

NATIONAL WILD AND SCENIC RIVERS

Abstract: Currently Colorado has only one designated Wild and Scenic River—the Cache la Poudre—located on the Estes Poudre Ranger District. Beginning in 1992, every stream within the boundaries of the Forests and Grassland was screened to determine if any others should be recommended for this type of designation. These streams were evaluated as a part of this revision to determine which streams were potentially eligible for inclusion into the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System (NWSRS). Four streams were found eligible and were evaluated for their suitability for inclusion in the NWSRS. These streams were the North St. Vrain Creek, Rock Creek, Cabin Creek and the North Fork of the Cache la Poudre River.

For the North St. Vrain, Rock and Cabin Creeks, Alternatives A, B, C, H, and I do not recommend inclusion into the NWSRS. Alternatives B and H reflect the suitability study determination that Research Natural Area designation would protect the outstanding resources while preserving private landowners' rights as well. Alternative E recommends inclusion into the NWSRS, adding to the representation of Colorado streams in the national system.

For the North Fork of the Cache la Poudre, Alternatives B, E and H recommend inclusion into the NWSRS. This would eliminate the opportunity for major water-resource development projects over the 30 miles of corridor, and place other constraints on management within the corridor that are not found in Alternatives A, C, and I. Inclusion would add another representative Colorado stream to the NWSRS.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The National Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1968 established Congressional policy to preserve certain rivers and streams with outstanding natural, heritage, or recreational features in a free-flowing condition for the enjoyment of present and future generations. *The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act*, as amended (December 31, 1992) and *Forest Service Handbook 1909.12*, Chapter 8, direct the Forest Service to evaluate rivers for their inclusion into the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System during forest planning.

INTRODUCTION

Designated rivers and streams are classified as wild, scenic or recreational. The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act defines these terms as follows:

Wild Rivers: Rivers or sections of rivers that are free of impoundments and generally inaccessible except by trail, with watersheds or shorelines essentially primitive and waters unpolluted. These represent vestiges of primitive America.

Scenic Rivers: Rivers or sections of rivers that are free of impoundments, with shorelines or watersheds still largely undeveloped, but accessible in places by roads.

Recreational Rivers: Rivers or sections of rivers that are readily accessible by road or railroad, that may have some development along their shoreline, and that may have undergone some impoundment or diversion in the past.

A two-step process is required to include a river in the National System. The first is an evaluation of a river's "eligibility." This evaluation must consider the area within one-quarter mile of the high water marks on both sides of a river, and other features outside this corridor if their inclusion is essential for the protection of the river's outstandingly remarkable values. The second step is to evaluate eligible rivers for "suitability." This evaluation considers possible congressional inclusion of the river in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System (NWSRS) in terms of social and economic values, effects on other resources, and effects on private lands and other uses of the area. The administration may recommend suitable rivers to Congress for inclusion in the NWSRS. When Congress does designate a river for inclusion, a final boundary for the corridor is established.

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

Seven rivers were previously evaluated during and after the initial 1984 *Forest Plan* process in the Nationwide River Inventory (NRI). The Cache la Poudre River was studied in its entirety, and designated in part; the North St. Vrain and North Fork of the Cache la Poudre Rivers were studied and found eligible. Four other NRI candidate rivers were studied and not recommended for eligibility: the Middle St. Vrain, Willow Creek, Williams Fork Upper and East (administered and evaluated by the Routt National Forest), and Boulder Creek North Fork.

The Big Thompson River from its source within Rocky Mountain National Park to the boundary with the National Forest was also included in the NRI. The Park Service studied this segment and found it not suitable. The analysis of the segment below the Park boundary was included in the revision.

Currently Colorado has only one designated wild and scenic river, the Cache la Poudre. The 1984 *Forest Plan* identified the Cache la Poudre eligible as a wild and scenic river; a suitability study was completed and segments of the river were added to the NWSRS.

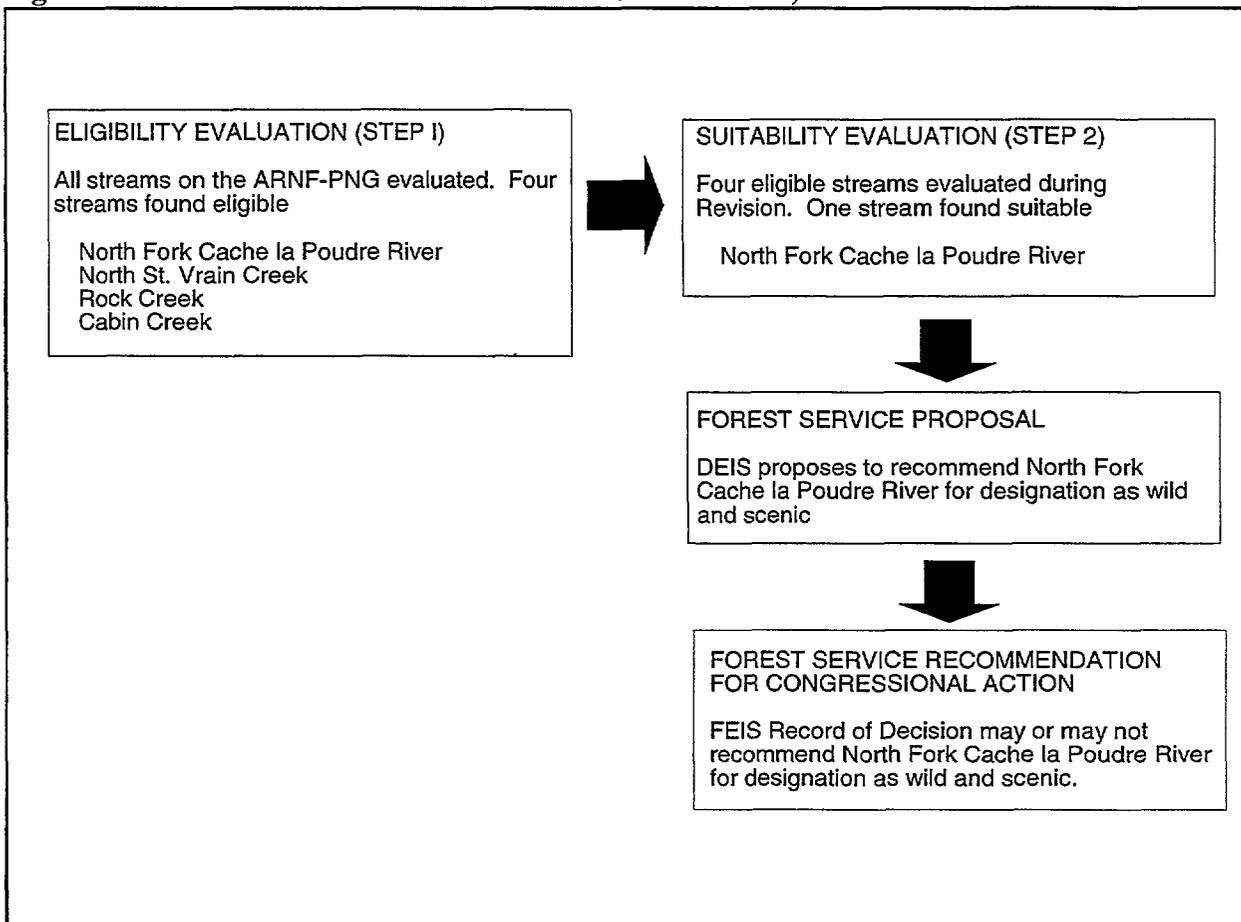
While this suitability study was going on, two other rivers on the Forests were being studied to determine their eligibility, the North Fork of the Cache la Poudre River and North St. Vrain Creek. The results of these studies determined that both were eligible. The 1984 *Forest Plan*

was amended in late 1989 and early 1990 to allow for these rivers to be studied for suitability during the revision.

Beginning in 1992, virtually every stream within the boundaries of the Arapaho and Roosevelt National Forests and the Pawnee National Grassland was screened to determine which should be evaluated for possible eligibility for wild and scenic river designation. Under the guidance of *Forest Service Handbook* 1909.12, Chapter 8, this list of streams was narrowed down to 30 for final evaluation. This list included three NRI rivers administered by the Arapaho and Roosevelt National Forests.

Figure 3.25 displays the evaluation process for wild and scenic river designation, followed by a brief compilation of the results of the eligible and suitable stream evaluations.

Figure 3.25 Evaluation Process for Wild and Scenic Rivers, ARNF



ELIGIBLE STREAM EVALUATIONS (STEP 1)

Eligibility evaluation reports were prepared for 30 inventoried streams totaling 231.2 miles in length. These evaluations determined which streams were potentially eligible for inclusion in the NWSRS. "Outstandingly remarkable values" were identified along and adjacent to these streams, and appropriate classification of each stream as "wild," "scenic," or "recreation" was made. The eligibility reports are available as part of the planning record. The results are:

1. Twenty-eight streams or stream segments totaling 227 miles were found not eligible for inclusion in the NWSRS (The North Fork of the Cache la Poudre and the North St. Vrain had been found eligible earlier).
2. Two streams, Rock Creek and Cabin Creek, totaling 4.2 miles were found eligible for inclusion in the NWSRS along with the North Fork of the Cache la Poudre and the North St. Vrain.

The two eligible streams are on the Boulder District. The Forest preferred to proceed with determining suitability for these creeks by completing the suitability assessment in concert with the other two previously-evaluated eligible streams during the revision.

SUITABLE STREAM EVALUATIONS (STEP 2)

Suitability evaluation reports were prepared to determine whether eligible segments of the North Fork of the Cache la Poudre River, and North St. Vrain, Cabin, and Rock Creeks are appropriate additions to the NWSRS. The suitability report compared alternative ways to manage each river. These alternatives were carried over into the revision process where the

Table 3.134 Miles of Rivers Recommended for Inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic River System

Classification	Alternative					
	A	B	C	E	H	I
North Fork of the Cache la Poudre River						
Recreational	0	12	0	12	12	0
Scenic	0	0	0	0	0	0
Wild	0	18	0	18	18	0
North St. Vrain, Rock and Cabin Creeks						
Recreational	0	0	0	0	0	0
Scenic	0	0	0	0	0	0
Wild	0	0	0	14.4	0	0

Forest applied them to varying degrees to the six revision alternatives. The objective of this process was to determine how best to manage the outstanding resources. The suitability reports are included in Appendix D. The following table summarizes miles recommended for inclusion in the NWSRS.

The environmental consequences associated with the suitability analysis are discussed below for all four streams evaluated. Because Rock Creek and Cabin Creek are in the North St. Vrain watershed, the analysis combined Rock and Cabin Creeks with North St. Vrain Creek.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

DIRECT AND INDIRECT EFFECTS: NORTH FORK CACHE LA POUFRE RIVER

Alternatives B, E and H

In Alternatives B, E, and H the entire North Fork of the Poudre from its headwaters to the Forest boundary on the eastern side of Section 24, T 11 N, R 72 W, would be recommended for designation as a wild and recreational river. Designation would eliminate the opportunity for major water-resource development projects over the entire 30 miles of corridors, and place other constraints on management in the corridor.

In general, the effects of designation would minimize short-term impacts on the land in the corridor and would protect and enhance visual resources to a greater extent than would occur otherwise. Some increase in recreational use can be expected due to designation. However, this will be small in relation to the expected demand for recreation opportunities by an ever expanding Colorado Front Range population. Nonetheless, the recreational use increase may result in increased user conflicts and more management controls.

Wild Designation. For those segments designated as Wild, the potential for new diversions and hydroelectric power generation would be foregone. Congressional designation as a "wild" river results in the area being withdrawn from mineral entry. Scheduled commercial timber harvest would not be allowed, and outputs of timber from otherwise suitable forest lands would be foregone. However, because much of the area would fall under riparian and water quality standards and guidelines, much of the suitable land within the corridor would not be harvested regardless of designation. Construction of major recreation facilities, roads, powerlines, and other features would not be allowed within the designated river corridor. Some opportunities for fish and wildlife habitat enhancement would also likely be foregone.

There could be some effects due to an increase in recreational use of the river following its inclusion in the NWSRS. This could be detrimental to the secluded nature of these segments. Some increase in revenues to the local recreation and tourism economy would result.

Recreation Designation. Designation of the river segments as Recreational would have some effects on other resource users. The potential for new diversions and hydroelectric power generation would be foregone. Timber harvest and other activities could occur, although constraints to maintain visual quality might increase costs and reduce outputs. As stated above, because much of the area would fall under riparian and water quality standards and guidelines, much of the suitable land within the corridor would not be harvested regardless of designation.

Higher than current recreational use can be expected and this could have some adverse impacts on the river environment. Designation could speed the development of public and private recreation facilities. Some increase in revenues to the local recreation and tourism economy would result.

Alternatives A, C, and I

Under these alternatives, there would be no recommendations for designation of wild and scenic rivers. The North Fork of the Cache la Poudre would be managed in accordance with the management area direction of adjacent lands.

Characteristics of the river segments presently categorized as either "wild" or "recreation" might change in the future, thereby making them ineligible for inclusion in the NWSRS. In general, *Forest Plan* standards and guidelines for soil, water, visual resources and recreation would ensure that many outstanding qualities remain. Exceptions might occur if (1) the free-flowing characteristics of the river are altered by impoundments (damming) or other modifications, or (2) if other uses, such as large-scale mining or major recreation sites, alter the visual resources within the river corridor. In all cases, water quality, riparian lands, special habitats for wildlife, and so forth would be protected by forestwide and management area standards and guidelines.

Under these alternatives, the management area direction along the North Fork of the Cache la Poudre would be divided among Forested Flora and Fauna Habitats (MA 3.5), Dispersed Recreation (MA 4.3), Forest and Intermingled Rangelands (MA 5.1), and Forest Products (MA 5.13).

Management Area 3.5. These areas are managed to provide adequate amounts of quality forage, cover, escape terrain, solitude, breeding habitat, and protection for a wide variety of wildlife species and associated plant communities. Timber harvesting may be used as a management activity to achieve optimal habitat for wildlife but no harvesting is scheduled. Some instream structures for fish habitat may also occur.

Management Area 4.3. These areas are managed to provide recreational opportunities in a natural or near natural appearing landscape. Recreation activities such as camping and driving will occur where roads or trails provide access to the Poudre corridor.

Management Area 5.1. These areas of forest and intermingled rangelands are managed to produce forest products, forage and wildlife habitat while providing recreational opportunities.

In the eastern portion of the North Fork Poudre, range and grazing improvements will be most evident.

Management Area 5.13. Forest Products emphasizes the management of trees to produce wood products while providing for forage production, visual quality, wildlife habitat, and recreational opportunities. Some timber harvest may be expected; however, it will be tempered by maintaining the visual quality and integrity of the river corridor. Timber harvest activities may affect the river quality, though this would be kept within standards and guidelines and legal limits.

CUMULATIVE EFFECTS: NORTH FORK OF THE CACHE LA POUFRE RIVER

If designation of the North Fork of the Cache la Poudre were to occur, it would increase the attraction of the entire Cache la Poudre River drainage. Some increases in recreational use and tourism could be expected to occur. However, taken in a regional context, with increasing demands for recreation by an ever increasing Colorado Front Range population, changes in recreational use, tourism and local income would probably not be measurable.

Designation of wild and scenic rivers does not open private lands to public access. Landowners can continue to post their property. Developed access points and recreation user facilities will usually help to reduce trespass and impact on both private and public lands.

Ongoing regular uses of private land, particularly those existing at the time a river is designated, are not directly affected. Most private land use, such as represented by homes and farms are compatible with wild and scenic river management. Since wild and scenic rivers enjoy a measure of protection from future incompatible land uses and development, designation can have a positive impact on property values and marketability.

The National Wild and Scenic Rivers Act places specific restrictions on the use of condemnation to acquire private lands within wild and scenic river boundaries. Fee title condemnation is prohibited if more than 50 percent of the corridor is publicly owned. The North Fork of the Cache la Poudre is more than 50 percent in public ownership.

Effects of nondesignation would likewise have little regional significance on recreational use or tourism. Nondesignation might, however, represent a lost opportunity to protect river characteristics that are unusual in the region.

DIRECT AND INDIRECT EFFECTS: NORTH ST. VRAIN, ROCK AND CABIN CREEKS

Alternative B

In Alternative B, North St. Vrain Creek, Rock Creek and Cabin Creek would not be recommended for designation as a wild river. The majority of North St. Vrain Creek is included in the North St. Vrain Research Natural Area (MA 2.2) which is located from the boundary between private and National Forest lands east of Wild Basin to the North St. Vrain's confluence

with Coulson Gulch. The portion of the creek from Coulson Gulch to the inlet of Buttonrock Reservoir is in an Existing Core Area Habitats Management Area (1.41). About one mile of the western segment is located adjacent to a Dispersed Recreation area (MA 4.3) that runs south from North St. Vrain Creek to Allenspark.

Cabin Creek and the northern portion of Rock Creek between Fox Creek and the North St. Vrain are both located in the North St. Vrain Research Natural Area (MA 2.2). The southern portion of Rock Creek between Allenspark and Fox Creek is located in an area allocated to Forested Flora and Fauna Habitats (MA 3.5).

Management Area 2.2. Establishes the North St. Vrain Research Natural Area. Recreational use is not emphasized and efforts are made to keep use as it exists today. Extractive or commercial uses are not allowed. The primary vegetation management tool is prescribed fire. Livestock grazing is eliminated on the portion of the Twin Sisters Allotment within the RNA boundary. The area is withdrawn from mineral entry.

Management Area 1.41. These areas are managed to maintain existing habitats which are shaped primarily through natural processes. Recreational use is allowed but not encouraged. New roads and trails are not allowed. The primary vegetation management tools are prescribed and wildland fires.

Management Area 4.3. These areas are managed to provide recreational opportunities in a natural or nearly natural-appearing landscape. Recreational activities such as camping and driving occur where roads or trails provide access to the public lands. Recreational use of North St. Vrain and Rock Creeks in this Management Area will be limited due to difficult access.

Management Area 3.5. These areas are managed to provide adequate amounts of quality forage, cover, escape terrain, solitude, breeding habitat, and protection for a wide variety of wildlife species and associated plant communities. Recreational use of Rock Creek will be limited due to difficult access. Timber harvesting may be used as a management activity to achieve optimal habitat for wildlife but no harvesting is scheduled.

Alternatives C, E and H

In Alternative E, the North St. Vrain, Cabin and Rock Creeks would be recommended for designation as a wild river. However, these segments are not recommended for any wild and scenic river designation in Alternatives C and H.

The majority of the North St. Vrain in these alternatives is managed so that ecological processes such as fire, insects, and diseases are essentially allowed to operate relatively free from the influence of humans. Users must be self-reliant and should expect low levels of contact with other people. Allocations include recommending the area for Wilderness Designation (MA 1.2 in Alternative H), emphasizing Backcountry Recreation (MA 1.3 in Alternative C), or recommending designation as a Wild River (MA 1.5 in Alternative E). Small portions of North St. Vrain, Cabin and Rock Creeks on the outer edges of the area are allocated to Limited Use

Areas (MA 3.12), Flora and Fauna (MA 3.5), Dispersed Recreation (MA 4.3), or Forest and Intermingled Rangelands (MA 5.1).

Management Area 1.2 (Alt. H). Recommends the core of the North St. Vrain drainage to Congress for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System. The area is being managed to protect wilderness characteristics until Congressional action is taken. Wilderness designation will result in national recognition of the area and may result in increased recreational use. Increased use could be limited through regulation. No extractive or commercial uses are allowed. Prescribed fire is the only vegetation management tool available. The area is withdrawn from mineral entry. The potential for water diversion and hydroelectric power are eliminated. Wilderness designation could result in establishment of a federal reserved water right which may affect future water development projects on Rock and Cabin Creeks.

Management Area 1.3 (Alt. C). The core of the North St. Vrain drainage is managed to provide nonmotorized recreational opportunities in a natural-appearing landscape. Recreational use may increase as a result of Colorado's expanding population. There may be an increase in facilities (primarily trailheads) on the area's perimeter to accommodate this use.

Management Area 1.5 (Alt. E). Recommends North St. Vrain, Cabin and Rock Creeks to Congress for designation as a Wild River. The potential for new diversions and hydroelectric power generation would be foregone. Congressional designation as a "wild" river results in the area's withdrawal from mineral entry. Scheduled commercial timber harvest would not be allowed, and outputs of timber from otherwise suitable forest lands would be foregone. Construction of major recreation facilities, roads, powerlines, and other features would not be allowed within the designated river corridor. Some opportunities for fish and wildlife habitat enhancement would also likely be foregone.

There could be some effects due to an increase in recreational use of the river following its inclusion in the NWSRS. This could be detrimental to the secluded nature of these segments. Some increase in revenues to the local recreation and tourism economy would result.

Management Area 3.21. These areas are managed to insure long-term viability of adjacent core and corridor areas by preventing intrusion of exotic species and human disturbances. Recreational use is allowed but not encouraged. Prescribed fire is the primary vegetation management tool. Other types of vegetation management are allowed but none will occur within one quarter mile of North St. Vrain, Rock, or Cabin Creeks.

Management Area 5.1. These areas of forests and intermingled rangelands are managed to produce forest products, forage, and wildlife habitat while providing recreational opportunities. Recreation use could increase over present levels. Vegetation management may occur to accomplish a wide variety of objectives.

Management Areas 3.5 and 4.3. Effects associated with these management areas are the same as in Alternative B.

Alternative A

In Alternative A, North St. Vrain Creek, Rock Creek and Cabin Creek would not be recommended for designation as a wild river. Management emphasis along the majority of the North St. Vrain in this alternative is on the bighorn sheep herd that uses the area (MA 3.5). Small portions of North St. Vrain, Rock, and Cabin Creeks on the outer edges of the area are allocated to Backcountry Motorized Recreation (MA 3.3) and Forest and Intermingled Rangelands (MA 5.1).

Management Area 3.3. Areas are managed to provide backcountry motorized recreation on primitive roads and trails in a natural-appearing landscape. Recreational use of North St. Vrain and Rock Creeks will be limited due to difficult access. Prescribed fire is the primary vegetation management tool. Other vegetation management activities are allowed.

Management Area 3.5. Effects associated with this Management Area are the same as in Alternative B.

Management Area 5.1. Effects associated with this Management Area are the same as in Alternatives C, E, and H.

Alternative I

The majority of the North St. Vrain in this alternative is managed for Backcountry Motorized Recreation (MA 3.3). Small portions of North St. Vrain, Rock, and Cabin Creeks on the outer edges of the area are allocated to Flora and Fauna (MA 3.5) and Forest Products (MA 5.13).

Management Area 3.3. These areas are managed to provide backcountry motorized recreation on primitive roads and trails in a natural-appearing landscape. Motorized recreational use of the North St. Vrain area is permitted on a variety of roads and trails. Opportunities to expand motorized access are pursued and developed sites are provided to accommodate increased recreation visitation. Prescribed fire is the primary vegetation management tool. Other vegetation management activities are allowed.

Management Area 3.5. Effects associated with this Management Area are the same as in Alternative B.

Management Area 5.13. These areas are managed to produce wood products while providing for forage production and recreational opportunities. Increased recreational use occurs, often on road networks that are also used for the removal of forest products. A full range of vegetation management activities could occur in the Taylor Mountain, East Olive Ridge, and Deer Ridge portions of the area.

CUMULATIVE EFFECTS: NORTH ST. VRAIN, ROCK AND CABIN CREEKS

If designation were to occur, it would represent a unique regional attraction and some increases in recreational use and tourism could be expected to result. However, taken in a regional context, changes in recreational use, tourism and local income would probably not be measurable. Other effects are similar to those described for the North Fork of the Cache la Poudre.

Nondesignation would likewise have little regional impact on recreational use or tourism. Nondesignation might, however, represent a lost opportunity to protect stream characteristics that made it eligible. Characteristics of the river segments presently categorized as "wild" might change in the future, thereby making them ineligible for inclusion in the NWSRS. In general, *Forest Plan* standards and guidelines for soil, water, visual resources and recreation would ensure that many outstanding qualities remain. Exceptions might occur if (1) the free-flowing characteristics of the river are altered by impoundments (damming) or other modifications, or (2) if other uses, such as large-scale mining or major recreation sites, alter the visual resources within the river corridor. It is likely that efforts to pass Congressional legislation prohibiting the building of dams on the main stem of the North St. Vrain would continue.

