



free-flowing FOREVER

We are a nation rich in rivers.

Charles Kuralt, *On the Road with Charles Kuralt*, 1995

Coursing more than three million miles, America's streams and rivers lend life to landscapes and communities as varied as the waters themselves. While these waterways nourish the people and ecosystems they flow through, only a relatively small number have received the national distinction of "Wild and Scenic River."

Above: Middle Fork Salmon River, Idaho. © MARK LISK

A National System



BLM

By the 1950s, many rivers in the United States had been irreversibly altered to accommodate the growing needs of modern civilization. Dams were impeding fish passage. Diversions were depleting flows of life-giving streams. Urbanization had modified channels. Industrial pollution was ruining water quality.

An environmental awakening in the 1960s led to the enactment of a national law to protect some of the most exceptional rivers and streams in the United States. Crafted by leaders who sought to undo decades of damage, the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1968 created an enduring process to protect certain waterways with outstanding natural, cultural, and recreational values

in a free-flowing condition for the enjoyment of present and future generations. Passage of the Act established the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System and granted immediate protection to eight rivers while encouraging growth of the national system through future addition of other rivers and streams.

River supporters today encourage officials to consider additional wild and scenic river designations. Congress can authorize a study or new designation; or a state governor may request the Secretary of the Interior to designate a river. Federal river-administering agencies also seek public input through their planning processes.

Above: Boating on the Owyhee River, Oregon.

Caring for Rivers

The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act strives to balance demands for hydropower, flood control, water supply, and irrigation with the desire to keep certain rivers free flowing and natural. Existing uses may continue where no conflict with river protection occurs, but special designation protects waters where human activities could affect free flow, water quality, and outstandingly remarkable values. Shoreline development, access, and natural conditions determine designated river classifications as *wild*, *scenic*, or *recreational*, which then form the basis for how river corridors are managed in perpetuity.

The Act enables all levels of government to work with landowners, river users, tribal nations, and private organizations to plan, protect, and manage river values. Stewardship strategies include technical assistance, cooperative management, and agreements. The Bureau of Land Management, National



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Park Service, U.S. Forest Service, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service manage designated rivers that flow through federal lands and work cooperatively with partner organizations and stakeholders on both federal and non-federal rivers.

Clockwise from top: Andreafsky River salmon monitoring, Alaska; Namekagon River inventory, Wisconsin; Cleanup, Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, Alaska.



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Lasting Benefits



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Teamwork by private and public stewards alike protects and enhances river values for the future. Collaborative river protection promotes increased appreciation and grassroots support for river conservation. Such partnerships help provide communities with the benefits of clean water, health, prosperous economies, recreational opportunities, jobs, and natural and cultural resource conservation for many years to come.

Cooperative river management and stewardship are long-term commitments that contribute both to water quality and to quality of life. The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act prohibits new dam construction and water projects implemented with

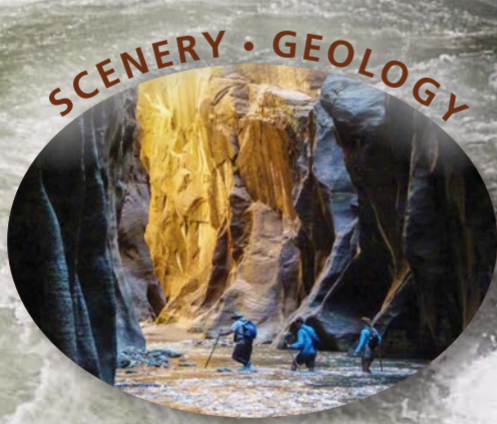
federal funds, permits, or assistance that would negatively affect a river's free flow, water quality, or its outstandingly remarkable values. Over fifty years after passage of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, public participation and awareness remain essential to safeguarding river values and identifying potential additions to the national system.

The National Wild and Scenic Rivers System now protects over 13,000 miles of more than 200 rivers in 41 states and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico—still only slightly more than one-third of one percent of all the nation's rivers. Many more miles of waterways remain eligible for this special designation.

Above: Planting, Snake Rivers Headwaters, Wyoming.



Outstandingly remarkable values make a river worthy of special protection. Each wild and scenic river must have at least one of these or other similar values that are river-related and unique, rare, or exemplary on a regional or national scale.



Inspiration abounds. Designated river corridors may feature highly diverse landscapes, landforms, other visual attractions, and notable geologic features or processes.

VIRGIN RIVER, UTAH / NPS



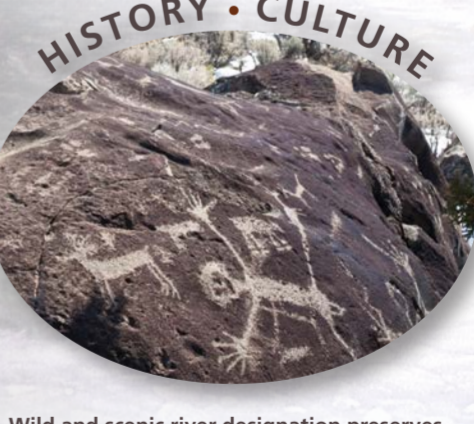
River-dependent wildlife and their habitats can be outstandingly remarkable values based on important populations of indigenous wildlife species, habitat or species diversity, and use of aquatic or terrestrial habitat as migration corridors.

RIVER OTTER, LANQUA RIVER, OREGON / BLM



A river's outstandingly remarkable fish value may be judged on the relative merits of fish populations, diversity, and habitat. Wild stocks of resident and migratory species are considered.

QUARTZVILLE CREEK, OREGON / BLM



Wild and scenic river designation preserves important river-related historic and cultural resources including evidence of ancient human activities like petroglyphs, pre-contact dwellings, and other important archeological sites.

PETROGLYPH, RIO GRANDE RIVER, NEW MEXICO / BLM



Special designation means enjoyment for all. Outstanding river-related recreation can include a wide range of offerings from highly social settings to opportunities for solitude.

UPPER DELAWARE RIVER / WILDERNESS INQUIRY

RIVER PROTECTION MILESTONES

Pre-contact	1750–1800s	1900–1950s	1960–1980s	1990–2020s
<p>HUPA PLATFORM FISHING / LIBRARY OF CONGRESS</p> <p>For thousands of years, indigenous people gain both physical and spiritual nourishment from rivers—a sustainable coexistence that enables human settlement, exploration, trade, and travel.</p>	<p>WASHINGTON MILLS / LIBRARY OF CONGRESS</p> <p>Industrial Revolution processes use energy from flowing water. Mechanization advances from waterwheels and steam engines to hydroelectric power from reservoir-fed turbines.</p>	<p>HOOPER DAM / ANSEL ADAMS NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS</p> <p>New dams provide hydropower, irrigation, flood control, and water storage to support urban and industrial growth. Depression-era floods and drought propel construction of major multipurpose impoundments like Hoover Dam.</p>	<p>JOHN AND FRANK CRAIGHEAD / COURTESY CRAIGHEAD FAMILY</p> <p>Public opposition builds toward certain dam proposals like Spruce Park Dam on the Flathead River in Montana. Conservationists led by John and Frank Craighead call for a law to protect free-flowing rivers from damage by dams.</p>	<p>SENATOR FRANK CHURCH / PRESIDENTIAL LIBRARY</p> <p>Ecological awareness increases with publications like Rachel Carson's "Silent Spring" in 1962. Environmental and outdoor recreation movements result in the passage of the Wilderness Act and the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act in 1964. President Lyndon B. Johnson calls for "a wild rivers bill" in 1965.</p>
<p>GREAT EGG HARBOR RIVER, NEW JERSEY / TIM PALMER</p> <p>The National Park Service and local jurisdictions join together to protect and enhance Great Egg Harbor River, the first designated wild and scenic "partnership" river. The Interagency Wild and Scenic Rivers Coordinating Council forms in 1995 to improve coordination among the four federal agencies administering the Act.</p>	<p>WILD & SCENIC RIVERS 50 YEARS</p> <p>Work to remove and decommission dams increases in the new millennium, restoring flows, fish populations, and natural conditions. The National Wild and Scenic Rivers System flourishes as it celebrates its fiftieth anniversary on October 2, 2018. By early 2023, wild and scenic designations protect 228 rivers.</p>			

To us, water is sacred. —Jamie Fullmer, Tribal Chairman, Yavapai-Apache Nation, 2005

National Wild and Scenic Rivers System

U.S. Department of Agriculture
Forest Service

U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Fish and Wildlife Service
National Park Service

...the time has also come to identify and preserve free-flowing stretches of our great rivers before growth and development make the beauty of the unspoiled waterway a memory.

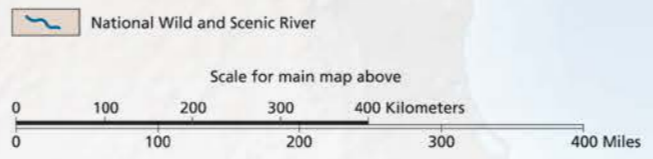
—President Lyndon B. Johnson, 1965

- Clackamas
- Collawash
- Crooked
- Eagle Creek
- East Fork Hood
- Elkhorn Creek
- Fifteenmile Creek
- Fish Creek
- Middle Fork Hood
- McKenzie
- Metolius
- Molalla
- North Fork Crooked
- Quartzville Creek
- Roaring
- Salmon
- Sandy
- South Fork Clackamas
- South Fork Roaring
- White
- Whychus Creek
- Zigzag

- Chetco
- Elk Creek
- Illinois
- Jenny Creek
- North Fork Silver Creek
- North Fork Smith
- River Styx
- Rogue
- Spring Creek
- Upper Rogue

- Big Marsh Creek
- Crescent Creek
- Little Deschutes
- Sycan
- North Fork Sprague
- Donner und Blitzen
- Kiger Creek
- Wildhorse Creek
- Little Owyhee

- Battle Creek
- Deep Creek
- Dickshooter Creek
- Owyhee
- Red Canyon
- South Fork Owyhee



Cartography by National Park Service, Harpers Ferry Center, September 2018, updated by National Information Services Center, February 2023.



National Wild and Scenic Rivers System

Established by Congress under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1968, the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System was created to preserve the free flow, water quality, and outstanding natural, cultural, and recreational values of select rivers for the enjoyment of present and future generations. The Act is notable for safeguarding the special character of these rivers, while also recognizing the potential for their appropriate use and development. It encourages river management that crosses political boundaries and promotes public participation in developing goals for river protection.

For more information about the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System or specific designated rivers, visit the Interagency Wild and Scenic Rivers Coordinating Council's website, www.rivers.gov, or contact one of the federal river-administering agencies:

- U.S. Forest Service
www.fs.usda.gov
- National Park Service
www.nps.gov
- Bureau of Land Management
www.blm.gov
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
www.fws.gov

