

NORTHEASTERN WASHINGTON FOREST PLAN REVISION

REVIEW OF POTENTIALLY ELIGIBLE WILD AND SCENIC RIVERS

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Historical Context

The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1968 provides federal protection for the most outstanding of our country's free-flowing rivers; preserving them and their immediate environments for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations. Identifying rivers is a two-step process. First, **eligibility** is determined based on whether the river or stream is free flowing and has one or more outstandingly remarkable values. This creates an inventory of rivers. The second step is to determine **suitability**. Suitability examines a number of factors such as compatibility with resources uses, impacts on non-federal lands, and the costs of land acquisition. This information informs an agency decision on whether or not to recommend designation of a river.

Wild and scenic rivers can be made official (designated) in two ways. The most common way is for Congress to pass a law designating the river. Rivers can also be designated by the Secretary of the Interior when a state has passed legislation and the governor has nominated the river.

Determining Eligibility

To be eligible a river must be free flowing and have one or more outstandingly remarkable values (ORV). The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act defines a river as "a flowing body of water or estuary or a section, portion, or tributary thereof, including rivers, streams, creeks, runs, kills, rills, and small lakes."

The Act also defines "free-flowing".

"Free-flowing", as applied to any river or section of a river, means existing or flowing in a natural condition without impoundment, diversion, straightening, rip-rapping, or other modification of the waterway. The existence, however, of low dams, diversion works, and other minor structures at the time any river is proposed for inclusion in the national wild and scenic rivers system shall not automatically bar its consideration for such inclusion; *Provided*, that this shall not be construed to authorize, intend, or encourage further construction of such structures within components of the national wild and scenic rivers system.

FSH 1909.12 Chapter 80 Wild and Scenic River Evaluation offers guidance on how to determine whether a value is outstandingly remarkable.

In order to be assessed as outstandingly remarkable, a river-related value must be a unique, rare, or exemplary feature that is significant at a comparative regional or national scale. A river-related value would be a conspicuous example of that value from among a number of similar examples that are themselves uncommon or extraordinary. ORVs might include scenery, recreation, geology, fish, wildlife, historic and cultural, or other values.

While the spectrum of resources that may be considered is broad, all features considered should be directly river-related. That is, they should:

1. Be located in the river or on its immediate shore lands (within 1/4 mile on either side of the river);
2. Contribute substantially to the functioning of the river ecosystem; and/or
3. Owe their location or existence to the presence of the river.

The Forest Plan Revision Process

Forest Service Handbook (FSH) 1909.12 Chapter 80 provides agency guidance for when additional review of eligibility is needed in conjunction with revising land management plans.

“If a systematic inventory of eligible rivers or a comprehensive forest, grassland, prairie, or other comparable administrative unit-wide suitability study has been previously completed and documented, additional assessment and study at time of land management plan revision need only be done if **changed circumstances** warrant additional review of eligibility or if the Responsible Official decides to evaluate suitability for one or more eligible rivers in the planning process.”

Such a review can either be based on an internal review, or on public input.

The 1988 Colville, 1989 Okanogan, and the 1990 Wenatchee Land and Resource Management Plans did eligibility and suitability studies (see table 3 at the end of this paper for results). That process produced a list of eligible and suitable rivers, but did not produce a recommendation to Congress to add any rivers to the national wild and scenic river system.

The Okanogan plan was appealed regarding the sufficiency of the wild and scenic river eligibility studies. The settlement agreement identified over 200 additional rivers and streams that required further study to determine eligibility. This eligibility study will be completed as part of the revision process. The preliminary eligibility results are identified below.

Several letters were received from the public asking for reconsideration of numerous rivers and streams on the Wenatchee portion of the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest based on an assertion that conditions have changed since the 1990 forest plan was released and that the 1990 plan had errors and omissions. In response to these letters, an additional review was done of these rivers to determine if a change in circumstance might lead to a finding of eligible.

After reviewing findings, the following tables reflect preliminary determinations of the eligibility of rivers studied.

Table 1--Rivers found eligible on the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest

Proposed for eligible under this plan revision	Drainage / Ranger District (RD)	Outstandingly Remarkable Value
American River, Rainier Fork	Naches / Naches RD	Scenery
Cedar Creek	Methow / Methow Valley RD	Scenery, recreation
Cooper River (tributary to the Cle Elum River)	Yakima / Cle Elum RD	Scenery, recreation, other ecological values
Deep Creek (tributary to the Bumping River)	Bumping River / Naches RD	Scenery, geology, fish, other ecological values
Devils Creek – tributary to Naches River	Naches River / Naches RD	Scenery, recreation, geology, wildlife
Early Winters Creek	Methow / Methow Valley RD	Scenery, recreation
Indian Creek	Tieton / Naches RD	Geology, fish, other ecological values
Little Naches River (including North Fork)	Naches / Naches RD	Recreation, fish, historic/cultural, other ecological values
Little Wenatchee River (including Lake Creek)	Wenatchee River / Wenatchee River RD	Scenery, recreation, fish, wildlife, other ecological values
Mad River	Entiat / Entiat RD	Scenery, recreation, fish, other ecological values
Nason Creek	Wenatchee River / Wenatchee River RD	Scenery, recreation
Raging Creek - tributary to the Chiwawa River	Wenatchee River / Wenatchee River RD	Recreation
Rattlesnake Creek	Naches / Naches RD	Scenery, recreation, geology, fish
Rock Creek – tributary to the Chiwawa River	Wenatchee River / Wenatchee River RD	Fish
Silver Creek (tributary to the Yakima River)	Yakima / Cle Elum	Scenery, recreation, wildlife
Tieton River, South Fork	Naches / Naches RD	Scenery, recreation, fish, other ecological values

Table 2--Rivers studied and found not eligible for Wild and Scenic River designation

Name	Rationale
Bumping River (below Bumping Reservoir)	Not free flowing, impinged by Highway 410 and Road 1800
Naches River (below Bumping Reservoir)	Not free flowing, impinged by Highway 410
North Fork of the Entiat River	Free flowing, no outstandingly remarkable value
Teanaway River - West, Middle and North Forks; Stafford and Bear Creeks	Free flowing, no outstandingly remarkable value

Table 3--Rivers identified in current forest plans that will be carried forward in the revised forest plan as an existing decision

Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest		Colville National Forest	
Name	Eligible or Suitable status	Name	Eligible or Suitable status
American River	Suitable	Kettle River	Eligible
Canyon Creek	Eligible	South Salmo River	Eligible
Chewuch River	Suitable		
Chiwawa River	Suitable		
Cle Elum River	Suitable		
Entiat River	Suitable		
Granite Creek	Eligible		
Icicle Creek	Suitable		
Lost River	Suitable		
Methow River	Suitable		
Napeequa River	Suitable		
Pasayten River	Suitable		
Ruby Creek	Eligible		
Twisp River	Suitable		
Waptus Creek	Suitable		
Wenatchee River	Suitable		
White River	Suitable		
Wolf Creek	Suitable		