

16 Wild and Scenic Rivers

Healthy Forest Service rivers and streams provide millions of Americans with clean drinking water, world-class recreation, and economic benefits and support a wide array of native aquatic species.

Overview

The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1968 ((P.L. 90-542) aims to preserve those of our Nation’s rivers with outstanding natural, cultural, and recreational values in a free-flowing condition. Congress can designate a river as “wild,” “scenic,” or “recreational” under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, and the Forest Service must ensure that the free-flow, water quality and “outstandingly remarkable values” of the designated river are protected and enhanced. During the planning process, the Forest Service must conduct an up-to-date inventory of other rivers that may be suitable and eligible for official protection by Congress.

Why It Matters

Healthy rivers and streams on the National Forest System provide millions of Americans with clean drinking water, world-class recreation, and economic benefits. They also support a wide range of native aquatic species. The National Wild and Scenic Rivers System safeguards and showcases some of America’s most spectacular waterways.

Process

During the plan revision process, the Forest Service will conduct an inventory of rivers and streams on National Forest System lands to determine which are eligible for wild and scenic designation. If a systematic inventory has been previously completed and documented, then inventory work can be limited to evaluation of rivers with changed circumstances or that have never been evaluated. To be eligible, a river or stream reach must be free-flowing, and have at least one river-related value that has unique, rare, or exemplary significance at a regional or national scale. These specific values, known as “outstandingly remarkable values,” may fall into recreational, biological, geological, historical, cultural, scenic, or other similar categories. Each eligible river is assigned a preliminary classification of “wild,” “scenic,” or “recreational,” depending on the level of development in the river corridor at the time of study.

A suitability study may also be completed during plan revision to determine which eligible rivers or river segments should be recommended to Congress as potential additions to the National System. Suitability studies may also be conducted outside of the plan revision process.

Interim protection measures must be applied to rivers and their half-mile-wide corridors that are eligible or suitable for congressional designation. Eligible or suitable rivers may be managed under one or more land management categories depending, in part, on whether their preliminary classifications are eligible for wild, scenic, or recreational designation. Plan components must

Wild and Scenic Rivers Process

1

Identify Study Rivers

- Engage the public
- Include all named rivers on U.S. Geological Survey 7.5-minute quadrangle map

2

Evaluate Eligibility for Designation

- Identify which rivers meet Wild and Scenic Rivers Act criteria: Are free-flowing and have outstandingly remarkable values
- Provide opportunity for public participation

3

Classify

- Wild, scenic, and/or recreational

4

Evaluate Suitability

- Is designation as a wild and scenic river appropriate?
 - Are there other competing uses?
 - Will designation protect the river? Is it the best protection?
 - Will river be protected where it flows out of national forest?

protect the values that make rivers and streams eligible for being designated in the future by Congress and should not limit uses that do not substantially interfere with those values.

Within three years of congressional designation of a river, the Forest Service must produce a comprehensive river management plan. This plan must be consistent with the land management plan and should describe the river corridor and how the Forest Service will protect its free-flowing status, water quality, and the other values that led to its designation. River management plans must be updated regularly and may be updated during the revision process.

Possible Key Topics

- Designated river management planning during forest planning
- River evaluations for eligibility
- Whether to complete river suitability studies during plan revision
- Recreation management and adjacent landowners
- Accessibility to rivers
- Traditional cultural properties around rivers
- Thoroughness of river inventory

For More Information

Interagency Wild and Scenic Rivers
Coordinating Council's Web site:
<http://www.rivers.gov>