



THE NATIONAL WILD AND SCENIC RIVERS

The National Wild and Scenic Rivers System was created by Congress in 1980 (Public Law 96-542; 16 U.S.C. 1271 et seq.) to preserve certain rivers with outstanding natural, cultural, or recreational features in a free-flowing condition for the enjoyment of present and future generations. As of January 2000, the National System had grown from its initial eight components to a 158-river system with representation in 37 states.

Rivers may be designated by Congress usually following a study by a federal agency or the Secretary of the Interior. Each river is administered by either a federal agency (see individual river listing) or a state agency. The river designation may not include the entire river, but may include tributaries. For federally administered rivers, the designated boundaries usually average about 1/4 mile on each side of the river in order to protect related natural, cultural, and recreational values.

Rivers are classified as wild, scenic, or recreational. The following definitions are provided by the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act:

- "Wild" rivers—rivers or sections of rivers that are free of impoundments and generally inaccessible except by trail, with watersheds or shorelines essentially primitive and waters unpolluted. These represent vestiges of primitive America.
- "Scenic" rivers—rivers or sections of rivers that are free of impoundments, with shorelines or watersheds still largely undeveloped, but accessible in places by roads.
- "Recreational" rivers—rivers or sections of rivers that are readily accessible by road or railroad, that may have some development along their shorelines, and that may have undergone some impoundment or diversion in the past.

Rivers in the National System are often referred to as "wild and scenic rivers" without regard to actual classification. This is acceptable when speaking of the System in general, but the specific legal classification is an important distinction because it has a direct effect on how the river is administered and whether certain activities on federally owned land within the boundaries are permissible.

Regardless of classification, each designated river is administered with the goal of nondegradation and enhancement of the values that caused it to be designated. Other uses, including recreational, a variety of agricultural practices, and residential development, may continue. In most cases not all land within boundaries is or will be publicly owned. In fact, where there is a federal administering agency, there are limitations on how much land the agency is allowed to acquire. When recreating on any System river, users are cautioned to be aware of and respect private property rights.

The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission is prohibited from licensing projects on or directly affecting designated rivers. Other federal agencies cannot assist by loan, grant, license, or otherwise in the construction of any water resource project (such as dams, water diversions, channelization, and floodgates) that would have a direct and adverse effect on river values. However, designation does not affect existing water rights or existing jurisdiction of states and the United States over waters as determined by established principles of law.

For information concerning specific designated rivers, contact the office on this sheet identified as responsible for administering the river. For general questions concerning the wild and scenic rivers program, contact one of the following:

National Park Service U.S. Department of the Interior National Center for Recreation and Conservation 1849 C Street, N.W. Mail Stop: MIB 3023 Washington, DC 20240	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service U.S. Department of the Interior Division of Refuges 4401 N. Fairfax Drive Mail Stop: 670 ARJSG Arlington, VA 22203-6110
Bureau of Land Management U.S. Department of the Interior Rivers and Special Areas 1849 C Street, N.W. Suite 204 LS (WVC-240) Washington, DC 20240-9098	Forest Service U.S. Department of Agriculture Recreation, Heritage, and Wilderness Resources 201 14th Street, S.W. Washington, DC 20006

In addition to the National System, there are approximately 30 state systems which provide varying degrees of resource protection for many of the nation's rivers. For more information on state systems, contact:

National Park Service U.S. Department of the Interior National Center for Recreation and Conservation 1849 C Street, N.W. Mail Stop: MIB 3023 Washington, DC 20240	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service U.S. Department of the Interior Division of Refuges 4401 N. Fairfax Drive Mail Stop: 670 ARJSG Arlington, VA 22203-6110
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*Certain requirements must be met before the Secretary can make a designation:
—the river must have been designated into a state river protection system;
—the Governor of the state must notify the Secretary; and
—the Secretary must find that the river meets the necessary outstanding values and that the benefits will permanently exceed them.

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There are no Wild and Scenic Rivers in Hawaii.

Cover Photo: Owyhee River, Oregon, by Larry Olson

**NATIONAL WILD AND SCENIC RIVERS SYSTEM
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