



Wild and Scenic Rivers & Habitat Restoration Projects



American Rivers
Thriving By Nature

Just as we have National Park and Wilderness designations to protect the nation's most special lands, we have Wild and Scenic River designations to protect our highest-quality rivers. Wild and Scenic designation permanently protects a river's free-flowing character, water quality and outstanding values such as fish, wildlife, scenery, recreation, and cultural resources. The National Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, signed into law in 1968, is the strongest tool available to protect high-quality, free-flowing rivers. The National Wild and Scenic Rivers System now includes more than 12,000 miles along 252 rivers in 40 states.

How does a Wild and Scenic River Designation Affect Proposed Habitat Restoration Activities?

A frequently-asked question about Wild and Scenic River designation is how it affects potential projects to restore ecological function to a river, such as projects to restore salmon habitat. There are many examples of successful restoration projects that have been implemented on designated Wild and Scenic Rivers (see below).

General guidelines

The Interagency Wild and Scenic Rivers Coordinating Council¹ gives guidance on construction and placement of fish and habitat structures on Wild and Scenic Rivers. Generally, structures to enhance fish and wildlife habitat are allowed; provided they

- allow the area to remain natural in appearance
- are compatible with the river's classification (wild/scenic/recreational), and
- harmonize with the surrounding environment.

Even some structures that may affect the free-flowing nature of the river are sometimes allowed if they

- mimic naturally occurring events (such as trees falling in/across the river, opening or closing of existing secondary channels etc.)
- do not create unusual hazards for recreation, and
- do not prevent naturally-occurring events such as bank erosion or debris movement.

Structures should be made of native materials (logs, boulders etc), placed in locations, positions or quantities that mimic natural conditions, and anchoring materials such as cables and rebar should be installed in such a manner as to be visually acceptable.

Project Review

Any proposed federally-assisted² project within the bed or banks of a Wild and Scenic River requires a formal consultation with the federal Wild and Scenic River managing agency, unless it is very minor maintenance of an existing project. This review, required under Section 7 of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act (WSRA), is one of the strongest protections of the WSRA and determines whether the

¹ Comprised of the four federal agencies that manage the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System: U.S. Forest Service, National Park Service, Bureau of Land Management, and U.S. Fish & Wildlife.

² Federally-assisted: requires a permit, license, funding or technical assistance from a federal agency

project is likely to have a ‘direct and adverse’ effect on the river’s free-flowing character, water quality, or “outstandingly remarkable values³.” If the WSR managing agency finds that the project is likely to have a direct and adverse effect, the agency may suggest changes to the project’s design in order to avoid the adverse impacts to these values and a revised proposal can be resubmitted for review. If the project can not be revised accordingly, federal assistance cannot continue.

Many restoration projects meet the criteria of being within the bed or banks and having a federal nexus, and therefore are subject to a Section 7 review. It should be noted that many other types of projects, such as road and bridge repairs and bank stabilization, which in many cases are done without meaningful consideration of protecting river values and flow, also benefit from this review. Many projects which would have been detrimental to the health of the river and fish and wildlife have been redesigned to be much more river and habitat-friendly as a result of the Section 7 review.⁴

Although the Section 7 review does add another layer of review, early coordination between project proponents and the WSR managing agency in the design of the project can ensure that the project meets the requirements of the WSRA, while avoiding significant additional time or expense in the design and completion of the project. In many cases, there are a number of review/permits required for restoration projects, particularly where listed species are involved; with appropriate planning the Section 7 review can be integrated with these other required reviews and associated environmental analysis.

Potential additional resources with Wild and Scenic designation

Wild and Scenic River designation can be helpful in securing funding and other resources for restoration projects, and in this manner can provide opportunities for restoration work. Although it is difficult to trace a direct ‘cause and effect’ relationship between Wild and Scenic designation and gaining additional funding (as so many factors go into the application and receipt of funds), many project proponents and agency staff believe that the designation is quite helpful in bumping projects up on funding priority lists, and providing access to funding sources that would not have been available without the federal nexus that the Wild and Scenic River designation provides. For example, on the Skagit Wild and Scenic River, Title II Resource Advisory Committee (RAC) funds allowed habitat restoration projects to take place on private lands within the designated corridor; without the federal nexus, this funding source would not have been available to these projects.

Additionally, Wild and Scenic designation can be helpful in obtaining resources in the form of technical assistance on restoration projects from staff in various agencies. For several examples of how designation has been helpful in this area, please see “*Beyond Banning Dams: Benefits of Wild and Scenic River Designation for Northwest and National River Systems*” (American Rivers, 2009).

Balancing ecological function and recreation

Section 10 of the WSRA clearly states that the goal for administering a designated river is to ‘protect and enhance the values’ for which it was designated. Particularly on rivers where fisheries has been determined to be an outstandingly remarkable value, consideration will be given in the Section 7 review to projects that enhance the overall fisheries value.

The federal river managing agency must balance protection of all of the outstandingly remarkable values. For rivers where recreation has also been determined to be an outstanding value, habitat restoration projects for fish will be balanced with maintaining a quality recreational experience. However, even in cases where both fisheries and recreation are outstanding values, such as the highly popular Metolius

³ ‘Outstandingly Remarkable Values’ are determined by a federal agency during a formal Wild and Scenic River eligibility study. Examples include fish, wildlife, scenery, recreation, cultural/historical values, etc.

⁴ See fact sheet “Wild and Scenic Rivers and Road and Bridge Projects”

Wild and Scenic River in Oregon, which is outlined below, habitat restoration projects are being implemented. Similarly, On the Upper Rogue River, the 'Wild' reach is closed to both commercial and private boating in order to allow for maximum wood recruitment. When deciding to close sections of the river to commercial boating, the Forest Supervisor noted "a key objective in maintaining a natural to near-natural riverine system is the allowance of in-stream woody material to remain which creates a conflict with providing a safe boating experience" in the Environmental Assessment.

Within three years of designation, the federal river managing agency must complete a Wild and Scenic River management plan. Development of the plan involves a coordinated public process, in which all interested river stakeholders can participate. Through this process, a vision for the river and how it should be managed will be developed; goals, direction and guidance for enhancement of the river's outstanding values can and should be a main element of the plan.

Examples of Restoration Projects on Wild and Scenic Rivers

Metolius River (Oregon)



Metolius River (U.S. Forest Service)

The Metolius River was historically the most important area upstream of the Pelton Round Butte Dams for spawning and rearing of spring Chinook salmon. However, removal of in-stream woody material during the early part of the past century significantly reduced the quality of available habitat for Chinook in the mainstem Metolius River. The Upper Deschutes Watershed Council and the Deschutes National Forest have begun a project to improve habitat quality and availability by restoring up to 920 whole trees to 174 restoration sites along 9.8 miles of the river. Woody material ranges from

12" in diameter to 20" in diameter, with a (general) maximum of 12 pieces per site. The project is an important step toward creating the habitat necessary to support strong, self-sustaining Chinook salmon populations above the Pelton Round Butte dams.

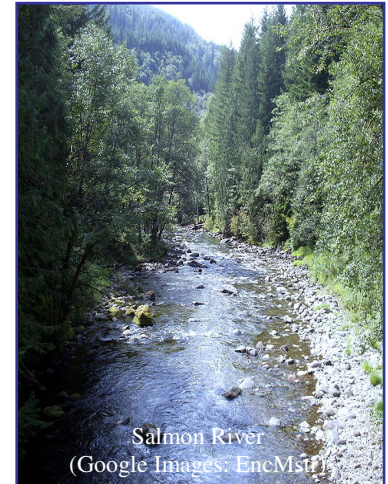
Because fish and recreation are both outstandingly remarkable values for the Metolius, the federal Wild and Scenic River managing agency must manage the river to protect both values. Development of the Wild and Scenic River management plan provided an important framework for direction on management. In certain reaches of the river, habitat restoration has been prioritized over recreation, for example, no wood manipulation is allowed for recreation downstream of Bridge 99, a popular boating reach.

According to Mike Riehle, Fish Biologist for the U.S. Forest Service on the project, the Wild and Scenic designation has helped with funding and has provided important direction for management of the river. The Wild and Scenic designation "opens the door to grants and projects by giving them a higher level ranking" than would occur without the designation and "helps us to do a lot more than [simply] recruit funding." The designation has "helped to define the issues for the wood restoration and direct future management."

Salmon River (Oregon)

The Salmon River is one of the few rivers in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System to be designated for its entire length. It is home to important Chinook, coho, and steelhead populations. Wild and Scenic River designation has been instrumental in restoring habitat on the Salmon River in several ways.

- After floods in the 1960s, the river was channelized and cleared of woody debris, which drastically affected the health of the river for decades. The USFS, along with Clackamas County, decided that past efforts to clear and channelize the river had been ineffective, and the Wild and Scenic designation motivated them to look at natural management practices. As a result, they decided not to remove wood that had been swept into the river, despite strong opposition from landowners. Wild and Scenic designation gave them leverage to back up their stance and do what was right for the health of the river.
- After the river was designated in 1988, the USFS has restored 29 side channels since 1992, working with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, Oregon Trout, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), the Sandy River Basin Watershed Council, and ten other Sandy Basin partners. The BLM, which oversees management of the lower Salmon Wild and Scenic River, has also been leading side channel restoration efforts, primarily in the lower river, restoring important habitat for anadromous fish.
- A constructed dike in the lower Salmon River blocked water flow to a side channel which provides key spawning and over-wintering rearing habitat for winter steelhead, cutthroat trout, and coho salmon. After the river was designated as Wild and Scenic, the BLM began devising a plan to address this problem. Consultation required by the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act ensured coordination between the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, the Oregon Department of Water Resources, and the Army Corps of Engineers to design a project design that would protect the river's health. The dike was breached and a surface flow diversion structure was implemented with a headgate screened by natural or natural looking materials. Overall, the project has re-established roughly 2,700 square meters of important anadromous fish habitat.



From a regulatory perspective, the Section 7 consultation required by the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act and direction for natural restoration contained in the Salmon Wild and Scenic River management plan caused the USFS to drop several rock or hard material projects in favor of more natural designs with organic materials.

Skagit River (Washington)



The Skagit River is home to strong populations of salmon, steelhead and bull trout, and is one of the most important rivers flowing into Puget Sound. In the winter, one of the largest bald eagle populations in the lower 48 states flocks to the Skagit River for its strong salmon runs. The Skagit flows through a diversity of lands, and it offers outstanding scenic and recreational values to a number of communities.

Perry Welch, project manager of the Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group (SFEG), describes how the Wild and Scenic designation helps their work on the Skagit River:

“We find this designation very helpful when seeking grant funds for working on the Skagit because funders generally like to fund projects on productive systems, and the WSR designation helps in the characterization of the Skagit as an important resource. The designation also helps to create a nexus between the federal government and non-federal property along the river and makes some projects on private or other public lands eligible for Forest Service funding such as Title II Resource Advisory Committee (RAC) funds. This also enables restoration proponents to pull in the USFS as project partners on non-federally owned parcels.

“Examples from SFEG include the Morgan Creek Assessment and Restoration Design, which was funded by RAC and which led to a FishAmerica grant using National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Restoration funds to remove a partial fish passage barrier on private land near Ross Island Slough in 2007. [This] enabled access to over 3 miles of habitat. Another example is Suiattle Slough Fish Passage repair, funded by RAC, which led to the replacement of a deteriorating WA Department of Fish and Wildlife fishway on WA Department of Natural Resources land, which provides great coho spawning and rearing habitat on the lower Suiattle River, which drains into the Sauk River.”

Phil Kincare, the Forest Service Skagit Assistant River Manager, values the designation for the way it facilitates coordination. The USFS works with the SFEG, the Skagit River System Cooperative (Sauk-Suiattle and Swinomish Indian Tribes), the Upper Skagit Indian Tribe, Seattle City Light, other state and local agencies, non-governmental organizations and interagency committees to oversee the management of this Wild and Scenic River. The designation also gives the USFS, as the federal river managing agency, a voice on the Skagit Watershed Council (the lead entity for Salmon Recovery Fund Board grants) and influence on project design that can benefit natural resources when, for example, the Army Corps of Engineers and the Federal Emergency Management Agency are planning and implementing projects in the river corridor. In addition, Kincare notes that the designation has “helped us get a better handle on some of the downstream” areas of the river, outside of the designated section but still affecting the river. “We have the opportunity to have at least some type of a voice” over the entire length of the river.

The designation has been helpful “particularly for land acquisition and land conservation.” It has allowed the USFS to compete for funds to acquire land in voluntary, willing-seller agreements with private landowners within the Wild and Scenic River corridor but outside the national forest boundary. As a result of the designation, the USFS has been able to acquire land, implement habitat restoration projects and develop areas for public access to the river.