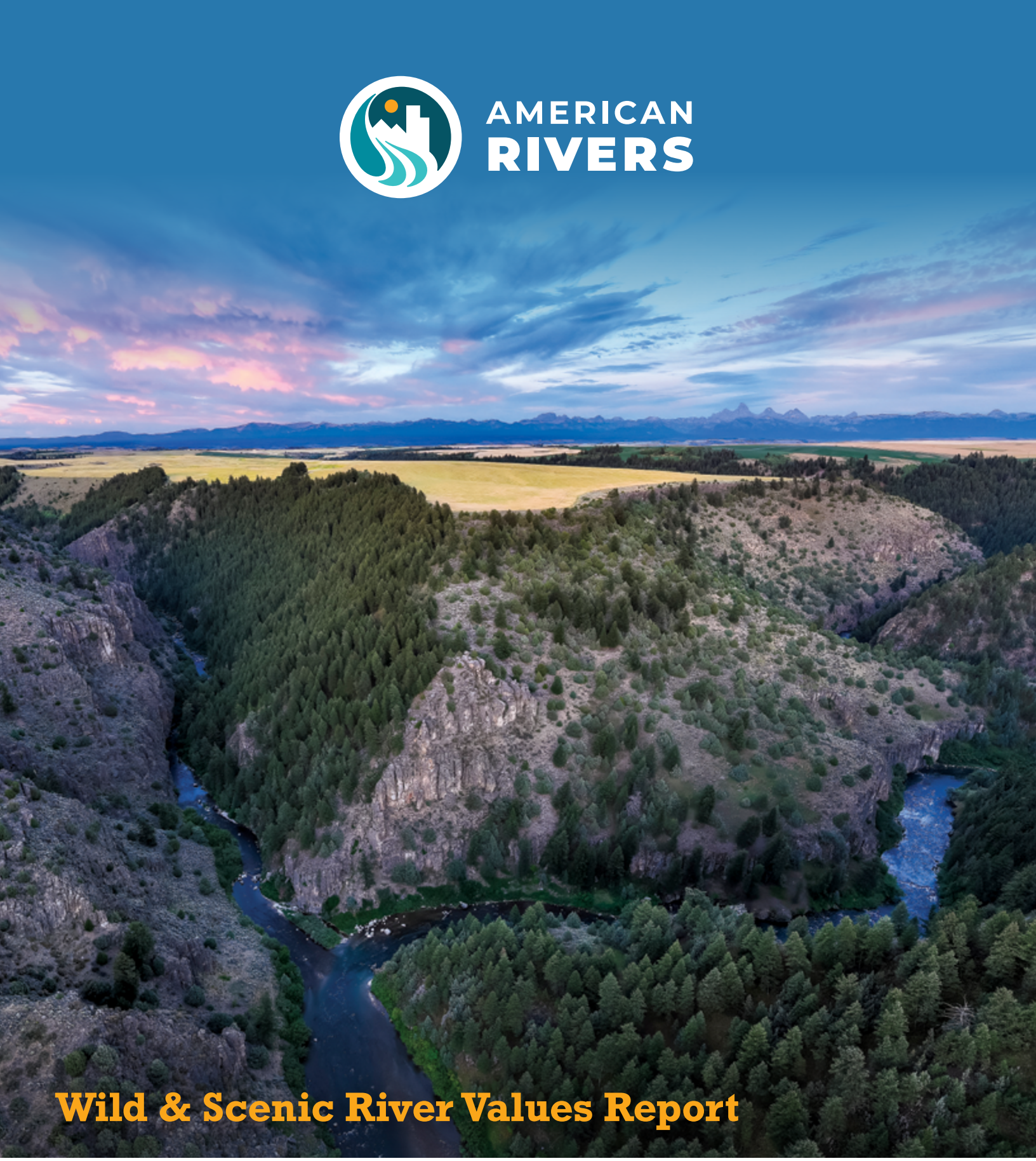
AMERICAN RIVERS



Wild & Scenic River Values Report

SOUTH FORK SNAKE RIVER, TETON RIVER, AND SELECT TRIBUTARIES

2026

Acknowledgments

TRIBAL LANDS

The South Fork Snake River and the Teton River basins are ceded lands of the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes, who traditionally occupied vast regions of land encompassing present-day Idaho, Oregon, Nevada, Utah, Wyoming, Montana, and Canada. Fort Hall Reservation was reserved under the Bridger Treaty of 1868 for the mixed bands of Shoshone and Bannock people, today's Shoshone-Bannock Tribes of Fort Hall. These river basins are vitally important to contemporary and future tribal members who maintain connection and kinship to the land, water, wildlife, and plants for sustenance, traditional cultural practices, ceremony, and the realization of tribal sovereignty and treaty rights across ancestral homelands.

These rivers flow through a landscape shared by multigenerational rural and urban families, many of whom make a living from the land through farming, ranching, or outdoor recreation related tourism.

ASSISTANCE WITH THIS REPORT

This report on the suitability of eligible Wild and Scenic Rivers managed by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) Upper Snake Field Office (USFO) in eastern Idaho was developed by American Rivers, with technical support from independent contractors and financial support from individuals. The report includes Geographical Information System analysis and mapping by Four Corners Mapping, LLC; public opinion polling conducted by Peak Insights; photography by Bob Wick Photography. Graphic Design and Layout by J. Huckleberry Graphic Design. Access assistance was supported by the BLM USFO. Wildlife and fisheries data, peer-reviewed literature, scientific and agency reports were extensively used, as were conversations with community members and subject matter experts. American Rivers thanks those who have shared information, time, and wisdom about this landscape and its rivers to inform this report.

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COVER PHOTO:
Confluence of the Teton River and Bitch Creek,
by Bob Wick Photography

ABOUT AMERICAN RIVERS

American Rivers is a national conservation organization working to make every river clean and healthy for people and wildlife. We combine evidence-based solutions with enduring partnerships to safeguard the 4.4 million miles of rivers and streams that are essential to our nation's clean drinking water, extraordinary wildlife, and the strength of our communities. For more than 50 years, our staff, supporters, and partners have been driven by a common belief: Life Depends on Rivers.

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Executive Summary

The South Fork Snake River, the Teton River, and select tributaries managed by the Bureau of Land Management's Upper Snake Field Office represent some of eastern Idaho's most significant remaining free-flowing river resources. Building upon the BLM's 2009 Eligibility Report and incorporating updated scientific data, restoration outcomes, economic analysis, and public opinion research, this report concludes that these river segments warrant a determination of suitability for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System.

Together, the nearly 100 miles of river evaluated here possess Outstandingly Remarkable Values (ORVs) that are regionally—and in some cases nationally—significant. These rivers sustain imperiled native Yellowstone cutthroat trout populations, provide essential winter range and migration corridors for mule deer and elk, support exceptional bird diversity, and protect extensive cottonwood gallery forests and rare plant species. They also offer premier recreational opportunities—particularly angling and boating—that contribute meaningfully to the regional economy and define eastern Idaho's outdoor identity.

The ORVs identified during the eligibility phase remain intact and, in several cases, strengthened by recent restoration investments. Fish populations in the Teton River Canyon have rebounded. Conservation easements and public land acquisitions along the South Fork have expanded permanently protected acreage. Basin-wide water quality improvements and collaborative habitat restoration efforts demonstrate sustained commitment from tribes, state agencies, nonprofit organizations, and local communities.

Public support for permanent protection is strong. Recent polling of eastern Idaho voters shows broad support for long-term river protection and for Wild and Scenic River designation, reflecting recognition that healthy rivers underpin wildlife, local economies, and clean water.

A suitability determination would not alter private property rights or eliminate existing infrastructure and uses; provided management protects the rivers' free-flowing character and enhances their ORVs.

For these reasons, and consistent with the purposes of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, the Upper Snake Field Office would be warranted in determining that the eligible segments of the South Fork Snake River, the Teton River, and Bitch Creek are suitable for future Congressional designation.

Key Findings

1. **The Rivers Possess Clearly Outstanding Values.**
   The South Fork Snake River, the Teton River, and select tributaries contain exceptional fisheries, wildlife habitat, cultural resources, scenery, and recreation that meet the standard of "outstandingly remarkable" under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act.

2. **The Fisheries Are High-Quality and Economically Important.**
   Native Yellowstone cutthroat trout populations in both river systems represent critical remaining strongholds within their historic range. Restoration efforts have produced measurable improvements, supporting nationally recognized wild trout fisheries that contribute significantly to the regional economy.

3. **The River Corridors Provide Essential Wildlife Habitat.**
   These corridors function as key winter range and migration pathways for mule deer and elk, nesting and wintering habitat for bald eagles, and important habitat for waterfowl and raptors. Extensive cottonwood gallery forests and intact tributary networks enhance their ecological significance.

4. **Cultural and Historic Resources Are Substantial and Enduring.**
   The rivers lie within the ancestral homelands of the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes and contain numerous archeological, sacred, and historic sites. These resources reflect deep Indigenous connections and the region's agricultural and settlement history.

5. **Long-Term Investment Demonstrates Local Commitment.**
   Substantial investments in conservation easements, habitat restoration, fisheries management, and water quality improvement demonstrate durable, nonfederal commitment to protecting these river systems.

6. **Public Support Is Strong.**
   Polling in eastern Idaho counties shows clear majority support for long-term river protection and Wild and Scenic designation, grounded in shared priorities of habitat protection, economic vitality, and clean water.

7. **Suitability Is Compatible with Existing Uses.**
   Current agricultural, recreational, and infrastructure uses have coexisted with eligibility status and state protections for decades. A suitability determination would maintain this balance while ensuring that future management safeguards the rivers' outstanding values.

8. **Supported Conclusion.**
   The South Fork Snake River, the Teton River, and select tributaries are high-quality, regionally significant river systems whose ecological integrity, cultural importance, economic value, and public support justify advancement to the suitability phase. The Upper Snake Field Office would be warranted in determining that these eligible segments are suitable for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System and recommend them to Congress for future designation.

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Introduction

Located in eastern Idaho, the South Fork Snake River and the Teton River are exceptional natural treasures, true Idaho gems. Originating in Wyoming's Teton Range and flowing west into Idaho, they provide water for agriculture, industry, and recreation while sustaining important fish and wildlife habitat.

The Bureau of Land Management's Upper Snake Field Office (USFO) has found the South Fork Snake River, the Teton River, and select tributaries eligible for Wild and Scenic River designation. This report compiles scientific literature, agency reports, polling data, and expert input to support Wild and Scenic protections for these river segments and concludes that the USFO would be warranted in determining that these eligible segments are suitable for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System as the USFO develops its new Resource Management Plan.

These waterways run through Teton, Fremont, Madison, Jefferson, and Bonneville counties—an area that supports nearly one million acres of farmland and roughly 100,000 tourism-related jobs, with especially strong tourism activity in Teton County.[1] Rapid population growth, rising water demand, and increasing recreational pressure in eastern Idaho strengthen the case for durable river protections. The nearly 100 river miles evaluated here warrant the highest level of administrative protection and inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System to secure their long-term ecological, cultural, recreational and economic benefits.

[1] Loomis, John. 2005. The Economic Values of Recreational Fishing & Boating to Visitors & Communities along the Upper Snake River. Department of Agriculture and Resource Economics, Colorado State University. Fort Collins, CO.

Overview of Wild and Scenic Rivers Act

The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act was passed by Congress in 1968 to preserve free-flowing rivers with outstandingly remarkable values for the enjoyment of present and future generations.[2]

> *"It is hereby declared to be the policy of the United States that certain selected rivers of the Nation which, with their immediate environments, possess outstandingly remarkable scenic, recreational, geologic, fish and wildlife, historic, cultural or other similar values, shall be preserved in free-flowing condition, and that they and their immediate environments shall be protected for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations. The Congress declares that the established national policy of dams and other construction at appropriate sections of the rivers of the United States needs to be complemented by a policy that would preserve other selected rivers or sections thereof in their free-flowing condition to protect the water quality of such rivers and to fulfill other vital national conservation purposes."*
>
> *Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, October 2, 1968*

Under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, agencies are charged with determining which rivers and streams within their jurisdiction are eligible for designation. To be considered eligible, a river or stream must be free-flowing and possess one or more Outstandingly Remarkable Values (ORVs). To be considered as outstandingly remarkable, a river-related value must be a unique, rare, or exemplary feature that is significant at a comparative regional or national scale. While the spectrum of resources that may be considered is broad, all values should be directly river-related. These values may include fish, wildlife, culture, recreation, geology, botany, scenery, history, and literary significance.

When found eligible for inclusion in the Wild and Scenic River System, a river or stream is preliminarily classified as either Wild, Scenic, or Recreational, based on the degree of access and extent of development within the river corridor.

- **Wild Rivers** – rivers or sections of rivers that are free of impoundments and generally inaccessible except by trail, with shorelines essentially primitive and waters unpolluted.
- **Scenic Rivers** – rivers or sections of rivers that are free of impoundments, with shorelines or watersheds largely primitive and undeveloped, but accessible in places by roads.
- **Recreational Rivers** –rivers or sections of rivers that are readily accessible by road or railroad, that may have some development along their shorelines, and that may have undergone some limited impoundment or diversion in the past.

Regardless of classification, rivers deemed eligible are administered with the goal of protecting and enhancing their outstanding values. Recreation, forestry practices, and other uses may continue in a manner that is consistent with protecting or enhancing the river's ORVs.

[2] Public Law 90-542; 16 U.S.C. 1271 et seq.

From time to time, frequently during an agency's work to refresh or adopt an updated land management plan, the local offices of land management agencies revisit their prior eligible determinations and consider if a river should be reclassified. This re-assessment can result in a river remaining classified as an eligible river, or, through review, determined to be suitable for Wild and Scenic designation. Rivers found to no longer be eligible, or not suitable, are typically reclassified as such.

A determination of suitability is the final agency step in the river assessment process for Wild and Scenic designation. This step provides the basis for determining which rivers should be recommended for addition to the National System and forms the basis for an agency's recommendation to Congress, since it is Congress that has the authority to designate a river as Wild and Scenic.

Eligible, suitable, and designated Wild and Scenic Rivers are managed by agencies to maintain their free-flowing character and protect and enhance their ORVs. This includes lands within a buffer extending out ¼ of a mile on both sides of the river. This buffer only applies to public lands; private lands along a Wild and Scenic River are not subject to any federal government management, restriction, or regulation. Existing uses on public lands within this buffer, such as for recreation (e.g. a boat ramp) or irrigation (e.g. existing infrastructure), are allowed to continue, as long as they do not degrade the river's free-flowing character, water quality, or outstanding values.

Designated Wild and Scenic Rivers within today's National Wild and Scenic Rivers System encompass many types of waterways, including remote headwaters, rural streams, the free-flowing sections of river above or below existing dams.

LOCHSA WILD AND SCENIC RIVER | CHUCK PEZESHKI

Wild and Scenic Rivers in Idaho

Idaho has played a unique role in the history of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System, due to the efforts of Idaho Senator Frank Church. Senator Church was one of the chief architects of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act and was its primary sponsor in the U.S. Senate. Two of Idaho's 22 Wild and Scenic Rivers were designated with passage of the Act—the Middle Fork of the Clearwater River (including the Selway and Lochsa Rivers) and the famed Middle Fork of the Salmon River.

Despite Idaho's role in river protection history, of the 107,651 miles of rivers across Idaho, only 891 miles are designated as Wild and Scenic—less than 1% of the state's total river miles.

Since the passage of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, Idahoans have been strong advocates for additional river designations and numerous additional rivers and streams have been formally designated as Wild and Scenic by Congress.

YEAR OF DESIGNATION	RIVER	MANAGING UNIT (BLM DISTRICT / NATIONAL FOREST)	WILD MILES	SCENIC MILES	RECREATIONAL MILES	TOTAL
1968	MIDDLE FORK CLEARWATER RIVER	NEZ PERCE-CLEARWATER NATIONAL FORESTS	54	0	131	185
1968	MIDDLE FORK SALMON RIVER	SALMON-CHALLIS NATIONAL FOREST	103	0	1	104
1975	RAPID RIVER	NEZ PERCE-CLEARWATER NATIONAL FORESTS	26.8	0	0	26.8
1975	SNAKE RIVER	WALLOWA-WHITMAN NATIONAL FOREST (HELLS CANYON NRA)	31.5	36	0	67.5
1978	SAINT JOE RIVER	IDAHO PANHANDLE NATIONAL FORESTS	26.6	0	39.7	66.3
1980	SALMON RIVER	SALMON-CHALLIS NATIONAL FOREST (FRANK CHURCH–RONR WILDERNESS)	79	0	46	125
2009	BATTLE CREEK	BLM BOISE DISTRICT	23.4	0	0	23.4
2009	BIG JACKS CREEK	BLM BOISE DISTRICT	35	0	0	35
2009	BRUNEAU RIVER	BLM TWIN FALLS DISTRICT	38.7	0	0	39.3
2009	COTTONWOOD CREEK	BLM BOISE DISTRICT	2.6	0	0	2.6
2009	DEEP CREEK	BLM BOISE DISTRICT	13.1	0	0	13.1
2009	DICKSHOOTER CREEK	BLM BOISE DISTRICT	9.3	0	0	9.3
2009	DUNCAN CREEK	BLM BOISE DISTRICT	0.9	0	0	0.9
2009	JARBIDGE RIVER	BLM TWIN FALLS DISTRICT	28.8	0	0	28.8
2009	LITTLE JACKS CREEK	BLM BOISE DISTRICT	12.4	0	0	12.4
2009	NORTH FORK OWYHEE RIVER	BLM BOISE DISTRICT	15.1	0	5.7	20.8
2009	OWYHEE RIVER	BLM BOISE DISTRICT	67.3	0	0	67.3
2009	RED CANYON	BLM BOISE DISTRICT	4.6	0	0	4.6
2009	SHEEP CREEK	BLM TWIN FALLS DISTRICT	25.6	0	0	25.6
2009	SOUTH FORK OWYHEE RIVER	BLM BOISE DISTRICT	30.2	0	0	31.4
2009	WEST FORK BRUNEAU RIVER	BLM TWIN FALLS DISTRICT	0.4	0	0	0.4
2009	WICKAHONEY CREEK	BLM BOISE DISTRICT	1.5	0	0	1.5

COLT KILLED CREEK, A SUITABLE WILD AND SCENIC RIVER ON THE NEZ PERCE-CLEARWATER NATIONAL FOREST | LISA RONALD

Eligible and Suitable Rivers in Idaho

In Idaho, the BLM and U.S. Forest Service (USFS) collectively manage 2,745 miles of 172 eligible or suitable Wild and Scenic Rivers. That is more than three times the mileage and nearly eight times the number of rivers that are formally designated.[3]

The BLM and USFS are responsible for creating and updating land management plans, which direct the management of natural resources, land, water, recreation, and other elements and activities on National Landscape Conservation System lands and National Forests across Idaho. These plans are typically revised every 15 to 20 years to ensure that management practices are up to date and reflect current needs. Reviewing rivers and streams for potential inclusion as eligible Wild and Scenic Rivers is a mandatory component of the land management plan revision process and requires the agency to identify ORVs associated with rivers and streams within its jurisdiction. During this review, rivers found eligible for Wild and Scenic designation may be assessed for suitability.

[3] Calculated using data from rivers.gov and the Nationwide Rivers Inventory

As Forests revise their formal planning documents, suitability analyses are optional within forest plan revisions.[4] In contrast, the BLM, sequentially proceeds with determinations of eligibility and then an assessment of suitability when undertaking planning.[5]

River segments determined to be eligible are afforded interim protective management until a suitability study is completed. It is the BLM's policy to manage and protect the free flowing character, tentative classification, and identified ORVs of eligible rivers.

Agency management of rivers deemed either eligible or suitable for Wild and Scenic inclusion preserves for future generations the opportunity to consider rivers for designation and recognizes that the ultimate authority to designate a river as such lies with Congress.

Eligible Wild and Scenic Rivers in the Upper Snake Field Office

In March of 2009, the Upper Snake Field Office completed its Wild and Scenic River Eligibility Report[6], a BLM technical study prepared as part of land-use planning under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. Its purpose was to inventory rivers on BLM-administered lands within the USFO, evaluate whether they are free-flowing and possess Outstandingly Remarkable Values (ORVs), and determine whether they qualify as eligible for potential inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. The report represents the eligibility phase only; the later suitability determination would occur during Resource Management Plan revision.

After reviewing 922 stream segments, totaling roughly 465 miles of streams, the BLM concluded that sections of 5 rivers met eligibility criteria: the South Fork Snake River (three segments), the Teton River (four segments), and Badger Creek, Bitch Creek, and Canyon Creek.

The South Fork Snake River was found eligible based on exceptional recreational opportunities associated with the nationally recognized fishery, important spawning habitat for Yellowstone cutthroat trout, extensive cottonwood gallery forests, bald eagle habitat, bird diversity, and long-standing cultural and historic use.

The Teton River and its significant tributaries were found eligible because of their regionally significant fish, wildlife, scenic, recreational, cultural, and historic values. The Teton River supports one of Idaho's critical remaining populations of native Yellowstone cutthroat trout, provides important mule deer winter range, and contains raptor habitat and Native American cultural sites. Its tributaries similarly provide high-quality coldwater fish habitat and migration corridors for big game and significant historic resources.

Overall, the report demonstrates these rivers possess outstanding values and warrant being managed accordingly until a future planning decision determines whether they should be classified as suitable for Wild and Scenic designation.

[4] USFS Handbook 1909.12, Chapter 80

[5] BLM Manual 6400. https://rivers.gov/sites/rivers/files/2024-07/blm-policy-manual.pdf

[6] Wild and Scenic River Eligibility Report, The Bureau of Land Management, Upper Snake Field Office, March 2009. https://www.usbr.gov/pn/studies/henrysfork/reference/blmwild.pdf

Next Step: Suitability Analysis

As the BLM's Upper Snake Field Office undertakes the revision of its Resource Management Plan, it will have the responsibility of completing the suitability phase for all streams that it previously found to be eligible. Each eligible river segment will be evaluated for suitability or nonsuitability to assess whether or not it is a potential candidate for inclusion in the National System. Congressional action is required for actual designation.

This report supplements the BLM's 2009 Wild and Scenic River eligibility study with additional information consistent with the sort of material used by federal agencies to assess the suitability of eligible rivers for potential Wild and Scenic designation. This report provides additional details about the identified ORVs, evaluates the viability and support of competing uses, and describes public support for river protection.

Among the factors that the BLM typically considers when undertaking the suitability phase are matters related to local support or opposition to river designation. A public opinion poll was recently conducted within the six eastern Idaho Counties closest to these rivers. The information learned from this survey is included in this report.

This, taken with the information in this report regarding the ORVs supported by these rivers, demonstrates that it is warranted for the USFO to determine that these rivers are suitable for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System through future Congressional designation.

South Fork Snake River

Based on the information provided in this report, and complementing the BLM's prior determination of eligibility for three segments of the South Fork Snake River, these segments now warrant a finding of suitability for Wild and Scenic consideration.

Segment 1:
Palisades Reservoir to Conant Valley Power Line

Segment 2:
Conant Valley Power Line to Riley Diversion

Segment 3:
Riley Diversion to the Henry's Fork confluence

All three segments contain outstandingly remarkable recreational, fish, wildlife, botanical, cultural, and ecological values and the following descriptions of these values apply to all three segments. Collectively, these fisheries, wildlife, botanical, ecological, and cultural features illustrate the river's exceptional and regionally significant resource values.

Recreation

The South Fork Snake River is an internationally known recreation destination. Anglers travel from across the country to fish by drift boat, motorized craft, or from shore, making it one of Idaho's premier fly-fishing rivers. It is regionally and nationally renowned for its recreational opportunities, and the BLM estimates that more than 300,000 anglers, campers, hikers, boaters, and bird watchers visit it annually.[7] On average, since 1995, nearly 400 private parties float and camp on the multi-day section each year.[8] Eight commercial fishing outfitters are federally permitted by the BLM and USFS on the South Fork

[7] https://www.blm.gov/visit/south-fork-snake

[8] Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service. 2018. Interagency Management of Special Recreation Permits/Special Use Permits and Designated Camping with the Snake River Planning Area and Teton River Canyon Environmental Assessment. Idaho Falls District and Caribou-Targhee National Forest.

SOUTH FORK SNAKE RIVER | BOB WICK PHOTOGRAPHY

Snake River; these companies have brought more than 90,000 people down the river since 2008.[9] Access to the river occurs via 11 river access sites.

A 2001 University of Utah visitor survey found that most visitors came to the South Fork Snake River to fish, and most fished from boats.[10] More visitors float now, and angling remains popular statewide, with 19% of Idaho residents possessing a fishing license.[11] In 2021, Idaho anglers spent nearly $788 million on fishing statewide, which generated $1.2 billion and supported 8,750 jobs.[12] The South Fork's fishery supports one of the most important Yellowstone cutthroat trout populations in their historical range, hence its popularity among anglers specifically for its opportunities to catch wild native trout.[13] In 2006, researchers substantiated the connection between the health of the South Fork Snake River fishery and its value to the eastern Idaho economy, finding that having more, bigger fish brings in more anglers and nearly doubles the amount of money they're willing to spend here.[14]

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[9] Ibid.

[10] University of Utah Institute for Outdoor Recreation and Tourism. 2001. A Summary Report: 2001 South Fork of the Snake River Boater and Campers Visitor Survey.

[11] Idaho Department of Fish & Game. 2025. 2025-3030 Fisheries Management Strategy.

[12] American Sportfishing Association. 2021. Sportfishing in America: A reliable economic force.

[13] Idaho Department of Fish & Game. 2025. 2025-3030 Fisheries Management Strategy.

[14] Loomis, J. 2006. Use of survey data to estimate economic value and regional economic effects of fishery improvements. North American Journal of Fisheries Management 26:301-307.

Fish and Wildlife

Biologically, the high-quality habitat, deep summer pools, and cool water temperatures provide important thermal refuge and spawning conditions for fish and the river supports one of the state's most important spawning populations of native Yellowstone cutthroat trout, a recognized imperiled species. Yet prior to 2018, Yellowstone cutthroat trout were decreasing in number. That year, the Idaho Department of Fish & Game launched a rainbow trout suppression program to reduce competition and hybridization between the two species. By 2024, the program had successfully removed 30% of the rainbow trout population through electrofishing and angler harvest. Yellowstone cutthroat trout are recovering, opening the region to the economic gains predicted by researchers a decade ago. This intensive effort demonstrates the high value that nonfederal entities place on caring for and protecting this resource.

The river corridor contains the largest continuous cottonwood gallery forest in the western United States and is home to the Ute Ladies' Tresses orchid, a rare plant federally protected under the Endangered Species Act. The river here is also designated a National Important Bird Area because 126 species, including 20 birds of prey and numerous neotropical migrants, utilize the area for breeding, wintering, or stop-over locations. Fully half of Idaho's bald eagles – one-third of the bald eagles in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem – nest here. Eligible segments are located within the BLM's Snake River Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC), which was created to protect cottonwoods, bald eagle habitat, and scenery.

Cultural and Historic

The Shoshone-Bannock people have lived along the South Fork Snake River for over 8,000 years, and cultural and sacred sites associated with the river include numerous rockshelters, pictographs, and pit houses. The South Fork also includes historic sites associated with pioneers such as ranches, cabins, ferry landings, and irrigation diversions. The Anderson Canal, built in 1880, and Riley Ditch, built in 1900, are still in use today and provide water for present-day cattle ranching and cropland–including grain, alfalfa, and potatoes–downstream of the eligible section.[15]

YELLOWSTONE CUTTHROAT TROUT | PAY CLAYTON, FISH EYE GUY PHOTOGRAPHY

CONANT RIVER ACCESS AND BOAT RAMP | BOB WICK PHOTOGRAPHY

Nonfederal Commitment to Protecting this River

In addition to the protections granted under the ACEC and its current Wild and Scenic eligible status, longstanding work by the Teton Regional Land Trust, The Nature Conservancy, and The Conservation Fund have secured numerous conservation easements on and acquisitions of private lands along the river. Since the late 1990s, acquisitions and easements valued at more than $51.5 million have increased the conserved area along the river corridor by more than 18,000 acres. These significant investments demonstrate a strong and active commitment to protect the river by nonfederal entities.

In 1996, the South Fork Snake River – from Palisades Dam to its confluence with the Henry's Fork – was designated as a state-protected recreational river under the Idaho Comprehensive State Water Plan.[16] This, too, demonstrates a strong and active commitment to protect the river by nonfederal entities.

In 2025, American Rivers commissioned a poll of eastern Idaho voters revealing widespread support for permanent protection as a designated Wild and Scenic River. The poll demonstrated that eastern Idaho voters value vital fish and wildlife habitat, sustaining the local economy, and providing clean drinking water to communities as compelling reasons to protect eastern Idaho rivers. Fishing, wildlife-viewing, and floating/paddling were the top activities that people engaged in on the South Fork Snake River, and the top threats they identified were water pollution and riverside development. The poll found that 86% of respondents support long-term protection for the South Fork Snake River, and 81% are in favor of Wild and Scenic River designation.

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[15] Merigliano, M. F. 1994. Natural history of the South Fork Snake River eastern Idaho emphasizing geomorphology hydrology and vegetation. Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, & Professional Papers. 8161.

[16] https://idwr.idaho.gov/iwrb/water-planning/state-protected-rivers/

FALL CREEK FALLS | BOB WICK, BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

SEGMENT 1:

PALISADES DAM TO CONANT VALLEY POWER LINE

Mileage: 17.23 miles

Classification: Recreational

Outstandingly Remarkable Values: Recreation, Fish, Wildlife, Ecological

Competing Uses: None

Public Support: 86% of eastern Idaho voters support long-term protections for the South Fork Snake River and 81% support Wild and Scenic River designation.

Maps: #1 and #2

Description:
Palisades Dam began operations in 1958 and provides water storage, flood control, and hydroelectric power to eastern Idaho. Between Palisades Dam and Conant Valley, river use is largely day-use floating and angling via four river access sites: Palisades Dam, Palisades Creek, Spring Creek, and Conant. This segment includes Fall Creek Falls, a terraced waterfall cascading off the shores of the Snake River Islands Wilderness Study Area, which comprises 39 separate islands spread out over 25 river miles between Swan Valley and Heise, Idaho. Pine Creek Bench, uplands near Fall Creek Falls that support sharp-tail grouse, and transitional habitat for elk and mule deer, was an early land acquisition using mitigation funds from Palisades Dam.

FISHER BOTTOM | BOB WICK PHOTOGRAPHY

SEGMENT 2:

CONANT VALLEY POWER LINE TO RILEY DIVERSION

Mileage: 21.26 miles

Classification: Scenic

Outstandingly Remarkable Values: Recreation, Fish, Wildlife, Ecological, Scenery

Competing Uses: None

Public Support: 86% of eastern Idaho voters support long-term protections for the South Fork Snake River and 81% support Wild and Scenic River designation.

Maps: #3 and #4

Description:
Starting in the Conant Valley, the river leaves Highway 26 and feels remote and primitive. This popular scenic section provides the only opportunity for a multi-day river trip experience in the area. Camping at designated sites is required to avoid disturbing bald eagle nesting areas. The BLM also requires campers to use firepans and pack out all waste. The Canyon Rim Trail parallels the river between Dry and Black Canyons, with some road access to dispersed camping and the Fulmer and Wolf Flat access sites via Table Rock Canyon Road. The mouth of Burns Canyon, just upstream of the Fulmer river access site, was once proposed as the location for the Lynn Crandall Dam, which would have inundated the river and its side canyons upstream to the town of Swan Valley.

Not only does this section provide superb angling and wildlife viewing, it also serves as a migration corridor and winter range for mule deer migrating from summer range along Palisades Reservoir.[17] The river here is wide and braided with numerous brushy islands and is flanked by outstanding scenery including steep rock walls, mountain vistas, and cottonwood galleries. Lufkin Bottom remains one of the most popular float-in camping areas, but was once private land on which a golf course, marina, and 70-house subdivision were planned. Lufkin and Fisher bottoms were both transferred to the BLM through the extensive work of the Teton Regional Land Trust, The Nature Conservancy, and The Conservation Fund to expand public lands along the South Fork Snake River corridor. A historic cabin at Fisher Bottom was formerly the family homestead of famous Idaho author Vardis Fisher, who wrote *Mountain Man*, which was adapted in the 1972 film *Jeremiah Johnson* starring Robert Redford. The BLM has acquired other parcels through the Land and Water Conservation Fund and using mitigation funds associated with the Palisades Dam.

HISTORIC CABIN | BOB WICK PHOTOGRAPHY

DESIGNATED CAMPING | LISA RONALD

[17] Kauffman, M. et al. 2022. Ungulate Migrations of the Western United States, Volume 2. Scientific Investigations Report 2022-5008. United States Geological Survey, Reston Virginia.

LORENZO RIVER ACCESS AND BOAT RAMP | BOB WICK PHOTOGRAPHY

SEGMENT 3:

RILEY DIVERSION TO HENRY'S FORK CONFLUENCE

Mileage: 24.15 miles

Classification: Recreational

Outstandingly Remarkable Values: Recreation, Fish, Wildlife, Ecological

Competing Uses: None

Public Support: 86% of eastern Idaho voters support long-term protections for the South Fork Snake River and 81% support Wild and Scenic River designation.

Maps: #5, #6 and #7

Description:
From the Riley Diversion near Heise, Idaho, downstream to the confluence with the Henry's Fork, the river becomes more developed. Farming and ranching dominate an increasingly agricultural landscape, with numerous historic waterworks, including the Riley Ditch and Anderson Diversion. The Byington boat ramp, which is the takeout for the multi-day section upstream, and Kelly Island Campground are among the most popular recreation sites on the river. Heise Bridge and Lorenzo provide river access, while Twin Bridges includes a boat ramp and campground. This section of river encompasses several Land and Water Conservation Fund purchases from the early 1990s that now provide access to islands and sloughs. The Henry's Fork confluence is next to South Menan Butte, one of two large volcanic tuff cones rising 800 feet above the Snake River plain.

Teton River & Tributaries

Based on the information provided in this report, and complementing the BLM's prior determination of eligibility for four segments of the Teton River, these segments now warrant a finding of suitability for Wild and Scenic consideration.

Segment 1:
Felt Power Plant to Bitch Creek

Segment 2:
Bitch Creek to Spring Hollow

Segment 3:
Spring Hollow to Canyon Creek

Segment 4:
Canyon Creek to Teton Dam site

All four of the segments include outstandingly remarkable fish, wildlife, and cultural values and the following descriptions of these values apply to all four segments of the Teton River. Collectively, these fisheries, wildlife, historic, and cultural features illustrate the river's exceptional and regionally significant resource values.

Fish and Wildlife

The Teton River Canyon is a 300 to 500-foot-deep gorge carved into the surrounding landscape. It is a striking feature amid a pastoral agricultural setting. The river is one of Idaho's most important remaining strongholds for native Yellowstone cutthroat trout, an imperiled species experiencing range-wide declines. The river's exceptionally high water quality and intact tributary network sustain a naturally reproducing population and provide the cold, complex habitat needed for long-term persistence.

While the upper Teton River near Driggs struggles with invasive fish species that prey upon and outcompete Yellowstone cutthroat trout, the Teton River Canyon's fish population remains 85% Yellowstone cutthroat trout. Fish densities per mile have tripled,[18] largely due to extensive restoration and fish passage work that began on Canyon Creek in 2012 led by non-profits working with state and federal agencies.

The canyon corridor also serves as essential winter range for big game, particularly mule deer that migrate annually from higher elevation summer

SOUTH MENAN BUTTE | BOB WICK PHOTOGRAPHY

[18] https://idfg.idaho.gov/blog/2020/09/native-and-wild-trout-numbers-rise-teton-canyon

LOOKING DOWN THE TETON RIVER FROM THE BITCH CREEK CONFLUENCE | BOB WICK PHOTOGRAPHY

ranges and concentrate along the canyon rims and slopes.[19] The river's riffle-pool structure keeps portions of the channel open in winter, creating resting and feeding habitat for trumpeter swans, which have been documented in varying numbers along the river for decades. The reach also functions as a spring and fall migration stopover for American white pelicans. Rocky outcrops and open water provide winter hunting habitat for bald and golden eagles, while summer conditions support additional raptors—including kestrels, prairie and peregrine falcons, and red-tailed hawks—as well as numerous neotropical migratory songbirds.

Cultural and Historic

The Teton River is within the traditional homelands of the Shoshone and Bannock peoples. This area was also frequented by numerous other tribes including the Nez Perce, Flathead, Northern Paiute, Crow, and Blackfeet peoples, whose ancestral homelands also encompass parts of Idaho and beyond. Indigenous peoples used the Teton River and its tributaries for travel, camping, trading, hunting, fishing, and gathering. Numerous archeological and indigenous sacred sites located in the canyon, rim, or wall areas include rockshelters, pit houses, graves, artifacts of obsidian, stone tools, weapons, and pieces of animal bone.[20] Today's Shoshone and Bannock tribal members and descendants maintain rich cultural connections to the Teton River and its indigenous sacred sites for hunting, fishing, gathering of traditional foods, and ceremony.

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[19] Kauffman, M. et al. 2020. Ungulate Migrations of the Western United States, Volume 1. Scientific Investigations Report 2020-5101. United States Geological Survey, Reston, Virginia.

[20] Bureau of Reclamation. 2006. Teton River Canyon Resource Management Plan. U.S. Department of Interior, Pacific Northwest Region, Snake River Area Office.

TETON DAM FAILURE. JUNE 5, 1976 SOURCE: WWW.WATERARCHIVES.ORG

Following the first fur trappers in eastern Idaho in 1810, pioneer settlement of the Teton River basin was associated with the northward expansion of Mormon communities, which developed the agricultural and irrigation systems that still characterize the surrounding area today. Important sites related to transportation, ranching, agriculture, and irrigation history include Canyon Creek Bridge, the Linderman and Teton dams, the C.W. Thompson Ranch, Teton Valley Branch Railroad, and Neindorf Homestead.

Arguably the most interesting historic site on the Teton River is the former Teton Dam. The dam was completed in 1976, creating a 17-mile-long reservoir through the Teton River Canyon and inundating three miles of Canyon Creek. The dam failed catastrophically that same year. In less than six hours the reservoir drained, sending a 15-foot-high wall of water downstream that flooded farms, ranches, and communities. The dam failure claimed 11 human lives, drowned 16,000 cows, damaged or destroyed nearly 4,000 homes and businesses, inundating an area about half the size of Rhode Island. Total damage estimates from the flood ranged up to $2 billion. An independent panel determined that the Teton River Canyon's unusually difficult geology, including permeable volcanic rock and highly erodible soil, were major factors in the dam's collapse, despite the use of a grout curtain and other technologies still used in modern-day dam construction.[21, 22]

[21] Chadwick, W. L. et al. 1976. Report to U.S. Department of the Interior and State of Idaho on Failure of Teton Dam by Independent Panel to Review Cause of Teton Dam Failure. U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402.

[22] Smalley, I. 1992. The Teton Dam: rhyolite foundation + loess core = disaster. Geology Today, 8(1): 2-40.

FLY FISHING ON THE TETON RIVER | BOB WICK PHOTOGRAPHY

Commercial Outfitting and Recreation

Five outfitters are licensed to operate on the Teton River between Harrops Bridge and the Teton/Henry's Fork confluence. Since 2008, outfitters have brought more than 550 clients down the Teton River canyon annually, with use increasing in recent years.[23] The growing outfitting and guiding industry is materially contributing to the local economy.

Alignment With Other Management Plans

In 2006, The Bureau of Reclamation's Teton River Canyon management plan recommended, "if, and when, the [Teton Dam] is de-authorized, consideration of the Teton River for designation under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act can, and must be reassessed."[24] Wild and Scenic River designation would also complement future work occurring under the 2025 Memorandum of Understanding signed by the Bureau of Reclamation and the Idaho Department of Fish & Game to enhance mule deer winter range in the Teton Canyon.

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[23] Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service. 2018. Interagency Management of Special Recreation Permits/Special Use Permits and Designated Camping with the Snake River Planning Area and Teton River Canyon Environmental Assessment. Idaho Falls District and Caribou-Targhee National Forest.

[24] Bureau of Reclamation. 2006. Teton River Canyon Resource Management Plan. U.S. Department of Interior, Pacific Northwest Region, Snake River Area Office. p. 38.

LOOKING DOWNSTREAM FROM SPRING HOLLOW BOAT RAMP | LISA RONALD

Potential Competing Uses

From time to time, advocates for rebuilding the Teton Dam have emerged,[25, 26] most recently in 2025[27] – but the prospect of rebuilding the dam remains unpopular. Rebuilding the dam was estimated at half a billion dollars a decade ago, not including additional costs for fish passage, required aquatics studies, and hydropower retrofitting,[28] which would raise the cost to more than $1 billion today. Nearly 60% of eastern Idaho voters who were polled in 2025 were opposed to rebuilding the dam due to its expensive price tag and extensive ecological impacts. Voters instead favor less costly water storage strategies, such as diverting water into underground aquifers. Permanently protecting the Teton River Canyon is supported by a supermajority of Idahoans, would avoid a repeat of one of America's most catastrophic dam failures, protects government investments in wild game habitat for hunters, and ensures the persistence of the prized Yellowstone cutthroat trout fishery found in the Teton River today.

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[25] Smith, C. (2006, June 4). Remnants of the failed Teton Dam still unrestored. The Spokesman-Review. https://www.spokesman.com/stories/2006/jun/04/remnants-of-failed-teton-dam-still-unrestored/

[26] Bureau of Reclamation. 2015. Henry's Fork Basin Study. Produced in partnership with the State of Idaho Water Resource Board. DOI https://www.usbr.gov/watersmart/bsp/docs/finalreport/HenrysFork/HenrysForkBasinStudyReport.pdf

[27] MacIntosh, C. (2025, August 20). Teton Dam to rise again? Idaho irrigators push for resurrection of failed project. Jackson Hole News & Guide.

[28] Bureau of Reclamation. 2015. Henrys Fork Basin Study.

Nonfederal Commitment to Protecting this River

In 2005, the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality completed a Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) for the upper Teton River – upstream of the Wild and Scenic eligible section.[29] This provided a framework to reduce sediment, agricultural runoff, and temperature. This work was further enhanced via a refreshed implementation plan in 2020.[30] Restoration efforts by Friends of the Teton River, Trout Unlimited, Henry's Fork Foundation, and other groups and work by state agencies to meet water quality standards continue to improve water quality throughout the basin. These efforts, along with extensive restoration projects in the canyon and its tributaries, have improved and protected water quality and river health in the Wild and Scenic eligible section and demonstrate a strong commitment by nonfederal entities to protect and restore water quality in this river system.

In 1992, segments of the Teton River were designated as a state-protected recreational river under the Idaho Comprehensive State Water Plan.[31] This state-protected stretch is mostly upstream from the portion of the Teton River that is administered by the BLM, but does overlap in the segment around the Felt Dam and into Badger Creek. This too demonstrates a strong and active commitment to protect the river by a nonfederal entity.

In 2025, a poll conducted by Peak Insights asked eastern Idaho voters about their opinions on future management of the Teton River. The poll found that 83% of respondents support long-term protection for the Teton River; 84% also support long-term protections for its tributaries–Badger Creek, Bitch Creek, and Canyon Creek; and 78% are in favor of Wild and Scenic River designation. With 59% of eastern Idaho voters opposed to rebuilding the dam due to its expensive price tag and extensive ecological impacts. Overwhelmingly, those surveyed indicated that protecting fish and wildlife habitat, sustaining the local economy, and providing clean drinking water to communities were the most important reasons to protect eastern Idaho's rivers.

WATERFOWL ABOUND ON THE TETON RIVER | BOB WICK PHOTOGRAPHY

[29] Teton Subbasin Total Maximum Daily Load Implementation Plan for Agriculture .Idaho Department of Environmental Quality. April 2005. https://www2.deq.idaho.gov/admin/LEIA/api/document/download/12114

[30] Teton River TMDL Addendum Implementation Plan for Agriculture, Idaho Soil and Water Conservation Commission, 2020. https://www2.deq.idaho.gov/admin/LEIA/api/document/download/12116

[31] https://idwr.idaho.gov/iwrb/water-planning/state-protected-rivers/

UNDERCUT CANYON WALLS | BOB WICK PHOTOGRAPHY

SEGMENT 1:

FELT POWER PLANT TO BITCH CREEK

Mileage: 1.52 miles

Classification: Scenic

Outstandingly Remarkable Values: Scenic, Recreation, Fish, Wildlife, Cultural

Competing Uses: Rebuilding the Teton Dam would inundate portions of this eligible segment.

Public Support: 84% of eastern Idaho voters support long-term protections for the Teton River, and 78% support Wild and Scenic River designation. Additionally, 59% oppose rebuilding the Teton Dam.

Maps: #8

Description:
This section of the Teton River begins at the Felt Power Plant, a private hydroelectric plant owned by Fall River Rural Electric Cooperative, which is currently undergoing relicensing. This stretch is characterized by its wild and remote character, rugged landscape, healthy Yellowstone cutthroat trout fishery and periodic whitewater rapids.

RUN-OF-RIVER FELT DAM | SCOTT BOSSE

BITCH CREEK CONFLUENCE | BOB WICK PHOTOGRAPHY

SEGMENT 2:

BITCH CREEK TO SPRING HOLLOW

Mileage: 4.95 miles

Classification: Scenic

Outstandingly Remarkable Values: Scenic, Recreation, Fish, Wildlife, Cultural, Historic

Competing Uses: Rebuilding the Teton Dam would inundate portions of this eligible segment.

Public Support: 84% of eastern Idaho voters support long-term protections for the Teton River, and 78% support Wild and Scenic River designation. Additionally, 59% oppose rebuilding the Teton Dam.

Maps: #9

Description:
A steep trail allows access to the river bottom at the confluence with Bitch Creek and provides the only access point on this river segment, which features steep canyon walls with cliffs topped with trees and scrub, healthy Yellowstone cutthroat trout and technical class IV rapids. Kayakers can also float Bitch Creek down to this section. Approximately 18 miles upstream from the former Teton Dam, impacts from the prior reservoir are minimal here.

RAFTING ON THE TETON RIVER | BOB WICK PHOTOGRAPHY

SEGMENT 3:

SPRING HOLLOW TO CANYON CREEK

Mileage: 7.24 miles

Classification: Scenic

Outstandingly Remarkable Values:
Fish, Wildlife, Cultural, Historic

Competing Uses: Rebuilding the Teton Dam would inundate portions of this eligible segment.

Public Support: 84% of eastern Idaho voters support long-term protections for the Teton River, and 78% support Wild and Scenic River designation. Additionally, 59% oppose rebuilding the Teton Dam.

Maps: #10

Description:
Spring Hollow boat ramp is one of the few access points for boaters and anglers in the Teton Canyon and one of only two boat ramps. Basalt cliffs and rock outcroppings are steep in places, and riverside grass dominate the meandering river bottom. Downstream at the confluence with Milk Creek sits remnants of the former Linderman Dam, which was purposely dismantled prior to the construction of the Teton Dam. Evidence of the Teton Dam failure is minimal, but still visible, and visitors find this reach of the Teton River to be a primitive and scenic float.

FORMER TETON DAM SITE | LISA RONALD

SEGMENT 4:

CANYON CREEK TO FORMER TETON DAM SITE

Mileage: 5.91 miles

Classification: Recreational

Outstandingly Remarkable Values:
Recreation, Fish, Wildlife, Cultural, Historic

Competing Uses: Rebuilding the Teton Dam would inundate portions of this eligible segment.

Public Support: 84% of eastern Idaho voters support long-term protections for the Teton River, and 78% support Wild and Scenic River designation. Additionally, 59% oppose rebuilding the Teton Dam.

Maps: #11

Description:
Between Canyon Creek and the former dam site, the Teton River is broad with few trees and high desert vegetation. Clearcutting pre-construction and post-failure hill slumping from the failed Teton Dam are noticeable in this section and an interesting historic feature. Pools and riffles characterize the river, which has three different access points from which visitors can view the former dam site and gain an understanding of the dam's unique historical significance. A boat ramp at the dam provides access for floaters.

BOATERS ON BITCH CREEK,
KEVIN COLBURN, AMERICAN WHITEWATER

BITCH CREEK

Based on the information provided in this report, and complementing the BLM's prior determination of eligibility for Bitch Creek, this river now warrants a finding of suitability for Wild and Scenic consideration.

Mileage: 42.59 miles

Classification: Wild (30.63 miles), Scenic (11.96 miles (3.86 miles flowing through state or federal lands; 8.10 miles flowing through private lands))

Outstandingly Remarkable Values:
Scenic, Recreation, Fish, Wildlife, Cultural

Competing Uses: None

Public Support: 84% of eastern Idaho voters support long-term protections for Teton River tributaries, like Bitch Creek.

Maps: #12, #13, #14, #15 and #16

Description:
Bitch Creek has long been recognized as one of the most important spawning tributaries for Yellowstone cutthroat trout in the Teton River drainage.[32] It was designated as a state-protected river – both natural and recreational – in 1992 under the Idaho Comprehensive State Water Plan.[33] And, in its 2025-2030 Fisheries Management Plan, regarding efforts to protect and restore Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout, the Idaho Department of Fish & Game specifically names Bitch Creek when discussing the importance of protecting eastern Idaho waterways that are not impacted by water management activities.[34]

[32] Schrader, W. and Jones, M. 2004. Teton River Investigations. Part III: Fish Movement and Life History 25 Years After Teton Dam. Report Number 04-45. Idaho Department of Fish & Game.

[33] Idaho Department of Water Resources. https://idwr.idaho.gov/iwrb/water-planning/state-protected-rivers/

[34] Idaho Department of Fish & Game. 2025. Fisheries Management Plan 2025-2030 A Comprehensive Guide to Managing Idaho's Fisheries Resources. https://idfg.idaho.gov/sites/default/files/digital-2025-2030-fisheries-plan.pdf

BITCH CREEK NEAR ITS CONFLUENCE WITH THE TETON RIVER, BOB WICK PHOTOGRAPHY

▲ BITCH CREEK RIVER CORRIDOR AMID PRIVATE LANDS LOOKING TOWARDS THE TARGHEE NATIONAL FOREST, BOB WICK PHOTOGRAPHY

▶ BITCH CREEK FROM THE HISTORIC ASHTON-TETONIA RAIL TRAIL TRAIN TRESTLE, LISA RONALD

Bitch Creek also serves as an important migration corridor for mule deer moving from the Teton Range to winter along the Teton River. Bitch is said to be a corruption of the French word “biche” and that trappers originally named the waterway “Anse de Biche,” meaning “cove of deer.”[35]

Bitch Creek is a remote, high-quality Idaho whitewater run set in a dramatic canyon of forested slopes, dark basalt cliffs, and sculpted volcanic hoodoos. The landscape feels both rugged and wild—steep walls, clean rock, and long stretches without roads or development. It’s an immersive canyon experience from start to finish.

At moderate flows, the run offers predominantly Class III/IV whitewater. The rapids are technical and continuous, shaped by columnar and fractured basalt. The combination of technical rapids, striking geology, and a sense of true backcountry remoteness makes Bitch Creek a regionally recognized run for experienced paddlers.[36]

In addition to the nearly 12 miles of Bitch Creek found eligible by the BLM, in 1997 the Targhee National Forest found Bitch Creek’s headwaters, including the north and south forks within the Jedediah Smith Wilderness, to also be eligible for Wild and Scenic designation. In between the BLM and USFS sections, Bitch Creek flows through 8.10 miles of private lands. Much of the privately-owned section between where Bitch Creek exits BLM lands and crosses highway 32, is protected by conservation easements facilitated by the Teton Regional Land Trust.[37]

Closer to the Targhee National Forest boundary, the Ashton-Tetonia Rail Trail’s Bitch Creek Trestle crosses over the creek. The trail follows the abandoned railroad grade of the Teton Valley Branch of the Union Pacific Railroad from Ashton to Tetonia, and is one of the historic values unique to Bitch Creek and the Teton River basin. Hikers and bicyclists on the rail trail enjoy spectacular views of Bitch Creek from 130 feet above the water atop the trestle.

[35] Idaho State Parks & Recreation interpretive sign titled Bitch Creek, Bridges and Beyond located at the Bitch Creek Trestle

[36] American Whitewater. https://www.americanwhitewater.org/content/River/view/river-detail/524/main

[37] Teton Land Trust. https://www.tetonlandtrust.org/images/stories/articles/maps/Public_Map2.jpg?_gl=1*u3vleb*_ga*MjAwOTMwNjcxMi4xNzYyMjg5NjE2*_ga_XCS4DZJCRY*czE3NjM2NjM2MzYkbzUkZzEkdDE3NjM2NjQ2ODgkajU2JGwwJGgw

BADGER CREEK ABOVE THE CONFLUENCE WITH THE TETON RIVER, BOB WICK PHOTOGRAPHY

BADGER CREEK

Based on the information provided in this report, and complementing the BLM's prior determination of eligibility for Badger Creek, this river now warrants a finding of suitability for Wild and Scenic consideration.

Mileage: 1.14 miles

Classification: Scenic

Outstandingly Remarkable Values: Fish, Wildlife, Cultural

Competing Uses: None

Public Support: 84% of eastern Idaho voters support long-term protections for Teton River tributaries, like Badger Creek.

Maps: #17

Description:
Badger Creek flows into the Teton River shortly below the Felt Dam. This tributary is remote and infrequently visited with rock ledges, sharp meanders, and riparian areas rich in Douglas Fir and shrubs. Since 1992, it has been a state-protected recreational river under the Idaho Comprehensive State Water Plan.[38] Like Bitch Creek, Badger Creek is an important spawning tributary for Yellowstone cutthroat trout and a migratory corridor for big game traveling from Wyoming to winter along the Teton River.

[38] Idaho Department of Water Resources. https://idwr.idaho.gov/iwrb/water-planning/state-protected-rivers/

CANYON CREEK

Based on the information provided in this report, and complementing the BLM's prior determination of eligibility for Badger Creek, this river now warrants a finding of suitability for Wild and Scenic consideration.

Mileage: 3.85 miles

Classification: Scenic

Outstandingly Remarkable Values: Scenic, Fish, Wildlife, Cultural, Historic

Competing Uses: Rebuilding the Teton Dam would inundate portions of this eligible segment.

Public Support: 84% of eastern Idaho voters support long-term protections for Teton River tributaries, like Canyon Creek. Additionally, 59% oppose rebuilding the Teton Dam.

Maps: #18

Description:
Canyon Creek is one of the largest tributaries to the Teton River in the canyon. Like the lower reaches of the Teton River canyon, the eligible section of Canyon Creek was inundated by the Teton Dam and has some of the same types of post-dam-failure impacts as the Teton River. This is a small, steep stream with limited access and thick vegetation including willow, dogwood, aspen, chokecherry, and juniper. Upstream of the eligible stretch, near Highway 33, is the Canyon Creek Bridge, one of the area's historic transportation structures.

Canyon Creek is an important tributary for Yellowstone cutthroat trout, connecting the Teton River with the Big Hole Mountains to the south. It provides numerous examples of how nonfederal entities have invested time and energy into protecting and restoring this river's ORVs. Since 2012, Friends of the Teton River has conducted numerous restoration projects on private lands upstream of the eligible Wild and Scenic section. Restoring fish passage, decommissioning the Canyon Creek Canal, and rewatering parts of the creek have dramatically increased the Yellowstone cutthroat trout population and contributes to the health of the fishery in the Teton River proper. The Idaho Department of Fish & Game's Fisheries Management Plan recommends prioritizing summer flows and continuing to address fish connectivity in Canyon Creek to further improve Yellowstone cutthroat trout abundance in this tributary and the main Teton River in the canyon reach. If Teton Dam were rebuilt, Canyon Creek's restored Yellowstone cutthroat trout fishery would be devastated through increased prevalence of non-native fish, and millions of dollars invested in restoration would be negated.

CANYON CREEK | BOB WICK PHOTOGRAPHY

[39] Idaho Department of Fish & Game. 2025. 2025-3030 Fisheries Management Strategy.

Conclusion

The South Fork Snake River, the Teton River, Bitch Creek, Badger Creek, and Canyon Creek represent some of eastern Idaho's most intact, ecologically significant, and culturally important free-flowing river systems. As documented throughout this report – and consistent with the Bureau of Land Management's 2009 Eligibility Report – these rivers possess Outstandingly Remarkable Values (ORVs) that are regionally, and in several respects nationally, significant.

The evidence is substantial and consistent.

Ecologically, these river systems sustain some of the strongest remaining populations of native Yellowstone cutthroat trout within their historic range. In both the South Fork Snake River and the Teton River Canyon, fisheries data demonstrate resilient, recovering, and high-quality wild trout populations supported by intact tributary networks, cold-water habitat, and extensive restoration investment. Bitch Creek remains one of the most important spawning tributaries in the Teton basin. These fisheries are not only biologically important—they are central to the identity and economy of eastern Idaho.

The river corridors also provide essential wildlife habitat at a landscape scale. They function as critical winter range and migration corridors for mule deer and elk, nesting and wintering habitat for bald eagles, and important seasonal habitat for raptors, waterfowl, and neotropical migratory birds. The South Fork Snake River corridor contains one of the largest continuous cottonwood gallery forests in the West and supports a designated Important Bird Area. These features are rare in both extent and quality and remain largely intact.

Culturally and historically, these rivers are deeply rooted in the ancestral homelands of the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes and other Indigenous peoples. Archeological sites, sacred landscapes, and enduring cultural connections remain present and meaningful today. Historic irrigation works, ranching heritage, and the site of the Teton Dam failure provide additional layers of historical significance that are directly tied to the rivers themselves. Together, these resources underscore the rivers' longstanding importance to human communities.

Recreationally, the South Fork Snake River is internationally recognized for its angling and boating opportunities. The Teton River and Bitch Creek offer high-quality float, fishing, and whitewater experiences in scenic and largely undeveloped canyon settings. These recreational values generate measurable economic benefits, supporting outfitters, local businesses, tourism employment, and rural communities. The health of these rivers and the health of the local economy are closely linked.

Equally important to a suitability determination is the clear and durable public support for protecting these rivers. Recent polling of eastern Idaho voters demonstrates overwhelming support for long-term protection. The survey found that 86% support long-term protection of the South Fork Snake River, and 81% support its designation as a Wild and Scenic River. Support is similarly strong for the Teton River, with 83% supporting long-term protection, 84% supporting protection of its tributaries, and 78% supporting Wild and Scenic River designation. These results show that strong majorities across eastern Idaho recognize the importance of protecting these rivers and their associated fish and wildlife habitat, clean water, and recreation values.

These findings reflect broad recognition across eastern Idaho that protecting fish and wildlife habitat, sustaining the local economy, and safeguarding clean water are shared priorities. This strong level of public support is directly relevant to the BLM's suitability analysis and weighs in favor of a finding that these rivers are suitable for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System.

There are no identified competing uses for the South Fork Snake River. The only potential competing use affecting portions of the Teton River and Canyon Creek is periodic interest by some stakeholders in rebuilding the Teton Dam. However, the 2015 joint Idaho Department of Water Resources and Bureau of Reclamation Henry's Fork Basin Study concluded that rebuilding the dam would carry extraordinarily high financial, ecological, and recreational costs. Studies have found that earlier snowmelt, declining streamflows, and a reduced likelihood of consistent reservoir refill would substantially diminish the project's long-term utility to downstream water users. Consistent with these findings, a majority of eastern Idaho voters expressed opposition to rebuilding the dam, citing both fiscal and environmental concerns.

The record also reflects substantial, sustained nonfederal commitment to protecting and restoring these river systems. Millions of dollars have been invested in conservation easements and public land acquisitions along the South Fork Snake River corridor. State agencies and nonprofit organizations have implemented extensive fisheries restoration, fish passage improvements, habitat enhancement projects, and water quality improvement efforts throughout the Teton basin. State-level protected river designations, basin planning efforts, Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) implementation plans, and collaborative management agreements further demonstrate that local, state, and nonprofit partners recognize the enduring value of these rivers. This sustained investment and stewardship is important context for suitability: it confirms both the rivers' high resource value and the long-term community commitment to maintaining those values.

A determination of suitability would not disrupt existing agricultural operations, irrigation infrastructure, hydropower operations, outfitting, recreation, or other established uses. Rather, it would provide a durable management framework to ensure that future decisions protect and enhance the rivers' free-flowing character and Outstandingly Remarkable Values. As population growth, water demand, and recreation pressure increase in eastern Idaho, a forward-looking management approach is both prudent and necessary.

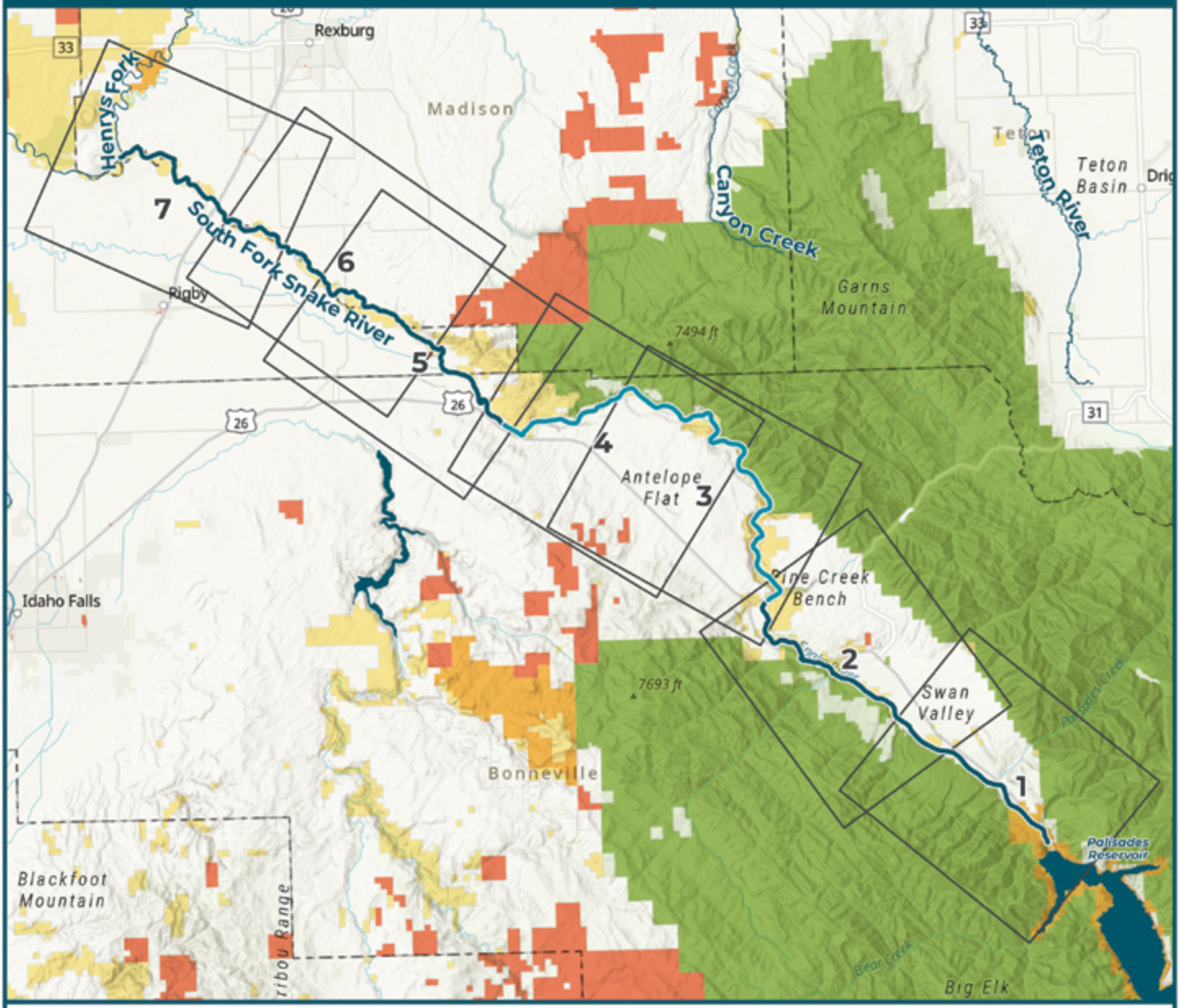
The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act was enacted to preserve rivers that possess outstanding values "for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations." The South Fork Snake River, the Teton River, Bitch Creek, Badger Creek, and Canyon Creek clearly meet that standard. Their ecological integrity, cultural significance, scenic character, economic contributions, demonstrated public support, and sustained nonfederal investment collectively establish a strong and well-supported case for suitability.

For these reasons, the Bureau of Land Management's Upper Snake Field Office would be warranted in determining that the eligible segments of the South Fork Snake River, the Teton River, Bitch Creek, Badger Creek, and Canyon Creek are suitable for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System and merit recommendation to Congress for future designation.

Advancing these rivers to suitability is consistent with the administrative record, responsive to local public support, aligned with decades of restoration and conservation investment, and faithful to the purposes of the Act. It is a responsible and forward-looking decision that honors the landscape, supports local communities, and ensures that these exceptional Idaho rivers remain free-flowing and vibrant for generations to come.

SUITABLE WILD AND SCENIC RIVER SEGMENTS

Map Index



South Fork Snake River

Suitable Wild and Scenic Segment Classification

- Recreational
- Scenic

Land Management Agency

- Bureau of Land Management
- Bureau of Reclamation
- U.S. Forest Service
- State
- Private

Scale: 1:380,160

0 6

Miles

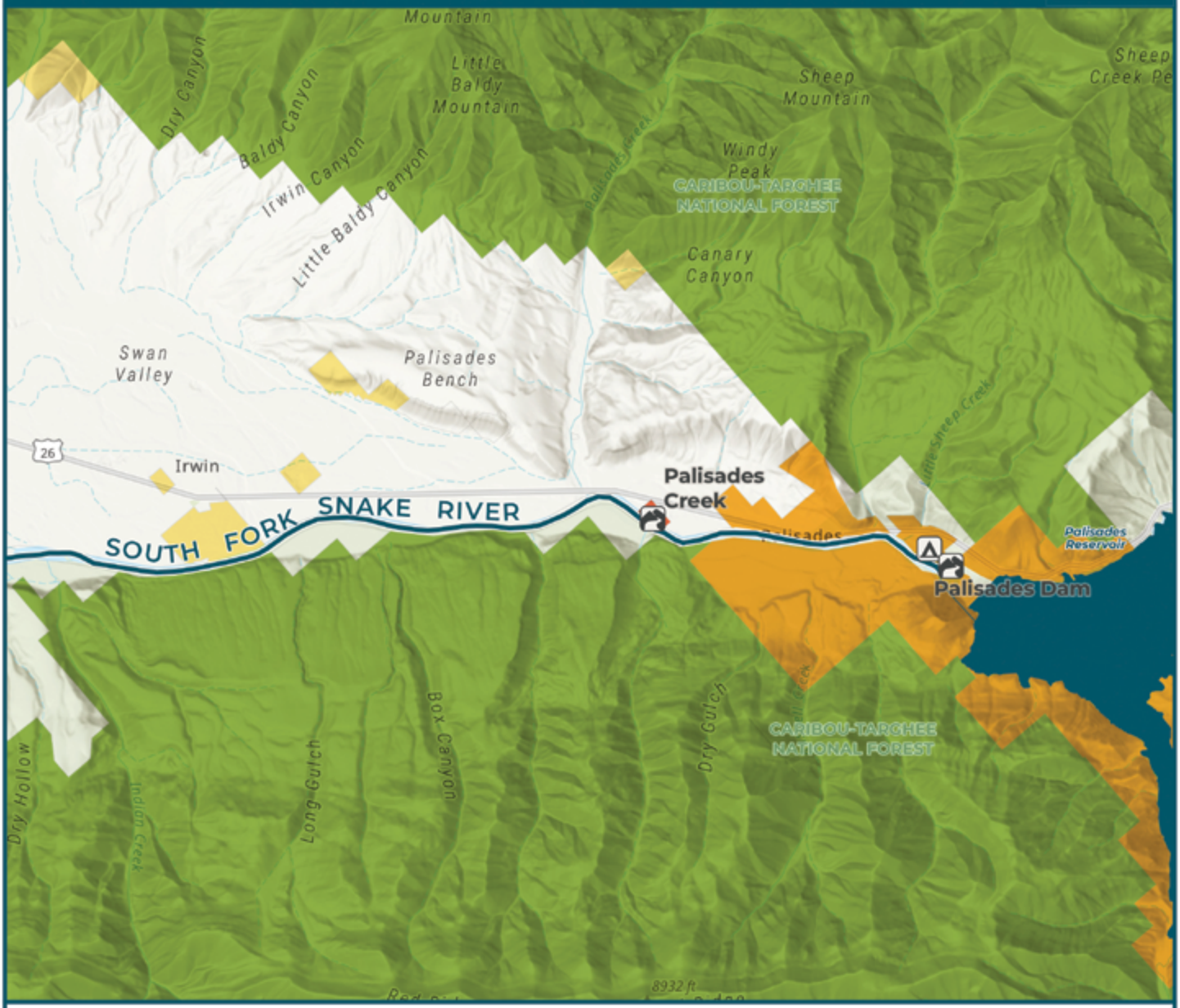
Production Date: January 2026. **Coord. System:** NAD 1983 Idaho TM. **Data sources:** USGS, BLM, US Census Bureau, Esri, NASA, NGA, USGS, Sources: Esri, TomTom, Garmin, FAO, NOAA, USGS, (c) OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS User Community, Sources: Esri, U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau; U.S. Department of Commerce (DOC), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), National Ocean Service (NOS), National Geodetic Survey (NGS), Esri, USGS. **Note:** Data in this map were acquired from various sources, and may exhibit varying degrees of accuracy. The information contained in these data is dynamic and may change over time. Data is not of survey quality and is in no way intended for engineering or legal purposes.

AMERICAN RIVERS

Life Depends on Rivers

PALISADES DAM TO CONANT VALLEY POWER LINE

Map #1



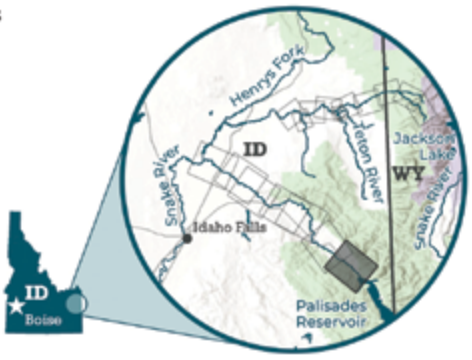
South Fork Snake River

Suitable Wild and Scenic Segment Classification
- Recreational

Land Management Agency
- Bureau of Land Management
- Bureau of Reclamation
- U.S. Forest Service
- State
- Private

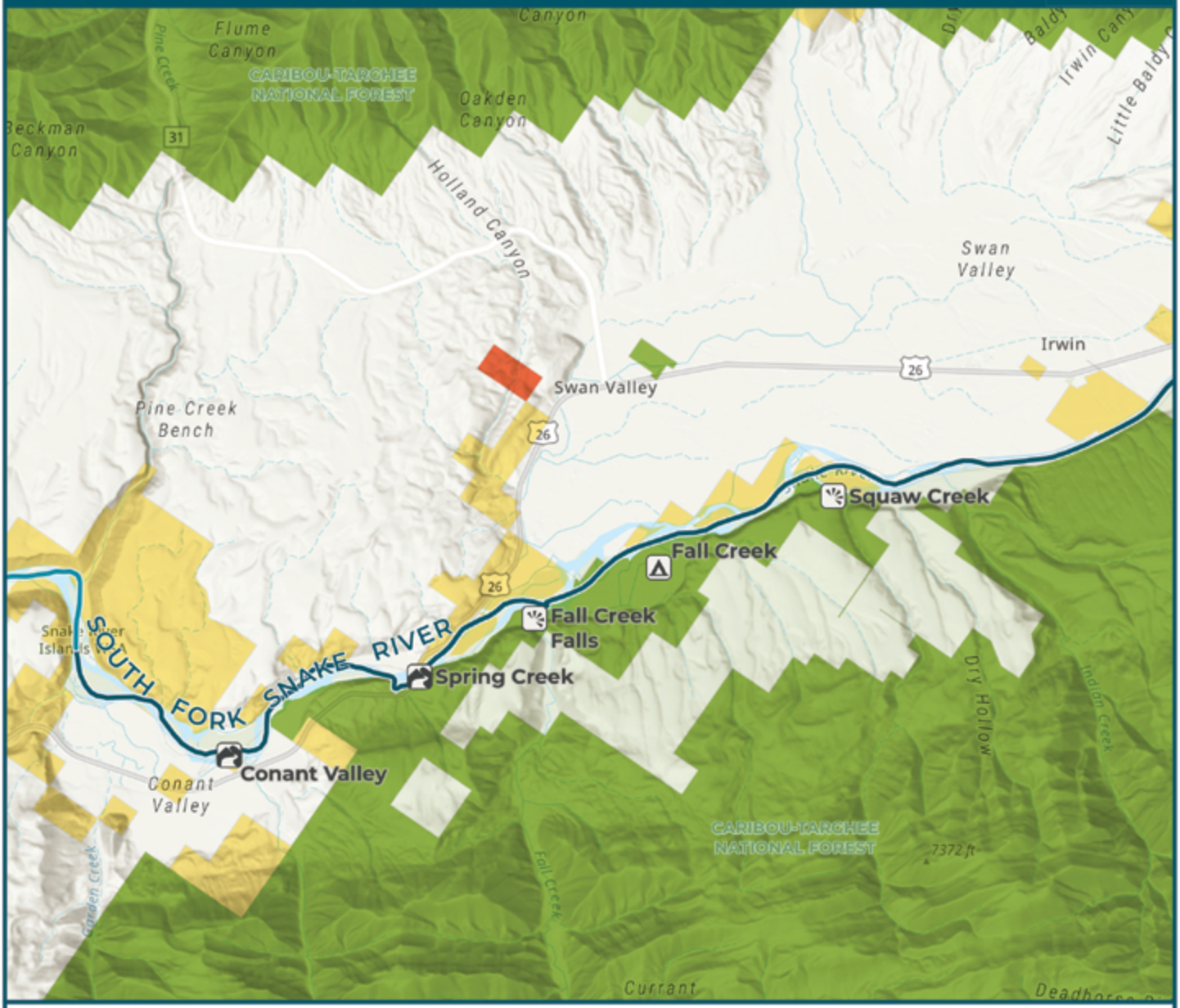
- Camping
- River Access

Scale: 1:79,200
0 1
Miles



PALISADES DAM TO CONANT VALLEY POWER LINE

Map #2



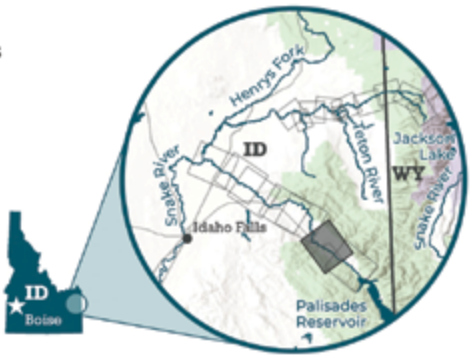
South Fork Snake River

Suitable Wild and Scenic Segment Classification
- Recreational
- Scenic

Land Management Agency
- Bureau of Land Management
- U.S. Forest Service
- State
- Private

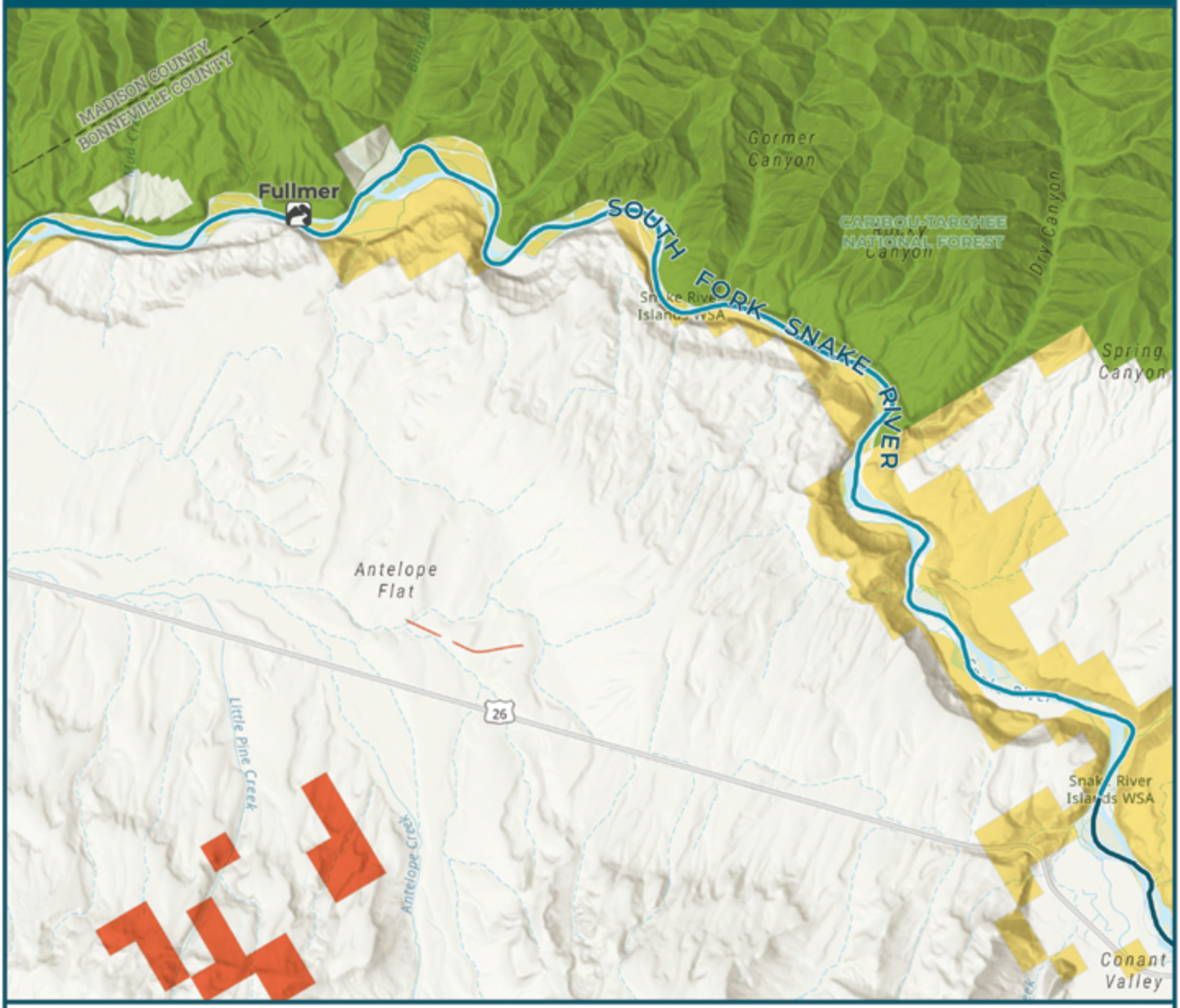
- Camping
- Overlook
- River Access

Scale: 1:79,200
0 1
Miles



CONANT VALLEY POWER LINE TO RILEY DIVERSION

Map #3



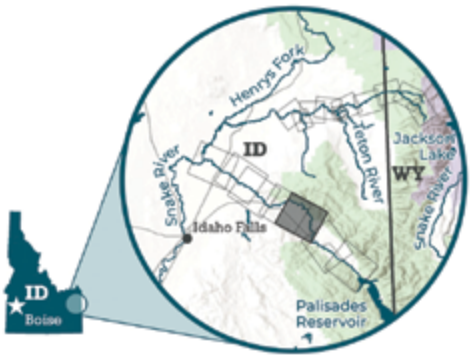
South Fork Snake River

Suitable Wild and Scenic Segment Classification
- Recreational
- Scenic

Land Management Agency
- Bureau of Land Management
- U.S. Forest Service
- State
- Private

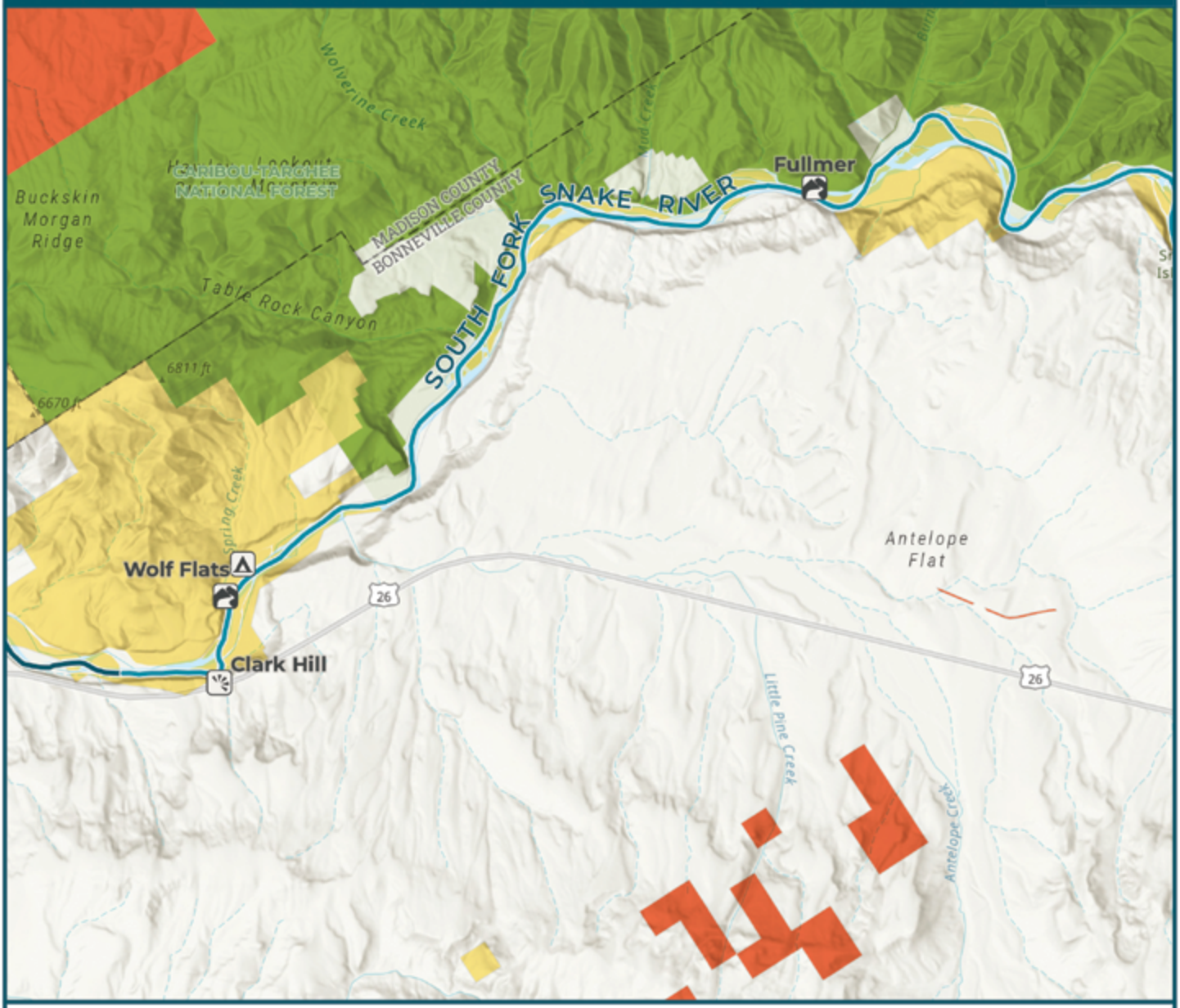
River Access

Scale: 1:79,200
0 1
Miles



CONANT VALLEY POWER LINE TO RILEY DIVERSION

Map #4



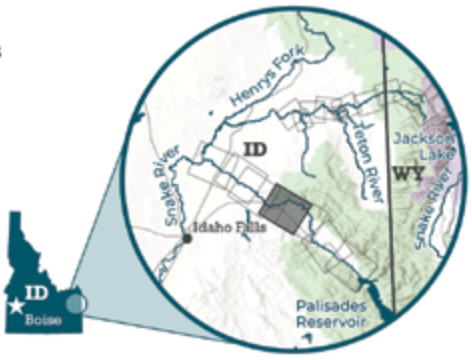
South Fork Snake River

Suitable Wild and Scenic Segment Classification
- Recreational
- Scenic

Land Management Agency
- Bureau of Land Management
- U.S. Forest Service
- State
- Private

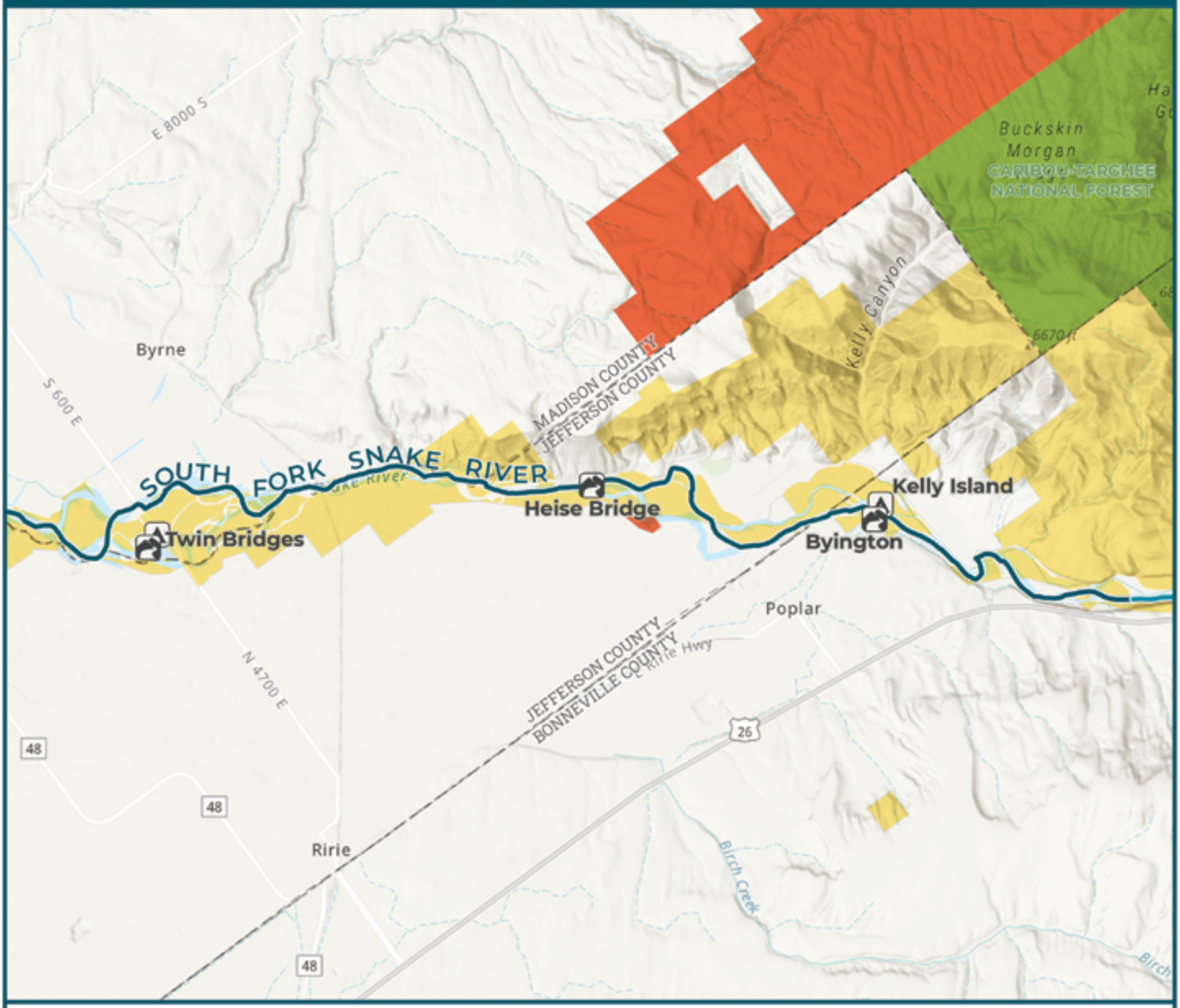
- Camping
- Overlook
- River Access

Scale: 1:79,200
0 1
Miles



RILEY DIVERSION TO HENRYS FORK CONFLUENCE

Map #5



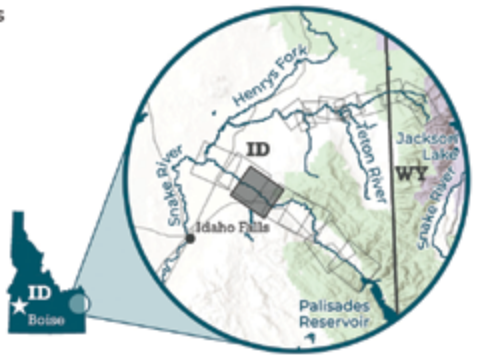
South Fork Snake River

Suitable Wild and Scenic Segment Classification
- Recreational
- Scenic

Land Management Agency
- Bureau of Land Management
- U.S. Forest Service
- State
- Private

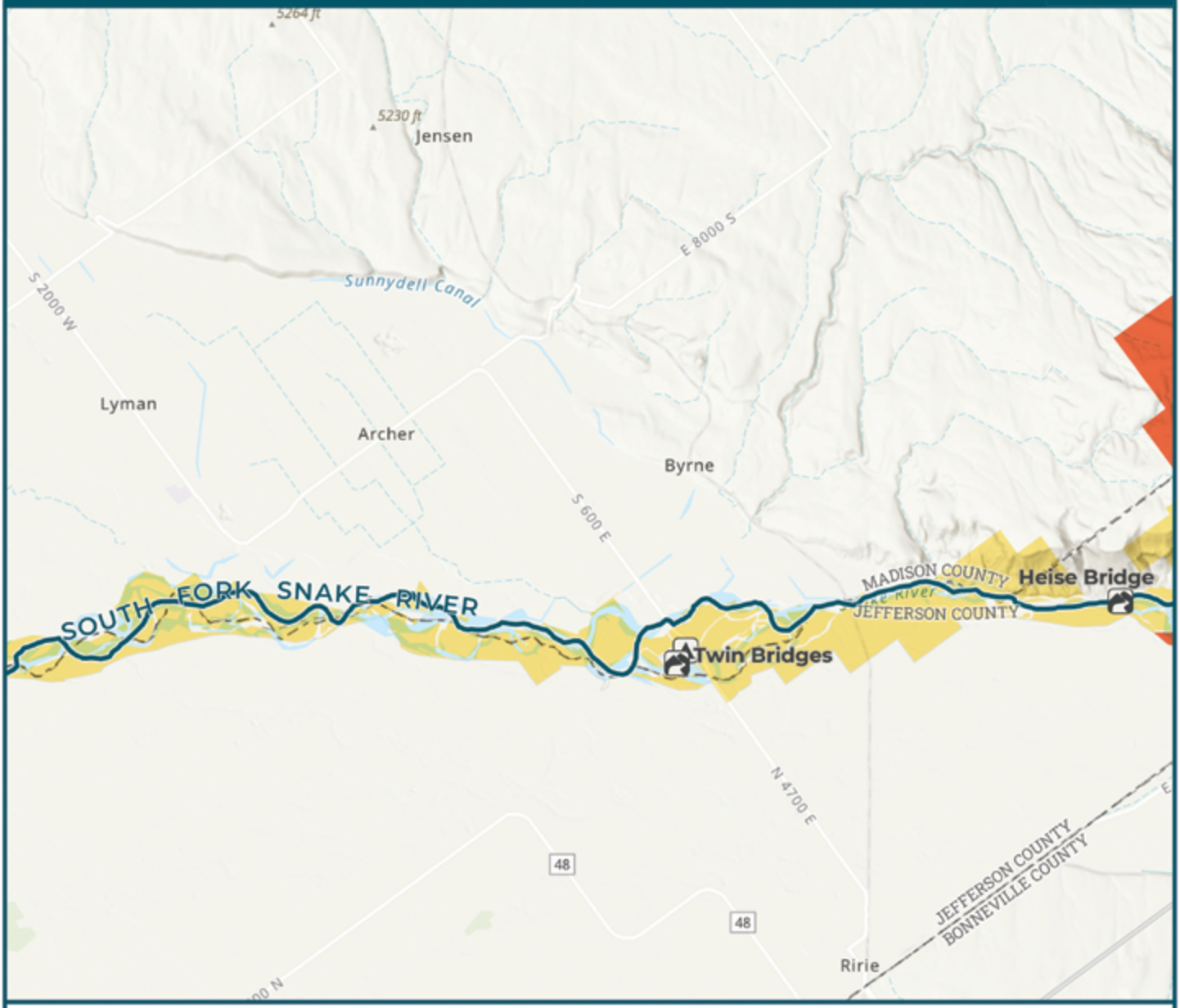
- Camping
- River Access

Scale: 1:79,200
0 1
Miles



RILEY DIVERSION TO HENRYS FORK CONFLUENCE

Map #6



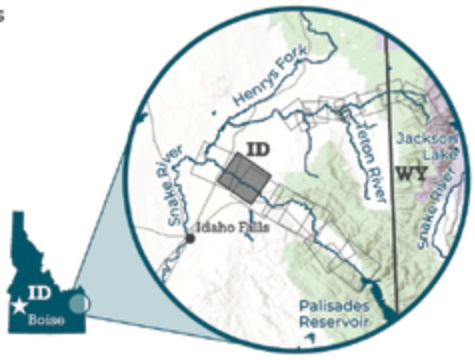
South Fork Snake River

Suitable Wild and Scenic Segment Classification
- Recreational

Land Management Agency
- Bureau of Land Management
- State
- Private

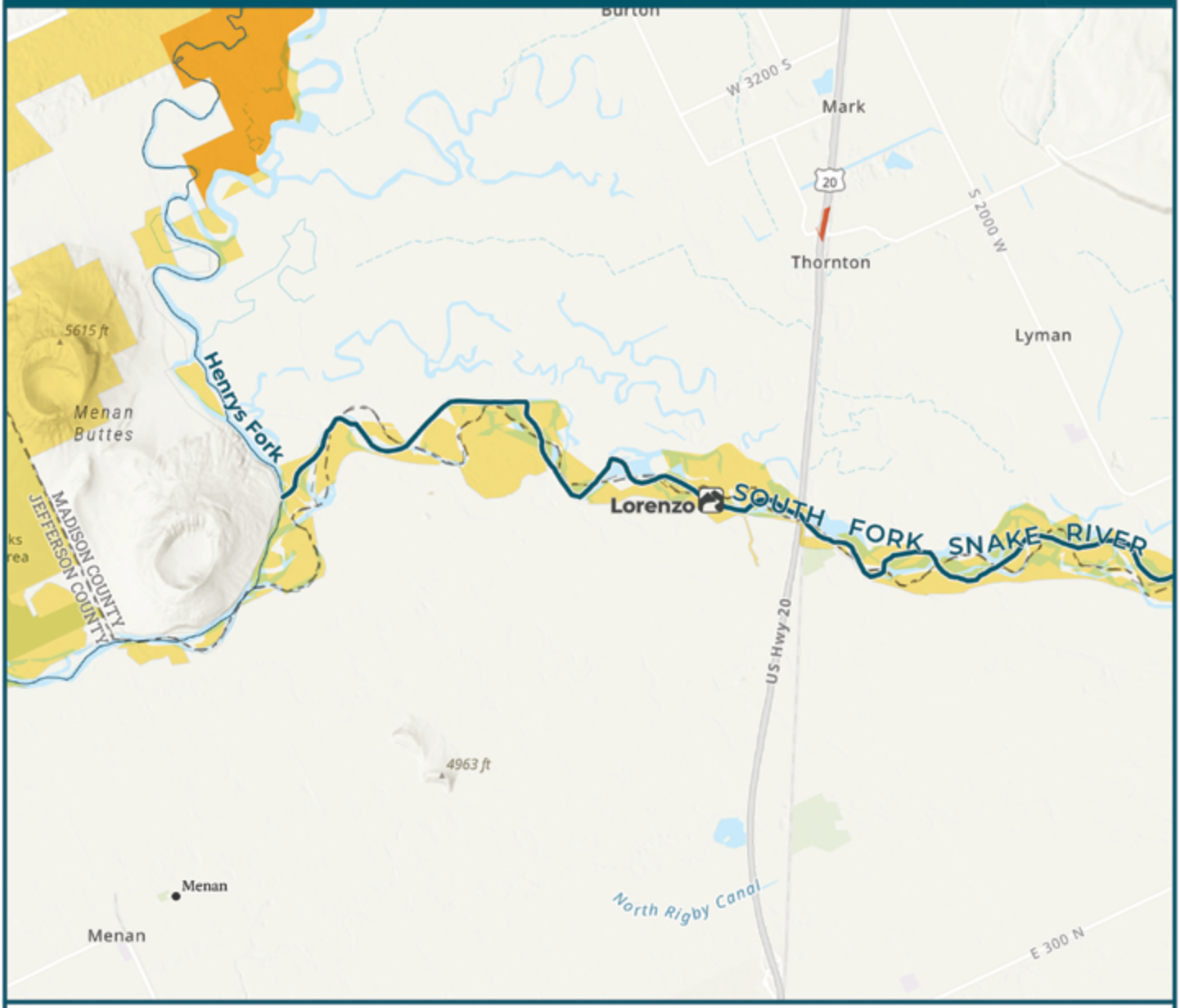
- Camping
- River Access

Scale: 1:79,200
0 1
Miles



RILEY DIVERSION TO HENRYS FORK CONFLUENCE

Map #7



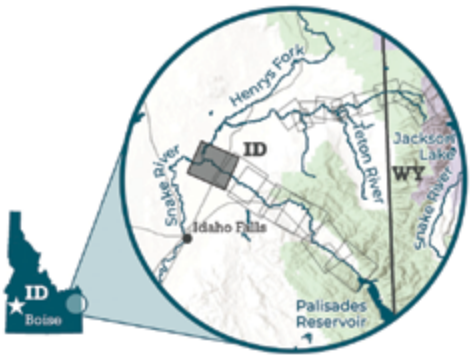
South Fork Snake River

Suitable Wild and Scenic Segment Classification
- Recreational

Land Management Agency
- Bureau of Land Management
- Bureau of Reclamation
- State
- Private

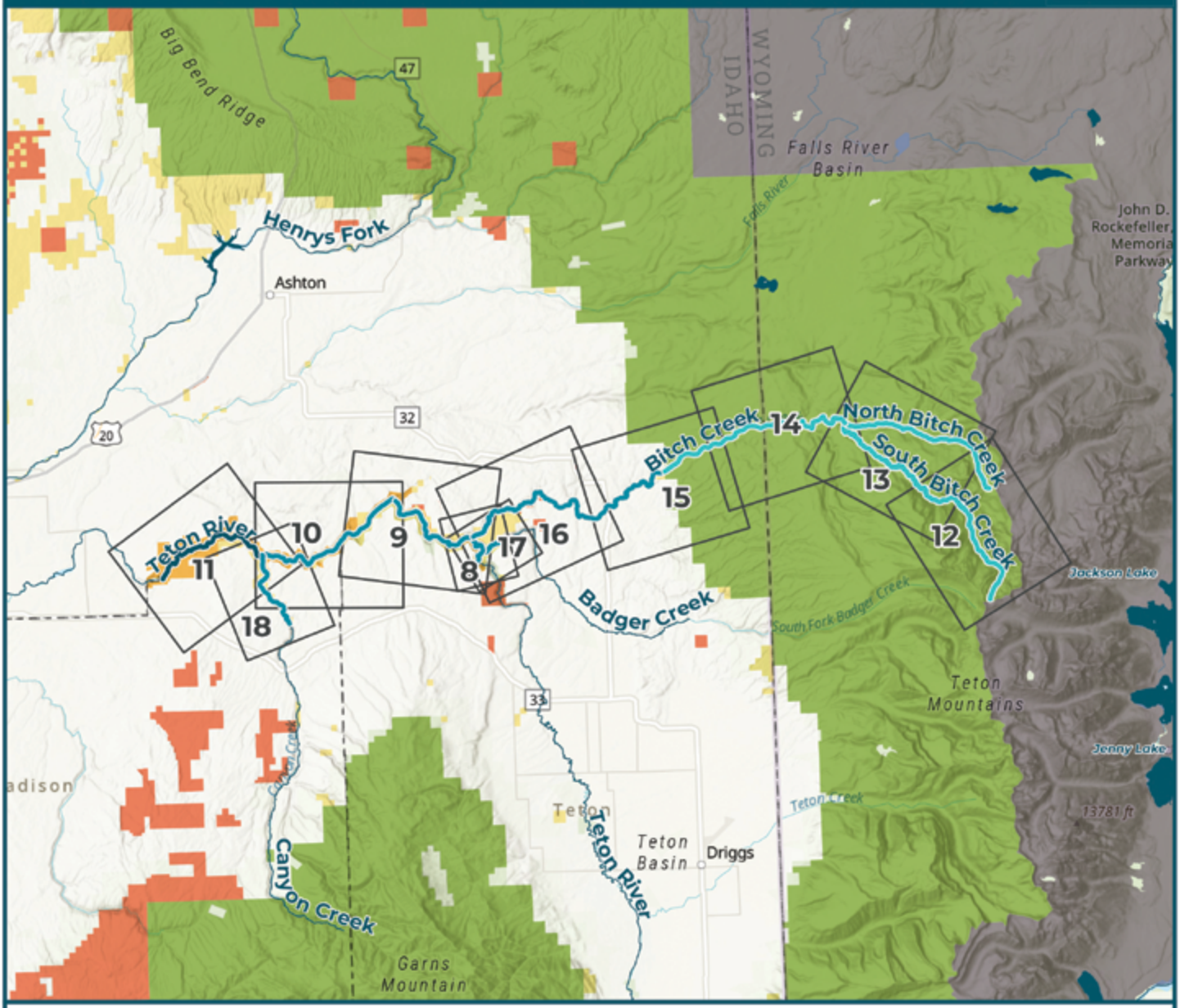
River Access

Scale: 1:79,200
0 1
Miles



SUITABLE WILD AND SCENIC RIVER SEGMENTS

Map Index



Teton River and Tributaries

Suitable Wild and Scenic Segment Classification

- Recreational
- Scenic
- Wild

Land Management Agency

- Bureau of Land Management
- Bureau of Reclamation
- U.S. Forest Service
- National Park Service
- State
- Private

Scale: 1:380,160

0 6

Miles

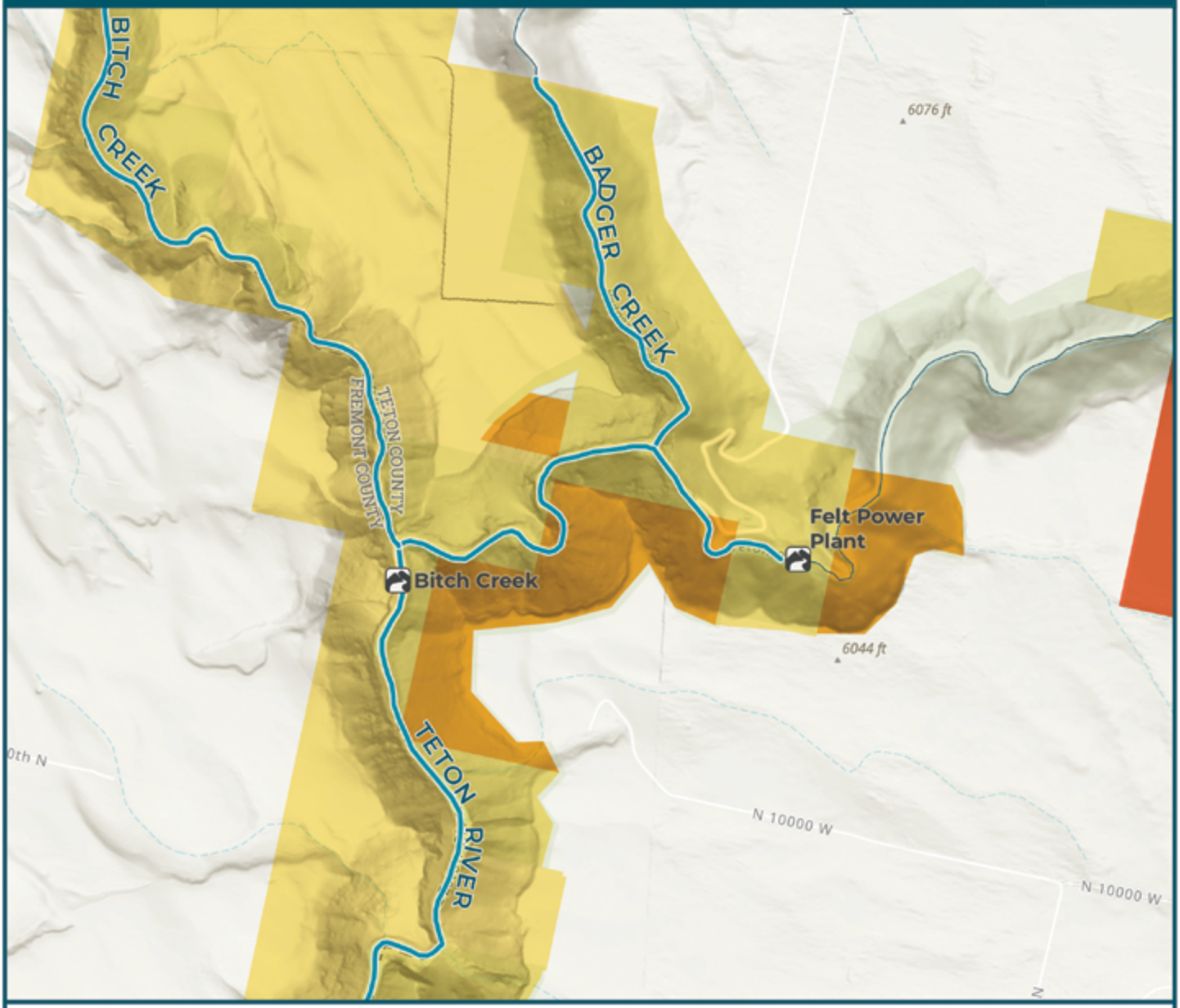
Production Date: January 2026. **Coord. System:** NAD 1983 Idaho TM. **Data sources:** USGS, BLM, US Census Bureau, Esri, NASA, NGA, USGS, Sources: Esri, TomTom, Garmin, FAO, NOAA, USGS, (c) OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS User Community, Sources: Esri; U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau; U.S. Department of Commerce (DOC), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), National Ocean Service (NOS), National Geodetic Survey (NGS), Esri, USGS. **Note:** Data in this map were acquired from various sources, and may exhibit varying degrees of accuracy. The information contained in these data is dynamic and may change over time. Data is not of survey quality and is in no way intended for engineering or legal purposes.

AMERICAN RIVERS

Life Depends on Rivers™

FELT POWER PLANT TO BITCH CREEK

Map #8



Teton River and Tributaries

Suitable Wild and Scenic Segment Classification
- Scenic

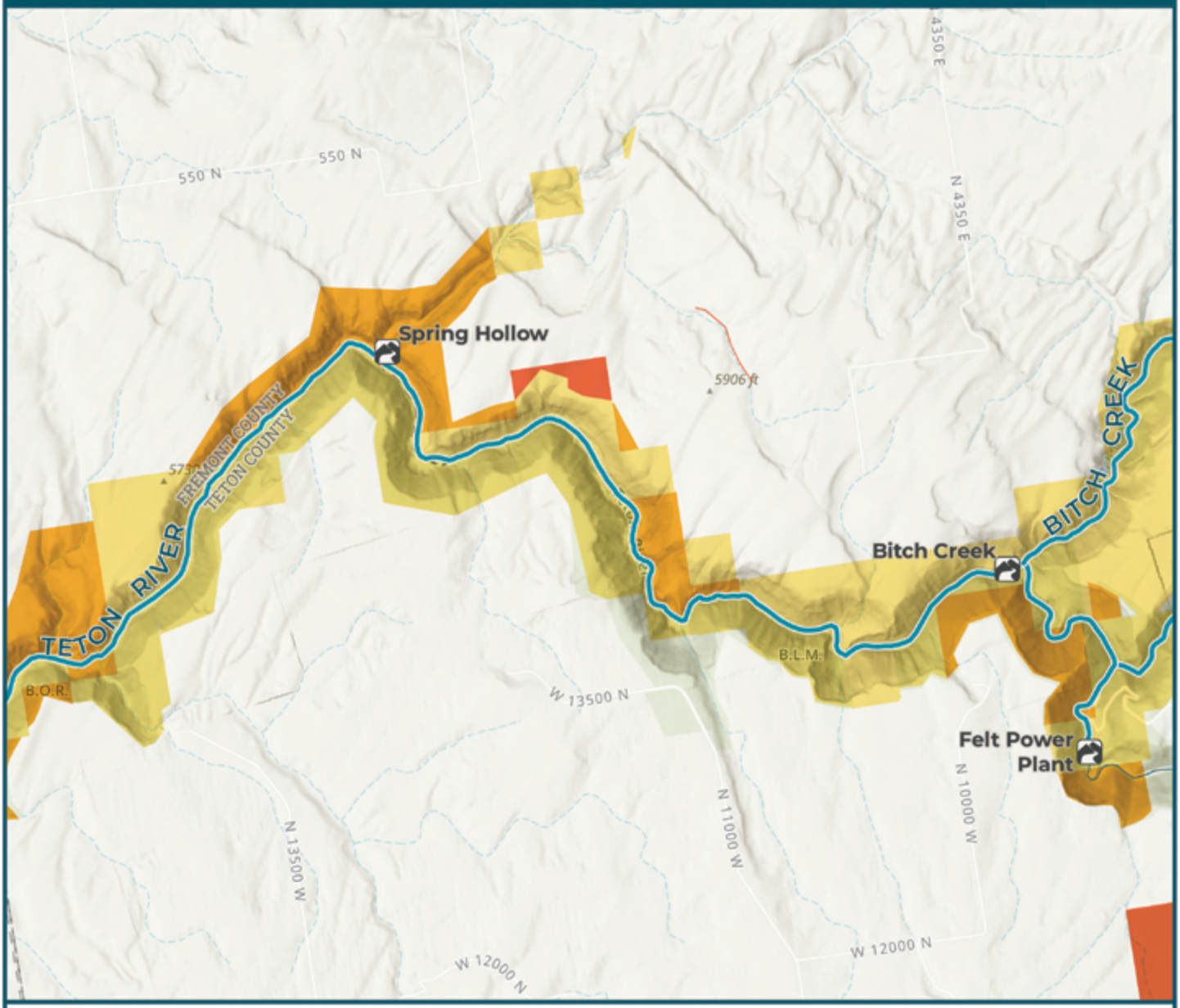
Land Management Agency
- Bureau of Land Management
- Bureau of Reclamation
- State
- Private

River Access

Scale: 1:24,000
0 0.5
Miles

BITCH CREEK TO SPRING HOLLOW

Map #9



Teton River and Tributaries

Suitable Wild and Scenic Segment Classification
- Scenic

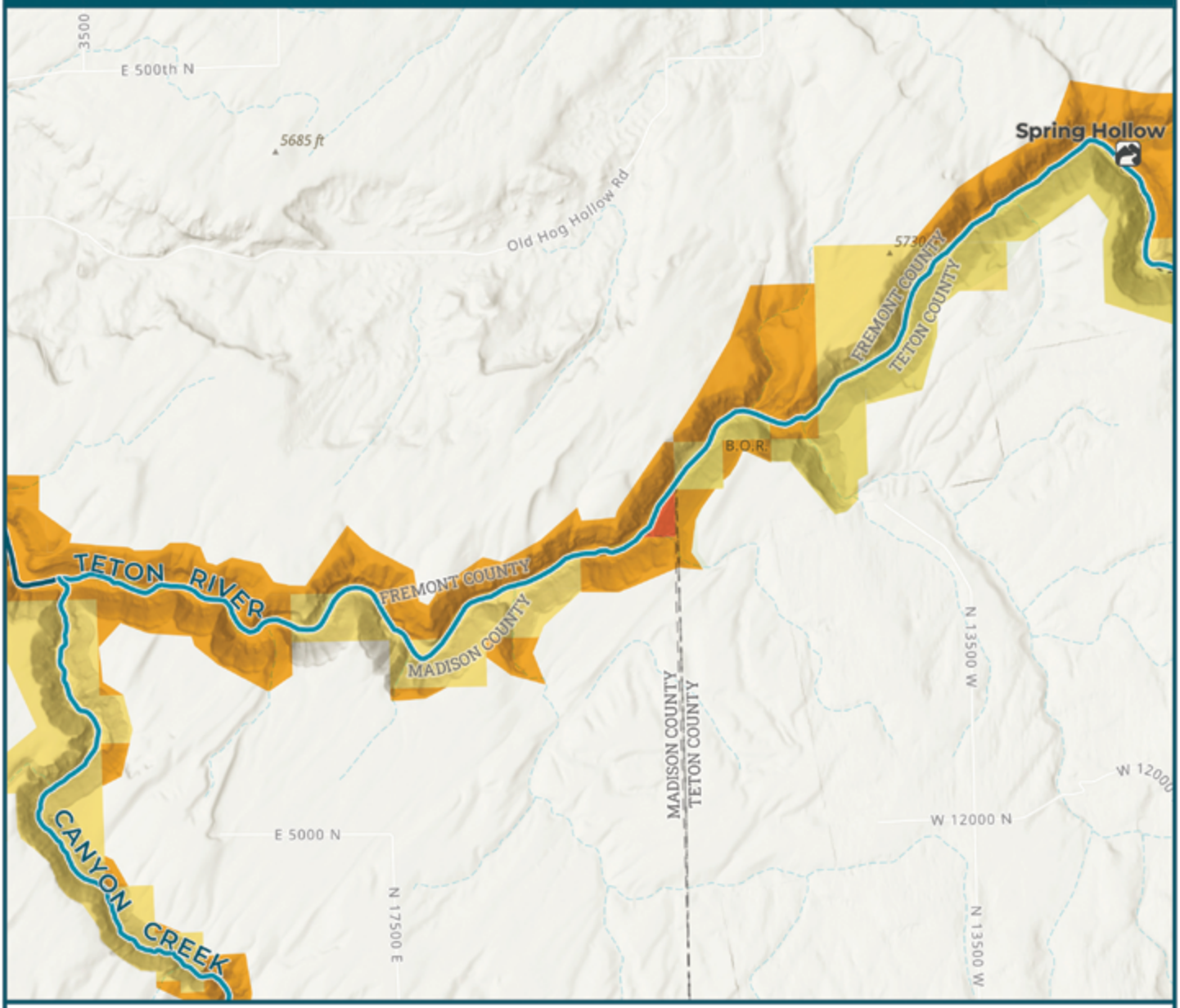
Land Management Agency
- Bureau of Land Management
- Bureau of Reclamation
- State
- Private

River Access

Scale: 1:48,000
0 0.5
Miles

SPRING HOLLOW TO CANYON CREEK

Map #10



Teton River and Tributaries

Suitable Wild and Scenic Segment Classification
- Recreational
- Scenic

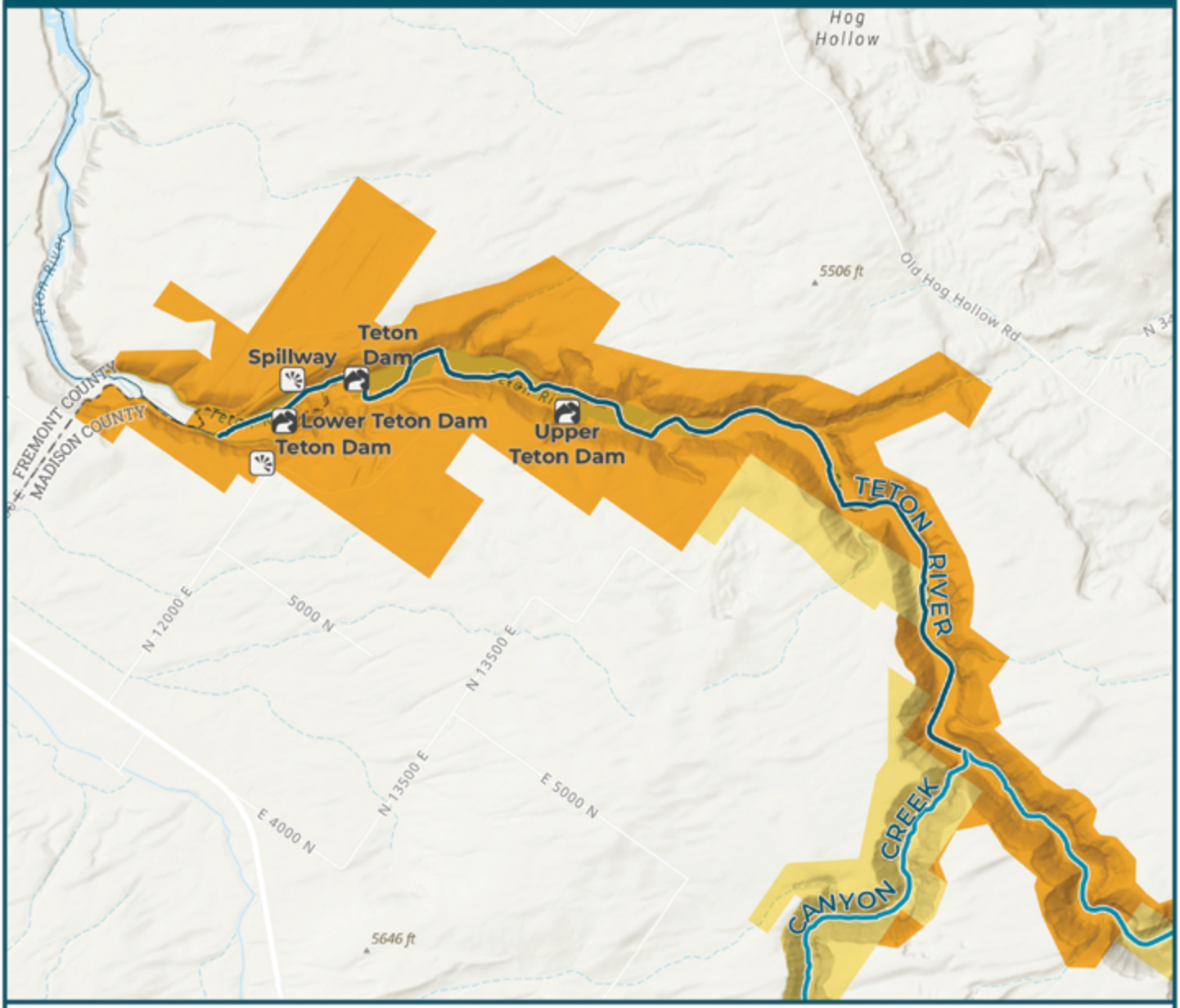
Land Management Agency
- Bureau of Land Management
- Bureau of Reclamation
- State

River Access

Scale: 1:48,000
0 0.5
Miles

CANYON CREEK TO FORMER TETON DAM SITE

Map #11



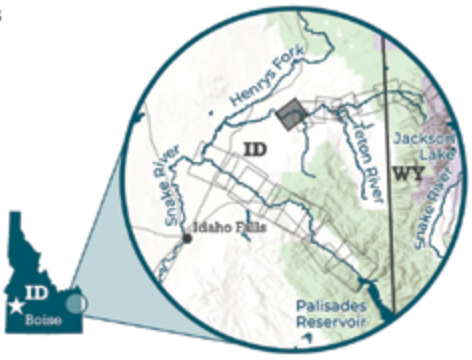
Teton River and Tributaries

Suitable Wild and Scenic Segment Classification
- Recreational
- Scenic

Land Management Agency
- Bureau of Land Management
- Bureau of Reclamation

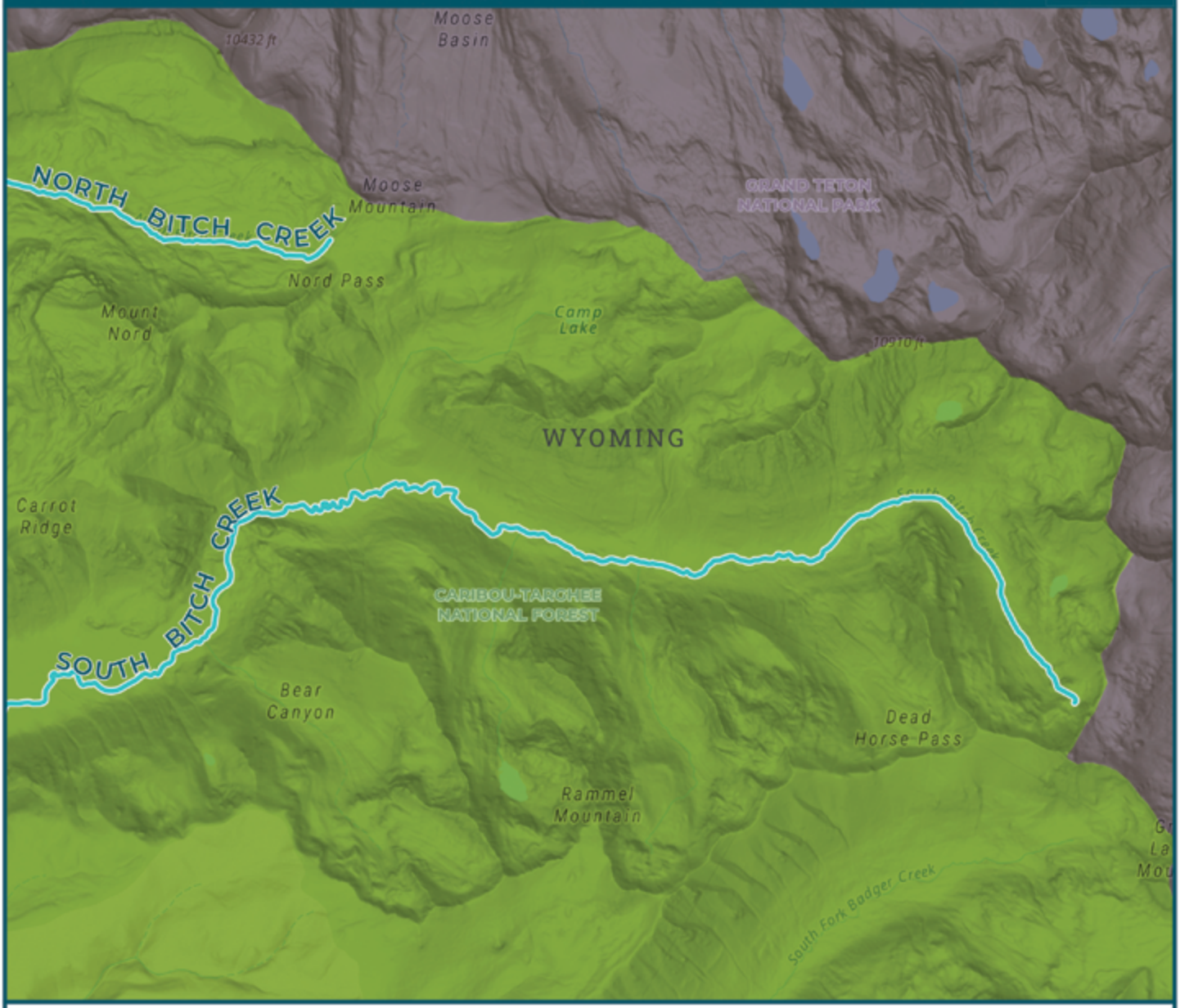
- Overlook
- River Access

Scale: 1:48,000
0 0.5
Miles



BITCH CREEK

Map #12



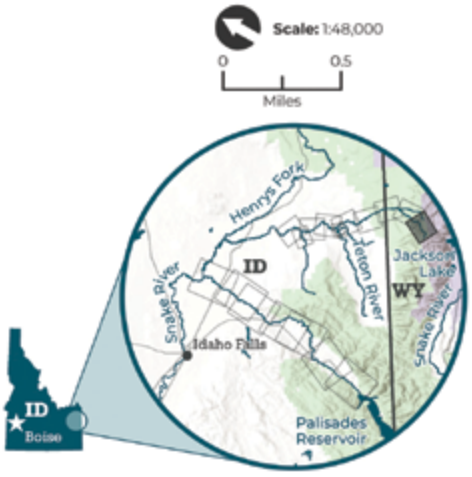
Teton River and Tributaries

Suitable Wild and Scenic Segment Classification

- Wild

Land Management Agency

- U.S. Forest Service
- National Park Service



BITCH CREEK

Map #13

Teton River and Tributaries

Suitable Wild and Scenic Segment Classification

- Wild

Land Management Agency

- U.S. Forest Service
- National Park Service

Scale: 1:48,000

0 0.5 Miles

BITCH CREEK

Map #14

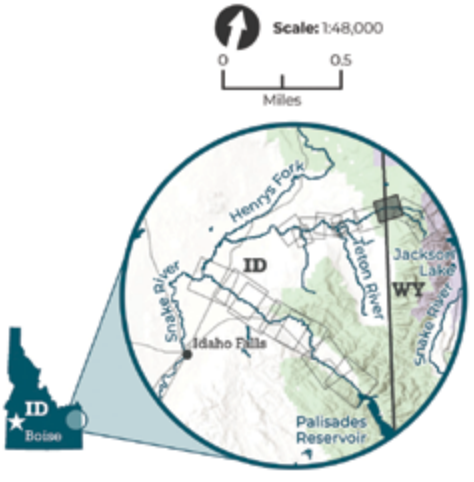
Teton River and Tributaries

Suitable Wild and Scenic Segment Classification

Wild

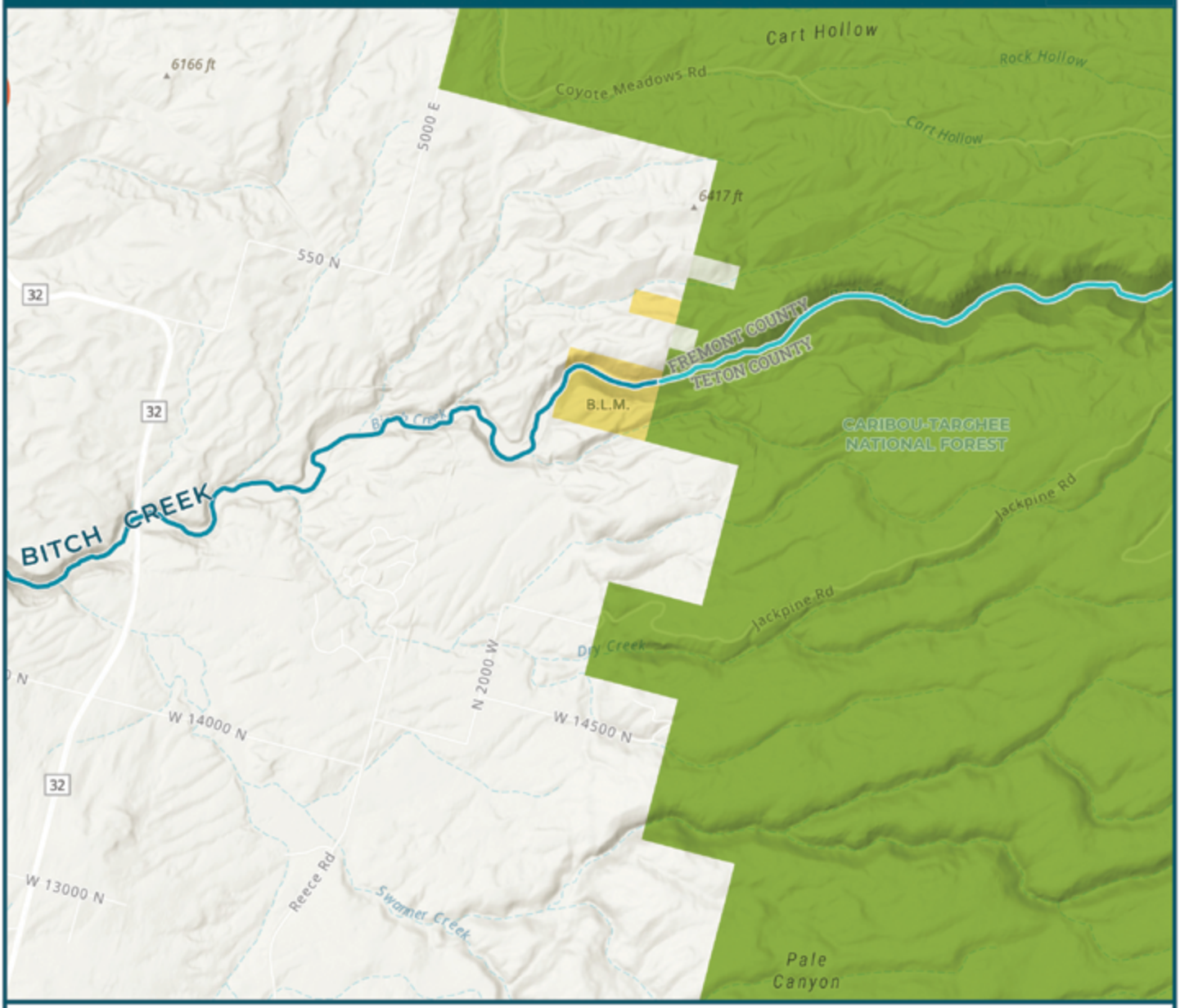
Land Management Agency

U.S. Forest Service



BITCH CREEK

Map #15



Teton River and Tributaries

Suitable Wild and Scenic Segment Classification

- Scenic
- Wild

Land Management Agency

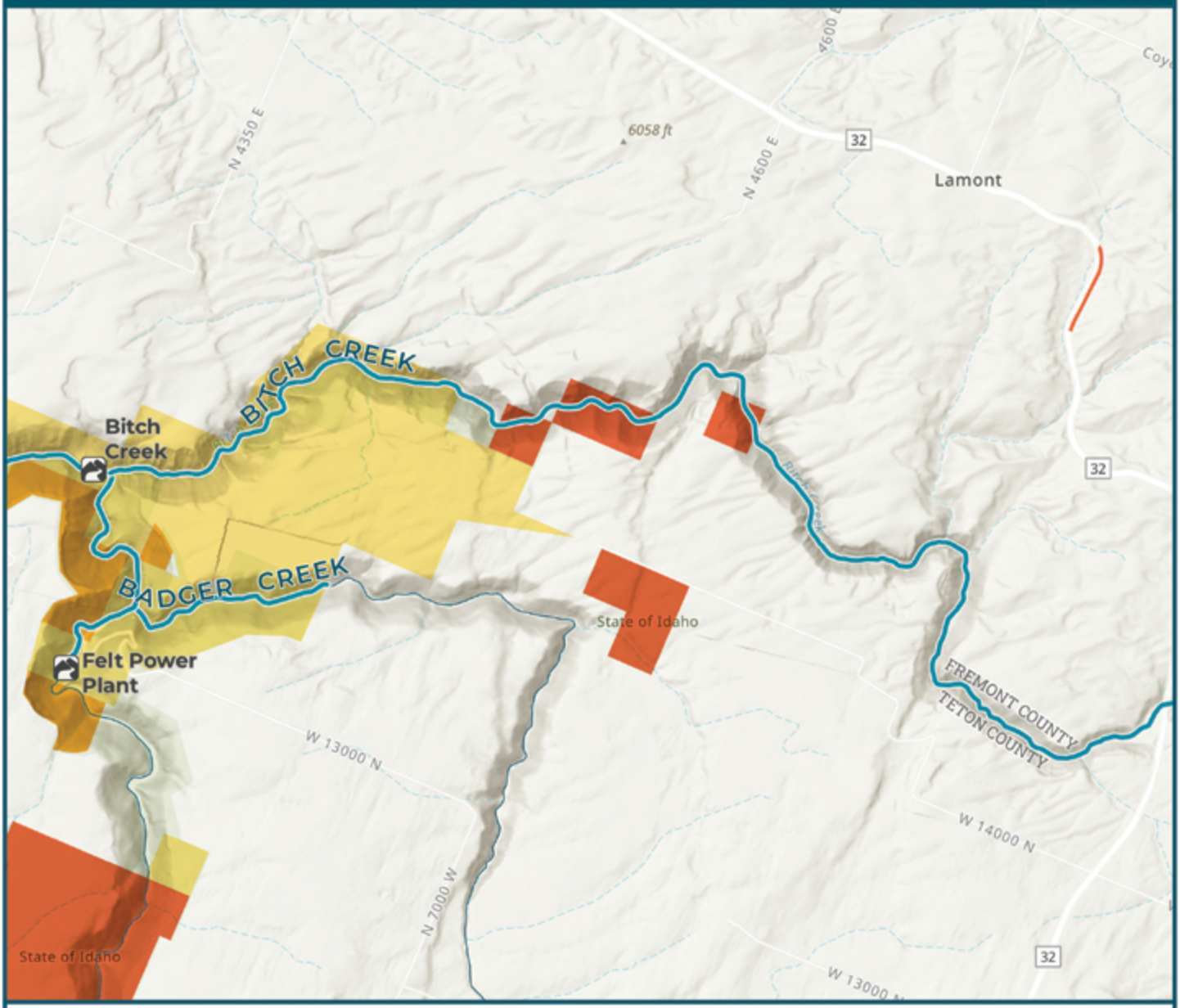
- Bureau of Land Management
- U.S. Forest Service
- State

Scale: 1:48,000

0 0.5 Miles

BITCH CREEK

Map #16



Teton River and Tributaries

Suitable Wild and Scenic Segment Classification
- Scenic

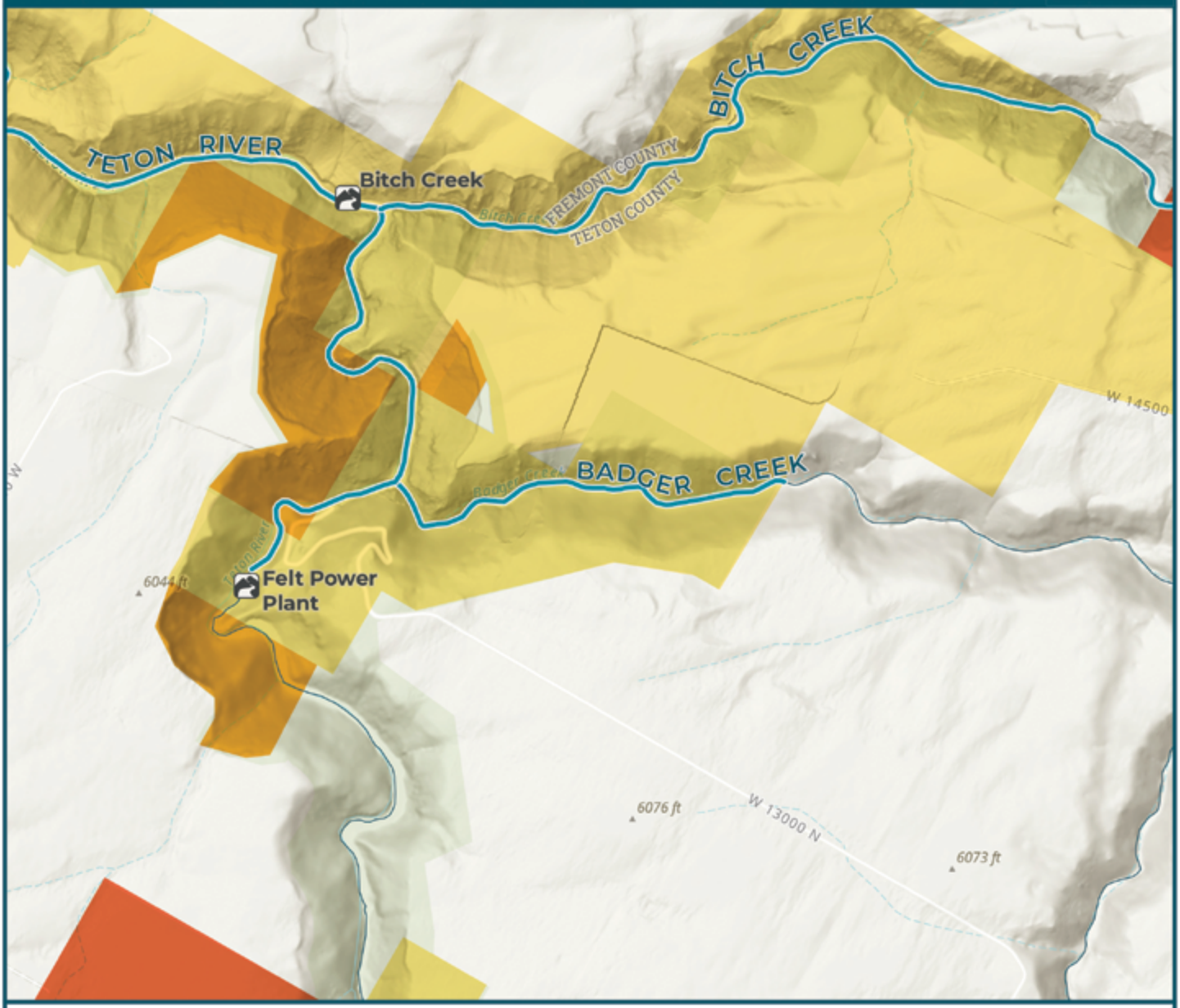
Land Management Agency
- Bureau of Land Management
- Bureau of Reclamation
- State
- Private

River Access

Scale: 1:48,000
0 0.5
Miles

BADGER CREEK

Map #17



Teton River and Tributaries

Suitable Wild and Scenic Segment Classification
- Scenic

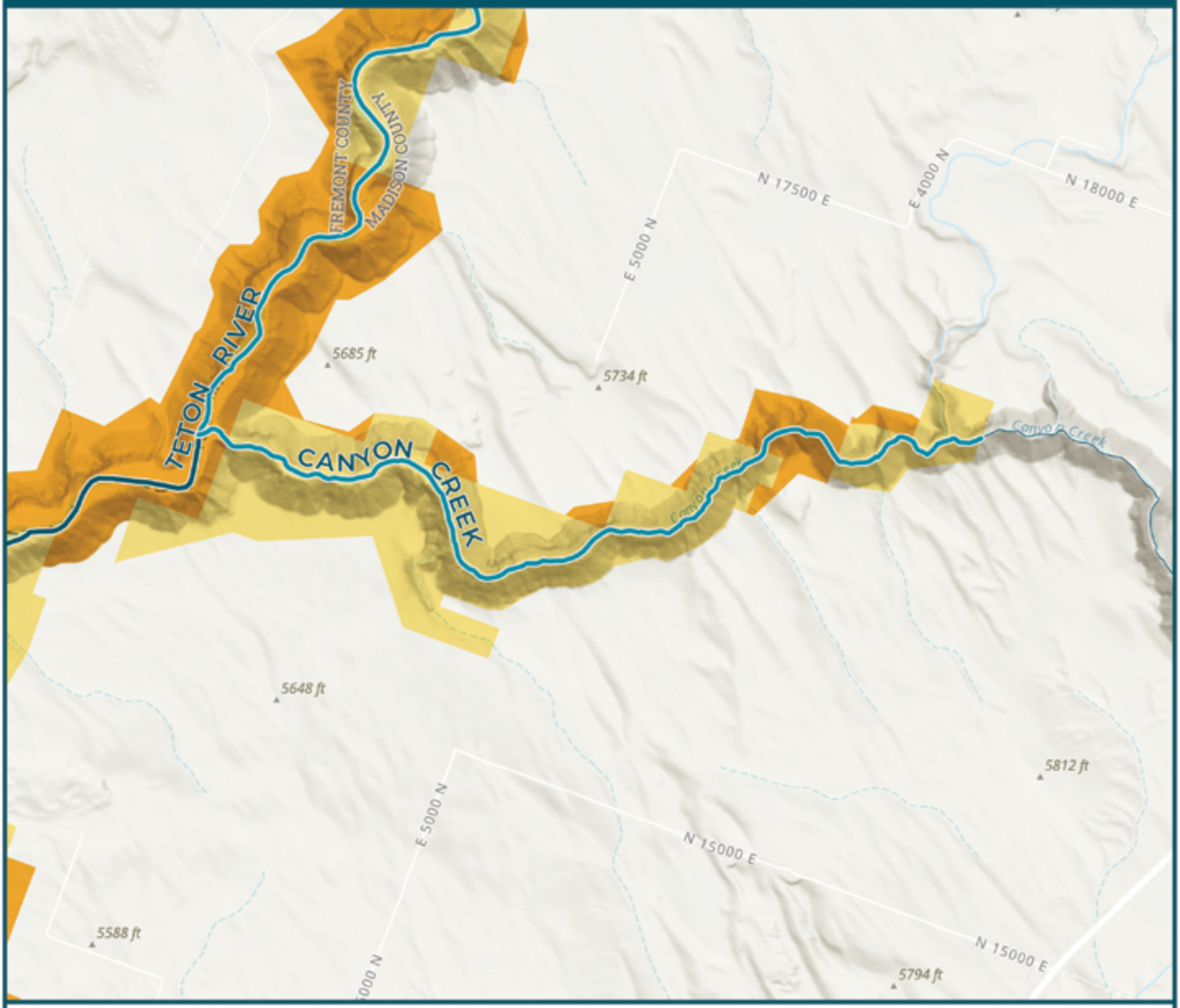
Land Management Agency
- Bureau of Land Management
- Bureau of Reclamation
- State
- Private

River Access

Scale: 1:24,000
0 0.5
Miles

CANYON CREEK

Map #18



Teton River and Tributaries

Suitable Wild and Scenic Segment Classification

- Recreational
- Scenic

Land Management Agency

- Bureau of Land Management
- Bureau of Reclamation

Scale: 1:36,000

0 0.5 Miles

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