

# Wild and Scenic Rivers Designation: Preserving our last, best rivers

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Our region's last, remaining wild rivers give us clean water, world-class recreation and unmatched opportunities for inspiration and solitude. They bring jobs and economic benefits to local communities and they provide critical habitat for salmon and steelhead, and other fish and wildlife.

The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act was passed in 1968 to protect our nation's last, best free-flowing rivers. Many of the Northwest's most iconic rivers are protected as Wild and Scenic--the Rogue in Oregon, the Salmon in Idaho, and the Skagit in Washington.

## **What does a Wild and Scenic designation mean for the river and its community?**

A Wild and Scenic designation:

- Protects a river's "outstandingly remarkable" values (wildlife, recreation, fisheries, cultural, etc.) and free-flowing character
- Protects existing uses of the river
- Prohibits federally-licensed dams and other harmful water projects
- Establishes a ¼-mile protected corridor on both sides of the river
- Requires the creation of a cooperative river management plan that addresses resource protection, development of lands and facilities, user capacities, etc.

## **Common questions about Wild and Scenic Rivers designation**

**How does a designation affect private land?** The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act carries no authority to regulate the use of privately-owned land. Land use controls on private lands are solely a matter of state and local zoning.

**Will a designation change how riverside lands are used?** Most current land uses, public and private, along the river will continue after designation. This includes agricultural uses such as farming and grazing.

**Will access or recreation on the river be restricted?** River recreation (like fishing and boating) comprise some of the major uses Wild and Scenic designation seeks to protect. Public access to the river and recreational use of the public lands adjacent to a Wild and Scenic river will continue as before, unless the use clearly threatens the river's outstanding values.

**Can the federal government force landowners to move because of Wild and Scenic designation?** No. The river study, enabling legislation and subsequent management planning process will consider how best to protect river values while recognizing private property rights.

**Can riverside lands be developed?** Wild and Scenic designation does not affect private landowners' ability to develop privately-owned lands within the river corridor. On federally-owned land, future development along a wild, scenic or recreational river is allowed as long as it is consistent with the river's classification, and does not harm the values for which the river was designated.

**Can local citizens have a say in designation?** There is ample opportunity for public input at many stages of the designation process. Public comments are considered when the agency determines the eligibility and suitability of a river, and when a study report is released. Also, local citizens can help craft the management plan for a Wild and Scenic river.

**How does designation affect existing water rights?** Existing, valid water rights are not affected by designation. Alterations to existing irrigation or water withdrawal facilities may be approved as long as there is no direct and adverse effect to the values for which the river was designated.

### **Are there different types of Wild and Scenic Rivers?**

Rivers are classified as Wild, Scenic, or Recreational upon designation. There are three determining factors: level of development of the waterway, level of development along the shoreline, and access to the river (roads, trails, etc). The same river may contain reaches with different classifications, i.e. part of the river may be classified as 'Wild' and another part may be classified as 'Recreational.'

**“Wild” rivers** – vestiges of primitive America

**“Scenic” rivers** – free of impoundments, with shorelines or watersheds still largely primitive and undeveloped, but accessible in places by roads

**“Recreational” rivers** – readily accessible by road or railroad, may have some development along their shorelines, and may have undergone some impoundment or diversion in the past

### **What is the process for designating a Wild and Scenic River?**

Rivers can be added to the national Wild and Scenic Rivers System in one of two ways. The traditional way is that Congress passes Wild and Scenic legislation and then it is signed into law by the President (similar to Wilderness). The other way is for the Governor of a state to petition the Secretary of the Interior to add a river to the system.