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Comprehensive Plan



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WASHINGTON STATE PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION

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TO: Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission
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SUBJECT: F-6 Scenic Rivers Program - Report

DATA:

Scenic Rivers Act

Chapter 79.72 RCW passed by the 1977 Legislature established a scenic river system for the state of Washington. The purpose of the law is to protect and preserve the natural character of the state's most scenic rivers. The act states:

The legislature hereby finds that many rivers of this state, with their immediate environs, possess outstanding natural, scenic, historical, ecological, and recreational values of present and future benefit to the public. The legislature further finds that the policy of permitting the construction of dams and other impoundment facilities at appropriate sections of the rivers of this state needs to be complemented by a policy that would protect and preserve the natural character of such rivers and fulfill other conservation purposes. It is hereby declared to be the policy of this state that certain selected rivers of the state which, with their immediate environs, possess the aforementioned characteristics, shall be preserved in as natural a condition as practical and that overuse of such rivers, which tends to downgrade their natural condition, shall be discouraged. (Ref. RCW 79.72.010)

Committee of Participating Agencies to Oversee the Scenic Rivers Program

The law created a Committee of Participating Agencies to approve policies for the program's operation and direction.

. . .the committee of participating agencies . . . composed of the executive head, or executive's designee, of each of the state departments of ecology, fisheries, game (now wildlife),

natural resources and highways, the state parks and recreation commission, the interagency committee for outdoor recreation, the Washington state association of counties and the association of Washington cities. In addition, the governor shall appoint two public members of the committee. (Ref. RCW 79.72.020(2))

While the Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission is directed to develop and adopt management policies for publicly owned or leased land on the designated scenic rivers, ". . . all such policies shall be subject to review by the Committee of Participating Agencies." (Ref. RCW 79.72.030(1)) Also, the Committee ". . . shall determine the boundaries which shall define the river area associated with any included river. . . (Ref. RCW 79.72.030(4)) and determine publicly owned or leased lands which are unsuitable to be managed as part of the system.

The law establishes the Chairman of the Parks and Recreation Commission or the Chairman's designee as the chair of any meetings of the Committee, in addition to being a committee member.

The membership of the Committee changes when a specific river or river segment of the state's scenic river system is being considered. Representatives of each local jurisdiction associated with the designated scenic river are asked to participate as a member of the Committee.

Commission Shall Administer the Management Program for the System

The Commission is given the authority for scenic river management. The Commission ". . . shall have the responsibility for coordinating the development of the program between affected state agencies and participating local governments, and . . . shall develop and adopt rules and regulations . . . for each portion of the system, which shall implement the management policies. . . " RCW 79.72.040(1). The policies affect publicly owned or leased land within the designated river area. State Parks currently owns no land on any of the designated river segments on the Skykomish River system.

The law further gives the Commission the authority ". . . to adopt regulations identifying river classifications which reflect the characteristics common to various segments of scenic rivers and may adopt management policies consistent with local government's shoreline management master plans appropriate for each such river classification." (Ref. RCW 79.72.030.(1)) All such policies are subject to review by the Committee. Once such a policy has been approved by the majority vote of the Committee, it shall be adopted by the Commission.

Impact on Private Lands

Nothing in the law grants to the Committee or the Commission, the power to restrict the use of private land without either the specific written consent of the owner or the acquisition of rights in real property authorized by RCW 79.72.040. The right of eminent domain is not to be

used in any purchase made in regards to this system. The Commission ". . . is authorized, subject to approval by majority vote of the members of the committee, to: (a) Purchase, within the river area, real property in fee or lesser right or interest in real property including, but not limited to scenic easements and future development rights, visual corridors, wildlife habitats, unique ecological areas, historical sites, camping and picnic areas, boat launching sites . . . and (b) purchase, outside of a river area, public access to the river area." (Ref. RCW 79.72.040(2))

Impact on Trust Lands and Other Public Programs

All state government agencies and local governments are directed ". . . to pursue policies with regard to their respective activities, functions, powers, and duties which are designed to conserve and enhance the conditions of rivers which have been included in the system. . ." (Ref. RCW 79.72.050(1)). However, nothing in the law ". . . shall authorize the modification of a shoreline management plan adopted by a local government. . . without the approval of the department of ecology and local government." (Ref. RCW 79.72.050 (1)). Nothing in this law prohibits the Department of Natural Resources from exercising its full responsibilities and obligations for the management of state trust lands. And nothing in the law affects the authority of the Departments of Fisheries and Game (Wildlife) to manage for the harvest of fish or wildlife within the designated river area. (Ref. RCW 79.72.050)

History of Program Development

Early efforts to move the program into active scenic river designation and land use management were stifled by several limiting factors. Selection of scenic rivers relies on extensive information on river resources including information on the ecological, economic, recreational, aesthetic, botanical, scenic, geological, hydrological, fish and wildlife, historical, cultural, archeological and scientific features. Incomplete resource inventories and lack of coordination between resource agencies delayed river studies.

Public reaction to the program was strong because the program was perceived to include extensive public control of private land.

Continual requests by State Parks for program staffing and supporting budget were not funded.

In the 1970s there was not widespread threat to free-flowing rivers and little interest in commercial damming of the rivers. The region-wide Hydro Assessment Study, conducted by the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA), began in August 1984, to assess the potential of small hydropower development on small rivers and streams in the Northwest. This triggered a resurgence of public interest in the protection of free-flowing Washington rivers. The Scenic River legislation addresses this river conservation issue:

. . . the policy of permitting the construction of dams and other impoundment facilities . . . needs to be complemented by a policy that would protect and preserve the natural character of such rivers and fulfill other conservation purposes. (Ref. RCW 79.72.010)

The Hydro Assessment Study initiated the Pacific Northwest Rivers Study, developed to determine river areas which have outstanding natural resource or recreation values and which should have protection from hydropower development. This study was completed at the end of 1986 and provides comprehensive river resource data for the entire state.

As part of the Rivers Study, a survey of river recreation in Washington was conducted. Over 500 questionnaires were returned. Some 233 river reaches were identified and evaluated for water dependent recreational use, encompassing 2,500 river miles. (Washington State includes over 50,000 miles of rivers and streams.) Of the 233 reaches, 39 percent (91) were rated as having high recreational value; 45 percent (104) as above average; 15 percent (36) as average and one percent (2) as below average.

Scenic River Boundaries

The law establishes a program for managing publicly owned land on designated scenic rivers and a procedure for adding additional components to the system. Portions of the upper Skykomish and some tributaries are designated as Scenic Rivers in the 1977 act.

The Committee of Participating Agencies, by majority vote, determines the boundaries for the river areas defined as scenic rivers and was specifically instructed to do so for the Skykomish River and its identified tributaries within one year of enactment of the law, September 21, 1977. After several public meetings in Snohomish County, a 200 foot width, river area boundary on either side of the river was proposed for public lands on the Skykomish River system and was adopted at a public meeting on September 19, 1978. This boundary matches the boundary of the Shoreline Management Act.

Additions to the Scenic Rivers System

The legislature may add additional rivers to the system:

The Committee shall seek and receive comments from the public regarding potential additions to the system, shall initiate studies, and may, through the department (Commission) submit to any session of the legislature proposals for additions to the state scenic river system. These proposals shall be accompanied by a detailed report on the factors which, in the committee's judgment, make an area a worthy addition to the system. (Ref. RCW 79.72.030(6))

To be eligible for inclusion in the Scenic River System a river should ideally meet the following criteria as set forth in RCW 79.72.060:

- (1) Is free-flowing without diversions that hinder recreational use;
- (2) Has a streamway that is relatively unmodified by riprapping and other stream bank protection;
- (3) Has water of sufficient quality and quantity to be deemed worthy of protection;
- (4) Has a relatively natural setting and adequate open space;
- (5) Requires some coordinated plan of management in order to enhance and preserve the river area; and
- (6) Has some lands along its length already in public ownership, or the possibility for purchase or dedication of public access and/or scenic easements.

During 1987 the Committee of Participating Agencies has studied and evaluated 56 rivers for their potential inclusion in the Scenic Rivers Program. The following 17 rivers have been selected for additional public review and potential recommendation to the Commission and the 1988 Legislature.

1. Stillaguamish - Headwaters of North and South Forks to Puget Sound
2. Nooksack - South Fork and North Fork/mainstream above confluence with South Fork
3. Green - Kanasket-Palmer State Park to City of Kent
4. Grande Ronde - Oregon-Washington border to confluence with Snake River
5. Columbia - "Hanford Reach;" Priest Rapids Dam to Richland city limits
6. Cispus - Headwaters to confluence with Cowlitz River
7. Lewis - From headwaters to back water at Swift Reservoir
8. White Salmon - Trout Lake Creek to Northwestern Lake
9. Washougal - Headwaters to confluence with the Columbia River
10. Wenatchee - Lake Wenatchee to confluence with the Columbia
11. Methow - Headwaters to the confluence with the Columbia River, including the Chewack and Twisp Rivers
12. Wynoochee - Entire river below Wynoochee Dam

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13. Humptulips - East and west forks and mainstem to town of Humptulips
14. Soleduck - Headwaters to Highway 101 crossing near Forks
15. Duckabush - Entire length
16. Kettle - Entire U.S. segments to backwater of Lake Roosevelt
17. Little Spokane - From State Highway 291 to confluence of the Spokane River

The following is a summary of the process used by the committee to select the seventeen rivers identified for further consideration.

First Sort: Resource Quality

The first step in the actual study process was to determine which rivers had the variety of exceptional natural, cultural, and recreational values required of Scenic River candidates. Several new river inventories have only recently made it possible to do statewide analysis of the quality of river resources. The most notable is the Pacific Northwest Rivers Study, funded by the Bonneville Power Administration and conducted by state and federal agencies in the four Northwest states. This computerized inventory contains historic and archaeological resources along more than 2,000 river segments in Washington State. River segments are rated on a value scale from "outstanding" to "limited" for each resource. Because of the emphasis on a variety of exceptional resources in the Scenic River criteria, the first selection step was to identify all river segments in the Rivers Study data base with more than one resource with an "outstanding" rating. This step resulted in the identification of 385 river segments.

Another source of resource information used in the selection process were special fisheries studies compiled by the Washington Departments of Wildlife and Fisheries, and the Nationwide Rivers Inventory. The fisheries studies identified 24 rivers with outstanding resident fisheries and 18 with outstanding anadromous fisheries. A third source was the Nationwide Rivers Inventory, published by the U.S. Department of the Interior in 1982. This inventory was developed to identify rivers which would, by virtue of their exceptional natural, cultural, scenic, or recreation resources, qualify for further consideration for the National Wild and Scenic River System. This Inventory identified 26 rivers in Washington State that meet these criteria.

Resource Mapping

The second step of the process was to map all of the segments and rivers identified as outstanding in the resource inventories: the 385 reaches from the Pacific Northwest Rivers Study, the 24 resident fishery and 18 anadromous fishery rivers from the fisheries studies, and the 26 rivers

from the Nationwide Rivers Inventory. Mapping was done at the 1:500,000 scale on USGS base sheets.

After all resource information was mapped, public meetings were held throughout the state to introduce people to the Scenic Rivers Program in general and the selection process specifically. While participation was less than anticipated, the response to the presentations was enthusiastic.

Second Sort: Continuous Length of Segments

Because of the emphasis on long, continuous segments in the Scenic River criteria, the next step was to determine which rivers had long reaches that had been identified as outstanding under one or more of the resource inventories. On the basis of a visual examination of the resource inventory maps, 56 rivers were identified that met this criteria. While segments were not actually measured, it is estimated that the minimum length was approximately 25 miles. In a few cases, rivers which had breaks in outstanding segments were included on the list of 56 rivers if they had been rated as outstanding over much of their entire length.

Third Sort: Geographical Distribution, Expert Opinion

The 56 rivers identified in the resource analyses, plus six others identified through public review, are formally defined as "rivers under consideration" by the Washington Scenic Rivers Program, and are listed in Appendix A. While all of these rivers may be eligible for Scenic River status, the selection continued in order to determine which of these rivers would be appropriate for immediate Scenic River consideration. The next step in this sequence was to choose the best candidate or candidates in each of the major geographic areas of Washington State. The basis for these choices was the expert opinion of members of the Committee of Participating Agencies and leaders of local river conservation groups. While this was a subjective evaluation, the breadth of experience among the evaluators make this a credible basis for choosing rivers for further consideration. In two steps, the list of rivers under study was cut to 33 and then to 26 rivers.

Field Evaluations

Tours were conducted on the 26 rivers remaining in the study process. Where possible, the Committee and other evaluators floated the study segments. Elsewhere, evaluations were conducted from parallel roads or trails. The purposes of the field evaluation were to familiarize the evaluators with the rivers and to photograph and conduct scenic evaluations of the rivers corridors. Scenic values were recorded on a consistent Scenic Evaluation Worksheet. The 26 rivers evaluated in the field are listed in Appendix A.

The field analysis also included meetings with local river interests in communities along the river under consideration. In some instances, persons representing local interests accompanied the evaluators on field

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trips along the rivers. These local contacts provided a useful introduction to issues and concerns in riverfront communities.

Fourth Sort: Geographical Distribution, Expert Opinion

The next step was for the Committee to again choose the best candidates from each geographical region of the state. Several areas, including the Olympic Peninsula and Puget Sound regions, had a disproportionately high number of rivers on the list of 26 rivers. On the basis of expert opinion, this list was reduced to 17 rivers. Having passed through sorts on natural, cultural, and recreational resource value, continuous length, geographical distribution, and scenic value, these 17 rivers are those described further in this report as candidates for the Washington State Scenic Rivers System.

Public Review

The next step is for the Committee of Participating Agencies to publish its report concerning the river selection process and its recommendations for public review and input. The report is scheduled for publication and distribution in March 1988.

Presentation of Committee recommendations to the Commission is scheduled for next fall and final recommendations to be presented to 1988 legislature for its consideration.