

Wild and Scenic River Talking Points

A Wild and Scenic River (WSR) is a river or segment of river that is protected to remain free-flowing (without dams) and to preserve its outstandingly remarkable values (scenic, recreational, geological, fish and wildlife, historic, cultural, or other similar values). Rivers are categorized in three ways:

- A. **Wild** - generally inaccessible except by trail, and representing vestiges of primitive America.
- B. **Scenic** - shorelines or watersheds still largely primitive, and largely undeveloped but accessible in places by roads.
- C. **Recreational** - readily accessible by road or railroad.

WSRs are designated by Congress; however, as part of the forest planning process, we are directed to identify and evaluating potential additions to the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System (National System) on National Forest System (NFS) lands pursuant to the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. To be eligible for inclusion, a river segment must be free-flowing and, in combination with its adjacent land area, possess one or more outstandingly remarkable values. Forest Service-identified eligible (and suitable rivers) must be protected sufficiently to maintain free flow and outstandingly remarkable values unless a determination of ineligibility or non-suitability is made.

Process To Date:

- A. The Forest Planning Interdisciplinary Team has identified the region of comparison for the Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests as the Southern Appalachian Region. This region is an acceptable comparison area for all resources within the Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests.
- B. An inventory of the named rivers and streams on the Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests was accomplished by using the current GIS databases for rivers and streams on the Forest and included all potential wild, scenic, and recreational rivers flowing wholly or partially on National Forest System lands as identified in the Nationwide Rivers Inventory, public proposals and the all rivers named on a standard U. S. Geological Survey 7.5 minute USGS quadrangle map. Additionally, we reviewed all currently eligible wild and scenic rivers.
- C. The Forest then determined which of the named rivers and streams were free-flowing. This determination was made by answering the question, “Is the river segment flowing in a natural condition without impoundment, diversion, straightening, rip rapping, or other modification of the waterway”? If the river segment was not free-flowing, then the river was not eligible.
- D. The next step was to identify potential eligibility by determining which of the named rivers and streams that are free-flowing might have a potential “outstandingly remarkable value” (ORV). The potential ORVs were then compared at a region of comparison scale to determine if the identified potential values were rare, unique, or exemplary.
- E. During May and June of 2015, all currently eligible rivers and all rivers named on a standard U. S. Geological Survey 7.5 minute USGS quadrangle map, over 1300 in total, were reviewed by

District personnel, Resource Specialists, and IDT members. At this time, a broad and inclusive review of potential ORVs resulted in 53 rivers with the *potential* for eligibility.

- F. The Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests plan revision team has developed an evaluation form to address each of the outstandingly remarkable value headings in consistent way.
- G. From late October to mid-December 2015, we asked for input on these potentially eligible rivers. We also asked the public to provide information on any additional rivers with a potential outstandingly remarkable values as well as currently eligible rivers.
- H. Using the region of comparison, we then reviewed the identified potential outstandingly remarkable value(s) and determined whether they meet the criteria of being unique, rare, or exemplary feature and meets other criteria for being directly river-related to be considered eligible for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System.

Public Input Opportunities:

- A. Assessment Phase: February 2013 to March 2014;
- B. Need for Change comment period: March 11, 2014 to April 28, 2014;
- C. Initial Wilderness Inventory Process and Designated Areas workshop: April 17, 2014;
- D. Public Meeting on Wildlife Habitat; Ecosystem Integrity and Diversity; and Wild and Scenic Rivers: July 10, 2014;
- E. Public Meetings on Wilderness and Wild and Scenic River evaluations: November 9 and 16, 2015.

Plan Alternatives:

If a river or river segment has been found eligible, it will move forward in all forest plan alternatives.

Management Activities:

Rivers legislatively mandated for study (sec. 5(a) of the Act), and other rivers the Forest Service determines to be eligible or suitable for inclusion in the National System (sec 5(d)(1) of the Act), must have certain interim protection measures. A Responsible Official may authorize site-specific projects and activities on National Forest System lands within legislatively mandated study river corridors, or within Forest Service-identified eligible or suitable river corridors when the project and activities are sufficient to maintain free flow and outstandingly remarkable values. **See Forest Plan Directives sections 84.3 and 84.4 for more details.**