

To Whom It May Concern,

I believe Panther Creek to be an incredible resource to the local residents of Lemhi County, residents of Idaho as well as the entire Nation. As a lifelong Idaho resident, a large part of my life has been shaped by Wild and Scenic rivers of Salmon River country.

Years ago, as a high school student, I was searching for my first summer job. Some way or another I was given the opportunity to guide boy scouts down the Salmon River at the Salmon River High Adventure Base (SRHAB). For the first time in my life, I left my parents home without knowing exactly when I would be back. The wilds of Salmon River country became my home for the next few months.

I will not soon forget the feeling of empowerment, exploration, and excitement that arose inside of me as the bus that drove us to camp first turned down the Salmon River Road. Around every bend of the river I felt as though I had discovered some fantastic new world. This sense of discovery was amplified to even greater levels as I became more familiar with the dry hillsides, enormous ponderosa pines, and learned to navigate the waters of the Salmon River. As I learned and grew, I became a part of what felt like a family. Our family extended beyond just our fellow guides, leaders, and participants. To me this family very obviously included the wild place in which we lived.

Among the SRHAB family there is maybe no more respected member than that of Panther Creek. To some of us, safely navigating the waters of Panther Creek was the pinnacle of human achievement. Nearly every day we would drive past the confluence of Panther Creek with the Salmon River. I remember every day craning my head to catch a glimpse of the impossibly steep final rapid. I recall listening attentively as older and wiser members of the family told tales of their encounters with Panther Creek. I also recall knowing from the first time that I saw it, that I wanted to know more. I needed to know what it was like to float among the rocks and the white frothy waters of Panther Creek.

That summer I spent nearly every single day on the water. The lessons I learned pervade my life still today. Among the things I learned were: how to dissect a raging rapid into navigable channels between the rocks, how to keep my calm when my kayak flipped over, how to help others even when I was frightened myself. Eventually, as our confidence on the water grew, we knew it was time.

Finally one day in late July, a group of guides and I trekked down to Panther Creek with our kayaks. We all suited up and put onto the river. One at a time we navigated the steep and rocky channel. We all made it down in one piece without incident. Though the actual kayaks we used that day have long since cracked and been discarded, there are a few things from that day that are still present in this world. I am pleased to say that list includes the friendships that were built, a slew of life lessons learned, and free flowing Panther Creek.

My love affair with wild rivers, as well as central Idaho, really began with this experience. Though I now have a business card that calls me a "Software Engineer", I consider my upbringing in the wilds of Idaho to be paramount in making me the person that I am today. I believe it taught me humility, self reliance, perseverance, and more than anything else, a sense of respect for the world around me. I wholeheartedly support Wild and Scenic designation for Panther Creek in an attempt to preserve it for later generations, in hopes that Panther Creek will have a chance to impact them in the same ways that it has impacted me.

Thank You,

Nick Benoit