



U.S. Forest Service
Pacific Southwest Region



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Update and Overview Wild and Scenic Rivers – Inventory and Eligibility

As part of revising the Inyo, Sequoia and Sierra National Forests land and resource management plans (forest plans), the Forest Service is considering rivers to include into the National Wild and Scenic Rivers (WSR) System. In 1968, Congress created the National WSR System to preserve free-flowing rivers with outstanding natural, cultural, and recreational values. Designations may be for a river segment or an entire river and may include tributaries. Both Congress and the Secretary of the Interior can designate wild and scenic rivers. Either federal or state agencies may manage designated rivers.

The 2012 Planning Rule requires the Forest Service to inventory, and determine WSR eligibility and classification during land and resource plan development or revision. The Rule also requires us to manage eligible and suitable rivers to protect their free flow, water quality and outstandingly remarkable values.

The WSR Process

There are four steps in the WSR process; three are required during plan revisions (inventory, eligibility, and classification) and one step (suitability) may happen during or after plan revision.

- *Step 1: Inventory:* develop a systematic and comprehensive inventory of rivers to consider for their potential eligibility
- *Step 2: Eligibility:* determine stream eligibility for inclusion in the WSR system (must be free-flowing and have at least one outstandingly remarkable value such as scenic, recreational, geologic, fish, wildlife, historic, or cultural)
- *Step 3: Classify* the rivers as “wild,” “scenic,” or “recreational” based on the level of development of the shoreline, watercourse and access at the time a river is found eligible
- *Step 4 Suitability:* During suitability we assess the eligible rivers’ potential for inclusion in the WSR System. We evaluate the potential physical, biological, economic, and social effects of adding the river to the National System. A suitability study provides the basis for determining which rivers to recommend to Congress as potential additions to the National WSR System.

Forest Service Determination

We have completed an inventory of rivers and have determined which rivers meet the eligibility requirements for WSR designation on the Inyo, Sequoia, and Sierra National Forests. All eligible rivers have also been classified as “wild,” “scenic,” or “recreational” based on the type and intensity of existing development.

- We have identified a total of 189 river segments on 139 named rivers as eligible for inclusion in the National WSR System:
- Inyo National Forest has identified 44 segments on 21 rivers
- Sequoia National Forest has identified 12 segments on 7 rivers

- Sierra National Forest has identified 133 segments on 111 rivers
- All of these rivers have been determined to be free-flowing and have at least one outstandingly remarkable value.
- An outstandingly remarkable value (ORV) is a river-related value that is rare, unique or exemplary at a national or regional scale. Examples include: scenery, recreation, geology, fish and wildlife populations and habitat, prehistory, history, botany, paleontology, or hydrology.

Next Steps

The inventory, evaluation, and classification process and findings are being compiled into one document and will be published as an appendix in the draft environmental impact statement (EIS) being developed for the forest plan revision. This document will be available for public review during the draft EIS comment period.

At some point in the future, the Forest Service will make a suitability decision for each of the rivers listed above. This analysis and decision-making step will not be completed as part of the current forest plan revision process but will be completed in a separate future environmental analysis process.

Wild and Scenic Rivers Facts

- The Forest Service manages 122 designated wild and scenic rivers nationally.
- In California the Forest Service manages all or portions of 21 designated wild and scenic rivers.
- There are a total of 5 designated wild and scenic rivers on the Inyo, Sequoia and Sierra National Forests.
- The Inyo National Forest manages the Cottonwood Creek and Owens River Headwaters Wild and Scenic Rivers, as well as portions of the Kern Wild and Scenic River (with the Sequoia National Forest). The Inyo National Forest manages the Cottonwood Creek WSR with the Bureau of Land Management.
- The Sequoia National Forest manages the Kern and the Kings Wild and Scenic Rivers. Management of the Kern River is shared with Inyo National Forest and Sequoia Kings Canyon National Park. Management of the Kings River is shared with Sierra National Forest and Sequoia Kings Canyon National Park.
- The Sierra National Forest has the lead for managing the Merced Wild and Scenic River with the Stanislaus National Forest. The Sierra National Forest also manages a portion of the Kings Wild and Scenic River (with the Sequoia National Forest). Management of the Merced Wild and Scenic River is shared with the Bureau of Land Management and Yosemite National Park.

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