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Draft Environmental Impact Statement

Wild and Scenic River Suitability Study for National Forest System Lands in Utah

Ashley, Dixie, Fishlake, Manti-La Sal, Uinta, and Wasatch-Cache National Forests

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**Wild and Scenic River Suitability Study for
National Forest System Lands in Utah
Draft Environmental Impact Statement**

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Abstract: The Forest Service is conducting an environmental analysis to evaluate the suitability of 86 eligible river segments (840 miles) on the National Forests in Utah for recommendation for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. The area affected by the proposal includes National Forest System lands on the Ashley, Dixie, Fishlake, Manti-La Sal, Uinta, and Wasatch-Cache National Forests in Utah. Portions of those National Forests extend into Colorado and Wyoming, and those areas will be included in this study. The Forest Service evaluation also considered the cumulative impacts of designation of eligible river segments managed by other agencies, such as the BLM.

The alternatives considered are:

- 1) No action, maintain eligibility of all river segments,
- 2) No rivers recommended,
- 3) Recommend rivers that best represent Utah Outstandingly Remarkable Values (ORVs) while having the least affect on existing or reasonably foreseeable future water resources projects and other developmental activities,
- 4) Recommend rivers that best represent Utah ORVs that could be adversely affected by existing or reasonably foreseeable future water resources projects and other developmental activities,
- 5) Recommend rivers with low cost for management that are consistent with other Federal wild and scenic studies and which have limited negative impact to community economic development, and
- 6) Recommend river segments recognized by public groups that represent a diversity of river systems in Utah and those that face future threats.

The Preferred Alternative (Alternative 3) recommends a suitable determination be made for 24 river segments including 132 miles classified as Wild, 56 miles classified as Scenic, and 24 miles classified as Recreational, that best represent Utah ORVs while having the least impact to future planned development.

Reviewers should provide the Forest Service with their comments during the review period of the draft environmental impact statement. This will enable the Forest Service to analyze and respond to the comments at one time and to use information acquired in the preparation of the final environmental impact statement, thus avoiding undue delay in the decision making process. Reviewers have an obligation to structure their participation in the National Environmental Policy Act process so that it is meaningful and alerts the agency to the reviewers' position and contentions. *Vermont Yankee Nuclear Power Corp. v. NRDC*, 435 U.S. 519, 553 (1978). Environmental objections that could have been raised at the draft stage may be waived if not raised until after completion of the final environmental impact statement. *City of Angoon v. Hodel* (9th Circuit, 1986) and *Wisconsin Heritages, Inc. v. Harris*, 490 F. Supp. 1334, 1338 (E.D. Wis. 1980). Comments on the draft environmental impact statement should be specific and should address the adequacy of the statement and the merits of the alternatives discussed (40 CFR 1503.3).

Send Comments to:

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Summary

The Forest Service is conducting an environmental analysis to evaluate the suitability of 86 eligible river segments on the National Forests in Utah for recommendation for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. The area affected by this study includes National Forest System lands on the Ashley, Dixie, Fishlake, Manti-La Sal, Uinta, and Wasatch-Cache National Forests in Utah. Portions of those National Forests extend into Colorado and Wyoming, and those areas were included in this study. The Forest Service evaluation also considered the cumulative impacts of designation of eligible river segments managed by other agencies such as the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). The purpose of this study is to assess the suitability of 86 eligible river segments (840 miles) and to initiate the process for making recommendations to Congress.

National Forests in Utah have evaluated river segments on the National Forests for their potential eligibility for designation into the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. The eligibility inventory and tentative classification for 78 of the segments took place during forest land and resource management plan revision. In addition, eight stream segments on the Dixie National Forest were found eligible for suitability consideration by an interagency planning process that included the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) (Grand Staircase Escalante National Monument) and the National Park Service (NPS) (Glen Canyon National Recreation Area). Interim protection for the resulting 86 eligible river segments is contained in Forest Plan standards, guidelines, and agency policies.

From scoping comments on the Notice of Intent published in the *Federal Register* April 30, 2007, and 17 public meetings held around the State of Utah, including two meetings in Wyoming and Colorado, six key issues emerged as a concern. These six key issues guided the development and evaluation of the alternatives:

- Issue 1 – Designation of river segments into the National Wild and Scenic River System may affect existing and future water resource project developments.
- Issue 2 – Uses and activities may be precluded, limited or enhanced if the river segment and its corridor were included in the National System.
- Issue 3 – Designation of a Wild and Scenic River could change the economy of a community.
- Issue 4 – Designation offers long-term protection of resource values.
- Issue 5 – Consistency with wild and scenic river studies conducted by the BLM and NPS.
- Issue 6 – Consistency with state, county, and local government laws and plans.

These issues led the agency to develop alternatives to the proposed action including: 1) No action, maintain eligibility of all river segments, 2) No rivers recommended, 3) Recommend rivers that best represent Utah ORVS while having the least affect on existing or reasonably foreseeable future water resources projects and other developmental activities, 4) Recommend rivers that best represent Utah ORVs that could be adversely affected by existing or reasonably foreseeable future water resources projects and other developmental activities, 5) Recommend rivers with low cost for management that are consistent with other Federal wild and scenic studies and which have limited negative impact to community economic development, and 6) Recommend river segments recognized by public groups that represent a diversity of river systems in Utah and those that face future threats.

The Preferred Alternative (Alternative 3) recommends a suitable determination be made for 24 river segments including 132 miles classified as Wild, 56 miles classified as Scenic, and 24 miles classified as Recreational that best represent Utah ORVs while having the least impact to future planned development. Based upon the effects of the alternatives, the responsible officials will decide: Which, if any, of the eligible river segments under consideration should be recommended to the Congress of the United States for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System?

Table of Contents

CHAPTER 1. PURPOSE OF AND NEED FOR ACTION

1.1 Background	1-1
1.2 Document Structure	1-1
1.3 Wild and Scenic Rivers Act	1-2
General Overview of the Act	1-2
General Overview of the Process	1-3
1.4 Purpose of and Need for Action	1-4
1.5 Proposed Action	1-5
1.6 River Study Areas	1-5
1.7 Decision Framework	1-7
1.8 Cooperating Agencies	1-7
1.9 Interrelationships	1-9
1.10 Public Involvement	1-11
1.11 Issues	1-12
Key Study Issues	1-12
Other Issues	1-15

CHAPTER 2. DESCRIPTION OF ALTERNATIVES

2.1 Introduction	2-1
2.2 Alternatives Considered in Detail	2-1
Alternative 1 – No action, maintain eligibility of all river segments.	2-1
Alternative 2 – No rivers recommended.	2-1
Alternative 3 – Recommend rivers that best represent Utah ORVs while having the least affect on existing or reasonably foreseeable future water resources projects and other developmental activities.	2-2
Alternative 4 – Recommend rivers that best represent Utah ORVs that could be adversely affected by existing or reasonably foreseeable future water resources projects and other developmental activities.	2-5
Alternative 5 – Recommend rivers with low cost for management that are consistent with other Federal wild and scenic studies and which have limited negative impact to community economic development.	2-8
Alternative 6 – Recommend river segments recognized by public groups that represent a diversity of river systems in Utah and those that face future threats.	2-12
2.3 Alternatives Considered but Eliminated from Detailed Study	2-15
2.4 Comparison of Alternatives	2-18
2.5 Preferred Alternative	2-26

CHAPTER 3. AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

3.1 Introduction	3-1
3.2 General Environment	3-4
3.3 Outstandingly Remarkable Values	3-11
3.3a Scenic Value	3-11
3.3b Recreational Value	3-17
3.3c Fish and Aquatic Habitat Values	3-23
3.3d Wildlife Value	3-30
3.3e Historic and Cultural Values	3-35
3.3f Geologic and Hydrologic Values	3-41
3.3g Ecological Values	3-52
3.4 Botanical Resources	3-58
3.5 Fish and Other Aquatic Species	3-64

3.6 Mineral Resources	3-75
3.7 Range	3-84
3.8 Recreation	3-92
3.9 Roads/Rights of Way	3-95
3.10 Social and Economic Resources	3-100
3.11 Timber Harvest	3-147
3.12 Water Resources and Water Developments	3-152
3.13 Wildlife (Terrestrial) Resources	3-188
3.14 Cumulative Effects Analysis	3-194
3.15 Short-term Uses and Long-term Productivity	3-204
3.16 Unavoidable Adverse Effects	3-205
3.17 Irreversible and Irrecoverable Commitments of Resources	3-205
3.18 Environmental Justice	3-205

CHAPTER 4. CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

4.1 Preparers and Contributors	4-1
4.2 Distribution of the Environmental Impact Statement	4-1

CHAPTER 5. REFERENCES AND GLOSSARY

5.1 References	5-1
5.2 Glossary	5-1

APPENDICES

Appendix A. Suitability Evaluation Reports	A-1
Appendix B. BLM List of Rivers	B-1
Appendix C. Wild and Scenic River Management Statutory Requirements	C-1
Appendix D. Effects of Managing a River as a Component of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System	D-1
Appendix E. Valid Existing Water Rights Maps	E-1