



# Wild and Scenic Rivers:

## *The National System*

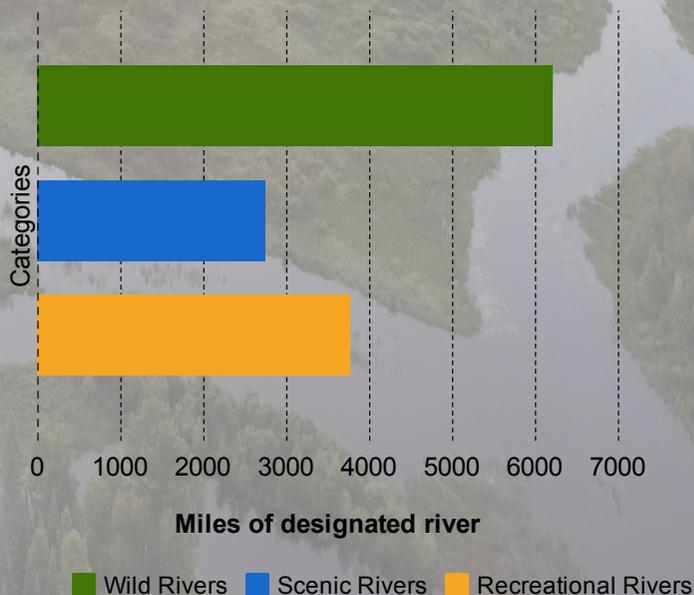
Signed into law on October 2, 1968 by President Lyndon B. Johnson, the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act preserves the essence of rivers that surge, ramble, gush, wander and weave. The act became law when visionary outdoor enthusiasts and Congressional sponsors championed a system of free-flowing rivers to balance national policies of extensive dam building and water diversions. This monumental act of citizens who cared about the future of American rivers--the arteries connecting communities and public lands--brought an age of invigorated understanding, restoration and respect for public safety.

The National Wild and Scenic Rivers Act defines rivers as deserving of legal protection because they are free-flowing and possess "outstandingly remarkable scenic, recreational, geologic, fish and wildlife, historic, cultural, or other similar values" or outstandingly remarkable values (ORVs).

What began with eight rivers has grown to include more than 12,700 miles legally-recognized wild, scenic and recreational rivers. In total, 209 rivers in 40 states and Puerto Rico are part of the National System.

River segments are classified in three categories: **wild, scenic and recreational**. Each category is defined by its accessibility and level of surrounding development. Wild rivers are primitive without development and are generally only accessible by trail, while recreational rivers are accessible by road or rail and may have shoreline or watershed developments. Scenic rivers fall in between. Overall, 56 rivers such as the Owyhee in Idaho and Oregon and the Sheenjek in Alaska fall exclusively into the wild category. 24 rivers fall exclusively into the scenic category, like the Pere Marquette in Michigan and Big Piney Creek in Arkansas, while 21 rivers such as the Allegheny in Pennsylvania and the Mississquoi and Trout Rivers in Vermont are considered exclusively recreational.

### Wild, Scenic, and Recreational Designations by Mileage



The states with the most Wild and Scenic River miles are:



Alaska  
3,210 miles, 25 rivers



Oregon  
1,839 miles, 57 rivers



California  
1,714 miles, 23 rivers

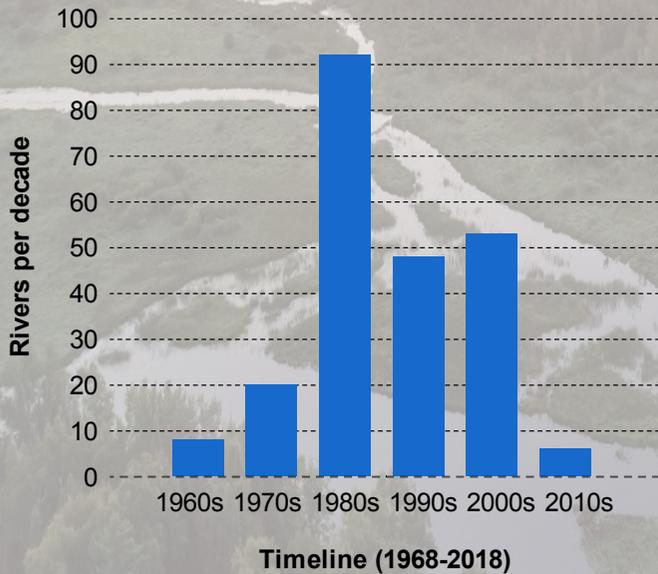


The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act was enacted at a time when Americans were becoming more environmentally aware. During the 1960s and 1970s, this changing consciousness gave rise to national policies protecting air, water, wilderness and endangered species. The National System of Wild and Scenic Rivers, created by the Act, lists each river and the federal agency or state responsible for managing its designation protecting its associated ORVs.

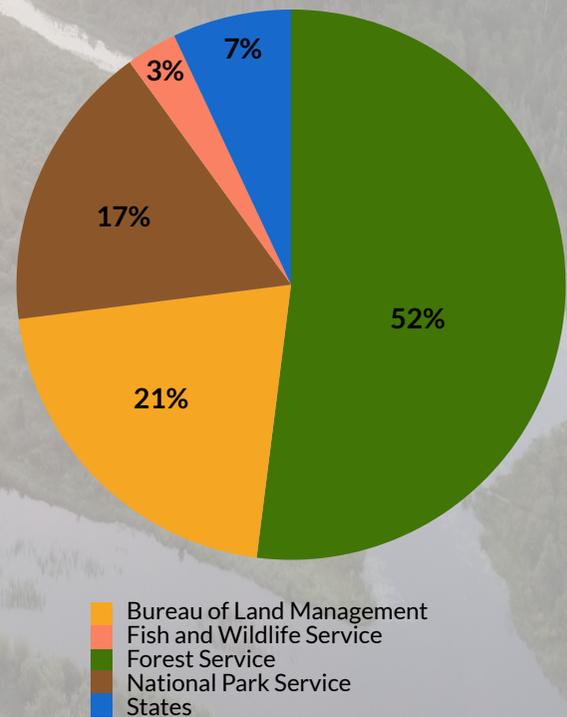
Following detailed study to determine if a river is suitable and has the public support to be protected, a Wild and Scenic River is generally designated by an act of Congress. The 1980s represented a decade of significant growth to the Wild and Scenic Rivers System due to the passage of laws that designated all 25 rivers in Alaska and most rivers in Oregon. Increases in the 1990s and 2000s resulted from state-wide river designation bills in Michigan and Arkansas, as well as the designation of 32 new rivers under the Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009. The most recent addition is East Rosebud Creek in Montana, designated in 2018.

The Bureau of Land Management, Fish and Wildlife Service, Forest Service and National Park Service manage designated rivers that flow through federal lands and work cooperatively with partner organizations and stakeholders on both federal and non-federal rivers. The Act notably safeguards 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.

### Growth of the Wild and Scenic River System



### River-Administering Agencies



Today, the Act continues to protect the special character of rivers while also balancing their role in economic growth, and encourages public participation in developing effective and long-term management strategies. Concerned citizens and river proponents collaborate with local industries on proposals like Washington's Wild Olympics wilderness, which would protect nearly 500 miles of rivers and more than 160,000 acres of land.

As water usage and construction projects increase, grassroots efforts continue to call attention to other special free-flowing rivers and the need to consider additional protections for them. The National Wild and Scenic River System's design helps protect the quality of free-flowing American rivers for current and future generations.