truly climb to the top of the world."

After two hitches this summer, the two SBFC Wilderness Ranger Fellows and their Lead Steward cleared 4 miles of the Camptender Trail, cutting 423 burned and deadfallen trees out of the trail corridor. Hikers interested in checking out this route should be able to easily make it to the Mountain Meadows Trail junction (4 miles). After that, more fallen trees are almost certainly obstructing trail access.

Looking at a map of the Frank and piecing together all the trails that connect to the Middle Fork of the Salmon River, it's easy to get caught up daydreaming about epic backpacking loops and what could be if resources were unlimited and these trails were worked on at the fullest capacity. Until then, enjoy some out-and-backs on trails that SBFC, the Forest Service, and other partner nonprofits have worked on thus far this summer. Rest assured that SBFC is committed to doing its part, in collaboration with the USFS, to keep these trail connections open and link these loops for future adventures.



Heather & Alex sawing a log on Camptender this summer.



2022 SBFC Trail Stewards, Lauren and Madeline, working the Camptender Trail.



Crossing Boundary Creek on the Camptender Trail.

WILDERNESS AWARD



SBFC Volunteer Program Manager, Krissy Ferriter, and Program Director, Josh Page, receive the National Wilderness Stewardship Organization of the Year Award for SBFC in April.

MOUNTAINFILM ONTOUR

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Email info@selwaybitterroot.org to learn more about partnership opportunities!

WHAT'S AT STAKE IN WILDERNESS

AUTHOR: RYAN GHELFI, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

American public lands are one of the United States' greatest assets. The right to hike, hunt, fish, and travel through millions of acres of forests, mountains, and deserts is something none of us should ever take for granted. While we might have these rights, we have been losing the ability to travel through many of these landscapes for some time, particularly Wilderness.

For most people, maintained trails constitute access to Wilderness. You may be allowed to travel cross-country through a Wilderness, but only a few can do this feat regularly. The American people NEED trails to access places like the Frank Church-River of No Return and Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness. Further, these lands were explicitly set aside "for the enjoyment of the American people." It says it right in the 1964 Wilderness Act:

"For this purpose, there is hereby established a National Wilderness Preservation System to be composed of federally owned areas designated by Congress as "wilderness areas", and these shall be administered for the use and enjoyment of the American people in such manner as will leave them unimpaired for future use and enjoyment as wilderness, and so as to provide for the protection of these areas, the preservation of their wilderness character, and for the gathering and dissemination of information regarding their use and enjoyment as wilderness;"

Our namesake Wilderness areas have thousands of miles of designated trails crossing them, allowing people to immerse themselves in these landscapes. But the problem is that we've struggled to maintain this access in many places for several decades. Countless designated trails disappear because of overgrown brush, dead fallen trees, and erosion. We are losing connections and routes, potentially forever in some cases.

I have seen and felt the degradation of our Wilderness trails many times in real life. Being in the middle of a long route and finding that much of the trail is swallowed by brush, leaving you swimming through overgrowth until you're beaten and bloody, is arduous. For many people, this type of experience would dissuade them from returning. Trail conditions like these create a negative feedback loop where fewer people use the trails, so there appears to be less demand and diminished support to maintain many of these routes. It's a chicken or egg problem where unmaintained trails lead to more and more unmaintained trails. This reduced access leads to overcrowding of the areas where trails are maintained, which is another issue altogether.

Many organizations are doing what they can. The US Forest Service is dedicated to this mission and working incredibly hard, but their budgets for staff addressing these issues have decreased by 49% since



1992*, which tells us that it will take a combined effort to solve. At SBFC, we are wholeheartedly devoted to this project, and still, it's not enough. A strong, sustained partnership with the USFS will leverage funds and move towards optimum trail access results. Robust collaboration is essential to attract supplemental funding from a variety of sources. We need more help, including volunteers and financial investment in our programs. We must commit to passing on this legacy of Wilderness and access to it to our grandchildren, their grandchildren, and all future generations.

As the saying goes, many hands make light work. This work won't be light, and it will take many hands. But I believe that we, the people, can save these trails and keep these Wilderness areas wild and accessible for all. It won't just happen, and asking, "Why don't 'they' do something about it" is the wrong question. It's we who must do something about it, and I know that we can.

Our staff, volunteers, and Wilderness Ranger Fellows are committed to this mission, and we are engaging as an organization to bring more people and communities into the tent and out into the Wilderness with us.

I promise that your efforts and money are well spent in the Frank and Selway Country. Now is the time to give generously, get your hands dirty, and get involved. The future of these wilderness areas depends on it!

*Source: <https://nafsr.org/advocacy/2019/072619%20Workforce%20Capacity%20Study.pdf>

2023 SBFC Member Outreach Project

Calling all SBFC Members!

We are attempting to chat with all of our 500+ members this year. We want your input about why you support SBFC, what you'd like to see from us in the future, and how you'd like to be involved in your wilderness areas.

Please reach out to us if you're interested in setting up a phone call!
membership@selwaybitterroot.org





Selway-Bitterroot Foundation INC
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We hope you will consider the Selway Bitterroot Frank Church Foundation in your estate planning. Memorial gifts and bequests are placed in a special fund so that these gifts can permanently support wilderness protection in the Selway-Bitterroot and Frank Church River of No Return Wilderness areas.

We welcome your inquiries about bequests and other kinds of giving. Please call or email Ryan Ghelfi, (208) 373-4381, rg Helfi@selwaybitterroot.org.