



Wild and Scenic Rivers Program



Alagnak Wild River in Katmai National Park and Preserve (Alaska). NPS PHOTO

Background

National Wild and Scenic Rivers (WSRs) are federally-protected areas designated by Congress or by the Secretary of the Interior under the 1968 Wild and Scenic Rivers Act (Act). The National Park Service (NPS) is responsible for managing rivers throughout the United States. The Act requires the NPS to protect and enhance a designated river's free-flowing condition, water quality, and outstandingly remarkable values. To meet these responsibilities the NPS National Leadership Council approved the formation of a servicewide Wild and Scenic Rivers (WSR) Program in May 2007.

The WSR Program is composed of a Steering Committee with interim leadership shared by the Associate Directorships for Partnerships and Civic Engagement (PCE) and Natural Resources Stewardship and Science (NRSS) until funding is secured for permanent staff.

The mission of the WSR Program is to develop and implement a comprehensive servicewide program to meet the legislative requirements of the WSR Act, improve internal and external communication and coordination, educate NPS staff, stakeholders, and the public about the importance of wild and scenic rivers, and protect the river resources under our care.

The need for coordinated, consistent action on WSR issues remains strong, particularly in light of recent court decisions dismissing NPS arguments related to the Section 7 determination for the Stillwater Bridge crossing on the Saint Croix National Scenic River and user capacity provisions of the Comprehensive River Management Plan for the Merced River at Yosemite National Park.

Highlights and Accomplishments

The WSR Program has developed a process for defining resources values that are required to be protected and enhanced under the WSR Act. This information is essential for the evaluation of water resource projects within and near designated segments. Wild and scenic river value statements have been completed for the Merced River, Missouri National Recreational River, the Musconetcong National Wild and Scenic River, the Niobrara Scenic River, the Obed Wild and Scenic River, the Rio Grande Wild and Scenic River, the Snake River Headwaters, the Tuolumne River, the Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreational River, Middle Delaware National Scenic and Recreational River, Lower Delaware National Wild and Scenic River, and the Virgin River and its tributaries. The program has created a Junior River Ranger program for the Farmington, Sudbury/Assabet/Concord, and Westfield

River that will stimulate the development of similar programs on other rivers.

In addition, the program is working to complete Directors Order 46 to guide the consistent management of rivers servicerwide, developing training programs with the Interagency Wild and Scenic Rivers Coordinating Council (IWSRCC), participating on the newly established User Management Interagency Group, developing WSR guidance for incorporation into NPS Foundation documents, and continuing to provide guidance and technical assistance on comprehensive management plans and Section 7 evaluations of water resources projects including streambank stabilization, road relocation, bridge replacement and construction projects, and hydro-fracking.

Status and Future

A number of requests for funding have been submitted to support the WSR Program, but due to the economic climate none have been successful and the program continues to operate using collateral staff. The program is being co-managed by staff from the Associate Directorships from PCE and NRSS in coordination with the WSR Steering Committee while we continue to seek permanent funding.

In the interim, the program will continue to fulfill the following responsibilities: conduct congressionally mandated studies of rivers for potential inclusion in the System; provide encouragement and technical assistance to others who are interested in river conservation;

collaborate with local, state and/or non-governmental entities in the management of “partnership” rivers, as designated by Congress; review section 2(a)(ii) applications that state governors submit to the Secretary of the Interior to have rivers in their states designated as part of the system; maintain a Nationwide Rivers Inventory and consult with state and federal agencies on the preservation of the potential WSR values of inventoried rivers; and provide support to all WSRs so that the Act’s requirements are met regarding protection of river values, planning, designation of boundaries, and classification.

More Information

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