

# Protecting

by the numbers

**3,500**  
MEMBERS

**38**

States

**85**

New members

**52%**

Member Return Rate

**29%**

Of budget from membership

**Increasing**  
Threats

**11**

Wild Sockeye Salmon return to Idaho (goal, 2,500)

**200 Million**

Annual taxpayer cost for upkeep of the 4 Lower Snake River Dams

**1 billion**

Costs of mitigation of failed fish restoration

**0%**

Possibility of reversing extinction

**Call to**  
Action

**127**

Business Partners supporting IRU

**103**

Miles of Wild and Scenic rivers successfully defended

**400,000**

Advocates sought change on the Lower Snake River

**2,000+**

IRU Members write federal agencies or Congress

**77%**

of budget goes toward IRU's program work of protecting Idaho Rivers and Native Fish species

OWYHEE CHAD CASE

## 2017 Disastrous for Idaho's Salmon

After nearly three decades on the brink of extinction, Idaho's salmon numbers this year show that the worst is yet to come if conditions in the Snake and Columbia rivers don't improve.

After spending \$16 billion on measures that haven't even come close to restoring endangered salmon — even during the best years — it's clear the federal plan to restore Idaho's salmon and steelhead has failed.

This year's extremely poor return numbers show this plainly, but the federal track record in court shows it too. Five times a federal judge has rejected the government's salmon plan for failure to do enough.

After the most recent loss to IRU and other plaintiffs in May 2016, federal agencies are drafting a sixth salmon plan and a correlating environ-



mental impact statement. IRU has put considerable time and energy this past year to getting people and politicians involved in those processes.

"It's time for the Pacific Northwest and for Idaho to get this right," said IRU Executive Director Kevin Lewis. "Our salmon and steelhead can't weather many years like the one we just had, and next

year isn't predicted to be much different."

Lewis said these terrible 2017 returns have three main causes.

- First, about half the fish are killed by dams and reservoirs during their migration to the ocean as juveniles.
- Second, poor ocean productivity is occurring because of a cyclical warming and cooling. Warm oceans provide less food for salmon.

**Five times a federal judge has rejected the government's salmon plan for failure to do enough.**

- Third, lethal hot water in the Columbia and lower Snake is now chronic every summer—and dramatically exacerbated by reservoirs. Hot water is killing many adult salmon before they even reach Idaho.

In May and June a disappointing spring and summer chinook run ended fishing seasons early. In August, steelheads seasons that allow anglers to catch and keep a predetermined limit of fish were canceled in favor of catch-and-release regulations. Harvest, with lower-than-normal bag limits, was restored in early October following a late push by mostly A-run steelhead destined for the Snake and Salmon rivers.

In August and September, a total of 11 wild sockeye salmon returned to Idaho. That's less than 0.004 percent of the number needed to even consider removing the species from its listing under the Endangered Species Act. "It's time to turn away from this record of failure and turn instead toward the prosperity that's possible when we embrace a free-flowing lower Snake River and restored salmon and steelhead," Lewis said.

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SADDLEBACK LAKES, SAWTOOTH WILDERNESS PAUL DAWSON

# Idaho Rivers United Mission: To Protect and Restore the Rivers of Idaho

## 2017 Highlights and Plans

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### Message from the Executive Director and Board Chair

For 27 years, Idaho Rivers United has been a strong voice for the rivers and streams of Idaho. We engage, we educate, we advocate and, when necessary, we litigate in order to protect the values that the IRU community holds dear.

Without a strong voice, Idaho's rivers and the species that depend on them will suffer, as will the people and communities who depend on rivers. Our commitment is to continue being the strong voice for Idaho's rivers. It's a voice you help create by being part of the IRU community.

Idaho Rivers United exists because you care. On behalf of the staff, board and entire river community at IRU, thank you for supporting the important work that we all do together.

As another Idaho fall transitions into winter, it's a good time to reflect on the past year while planning for the challenges ahead.

This past year we've won more protections for endangered wild salmon and Wild and Scenic rivers. We've engaged in government processes to protect some of our most precious

watersheds from the damaging impacts of mines, and are working to stem water pollution on the Snake River, one of the West's most polluted waterways.

Meanwhile, looking ahead, the high flows of last spring have already sparked conversations about building new high-cost, low-value dams instead of seeking affordable and innovative solutions that do not further degrade Idaho's prized rivers.

Our fight to restore wild salmon to self-sustaining numbers is unfortunately far from over. The progress we've made has generated even stronger opposition from those committed to the unsupportable and unaffordable status quo. Meanwhile, while federal agencies tread bureaucratic water, salmon and steelhead returns have plummeted to near-40-year lows.

As 2017 draws to a close, please keep in mind the work you've helped accomplish for Idaho's rivers and help set IRU up for a solid start to 2018.

We thank you for your generous past and future support.

Kevin Lewis  
Executive Director

John Wells  
Board Chair

### Wild & Scenic

**Accomplishments ~ Big Oil loses on the Lochsa:** Early in 2017 the Nez Perce Tribe, IRU and our attorneys at Advocates for the West finalized a settlement with the U.S. Forest Service to protect historic uses of Highway 12 in north-central Idaho while blocking megaload shipments to preserve the area's spectacular scenery and cultural heritage. The settlement capped a nearly-decade-long battle to protect two of America's original Wild and Scenic rivers from being exploited by some of the largest companies on Earth.

**Irresponsible Selway logging stopped:** The Selway River and several sensitive tributary streams were protected in June when IRU and allied organizations completed negotiations with the U.S. Forest Service and settled on a revised plan for logging portions of the canyon burned in 2014. Unlike the original proposal, the revised plan protected the Wild and Scenic river corridor and the canyon's view shed. The settlement followed nearly two years and two separate court cases in which IRU stood firm in defense of the Wild and Scenic Selway River.

**Challenge ahead:** The U.S. Forest Service has initiated planning processes on two national forests covering some of Idaho's largest and most important river basins including the Clearwater, upper Salmon, parts of the Middle Fork Salmon and Big Lost. IRU filed comments with both forests seeking consideration for more than 2,000 miles of candidate Wild and Scenic rivers. In 2018 we'll work to make sure those thousands of deserving river miles are given fair consideration.



### Saving Salmon

**Accomplishments ~ Spill ordered for salmon:** A federal court in Portland sided with IRU and our allies and ruled that federal dam managers on the Columbia and Snake rivers must increase water releases over spillways at eight dams to improve survival rates for juvenile salmon migrating to the ocean. The court ruled that additional spill must start in spring 2018.

**Grassroots turnout:** IRU helped turn out thousands of Idahoans who joined nearly half a million voices from across the country to support a free-flowing lower Snake River and recovery of wild salmon and steelhead.

**Challenges ahead:** Restoring wild salmon to the wild rivers of Idaho is IRU's highest organizational priority. In the coming year we'll fight in court to retain the spill injunction, which the federal government appealed late in 2017. IRU will also work to educate Idahoans, including targeted and strategic outreach to Idaho elected leaders, about the dire state of Idaho's salmon.



### Hydro & Clean Water

**Accomplishments ~ Hot-water watchdogs:** IRU is part of a coalition of Columbia Basin organizations that sued the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to create a temperature pollution budget for the lower Snake and Columbia rivers where hot water kills endangered salmon and steelhead. With filing of the suit in February 2017, IRU and allies became the first plaintiffs in the nation to sue incoming EPA Chief Scott Pruitt.

**Mercury poisoning fish:** IRU has begun working with the Nez Perce Tribe to implement plans to reduce high levels of methyl mercury contamination in the Snake River. Methyl mercury is a dangerous bio accumulator that concentrates in large fish species like sturgeon, which are a primary component of the river's ecological and cultural health. Sturgeon are also a staple in the Native American diet, so methyl mercury contamination puts tribal members at higher risk of contamination.

**Challenges ahead:** As part of the relicensing process for the Hells Canyon complex of dams, Idaho Power is required to secure certification that the project meets water quality standards for Idaho and Oregon. This is called a Section 401 certification under the Clean Water Act. The primary issue in Hells Canyon is excessive water temperatures in the fall season below the hydropower complex. IRU will continue to work to ensure that water quality standards are met.

### Headwaters Protections

**Accomplishments ~ Massive mine opposed:** The IRU community made a strong statement in July and August when it spoke clearly in favor of clean water and healthy fisheries in the south Fork of the Salmon River basin. As part of the federal licensing process IRU provided detailed comments in opposition to new mining projects for the Midas Gold Stibnite Project, an enormous gold mine proposed for the river's headwaters.

**Thousands mobilized:** IRU mobilized thousands of grassroots protesters and established that the mine goes too far for Idahoans who care about clean water, native fish and one of the best whitewater rivers in the state.

**Challenge ahead:** The Midas Gold Stibnite Project is a colossal open-pit mine, and the company has created a slick marketing campaign touting the mine as a river restoration project. IRU will continue to monitor government oversight processes and work to push back against the dangerous notion that a mine can be disguised as anything else. A mine dressed up like a restoration project is still just a mine.



### Why It Matters

At 100,000 miles of waterways, Idaho has a treasure trove of incredible rivers. That also means Idaho has a lot to lose.

Idaho's rivers provide drinking water, recreation, hydroelectric power and critical habitat for fish and other wildlife species. Idaho's rivers are the lifeblood of the state's cherished open spaces, wild country, economy and identity.

Nobody wants to see Idaho's rivers soiled or abused, but there's often a dramatic imbalance between the desires of hydroelectric companies, agribusiness, mining corporations and other interests and the sustainability of our unpolluted rivers and native fish populations.

What we do for our rivers today directly impacts the world our children will inherit. IRU is working to make sure to pass on the nation's cleanest, coldest, wildest, greatest rivers.

