



BACKGROUND: OUR NATIONAL WILD AND SCENIC RIVERS SYSTEM

Congress passed into law the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act in 1968, establishing the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System (NWSRS). The fundamental intent was to provide a system of designations to preserve free-flowing rivers based on their nationally significant and outstandingly remarkable values, including scenic, recreational, geologic, fish and wildlife, historic, cultural, or other similar values. The three classes of wild and scenic rivers as defined by the Act are:

- Wild Rivers—Those 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—Those rivers or sections of rivers that are free of impoundments, with shorelines or watersheds still largely primitive and shorelines largely undeveloped, but accessible in places by roads.
- Recreational Rivers—Those 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.

Today, the system includes over 13,400 river miles in 41 states and Puerto Rico. However, this is less than one-quarter of one percent of the nation's rivers. The package of bills we are considering in the House would represent a significant expansion of protected rivers by protecting over 1,000 river miles as components of the NWSRS.

- Title II includes designations for 479.8 river miles in Northwest California.
- Title III includes designations for 230.8 river miles in Central California.
- Title IV includes designations 45.5 river miles in California's San Gabriel Mountains.
- Title VI includes designations for 464.5 river miles on the Olympic Peninsula in Washington.

Any river segment may be proposed for designation as a component of the NWSRS and there is no requirement for a river segment to be studied prior to congressional designation. On federal lands, the Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and National Park Service all manage river segments within their jurisdiction. Wild and scenic rivers flowing entirely through non-federal lands are commonly referred to as "partnership wild and scenic rivers." Partnership rivers do not transfer ownership to the federal government and these rivers are generally managed by a state or local entity through cooperative agreements with the NPS. For a river segment crossing both federal and non-federal land, the adjacent federal agency will typically provide technical assistance and other resources through a cooperative agreement with the non-federal landowner.

Wild and scenic rivers are intended to complement the established national policy of dam construction on U.S. rivers. Beyond clean water protections, the primary intent of a designation is to limit in-river construction projects or other activities that would impact a river's flow. Transmission lines over rivers, selective timber thinning near rivers, and other development have been permitted so long as they don't have a "direct and adverse effect" on the purposes for which a river segment was designated.