

UPPER SALMON RIVER STEELHEAD ANGLING POCKET GUIDE

IDAHO FISH AND GAME – REGION 7



QUICK GUIDE

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This brochure is designed to assist steelhead anglers who wish to fish the upper Salmon River but might not be familiar with what the area offers, or anglers who are in need of some help with finding these amazing fish.

Maps of all six river location codes are shown which highlight areas anglers can put in or take out a boat and the distance between boat ramps. Internet links are provided that show instructional videos for all the most popular methods for catching steelhead. Additionally, information is provided about the Salmon River's average flows and how anglers typically distribute themselves during the fall and spring fisheries.

We hope this brochure assists you in catching your fish of a lifetime. For questions, comments, or to request additional information anglers can contact the IDFG Salmon Regional office at (208) 756-2271.

STEELHEAD RULES

REGULATIONS MAY CHANGE BETWEEN SEASONS; FOR COMPLETE AND CURRENT FISHING RULES. ALWAYS REFER TO THE IDFG WEBSITE OR OFFICIAL FISHING SEASONS AND RULES PUBLICATION BEFORE FISHING.

- Steelhead are defined as rainbow trout longer than 20 inches in length (excluding those found in lakes or in the Pahsimeroi and Lemhi rivers).
- Only steelhead with a clipped adipose fin, as evidenced by a healed scar, may be kept.
- All steelhead with an intact adipose fin must be released.
- Anyone fishing for steelhead, except those expressly exempt, must have a valid fishing license and steelhead permit. This includes catch-and-release fishing.
- Children (including nonresident children) under the age of 14 are exempt from purchasing a steelhead permit; assuming they are accompanied by a valid permit holder, provided that any fish caught must be recorded on the permit holder's card and counted in the permit holder's legal bag, possession and season limit. Children may purchase their own steelhead permits in order to harvest their own limits.
- Only barbless hooks with a maximum 5/8 inch gap between shank and point may be used when fishing for steelhead in the Salmon drainage. Bending the



barb(s) down to the shank of a single, double, or treble hook will meet this requirement.

- Any angler, who has attained the bag, possession, or season limit on waters with steelhead limits, must cease fish-

ing for steelhead; this includes catch-and-release fishing.

Salmon River Possession Limits

- 3 per day; 9 in possession
- 20 per season

Licenses – Steelhead Permits

Resident Fishing License	\$25.75
Nonresident Fishing License	\$98.25
Junior Resident License (14 – 17 years)	\$13.75
Junior Nonresident Fishing License	\$21.75
Resident Steelhead Permit (Full Season Fishing License Required)	\$12.75
Nonresident Steelhead Permit (Full Season Fishing License Required)	\$25.75
Nonresident Salmon or Steelhead 3-day License/Permit	\$37.50

Please Note

- Fishing for or targeting steelhead is prohibited unless a steelhead season is specifically opened for that water.
- A steelhead with a clipped adipose fin must be killed immediately if being reduced to possession. Otherwise it must be released upon landing.
- All steelhead reduced to possession shall be counted in the limit of the person who hooked the fish.
- No person shall have in the field or in transit any steelhead from which the head or tail has been removed, unless: 1) the angler is ashore and done fishing for the day; 2) the adult steelhead is properly recorded on the angler's steelhead permit; and 3) the fish is processed or packaged with the skin naturally attached to the flesh including a portion with a healed, clipped adipose fin scar. The fish must be processed or packaged in a manner that the number of fish harvested can be readily determined. Processed steelhead cannot be transported by boat.

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Permit Validation Steps

- When an adult steelhead has been reduced to possession and killed immediately, the angler who hooked the fish must immediately:
 - 1) Completely remove one numbered notch from the permit.
 - 2) Look up the number code from the River Location Code List and write it in the space provided.
 - 3) Enter the month and day the fish was caught.
- If the steelhead is released rather than reduced to possession, the angler is not required to make an entry on the permit.
- A proxy statement (see below) is required if a steelhead is reduced to your possession, then gifted to or transported by another individual or party.
- The upper Salmon River opens to catch-and-release steelhead fishing on **August 1st** and to harvest on **September 1st**.
- To lessen fishery impacts on the Middle Fork wild steelhead run, the Salmon River downstream of Long Tom Creek, just upstream of the Middle Fork Salmon River confluence, closes to steelhead fishing on **March 31st**.
- All other upper Salmon River location codes close to steelhead fishing on **April 30th**.

Steelhead harvest and angler participation are estimated by a telephone survey conducted within a few weeks after the season closes. You may be called and asked about your effort and success. Please save your permit until three months after the season has closed or until you are contacted by Idaho Fish and Game.

Fill in and cut out the Proxy Statement below to transfer a harvested steelhead to another individual.

PROXY STATEMENT *(To transport fish taken by another person)*

Angler's Name _____ Signature _____
Address _____ Phone _____
License No. _____ Tag No. _____ Permit No. _____
Name of person transporting _____ Phone _____

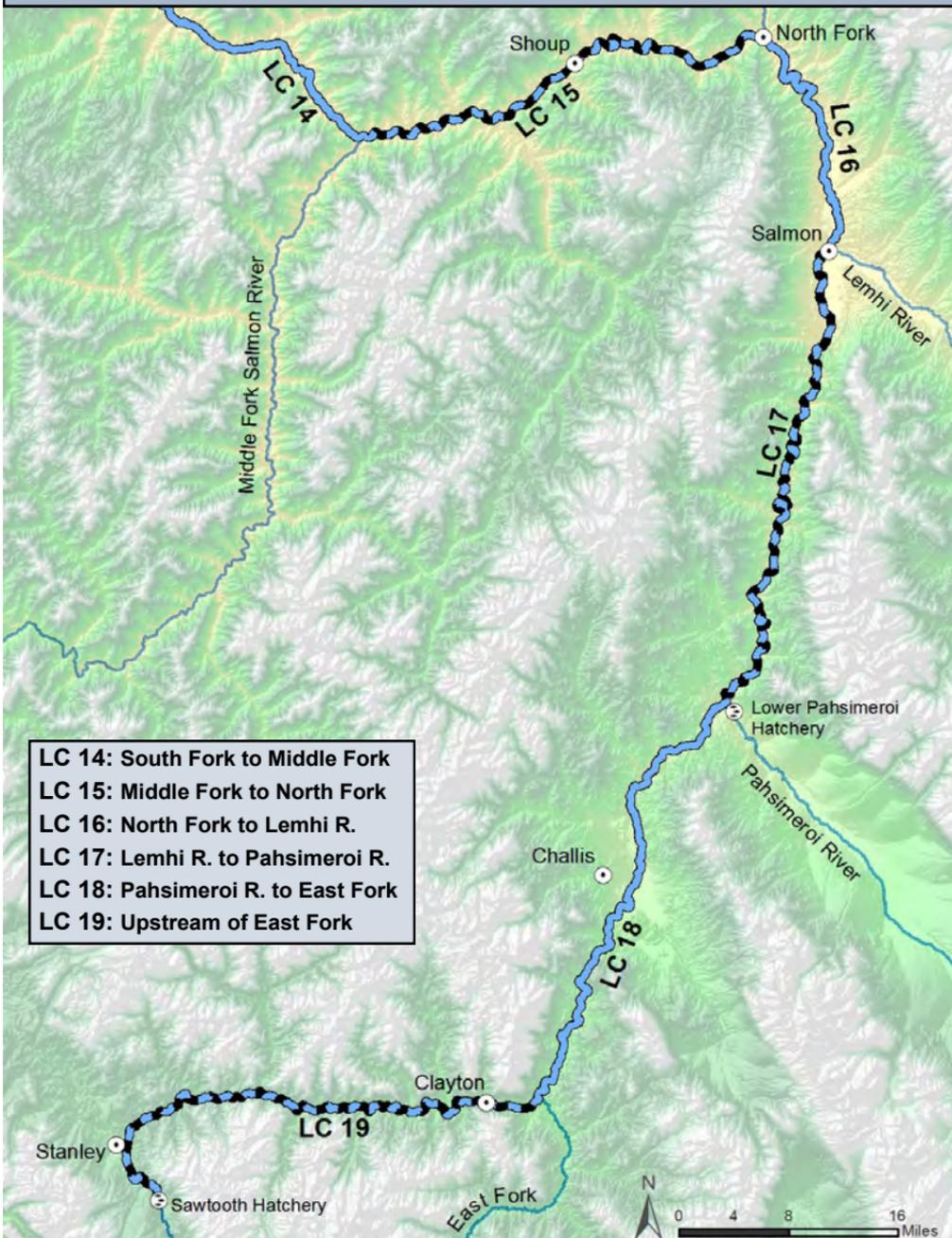
Fish Species	Description & Number Taken	Water Caught	Date

GAME:

Species _____ How many _____

Species _____ How many _____

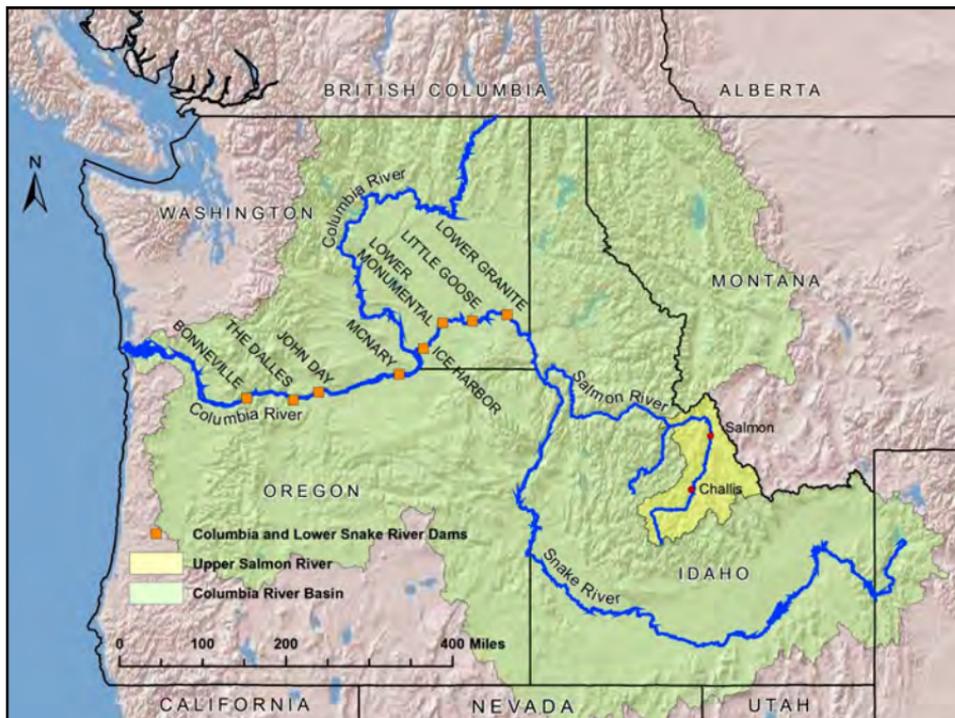
UPPER SALMON RIVER LOCATION CODES



UPPER SALMON RIVER STEELHEAD FISHERY

Each April millions of steelhead smolts produced by the Pahasimeroi and Sawtooth Hatcheries are released into the upper Salmon River. Once released, the smolts travel downstream through the Snake and Columbia Rivers for 900 miles and pass over 8 hydroelectric dams before reaching the Pacific Ocean. After one year, the majority of these fish return to Idaho, while the rest wait an additional one to two years before they too return.

Upper Salmon River adult steelhead return to the Columbia River during the months of July and August and begin to arrive in fishable numbers downstream of Salmon, ID by mid-October. The steelhead continue to move upstream until cold



water temperatures in late fall and winter halt their progress. During winter, the majority of steelhead will hold downstream of Challis, ID. Once the river begins to warm in February and March, the steelhead resume their upstream migration, and the fishery shifts upstream with them. This means that steelhead which are caught during the fall are part of the same run that occurs the following spring.

Steelhead start to arrive at the hatcheries during March and April and excellent fishing can often be found just downstream of both hatcheries. Spawning also occurs during this time and some years it extends into May.

A-RUN VS. B-RUN Idaho's steelhead stocks are characterized into A-run and B-run. A-run fish are the most commonly produced strain on the upper Salmon River. The majority of A-run steelhead stay in the ocean for one year and return to the Columbia River during July and August. During most years large numbers of them reach Idaho by the fall. These fish average between 23–26 inches in length and 4–6 pounds in weight.

B-run steelhead stay in the ocean for two years and enter the Columbia by late August or September. The extra year spent in the ocean results in them reaching significantly larger sizes compared to the A-run steelhead. Average B-run steelhead are 31–34 inches long and weigh between 10 and 13 pounds. Most B-run steelhead reach Idaho by fall, but they arrive behind the A-run steelhead. On the upper Salmon River, hatchery produced B-run steelhead are released at various locations throughout the upper Salmon River basin.

Please visit <http://fishandgame.idaho.gov/fish/steelhead/> for additional information about Idaho's steelhead.

STEELHEAD ANGLING METHODS

There is no “best” method when it comes to catching steelhead. Each method works well when done correctly and depending on the time of year, certain methods can outperform others. Oftentimes choosing where to fish is just as important as the method of fishing used. Regardless of which methods you choose to try, becoming proficient in at least one will greatly increase your odds of success.

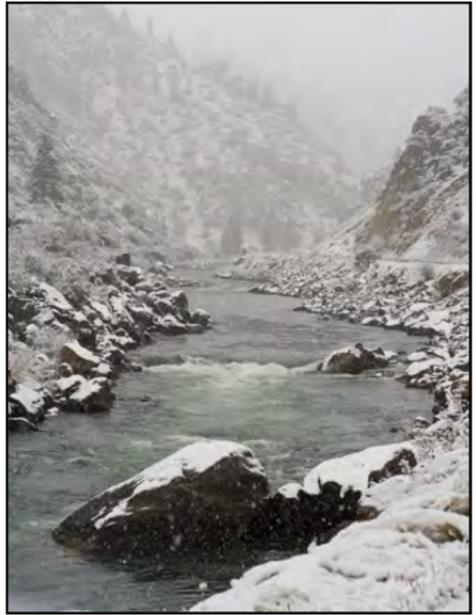
TACKLE

Steelhead are a powerful fish, and even though our steelhead exert much of their energy making it back to Idaho waters, they still have plenty of strength left when they arrive. To deal with their power, tackle should be sized large enough to not break but not so large as to take the fun out of the fight. Quality rods and reels (spinning or casting) capable of handling 8–12 pound test line are favored by most anglers. Some anglers choose to use a stronger mainline and then either 8 or 10 pound leaders. Either monofilament or braided lines are used depending on the angler’s fishing method and river conditions. Each type of line has its own strengths and weaknesses, testing both out will give you an idea of which type you prefer. We recommended to retie knots and check leaders frequently to reduce the risk of a break off when you hook into a Steelhead

DRIFT FISHING OR “BOTTOM BOUNCING”

Drift fishing can be done from a boat or from shore. Anglers drift fish by casting across or slightly upstream of the hole and allow the current to carry the terminal tackle downstream through where the steelhead lie. There is a nearly endless variety of baits and lures to use with this method. Corkies, worms, cut shrimp, roe, and beads are

just some of the tackle anglers can use while drift fishing. Regardless of what you decide to use, the most important aspect lies in the presentation. While swinging through the hole, the tackle should be moving at all times, but at a slow enough speed to allow the steelhead to see it and bite. In order to achieve the proper drift speed, you will need to adjust the weight on the line. Some anglers use pencil lead with surgical tubing and cut it to the desired



weight, while other anglers use premade weights out of parachute cord and lead shot and switch between different sizes. If you are using bait such as shrimp, it is not unusual to hook steelhead after your rig has completed the swing and is hanging at the end of the drift.

Drift fishing requires more experience to detect the bite compared to some of the other techniques because of the soft strikes that it sometimes produces from steelhead (especially during the winter months when water temperatures are cold). Once you've felt a few strikes, it does become much easier to detect bites.

BOBBER AND JIG This is a relatively new technique that is becoming more popular each year. It was first popularized on other rivers in the Pacific Northwest, but recently, anglers on the Salmon River have had success with it as well.

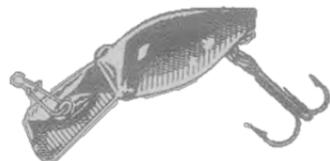
The method involves using a bobber (size and shape varies) to suspend a jig or other terminal tackle just above the river bottom. When used in areas with slower current, this can be a very effective method for catching steelhead. The most important factor is knowing how deep each hole or run is in order to keep the tackle just above the river bottom.

FLY FISHING Fly fishing for steelhead is growing fast in popularity. Anglers rave about the thrill of fighting a steelhead with fly gear. In our region, this method seems to be used most often in the fall near the towns of Salmon and North Fork and near Stanley, ID during the spring. These areas have many “runs” and “riffles” that fly anglers desire when looking for good holding water.

The majority of fly fishermen use rods at least 9 feet in length that are capable of handling seven to nine weight lines. A fairly big reel that is capable of holding 200 yards of backing is also recommended, as large steelhead can strip out line fast.

In addition to the tackle, location is key for fly fishing. Because of this, many fly fishermen wear chest waders and use boats to fish directly from platforms or to get to islands and bars that wouldn't otherwise be accessible.

PULLING PLUGS Also known as “hot shotting”, pulling plugs from drift or jet boats is one of the most effective ways of catching steelhead. It works when a back trolling boat keeps enough upstream pressure on a crankbait to keep it vibrating in the current at the end of line. The line should be let out far enough that the fish cannot detect the boat, but not so far that you cannot feel the take (although, strikes on hotshots are typi-



cally very hard and tough to miss). After letting the line out, the oarsman does most of the fishing by maintaining the proper boat speed against the current and maneuvering the boat from side to side over the holding water. Due to this, the most important factor when pulling plugs is having a skillful boat operator that can read the river and then maneuver through the area where the fish are most likely to be.

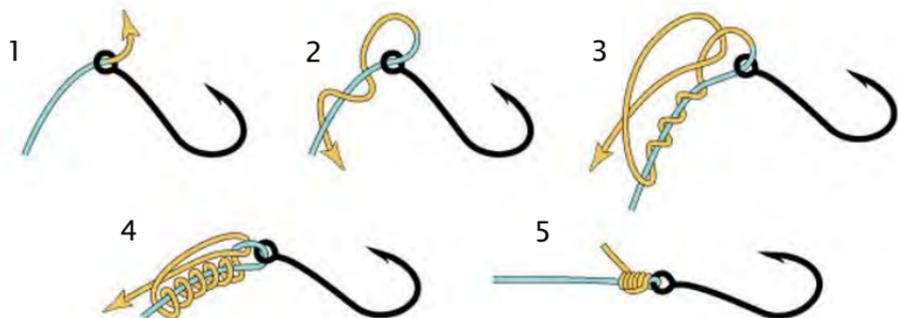
If you do not have a boat, side planers allows bank anglers to also pull plugs. Tackle shops can provide additional instruction on how to use a side planer.

Links to instructional videos demonstrating these and other methods are shown on page 27, towards the end of the brochure.

THE CLINCH KNOT

The clinch knot is a great knot for beginning anglers to learn and use. It does not break easily and will hold up to the fight of a steelhead.

In the figure below, the standing line is blue, and tag end is yellow.



FISHING ETIQUETTE: HOW TO COEXIST WITH OTHER ANGLERS

- Treat other anglers with respect.
- Always follow the rules and regulations for the waterbody you are fishing.
- If you are fishing from a boat, give bank anglers plenty of room. If people are there when you arrive, don't anchor in the middle of a hole.
- Most anglers fish downstream in a hole. Due to this, it is a good idea to begin fishing upstream of any anglers already present. If you are not sure which direction the angler is fishing then ask them before stepping in.
- Do not litter and when possible, pack out trash you find.
- Do not discard unwanted fish on the riverbank.
- When floating, choose to observe and obey all boating regulations; Understand and practice safe boating.
- Do not obstruct boat ramps; when boat ramps are busy, prepare your boat and trailer before you are on the ramp so you can launch quickly. Likewise, clear the ramp area before you unload your boat.
- Be conscious of your boat's wake, especially near anchored boats and wading bank anglers.
- If conditions allow, boaters should attempt to stay outside of bank anglers' casting distance
- Don't run your boat through water that someone else is attempting to fish
- A slow moving or stationary angler has the right to remain where he or she is. Politely move around them.
- Yield to an angler that has a fish on
- To view a video showing more suggestions, go to:



<https://idfg.idaho.gov/fishing/etiquette>

PLEASE REMEMBER

Steelhead fisheries are a vital component to the economies of the communities on the upper Salmon River. Sporting goods dealers in these areas love sharing their local knowledge and helping anglers find whatever fish they are targeting. **Be sure to take advantage of these local sources of knowledge.**

CATCH AND RELEASE OF WILD STEELHEAD

Any steelhead with an intact adipose fin that is landed or any steelhead that is landed but not reduced to possession must be released. Anglers should strive to minimize handling and stress on each fish caught and released to maximize their chance of survival. Please follow these suggestions to help reduce stress on released steelhead:

- Use only barbless hooks, as required by law.
- Avoid playing a fish to the point of complete exhaustion.
- Don't pull fish onto the shoreline, rocks or sand. Use a net or "tail" the fish to land them.
- Handle fish as little as possible. It is best to avoid handling a fish at all if you can release it by grasping the hook only.
- If handling is necessary, ensure that your hands are wet prior to touching the fish. Avoid squeezing the fish, and hold it in the water until you're ready to take a picture and release the fish.
- Minimize the time fish are held out of water while landing, photographing, and releasing fish. Have your camera ready!
- Always avoid touching the gills.
- If the hook is deep in the mouth area, consider cutting the line. The hook will quickly dissolve with less damage done to the fish.
- An exhausted fish may need some time to recover before being released. Gently support its underside with wet hands and let it rest in the water with its head oriented upstream until it swims away under its own power.
- Never toss or drop a fish back into the water.

To learn more about how IDFG is managing and monitoring our valuable wild steelhead populations, please visit:

<https://idfg.idaho.gov/fish/steelhead>

Unclipped Adipose Fin



Clipped Adipose Fin



THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND

- ◆ Most anglers prefer to fish when water temperatures are in the mid-30s to the low 40s. Good fishing can be had when temperatures are above or below this though.
- ◆ Periods of stable weather conditions oftentimes produce some of the best catch rates.
- ◆ Weather permitting, some of the best fishing can occur during December and January.
- ◆ Many anglers key in on the break up of the Deadwater ice jam for planning their trips to fish downstream of Salmon in March.
- ◆ Low water levels near Stanley can make boating hazardous.
- ◆ Bait, such as worms or shrimp, works well for catching steelhead during the fall and winter.
 - Rubber worms and hellgies work well alongside bait.
- ◆ In the spring, roe or egg imitations seem to work well for drift, bobber, or fly fishing. For fly fisherman, the local fly shops are a great resource for finding out what flies work best.
- ◆ Plugs (hot shots) and spoons work well during both the fall and spring fisheries; sometimes when the fish don't feel like biting at the other methods.

Weekly steelhead harvest reports are available at:
<http://fishandgame.idaho.gov/fish/steelhead/harvest>

AVERAGE CATCH RATE INFO*

Season	Location Code	Angler Effort (Hours)	No. Steelhead Kept	No. Hatchery Steelhead Released	No. Unclipped Steelhead Released	Ave. Hrs. per Steelhead Caught	Ave. Hrs. per Steelhead Kept
Fall	14	5,377	153	14	320	11	35
	15	11,387	500	113	314	12	23
	16	4,185	199	64	114	11	21
	17	477	23	8	11	11	21
	TOTAL	21,426	874	199	759	12	25
Spring	14	1,143	35	9	87	9	33
	15	7,333	465	223	293	7	16
	16	2,550	111	54	77	11	23
	17	6,235	265	127	78	13	24
	18	2,728	66	77	63	13	41
	19	6,669	318	260	341	7	21
TOTAL	26,659	1260	751	939	9	21	

* This table displays unexpanded creel survey averages from the upper Salmon River pooled over the last five years by season and river location code (Fall 2010 – Spring 2015). Individual years can vary significantly from these averages.

UPPER SALMON RIVER HYDROLOGY

River flow information for the state of Idaho can be obtained through the United States Geological Survey (USGS) website at:

<http://waterwatch.usgs.gov/new>

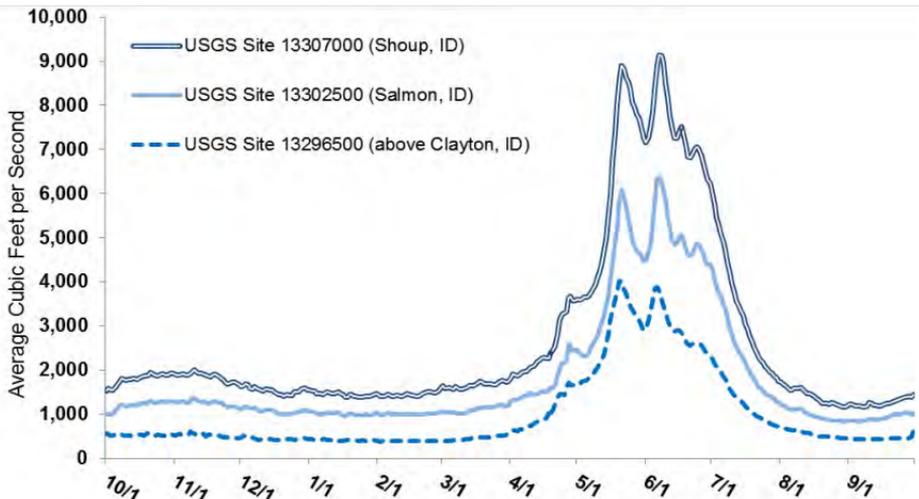
From there, select “*Current Streamflow*” and then select “*Idaho*” on the following page. There are currently three USGS gauging sites to choose from on the upper Salmon River:

- USGS 13296500 Salmon River BL Yankee Fork Nr Clayton ID
- USGS 13302500 Salmon River at Salmon ID
- USGS 13307000 Salmon River Nr Shoup ID

Things to Remember:

- With the exception of spring runoff, river conditions typically take at least 3–5 days to improve following a period of increased flows.
- Gauging sites are also available for the Yankee Fork, Pahsimeroi, Lemhi, and Middle Fork Rivers.
- Only averages are displayed below, current year flows may vary significantly.

USR HYDROGRAPHS (10 YEAR AVERAGES)



UPPER SALMON RIVER PIT TAG ARRAYS

Passive integrated transponder (PIT) tags are inserted into a percentage of juvenile hatchery fish before being released into rivers. They are also inserted into a number of adults when they return to the Columbia River and pass over Lower Granite Dam. Additionally, PIT tags are implanted into wild fish during summer field activities such as electrofishing. These tags allow biologists to uniquely identify fish and track them when they pass over antenna arrays that have been placed in strategic points throughout the Columbia River basin. These arrays then aid in managing our steelhead populations and fisheries.

In 2012, two PIT tag arrays were installed on the upper Salmon River. These arrays are located near the Elevenmile Access site and the Iron Creek bridge. Detection data from these arrays is uploaded in real-time to the

web and accessible to the public.

This data can be useful to anglers when attempting to figure out the timing of salmon and steelhead runs,

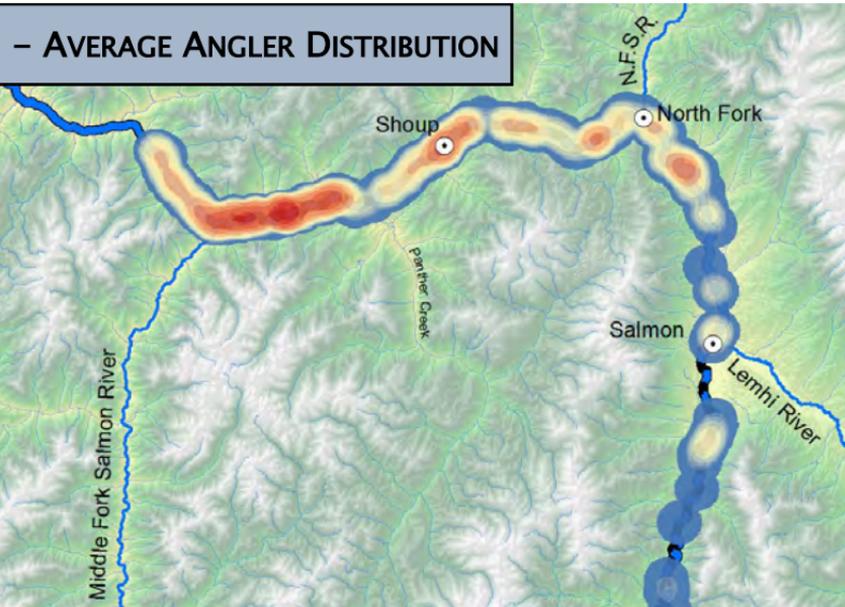


but it is important to remember that the number of detections does not equal the number of fish that have actually moved upriver. Separate fish stocks are tagged at different rates.

HOW TO OBTAIN THE DATA

- 1) On the internet, navigate to the Ptagis website at <http://ptagis.org>
- 2) Select “Data” -> “Quick Reports” -> “Small-scale Site Detections”; this will take you to a new page.
- 3) For the first selection, choose either “USE” or “USI” to select the Elevenmile or Iron Creek array, then click on “Detection Period”
- 4) Select the detection period you want and click on “Species”
- 5) Select “Steelhead” and click on “Run”
- 6) Select the desired run; typically “-all-” is the best choice for timing purposes. Click on “Rear Type”
- 7) Select the desired rear type and then click on “Run Document” at the bottom of the page. Your queried results should appear after a moment.
- 8) Juvenile fish detections will also be included in the results; pay attention to the “release year” to determine if the detected fish are adults or juveniles.
- 9) If needed, repeat the above steps for other upper Salmon River arrays.

FALL – AVERAGE ANGLER DISTRIBUTION



OCTOBER & NOVEMBER

- Although some steelhead do show up in September, large numbers do not typically arrive until early October.
- The majority of angler effort occurs downstream of North Fork – this distribution does not change much between October and November.
- Depending on the run timing, good fishing can be found upstream of Salmon in November.
- Between North Fork and Salmon is a very popular area for drift boats.
- The best catch rates usually occur near the end of October or early November.

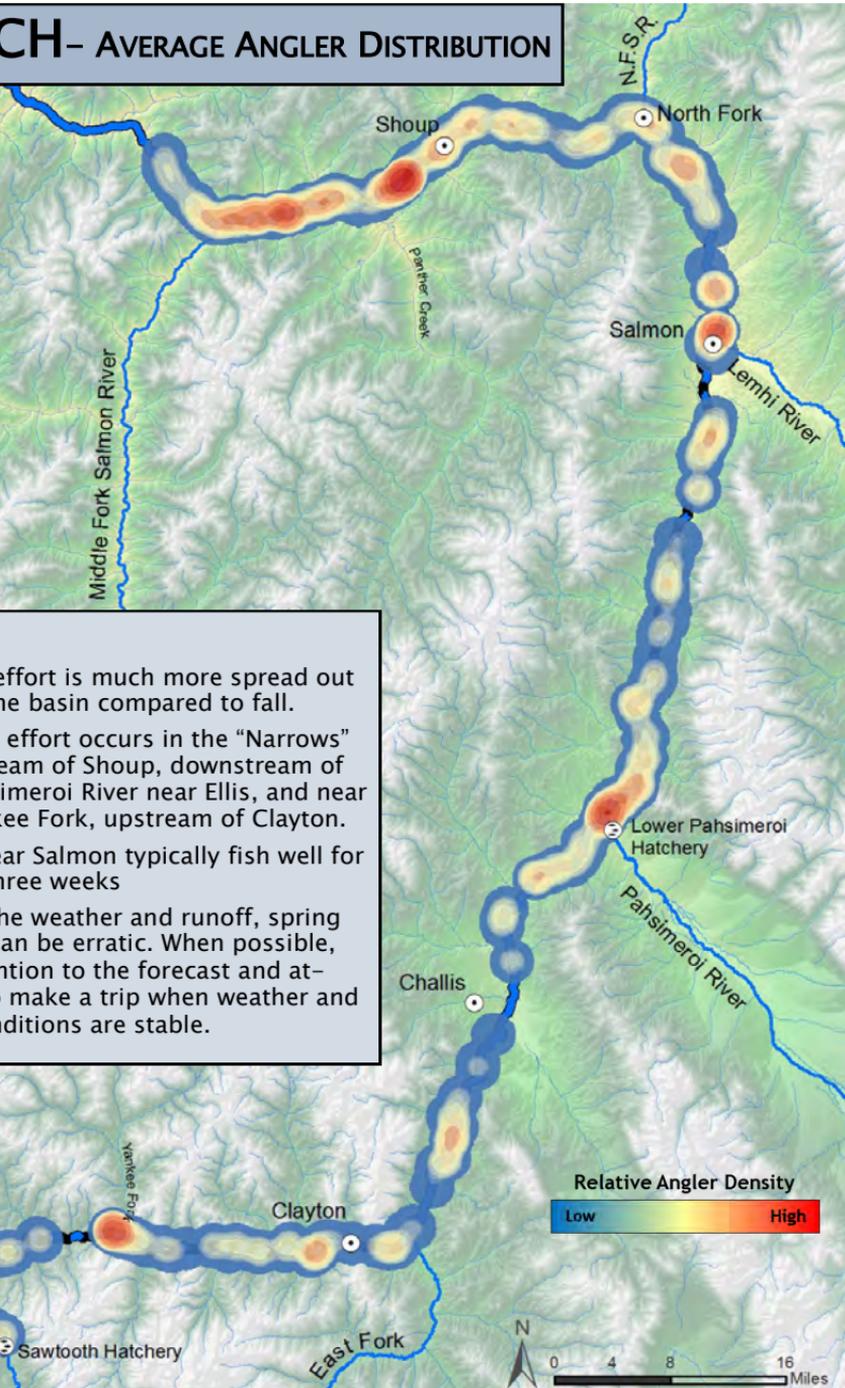
NOTE: Angler effort upstream of the Pahsimeroi River during late fall is low, but it does occur.

Relative Angler Density



0 4 8 16 Miles

MARCH- AVERAGE ANGLER DISTRIBUTION



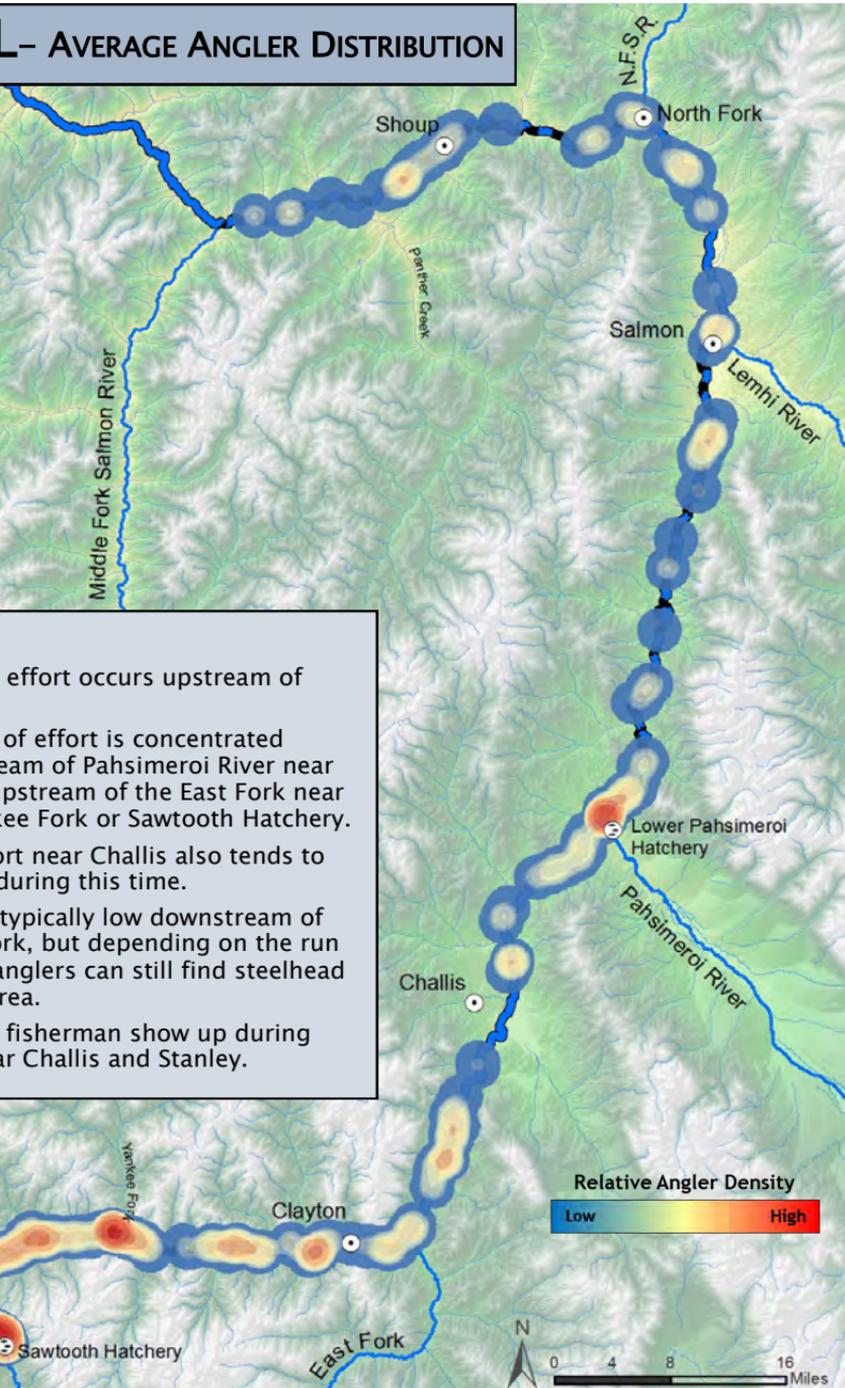
MARCH

- Fishing effort is much more spread out across the basin compared to fall.
- Heaviest effort occurs in the “Narrows” downstream of Shoup, downstream of the Pahsimeroi River near Ellis, and near the Yankee Fork, upstream of Clayton.
- Areas near Salmon typically fish well for two to three weeks
- Due to the weather and runoff, spring fishing can be erratic. When possible, pay attention to the forecast and attempt to make a trip when weather and river conditions are stable.

Relative Angler Density



APRIL- AVERAGE ANGLER DISTRIBUTION

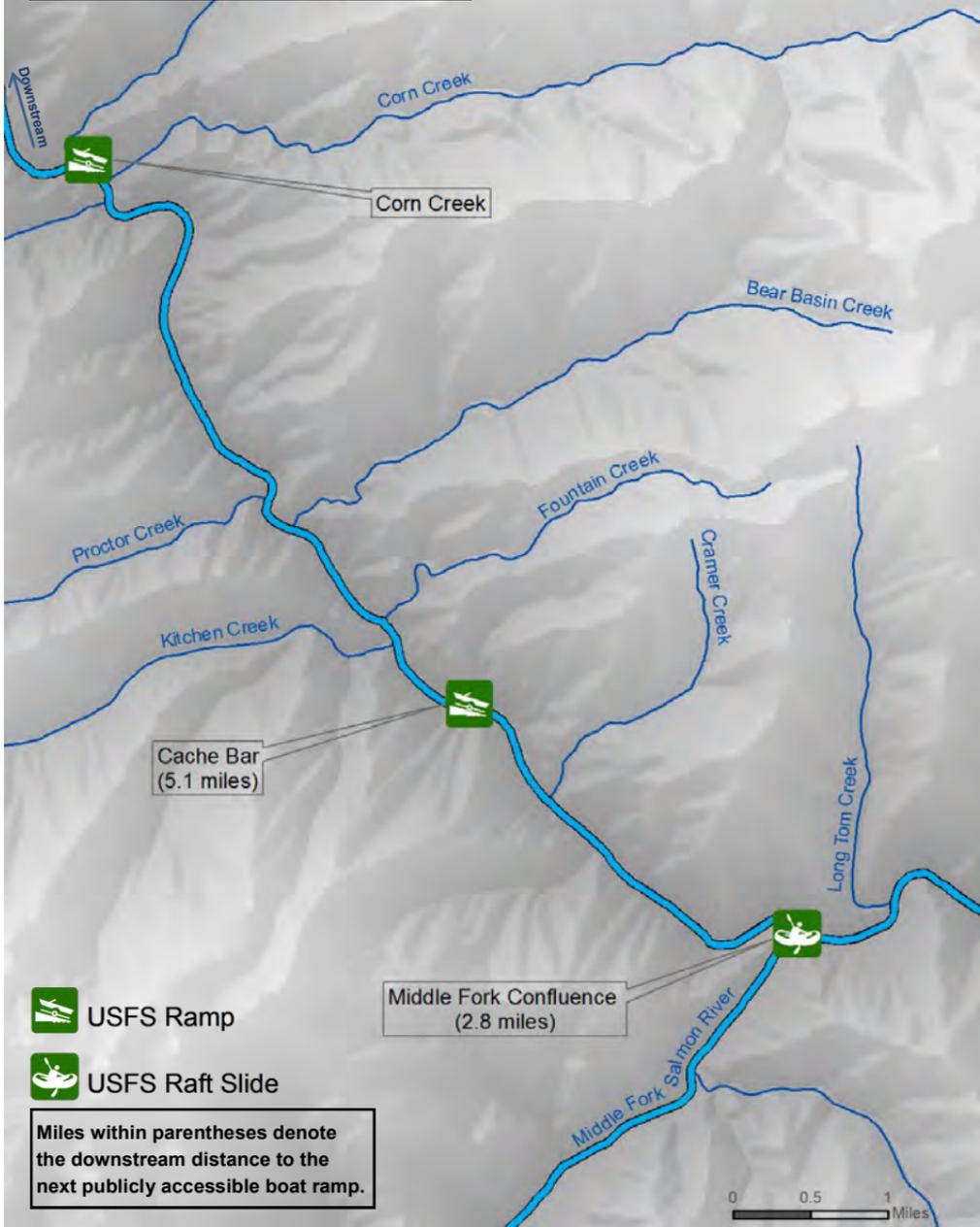


APRIL

- Heaviest effort occurs upstream of Salmon.
- Majority of effort is concentrated downstream of Pahasimeroi River near Ellis or upstream of the East Fork near the Yankee Fork or Sawtooth Hatchery.
- Boat effort near Challis also tends to pick up during this time.
- Effort is typically low downstream of North Fork, but depending on the run timing, anglers can still find steelhead in that area.
- Many fly fisherman show up during April near Challis and Stanley.

LOCATION CODE 14

SOUTH FORK – MIDDLE FORK



USFS Ramp

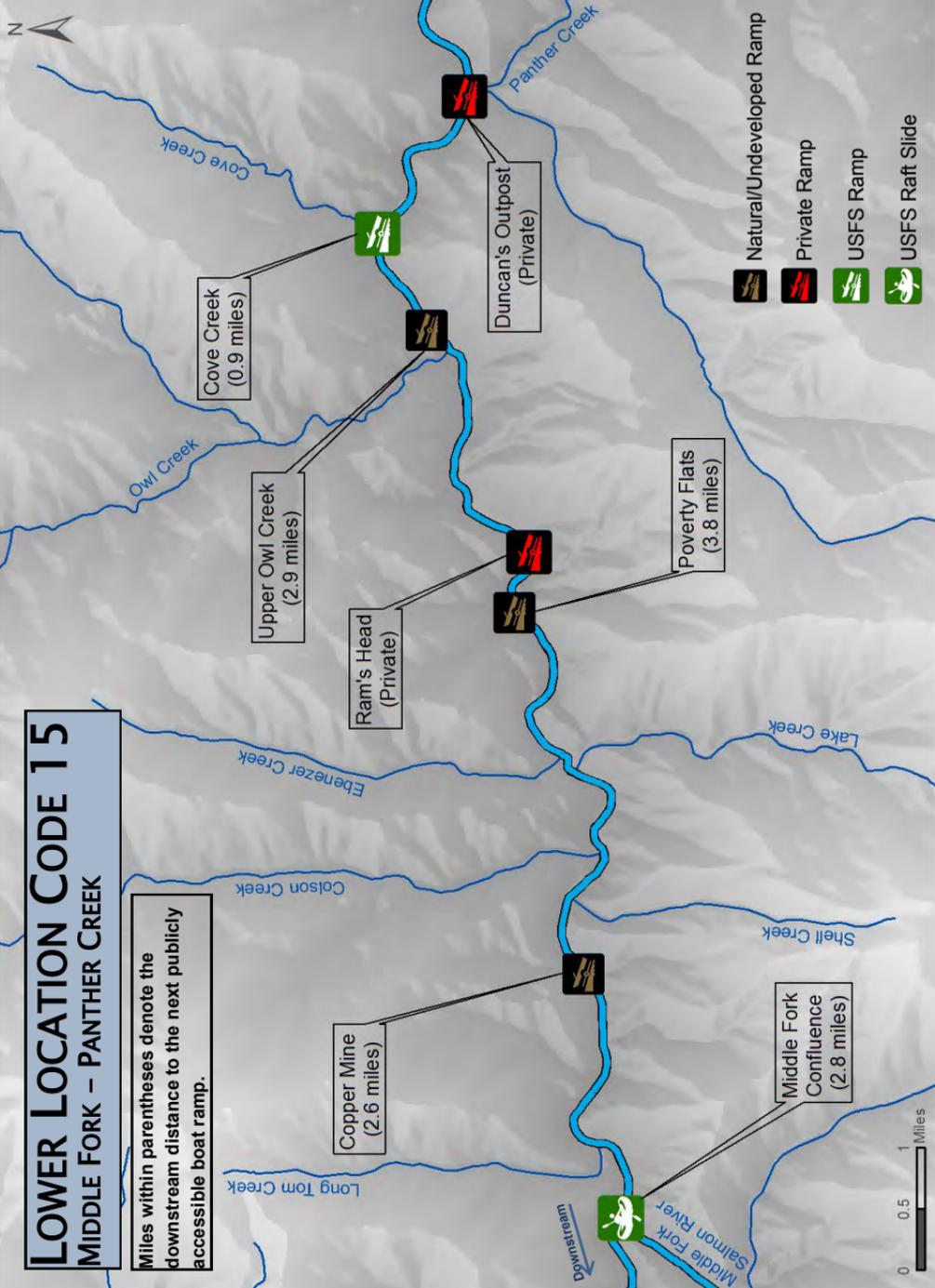


USFS Raft Slide

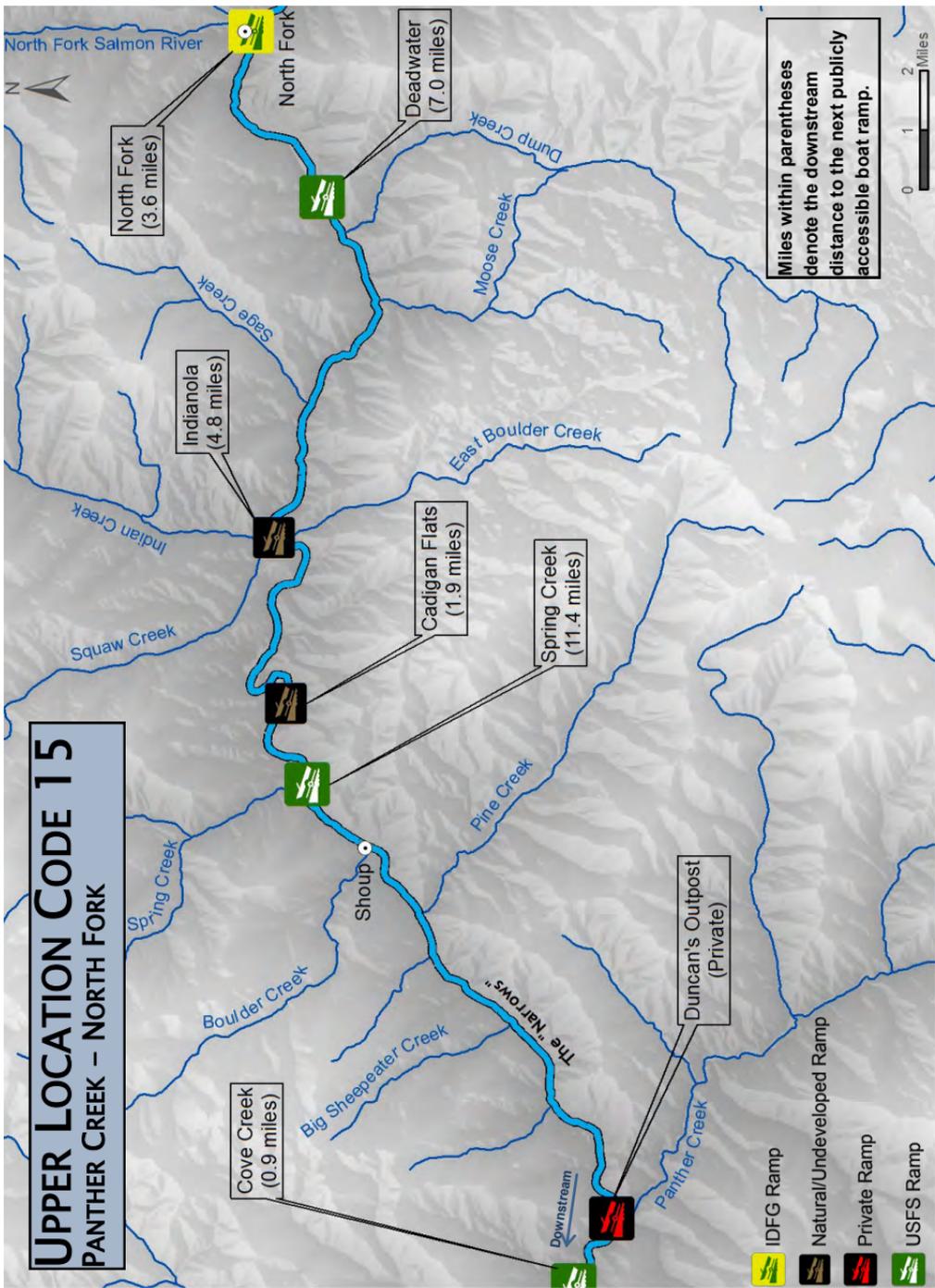
Miles within parentheses denote the downstream distance to the next publicly accessible boat ramp.

LOWER LOCATION CODE 15 MIDDLE FORK – PANTHER CREEK

Miles within parentheses denote the downstream distance to the next publicly accessible boat ramp.

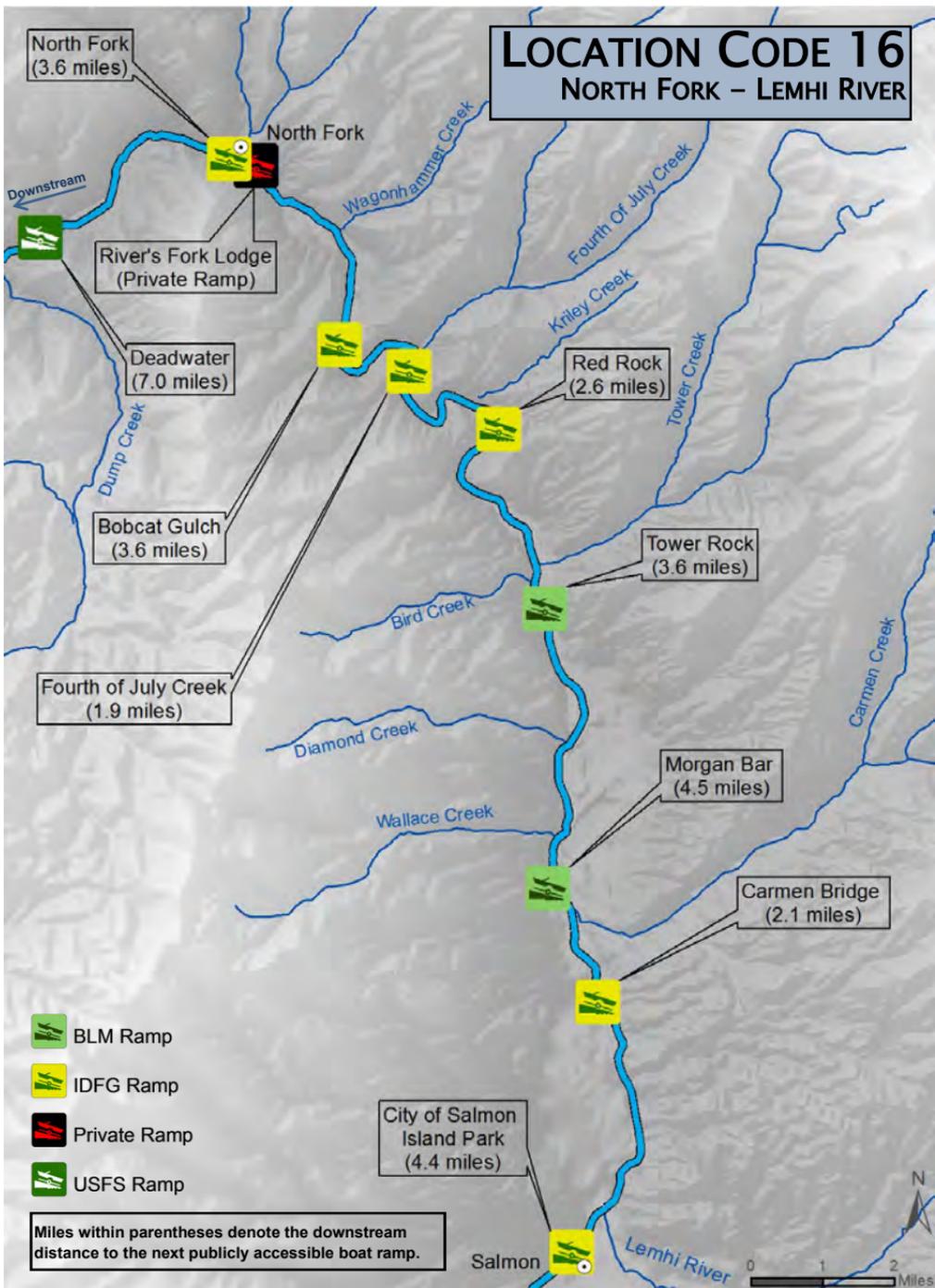


UPPER LOCATION CODE 15 PANTHER CREEK – NORTH FORK



LOCATION CODE 16

NORTH FORK – LEMHI RIVER



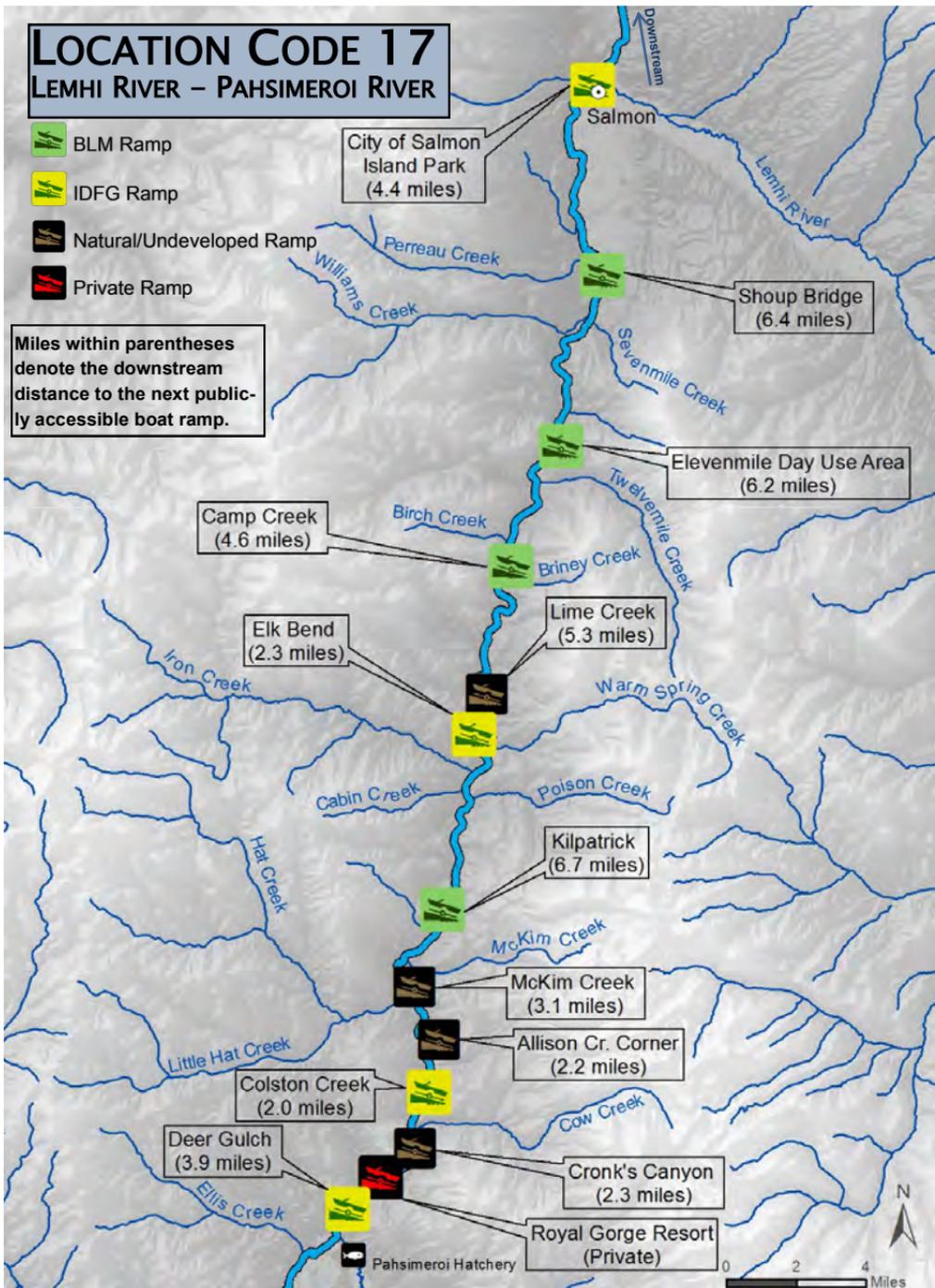
Miles within parentheses denote the downstream distance to the next publicly accessible boat ramp.

LOCATION CODE 17

LEMHI RIVER – PAHSIMEROI RIVER

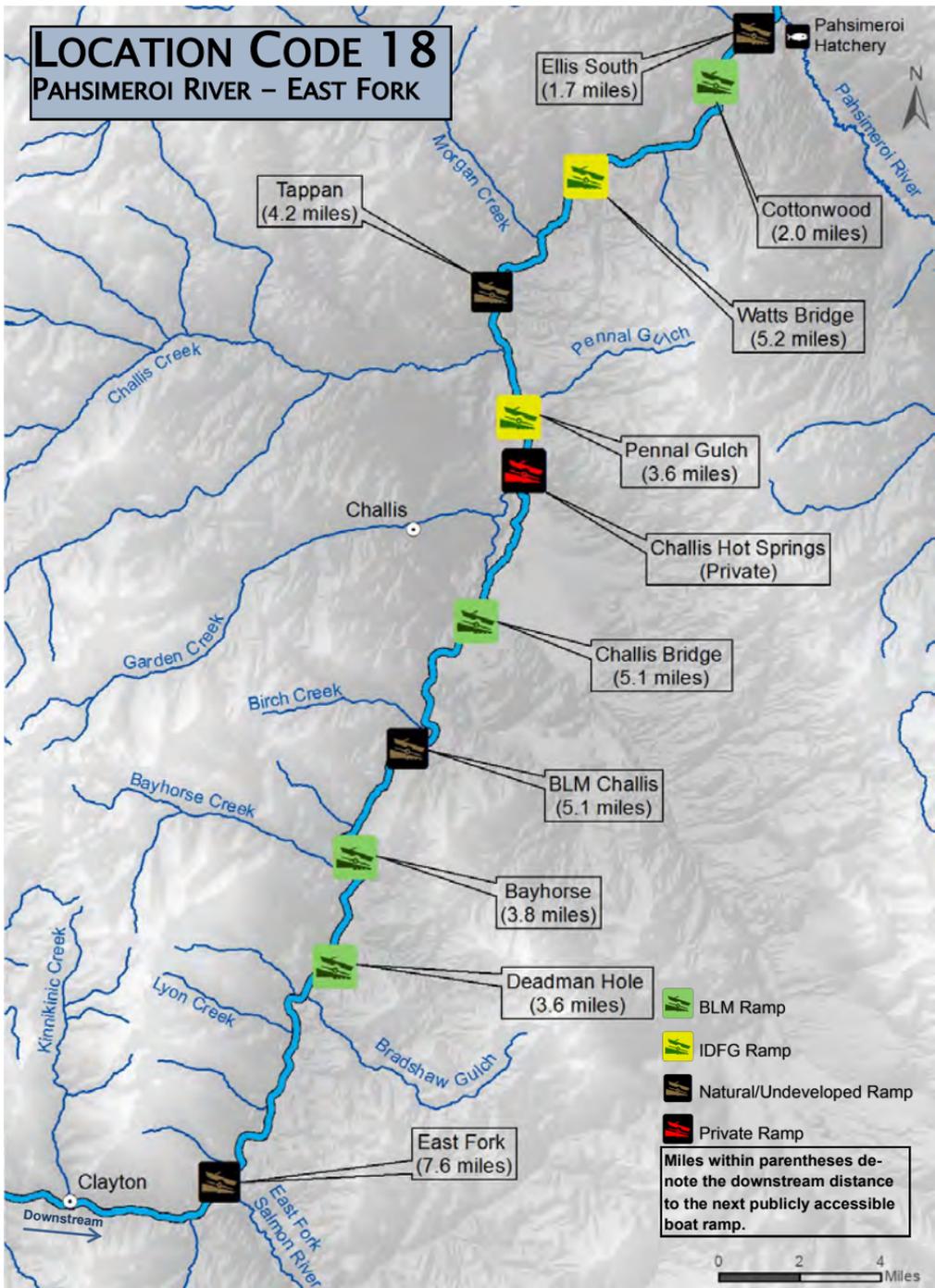
-  BLM Ramp
-  IDFG Ramp
-  Natural/Undeveloped Ramp
-  Private Ramp

Miles within parentheses denote the downstream distance to the next publicly accessible boat ramp.

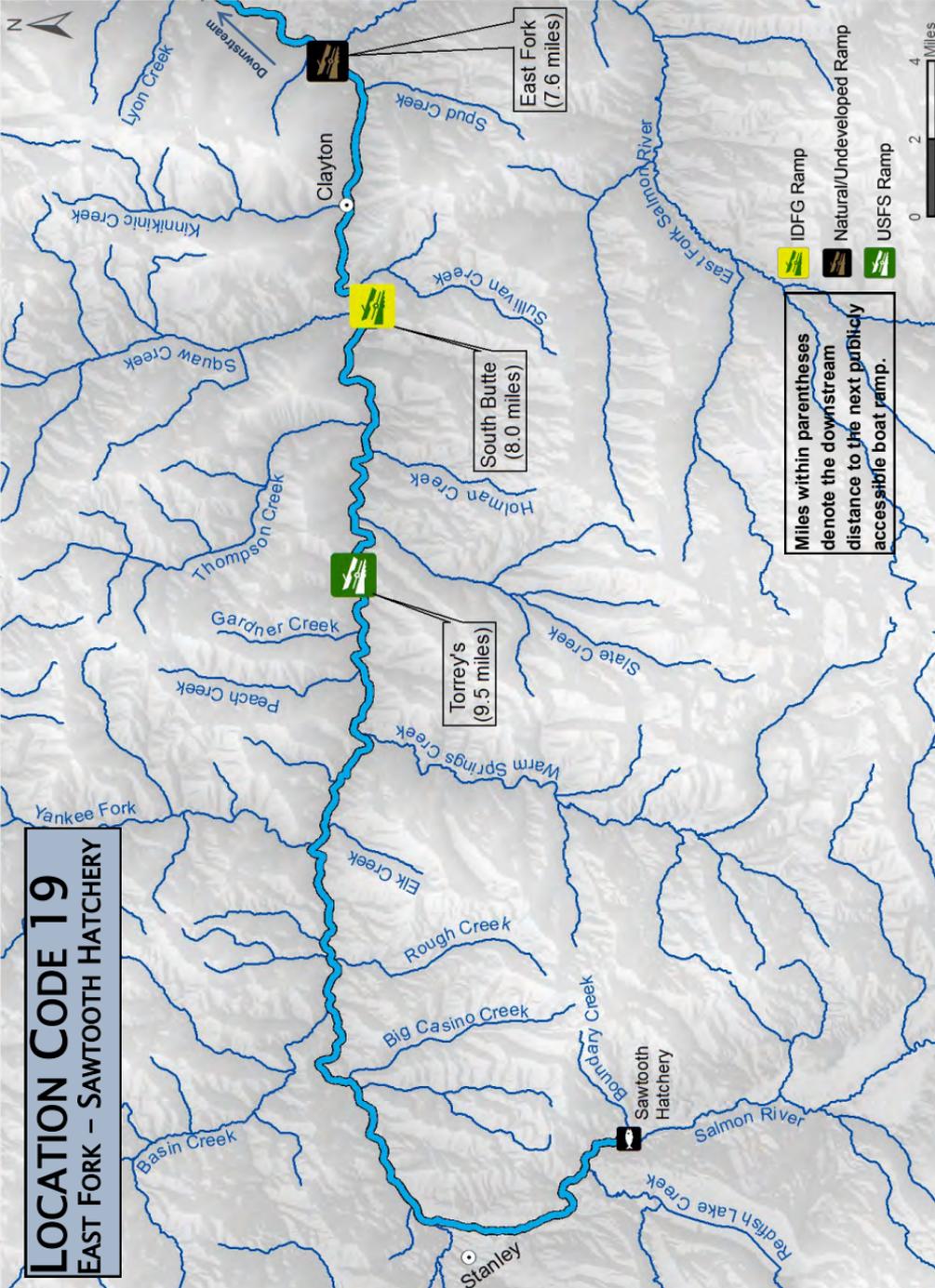


LOCATION CODE 18

PAHSIMEROI RIVER – EAST FORK



LOCATION CODE 19
EAST FORK – SAWTOOTH HATCHERY



Miles within parentheses denote the downstream distance to the next publicly accessible boat ramp.

STEELHEAD FISHING INSTRUCTIONAL VIDEOS

Made by IDFG personnel, these videos cover many aspects of steelhead fishing, such as descriptions or techniques for:

- Basic Steelhead Gear
- How to Clean a Fish
- Side Planers
- Back trolling/Pulling Plugs/Hot Shotting
- Bobber 'n Jig
- Drift or Bottom Bouncing
- Plunking
- Making Slinky Weights
- Knot Tying
- Steelhead Recipes
- additional videos are available at:

<http://fishandgame.idaho.gov/fish/steelhead/how-to>

Season dates, creel limits and special regulations vary from year to year or even during a steelhead fishing season. Always completely review current regulations, available online, wherever steelhead fishing tags are sold or at Idaho Department of Fish and Game offices.

Find the current IDFG Steelhead Regulations on your smartphone or computer at:

<http://fishandgame.idaho.gov/fish/steelhead/rules>

WHERE CAN I BUY A LICENSE?

SALMON

93 OUTDOOR SPORTS
(208) 756-3002

CORNER STORE
(208) 756-2113

HIGH COUNTRY
SPORTING GOODS
(208) 756-1982

NORTH FORK

THE VILLAGE AT NORTH
FORK
(208) 865-2412

CHALLIS

BENT ROD OUTDOORS
(208) 879-2500

GATEWAY MINI MART
(208) 879-4393

STANLEY

JERRY'S COUNTRY STORE
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MCCOY'S TACKLE SHOP
(208) 774-3377

MOUNTAIN VILLAGE
MERCANTILE & GAS
(208) 774-3500

RIVER 1
(208) 774-2270

Find full list of license vendors at <http://idfg.idaho.gov>

For a complete list of fishing guides, please visit <http://IOGA.org>

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