

Inventory, Monitoring and Simulating the Impacts from Dispersed Visitor Use in the Frank Church – River of No Return Wilderness

Rachel Nelson¹, Suzanne Cable², Robert Itami³, Randy Gimblett¹ and David Cole⁴

¹ School of Renewable Natural Resources, University of Arizona, Tucson, Arizona, USA

² North Fork Ranger District, Salmon-Challis National Forest, North Fork, Idaho, USA

³ GeoDimensions Pty Ltd, Sorrento, Victoria, Australia

⁴ Aldo Leopold Wilderness Research Institute, Missoula MT, USA

The Bighorn Crags is most likely the highest use non-river resource in the Frank Church – River of No Return Wilderness. Physical impacts from dispersed visitor use are widespread throughout these areas and severe at many popular camp locations. Social impacts to visitor experiences are likely, but currently not well documented. Through systematic inventory of impacts and monitoring of use, the need for site-specific management actions to address physical and social resource concerns can be determined.

This paper will discuss an approach implemented to collect specific data to examine the past and present conditions of sites and environments under traditional and current use and a protocol for long term monitoring of visitor flow, associated use and environmental conditions will be implemented. A virtual computer model of the wilderness area was built to simulate patterns of visitor use and model and evaluate alternative management scenarios for sustaining ecosystem values as well as providing high quality wilderness experiences for visitors.