

# Wild and Scenic Rivers Questions & Answers



Our region's last, remaining wild rivers give us clean water, world-class recreation, and unmatched opportunities for inspiration and solitude. They bring jobs and economic benefits to local communities and they provide critical habitat for salmon and steelhead, and other fish and wildlife.

The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act was passed in 1968 to protect our nation's last, best free-flowing rivers. Many of the Northwest's most iconic rivers are protected as Wild and Scenic -- the Rogue in Oregon, the Salmon in Idaho, and the Skagit in Washington.

## What does a Wild and Scenic designation mean for the river and its community?

### **A Wild and Scenic designation:**

- Protects a river's "outstandingly remarkable" values and free-flowing character
- Protects existing uses of the river
- Prohibits federally-licensed dams and other harmful water projects
- Establishes a ¼-mile protected corridor on both sides of the river
- Requires the creation of a cooperative river management plan that addresses resource protection, development of lands and facilities, user capacities, etc.



## Common questions about Wild and Scenic River designations

**How does a designation affect private land?** The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act carries no authority to regulate the use of privately-owned land; land use controls on private lands are a matter of state and local zoning. Administering agencies may highlight the need for amendment to local zoning, where such zoning occurs, in order to protect the river.

**Will a designation change how riverside lands are used?** Most current uses and activities on rivers and adjoining lands may continue. Primary consideration in any use limitation will be the protection and enhancement of the values for which the river was designated.

**Will access or recreation on the river be restricted?** River recreation (like fishing and boating) comprise some of the major uses Wild and Scenic designation seeks to protect. Public access to the river and recreational use of the public lands adjacent to a Wild and Scenic river will continue as before, unless the use clearly threatens the river's outstanding values – in which case it will be addressed in the management planning process.

Learn more at [www.AmericanRivers.org/GoWild](http://www.AmericanRivers.org/GoWild)



**Can the federal government force landowners to move because of Wild and Scenic designation?** No. The river study, enabling legislation, and subsequent management planning process will consider how best to protect river values while recognizing private property rights.

**Can riverside lands be developed?** Wild and Scenic River designation seeks to protect and enhance a river's current condition. Generally, future development levels must be compatible with the river's classification ('wild', 'scenic', or 'recreational'), which is established upon designation.

**Can local citizens have a say in designation?** There is ample opportunity for public input at many stages of the designation process. Public comments are considered when the agency determines the eligibility and suitability of a river, and when a study report is released. Also, local citizens can help craft the management plan for a Wild and Scenic river.

**How does designation affect existing water rights?** Existing, valid water rights are not affected by designation. Alterations to existing irrigation or water withdrawal facilities may be approved as long as there is no direct and adverse effect to the values for which the river was designated.

### Three types of Wild and Scenic Rivers

- **“Wild” rivers** – free of impoundments, generally inaccessible except by trail, shorelines essentially primitive and unpolluted waters
- **“Scenic” rivers** -- free of impoundments, with shorelines or watersheds still largely primitive and undeveloped, but accessible in places by roads
- **“Recreational” rivers** -- readily accessible by road or railroad, may have some development along their shorelines, and may have undergone some impoundment or diversion in the past



### What is the process for designating a Wild and Scenic River?

Rivers can be added to the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System in one of two ways. The traditional way is that Congress passes Wild and Scenic legislation and then it is signed into law by the President (similar to Wilderness designation). The other way is for the Governor of a state to petition the Secretary of the Interior to add a river to the system.

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*Photo Credits: Rafting on Snoqualmie River courtesy of Thomas O'Keefe, Fishing on the Deschutes and Bald Eagle with salmon courtesy of Paul Bannick*

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