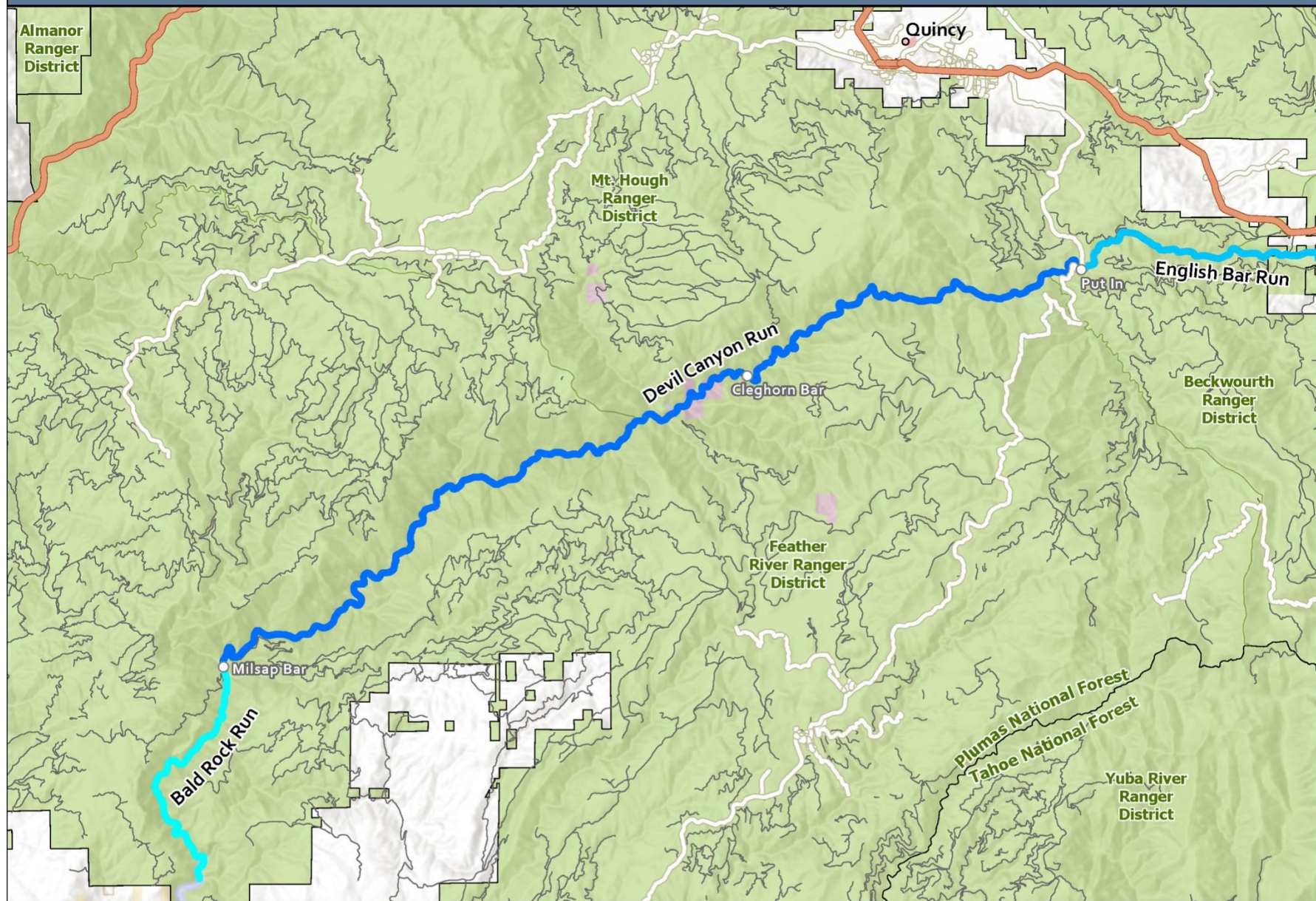


# Middle Fork Feather River Closure Discussion

USDA Forest Service  
Plumas National Forest

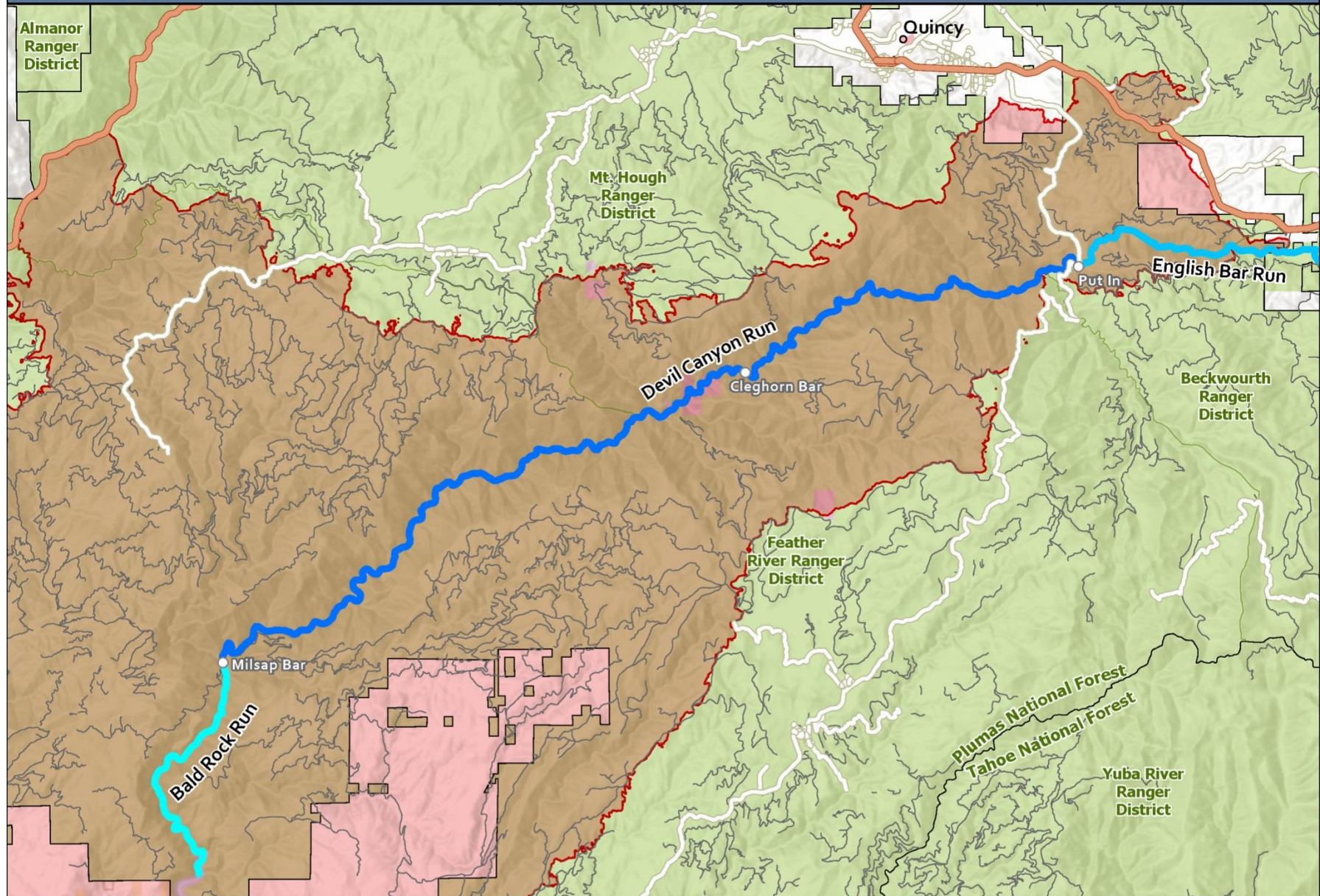


# Middle Fork Feather River Whitewater Boating Runs





# Middle Fork Feather River Whitewater Boating Runs - Burn Area







**"This is it! The Middle Fork of the Feather River is the best wilderness self-support trip in California."**

**-A Guide to the Best Whitewater in California (Stanley/Holbek)**





The Middle Fork Feather has a stunning setting and long, free-flowing reaches that are unique in the region.





The Devil Canyon Run is Class IV & V in difficulty, making it the domain of expert paddlers.





The Middle Fork Feather attracts highly skilled paddlers with substantial experience.





Being on the river is only part of the experience.





“A boat is a backpack, and a river is a trail.”



# National Wild & Scenic River Designation

One of the “Original Eight”

Outstandingly Remarkable Values:

- Recreation
- Fisheries
- Scenery
- Geology (potential)



Plumas NF's management direction for MF Feather wild river segments:

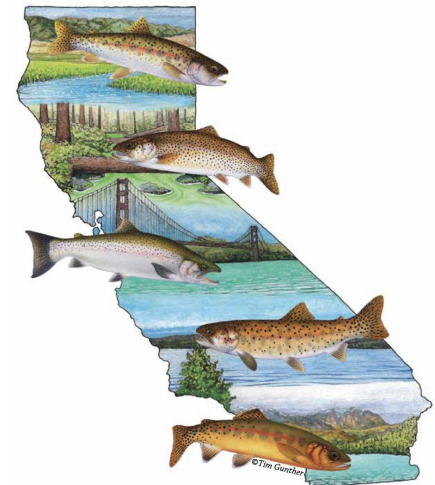
*"To provide opportunities for river oriented recreation in a primitive setting offering considerable physical challenge and requiring well developed outdoor skills."*

-Middle Fork Feather Wild and Scenic River Classification, Boundaries, and Development Plan (35 FR 4220)

## California Wild Trout Waters Designation

CDFW protects and enhances designated high-quality trout fisheries sustained by natural reproduction.

Middle Fork Feather River from Sloat to Oroville Reservoir





# Closure Order 05-11-00-21-06

## Unique Characteristics

- Long-term: two-year closure
- Specifically closes the immediate river area for ~21 miles (327 acres)
- Prohibits going into or being upon river
- Surrounding 318,000-acre burned area is open with exception of certain sites, roads, trails, and bridges
- Pacific Crest Trail is open via related forest order

**It is unclear how the river closure area warrants closure while surrounding areas are open.**

**ORDER NO. 05-11-00-21-06  
PLUMAS NATIONAL FOREST  
Feather River Ranger District  
Developed Recreation Site, Bridge and River Area Closure**

Pursuant to 16 U.S.C. § 551 and 36 C.F.R. § 261.50(a) and (b), and to provide for public safety, the following acts are prohibited within the Feather River Ranger District of the Plumas National Forest. This Order is effective from March 11, 2021, through March 10, 2023.

1. Entering or using the Developed Recreation Sites listed in Exhibit A and shown on Exhibit B. 36 C.F.R. § 261.58(b).
  2. Being within the areas listed below and shown on Exhibit B.
    - a. Being within 1000 feet of the Toland Creek Bridge or the Frasier Creek Bridge.
    - b. Being within 25 feet of Middle Fork, Feather River, from its intersection with Cleghorn Bar, Township 23 North, Range 9 East, Section 30 to its intersection with Milsap Bar Township 21 North, Range 06 East, Section 2.
- 36 C.F.R. § 261.53(e).
3. Going into or being upon the Middle Fork, Feather River, from its intersection with Cleghorn Bar, Township 23 North, Range 9 East, Section 30 to its intersection with Milsap Bar Township 21 North, Range 06 East, Section 2, as shown on Exhibit B. 36 C.F.R. § 261.58(k).

Pursuant to 36 C.F.R. § 261.50(e), the following persons are exempt from this Order:

1. Any Federal, State, or local officer, or member of an organized rescue or firefighting force in the performance of an official duty
2. Persons with Forest Service Permit No. FS-7700-48 (Permit for Use of Roads, Trails, or Areas Restricted by Regulation or Order), specifically exempting them from this Order.

These prohibitions are in addition to the general prohibitions contained in 36 C.F.R. Part 261, Subpart A.

A violation of these prohibitions is punishable by a fine of not more than \$5,000 for an individual or \$10,000 for an organization, or imprisonment for not more than 6 months, or both. 16 U.S.C § 551 and 18 U.S.C. §§ 3559, 3571, and 3581.

Done at Quincy, California, this 10th day of March 2021.

  
Chris Carlton

CHRISTOPHER CARLTON  
Forest Supervisor, Plumas National Forest

This Order supersedes Forest Order No. 05-11-03-21-02, dated on February 19, 2021.



# Closure Order 05-11-00-21-06

## Impacts

- Boaters

Closes best multi-day river trip in California

- Anglers

Closes some of California's best trout fishing

- PCT Hikers

Trail is open but hikers prohibited from accessing river

- Local Communities & Economy

Exacerbates and extends negative impact of fire

ORDER NO. 05-11-00-21-06  
PLUMAS NATIONAL FOREST  
Feather River Ranger District  
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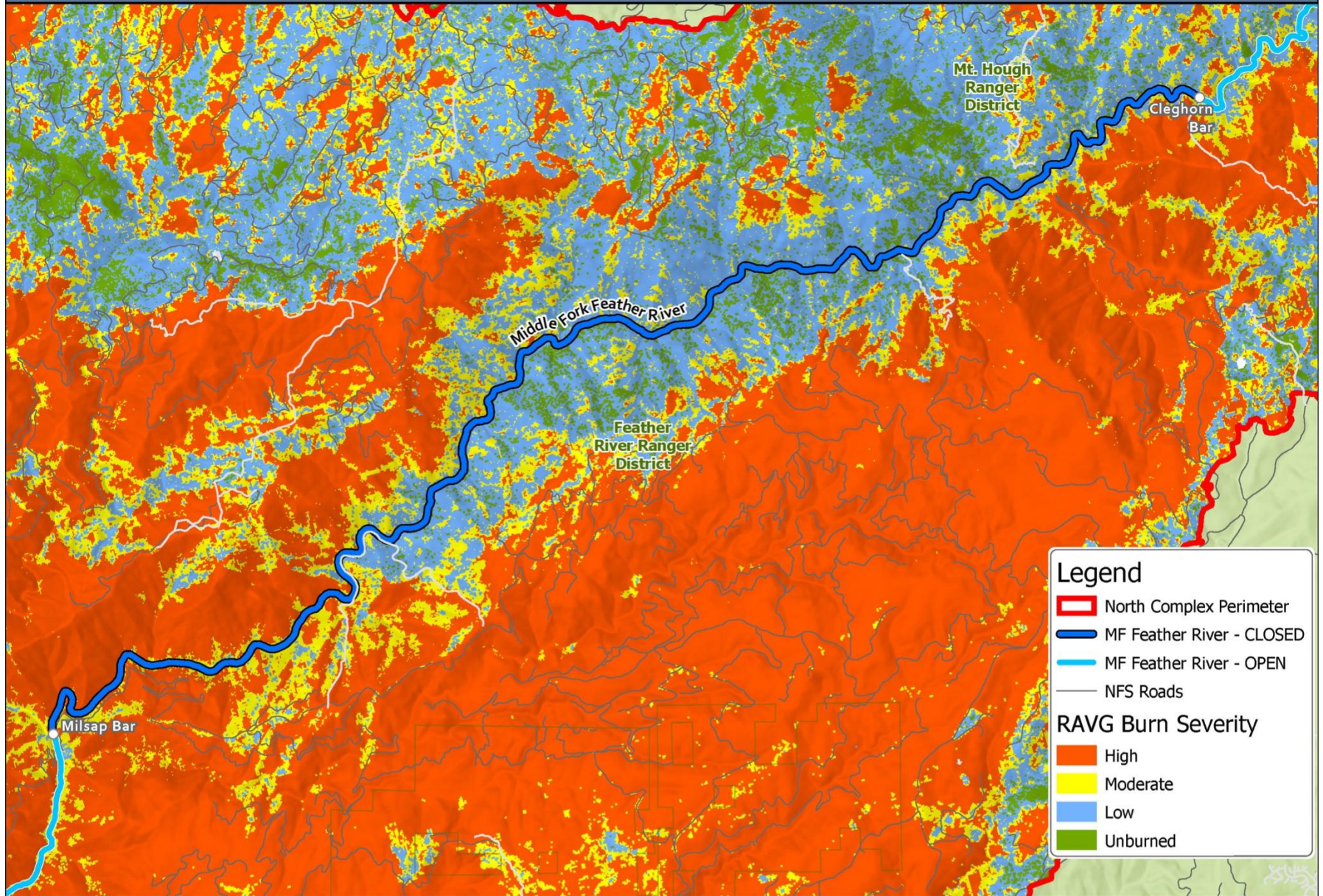
  
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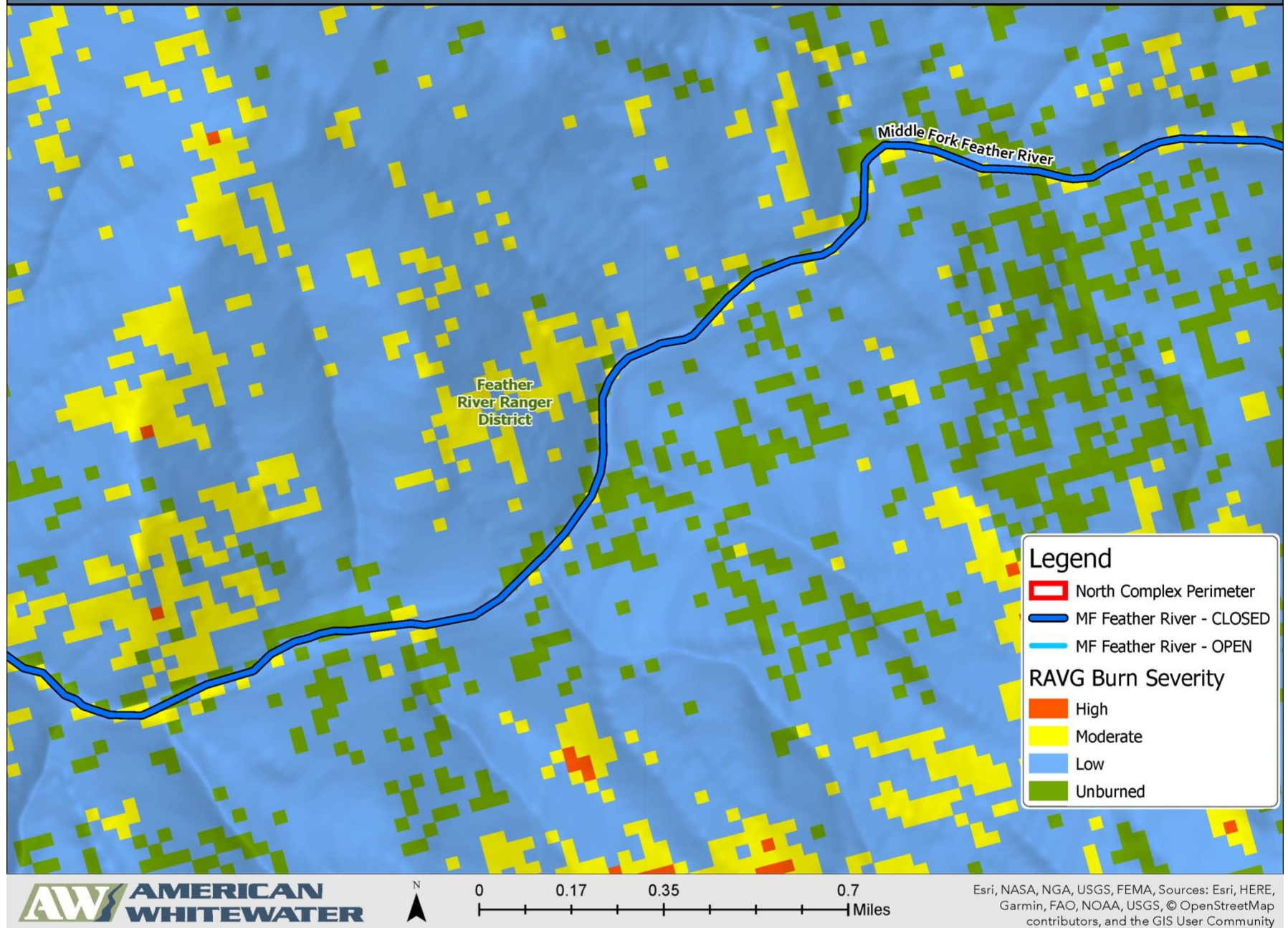


# Burn Severity: Middle Fork Feather River Closed Reach Overview



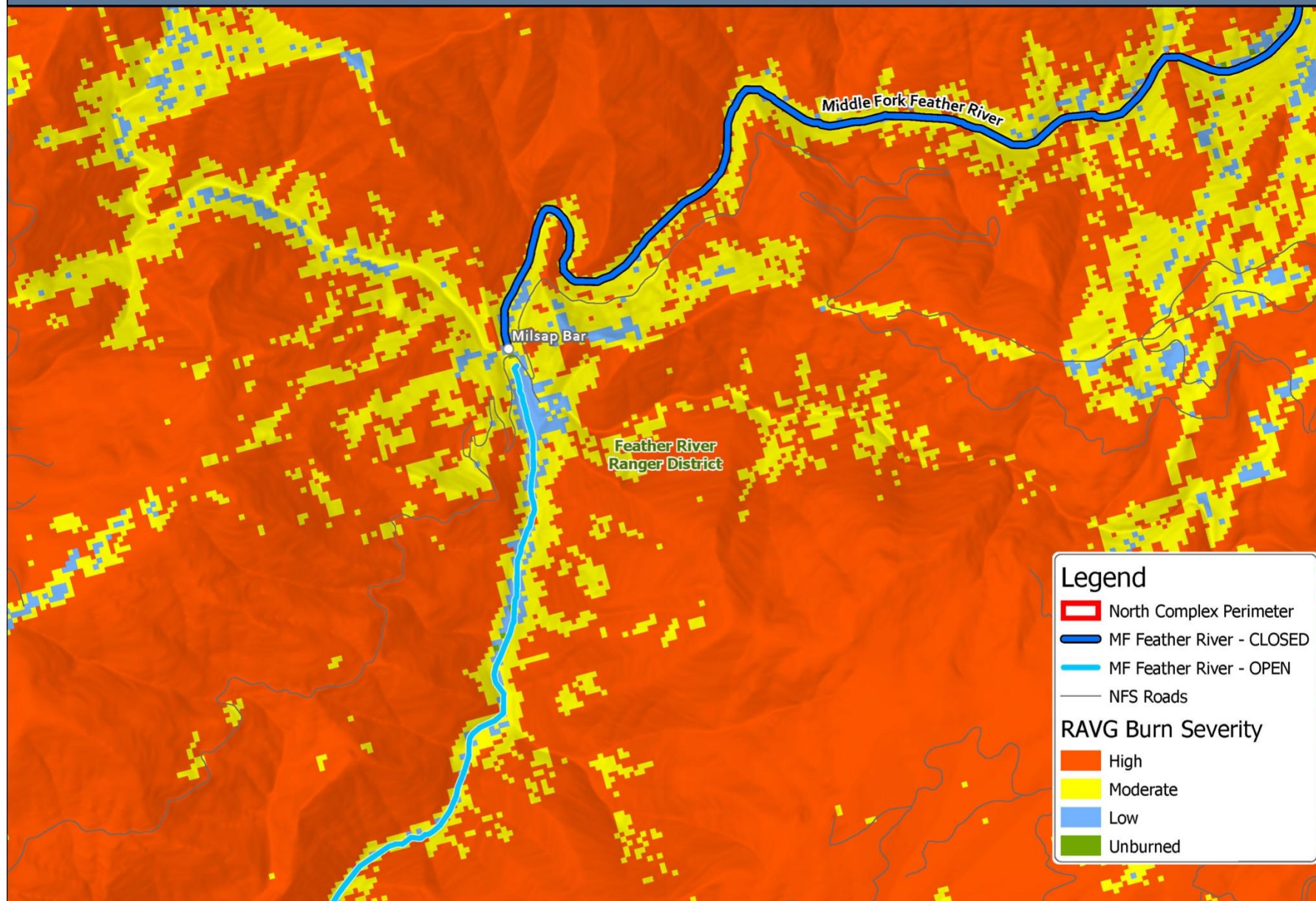


# Burn Severity: Middle Fork Feather River Closed Reach Overview



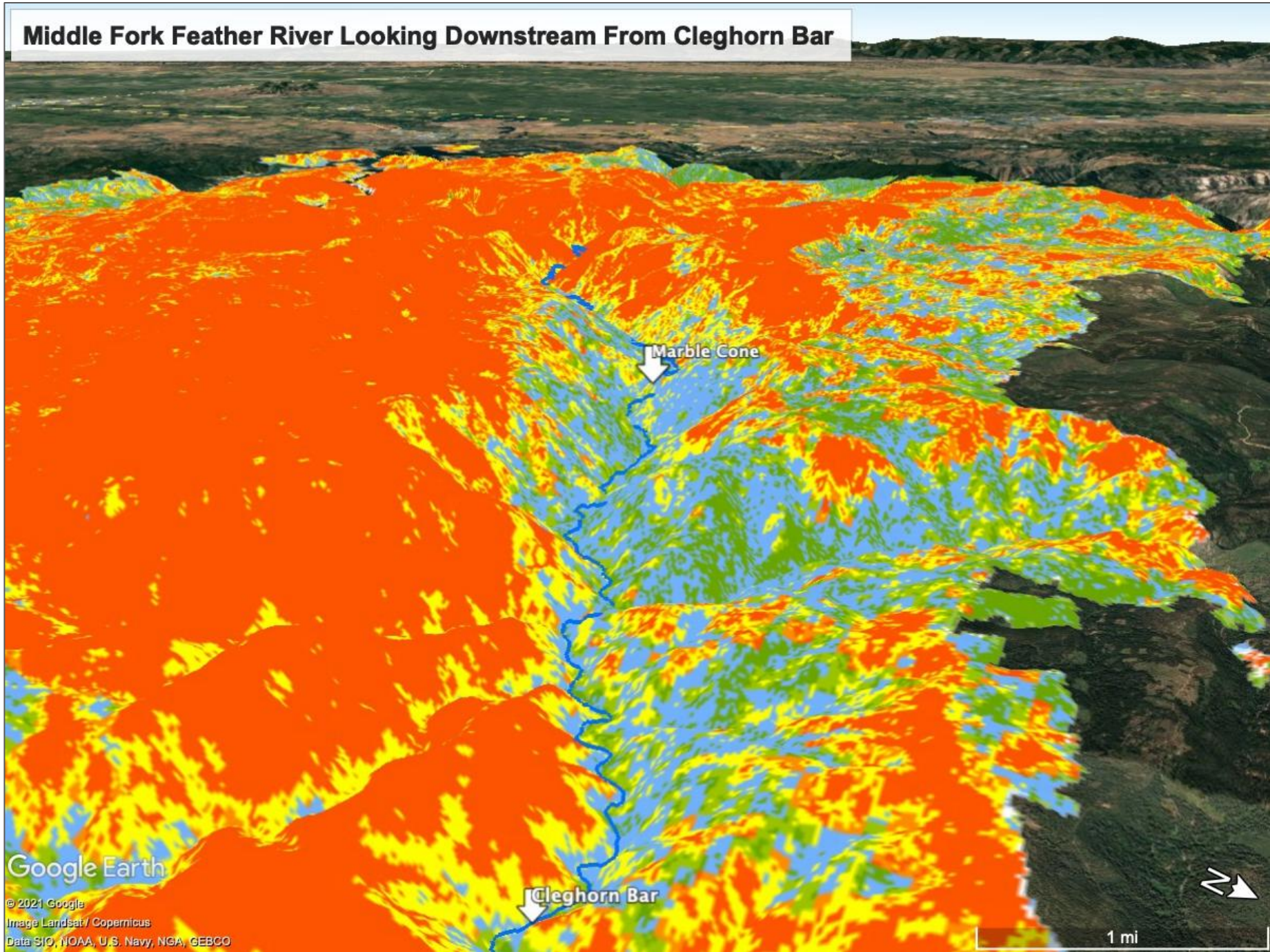


# Burn Severity: Above and Below Milsap Bar



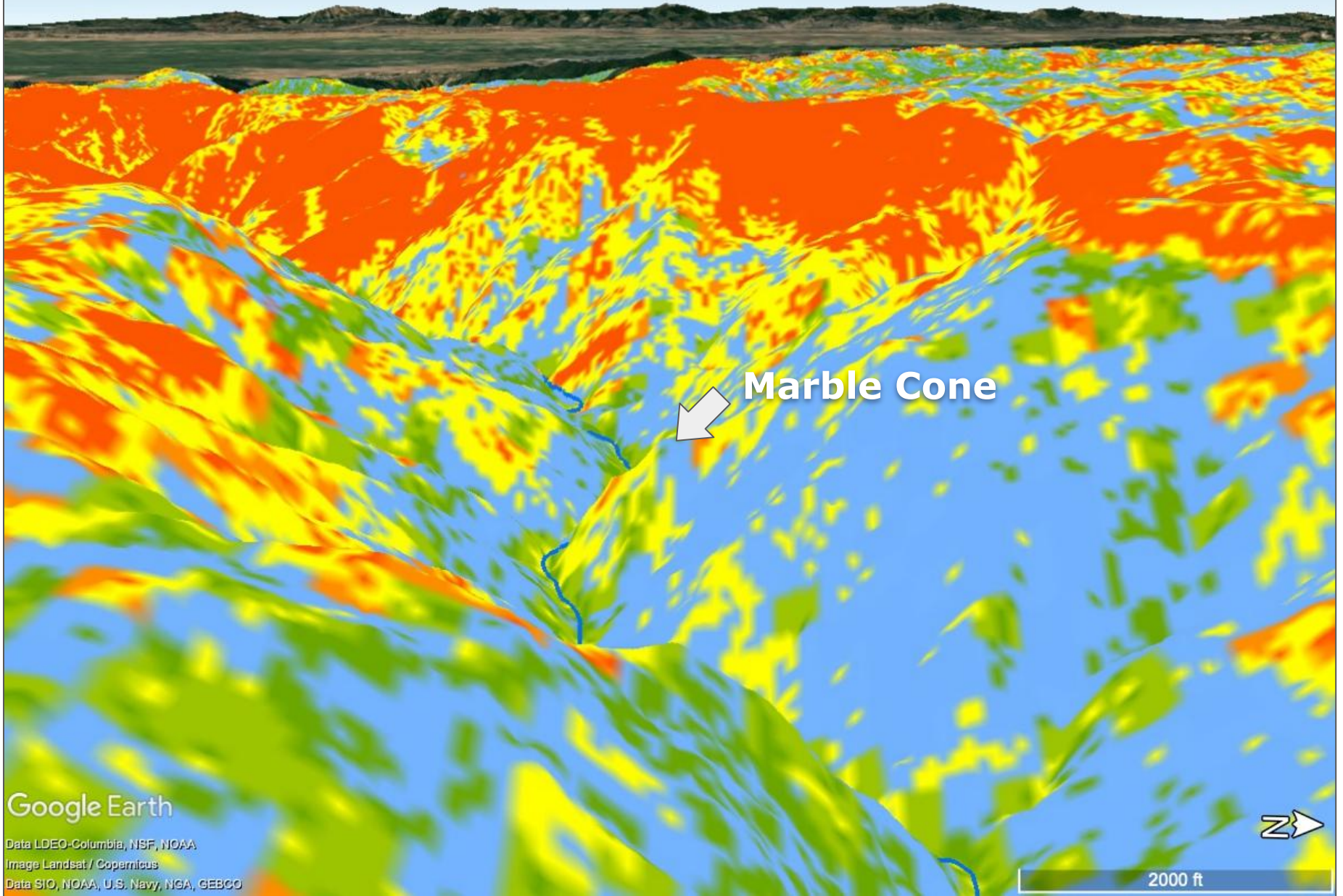


# Middle Fork Feather River Looking Downstream From Cleghorn Bar





# Middle Fork Feather River Looking Downstream at Marble Cone







↙ Marble Cone





←Pilot Peak

This is an aerial photograph of a vast mountain range. The terrain is rugged, with numerous peaks and valleys. The mountains are covered in dense forest, appearing in shades of green and brown. The sky is a clear, pale blue. Four specific locations are highlighted with white text and arrows: Pilot Peak in the upper center, Onion Valley Creek on the right side, Horsehoe Bend on the left side, and Cleghorn Bar in the lower center. The perspective is from a high vantage point, looking down into the valleys and across the ridges.

↙Onion Valley Creek

↙Horsehoe Bend

←Cleghorn Bar

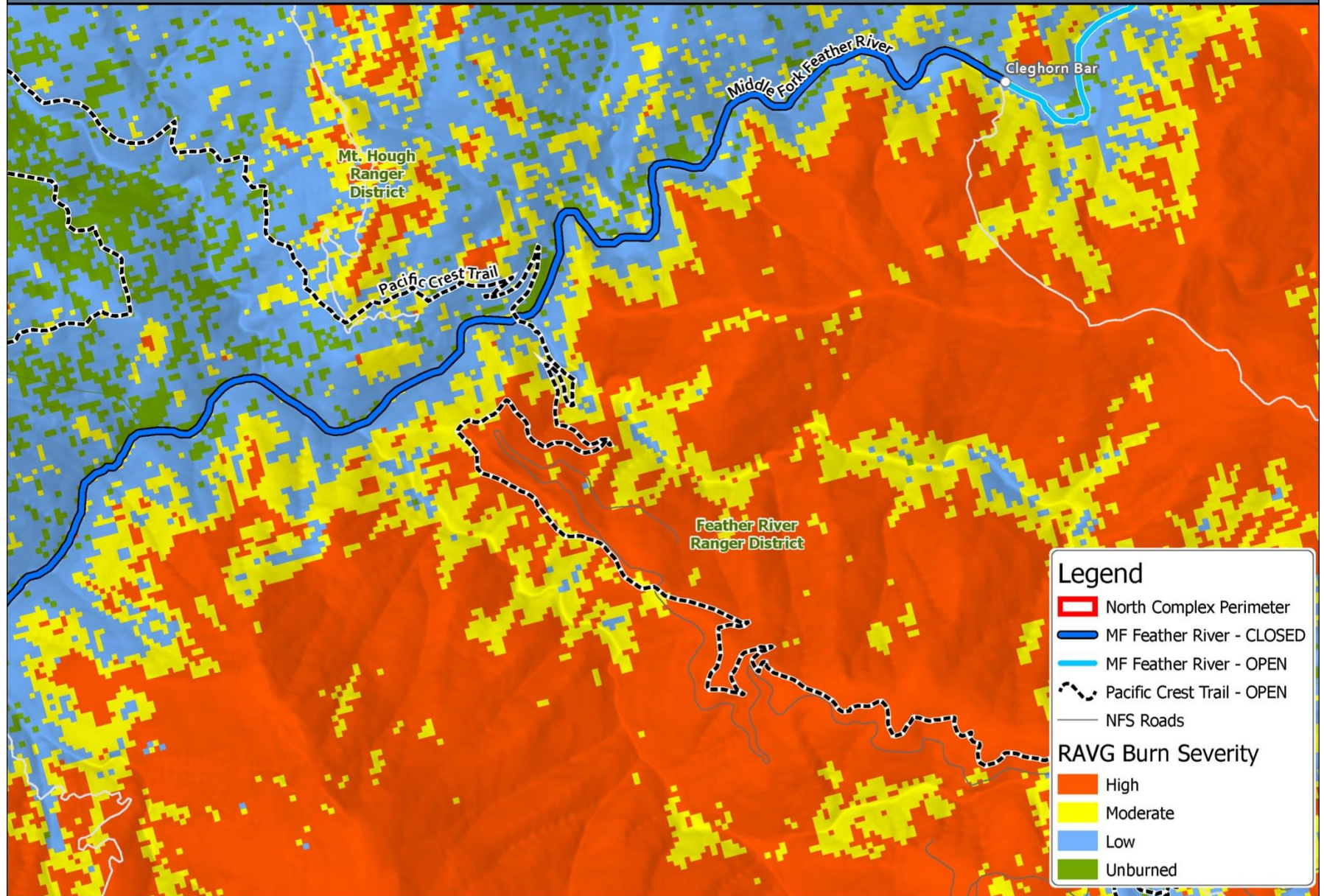


# Post-fire: May 2021





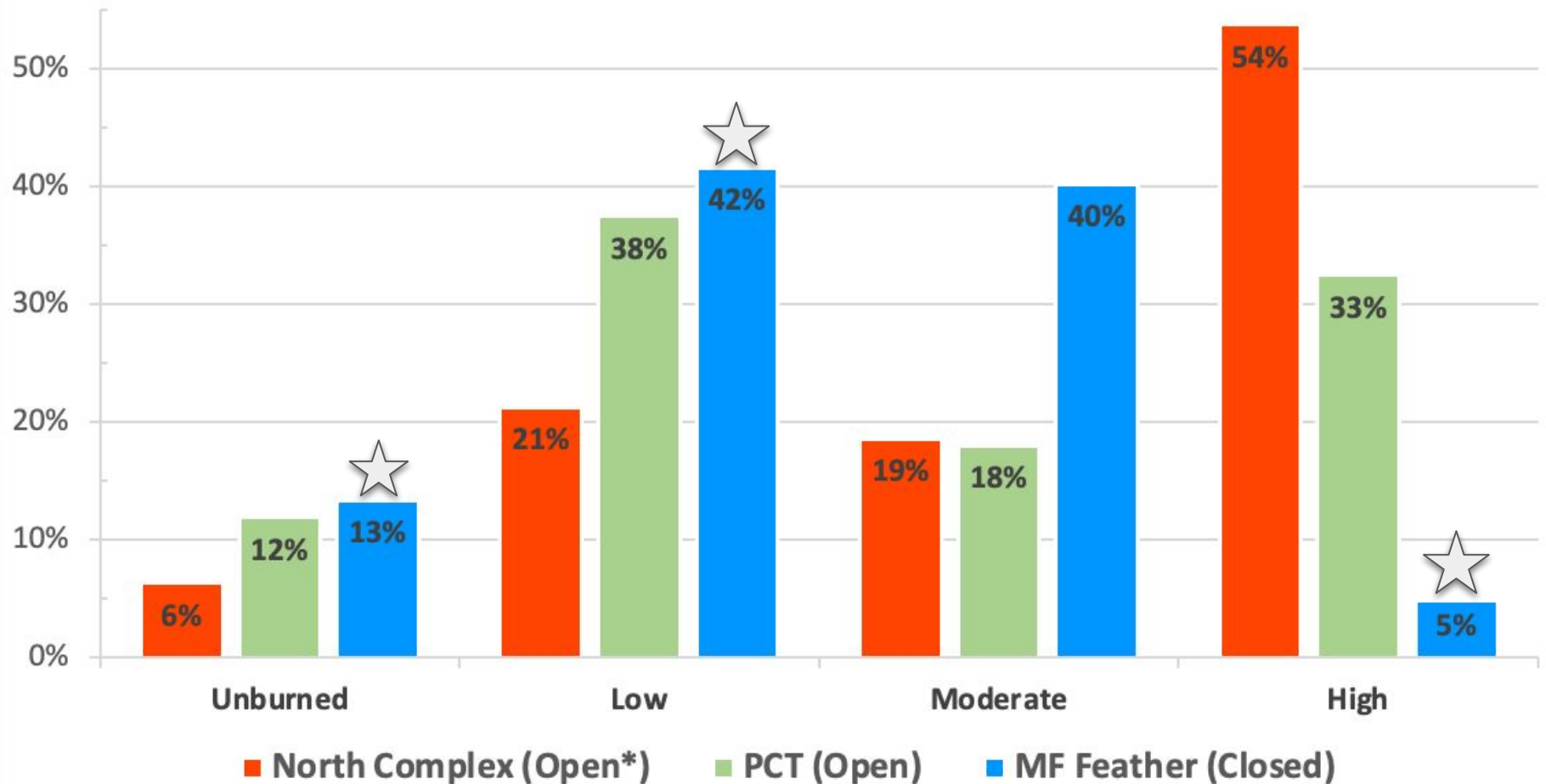
# Burn Severity: PCT vs. Middle Fork Feather River





## RAVG Burn Severity by Areas

(composite burn index)



The river has the greatest amount of unburned and low severity burn and--by far--the least amount of high severity burn, yet it is the one closed area remaining.



# Wildfires and Rivers

Fire is a natural ecosystem process and has shaped rivers in the western US for millenia.

High Fire Recurrence Intervals:

- MF Salmon River (ID)
- Salmon River (ID)
- Illinois River (OR)

September 2020:

- McKenzie River (OR)
- Santiam River (OR)
- North Umpqua River (OR)

All of these are Wild and Scenic Rivers that are managed by the US Forest Service.

Long-term post-fire closures are not part of the management strategy for these rivers.





# How Wildfires Affect Whitewater Rivers

## 1. Changes to the river channel

Fire-related erosion and mass wasting can cause substantial changes to the river channel.

- Triggered by high intensity rain
- Typically occur mid-winter
- Whitewater boaters rarely paddle the Middle Fork Feather River in winter or during storm events
- Very low likelihood of boaters encountering an active debris flow



Whitewater rivers are dynamic systems and boaters scout rapids and hazards as needed. Changes to the river channel are common and are a part of the experience of whitewater boating.

**Mitigation:** warn river users about potential for debris flows and changes to river channel



# How Wildfires Affect Whitewater Rivers

## 2. Obstructions

Fires may trigger increased large wood loading and movement in rivers.

- Often a result of debris flows
- Large rivers typically transport large wood rather than hold it
- Any river in a forested setting has potential for wood obstructions at any time: part of ambient hazard level
- Not all wood in rivers poses a hazard

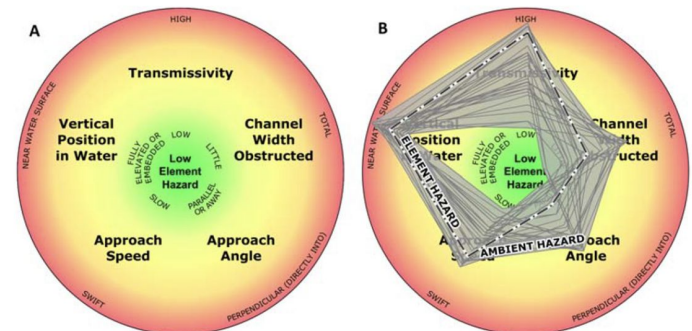


Whitewater boaters encounter obstructions and wood frequently and are familiar with managing risk and avoiding hazards.

Recent research has helped classify and contextualize large wood in terms of recreation safety.

**Mitigation:** warn river users about potential for new obstructions and any known hazards

LARGE WOOD AND RIVER RECREATION SAFETY



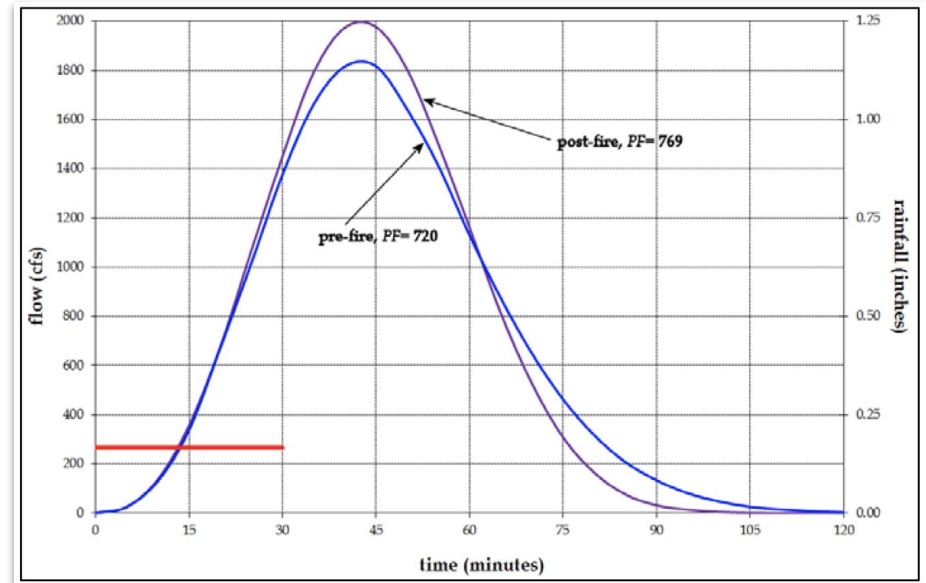


# How Wildfires Affect Whitewater Rivers

## 3. Changes to flow patterns

Increased runoff can alter typical flow patterns after a wildfire.

- Greater magnitude during seasonal storms
- Boaters typically paddle MF Feather during snowmelt season when diurnal flow variability is already high
- Changes to flow patterns are not a significant issue for boaters



Whitewater boaters are acutely attuned to river flows and are accustomed to highly variable flows. Flow information is important and can be obtained online.

**Mitigation:** warn river users about potential for increased flow variability



# Post-Fire Whitewater River Safety

# CAUTION

## ENTERING BURNED AREA

Wildfires can create **HAZARDS** for visitors including:

- Fire weakened trees & limbs may fall without warning (camp or rest AWAY from FIRE BURNED TREES)
- Trails may be obstructed or hard to follow
- Burned-out “stump holes” may give way under you
- During wet weather, water or mud may build up quickly
- Ash can become airborne during windy conditions
- Large rocks can dislodge and roll with out warning

Please be aware of  
your surroundings  
while enjoying your  
National Forest





# Post-Fire Whitewater River Safety




## PADDLE AWARE




- Check weather and flow conditions
- **Check for closures and river regulations**
- Know your ability and your group's ability
- **Understand surrounding landscape and escape routes**
- Research existing hazards, portages and critical features

#paddlewise



## PADDLE PREPARED



- Plan ahead
- **Consult existing beta**
- Understand International Scale of River Difficulty and your chosen river's rating
- **Carry proper equipment including medical kit, spare paddle and emergency food/layers**

#paddlewise

PaddleWise river responsibility code messages reinforce the importance of paddling safely and being prepared. [www.paddlewise.org](http://www.paddlewise.org)



# USFS Water Safety Directive (FSM 2300)

WO AMENDMENT 2300-2009-2

EFFECTIVE DATE: 11/04/2009

DURATION: This amendment is effective until superseded or removed.

2350

Page 51 of 77

## **FSM 2300 – RECREATION, WILDERNESS, AND RELATED RESOURCE MANAGEMENT CHAPTER 2350 – TRAIL, RIVER, AND SIMILAR RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES**

### **2354.41b - Water Safety**

The manager's role in safety is advisory and informational. Provide opportunities for the river recreation user to become informed of current river flows, equipment and experience minimums and hazards. The user must make the final decision about whether or not to engage in the recreation activity.

The enforcement of State boating laws, U.S. Coast Guard regulations, and other applicable State and Federal regulations shall remain with the appropriate agency.



# Closure Process

- Opaque
- Lacks public involvement
- Rationale not clear



## Scoping

Scoping is required “for all Forest Service proposed actions, including those that would appear to be categorically excluded.” -FSH 1909.15 Chapter 30 (31.3)

## Categorical Exclusion & Extraordinary Circumstances

Scoping is “the means to identify the presence or absence of any extraordinary circumstances.” -FSH 1909.15 Chapter 30 (31.3)

Wild and Scenic Rivers are a resource condition that must be considered in determining whether extraordinary circumstances exist -*See* 36 CFR § 220.6(b)(1)(iii)

Without properly determining whether extraordinary circumstances exist, the Forest Service may not categorically exclude an action from further analysis under NEPA -*See* 40 CFR § 1501.4(b)(2)

## Case File & Decision Memo

Although regulations grant the Forest Supervisor the discretion to prepare a case file and decision memo, they should be used to provide the public with the rationale and information used in making a closure decision.



# Discussion & Next Steps