

Wild and Scenic River Assessment

Introduction

The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1968 (Public Law 90-542), Section 1(b), expresses congressional policy for America's rivers as follows:

“It is hereby declared to be the policy of the United States that certain selected rivers of the Nation which, with their environments, possess outstanding remarkable scenic, recreational, geologic, fish and wildlife, historic, cultural, or other similar values, shall be preserved in free-flowing condition, and that they and their immediate environments shall be protected for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations.”

To accomplish this decree, Congress established a National Wild and Scenic Rivers System and prescribed methods and standards by which selected rivers could be added. Rivers or river segments are eligible to be considered for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System if they are essentially free flowing (without major dams, diversions, or channel modifications) and if they possess at least one “outstandingly remarkable” scenic, recreational, geologic, fish, wildlife, historic, cultural, or other similar value. These values should be a unique or exceptional representation for the area studied, and must be related to the river or its immediate environment. For study purposes, the Act requires that the evaluation of a river's eligibility consider, as a minimum, the area within ¼ mile of either side of the high water mark of the river.

Eligible rivers are evaluated for potential classification and determination of suitability. They are considered for potential “wild,” “scenic,” or “recreational” classification based on the condition of the river and adjacent lands as they exist at the time of the study. The suitability analysis provides the basis for determining which rivers to recommend as components of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System and considers the appropriateness of congressional designation and classification as a wild, scenic or recreational river. Suitable rivers may be recommended to Congress by the administration, whereby Congress then decides whether to pass a law adding the river to the national system. If designation occurs, a final boundary is established and a comprehensive river management plan is developed.

The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act also provides specific direction in Section 5(d)(1) regarding the identification of potential wild and scenic rivers in Federal agency planning processes:

“In all planning for the use and development of water and related land resources, consideration shall be given by all Federal agencies involved to potential national wild, scenic, and recreational river areas, and all river basin and project plan reports submitted to the Congress shall consider and discuss any such potentials.”

Land Management Planning

The land management planning process shall include a comprehensive evaluation of the potential for rivers in an administrative unit to be eligible for inclusion in the national system. Sources for identifying the significance of river-related values include the Nationwide Rivers Inventory; state river assessments; identification by tribal governments, or other Federal, State, or local agencies; and the public.

Agency policy related to wild and scenic rivers assessment during the land management planning process is defined in the Land Management Planning Handbook (FSH 1909.12, Chapter 80, Wild and Scenic River Evaluation). This chapter describes the process for identifying and evaluating potential additions to

the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System on National Forest System lands pursuant to the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. It requires the land management planning process to include a comprehensive evaluation of the potential for rivers to be eligible for inclusion in the national system.

Direction is provided in FSH 1909.12, Section 81.2 in regard to the assessment of rivers in forest plan revision. The assessment of a river identified as having potential for wild and scenic river designation follows a 3-step process:

1. Determination of eligibility.
1. Potential classification (wild, scenic, or recreational).
2. Determination of suitability.

Latitude is provided in FSH 1909.12, Chapter 80 regarding the process used for determination of eligibility as well as determination of suitability in land management planning, i.e., *completing a river study in the revised forest plan* to determine which rivers the agency may recommend to Congress as additions to the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. Specifically, FSH 1909.12, Section 81.2 states:

*“If a systematic inventory of eligible rivers or a comprehensive forest, grassland, prairie, or other comparable administrative unitwide 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. Otherwise, the process need not be revisited in land management planning.”*

Determination of Eligibility and Potential Classification

Wild and scenic rivers were not addressed in the 1987 forest plan for the Kaibab NF. However, a systematic inventory of eligible rivers was completed in January 1993 by the Forest Service, the Arizona Game and Fish Department, and other state and Federal agencies. The 1993 report, known as the Preliminary Analysis of Eligibility and Classification for Wild/Scenic/Recreational River Designation, included representatives from the Apache-Sitgreaves, Coconino, Coronado, Kaibab, Prescott and Tonto National Forests. Resource information for potential wild, scenic, and recreational rivers that the Forest Service determined to be potentially eligible for inclusion into the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System was compiled in a supplemental report published in September 1993 [Resource Information Report – Potential Wild/Scenic/Recreational River Designation, National Forests of Arizona (USDA Forest Service 1993)]. This report includes a determination of eligibility for Kanab Creek, with a classification of wild. Detailed information in the report includes location, descriptions of resources, outstandingly remarkable values, land uses and developments and social and economic values. In accord with FSH 1909.12, Section 81.2, this inventory has been used as the basis for assessing potential wild and scenic rivers eligibility in the revision of the Kaibab National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan.

As a result of the 1993 inventory, Kanab Creek was listed as eligible in the Nationwide Rivers Inventory. This Inventory, first published by the National Park Service in 1982, is a listing of more than 3,400 free-flowing river segments in the United States that are believed to possess one or more “outstandingly remarkable” natural or cultural values judged to be of more than local or regional significance. Under a 1979 presidential directive and related Council on Environmental Quality procedures, all Federal agencies must seek to avoid or mitigate actions that would adversely affect one or more Nationwide Rivers

Inventory segments. The Nationwide Rivers Inventory includes 20 miles of Kanab Creek, located on the Kaibab NF and within a designated wilderness (see table F 1). Additional segments of Kanab Creek beyond the southern Kaibab NF boundary are eligible. This segment includes the reach which flows into the Colorado River through lands administered by the National Park Service in Grand Canyon National Park.

Table F 1. Description of the eligible segment located on the Kaibab National Forest

River	County	Reach	Length (miles)	Year Listed	Potential Classification	ORVs	Description
Kanab Creek	Mohave-Coconino Boundary	FS/BLM Boundary to NPS/FS Boundary	20	1993	Wild	S, R, W, G	Intermittent, isolated reaches of perennial flow. Riparian vegetation. Broad canyon.

Source: Nationwide Rivers Inventory at <http://www.nps.gov/nrcr/programs/rtca/nri/states/az2.html>

ORV = Outstandingly remarkable value (S-Scenery, R-Recreation, W-Wildlife, G-Geology)

As allowed in FSH 1909.12, Section 81.2, this forest plan revision includes supplementary assessment of the 1993 inventory in order to determine if there are additional rivers or river segments that may be eligible given changed circumstances and/or new information that has occurred since the 1993 inventory was completed. The supplementary assessment entails a review of the following information as it relates to changed circumstances:

3. Changes in land status or ownership. The acquisition of additional private lands on the Kaibab NF could include new rivers or river segments that may not have been addressed in the 1993 inventory.
4. Changes related to additional identification of important resource values that may not have been identified in the 1993 inventory. New information regarding identification of important resource values could be reflected in monitoring and evaluation reports conducted on the Kaibab NF since the 1993 inventory.

As a result of the supplementary assessment, there are no changed circumstances or conditions necessitating additional consideration of rivers. Kanab Creek will continue to be listed in Nationwide Rivers Inventory as eligible for further study.

Determination of Suitability

The Kaibab NF has chosen to delay the suitability determination on Kanab Creek until a separate study is conducted outside of the forest plan revision process.. As provided in FSH 1909.12, Section 83.1, the decision to delay the suitability determination must be accompanied by provisions to provide for protection of the river area until a decision is made as to the future use of the river.

For interim management of eligible or suitable rivers, the special area recommendation should include the desired conditions, objectives, guidelines, and suitability of areas to be used in the design of projects and activities consistent with management guidelines of eligible or suitable rivers (FSH 1909.12, section 82.51). The segment determined as eligible for Kanab Creek is contained within a designated wilderness. The desired conditions, objectives, guidelines, and suitability of areas to be used in the design of projects and activities contained within the wilderness management area direction are consistent with management

guidelines that protect Kanab Creek's eligibility and potential wild classification, therefore no additional direction is needed in the revised plan.

Summary of Results

The eligibility process resulted in finding no new rivers or river segments eligible for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. Kanab Creek is considered eligible for further study as a wild and scenic river. Interim management of Kanab Creek within a designated wilderness will maintain its eligibility as a classified wild river until a suitability study is completed.

References

USDA Forest Service. 1993. Resource information report: Potential wild/scenic/recreational river designation, national forests of Arizona. Albuquerque, NM: Southwestern Region, USDA Forest Service.