

**Opportunity to Advocate for Protection of Rivers on the Colville, Okanogan,
and Wenatchee National Forests
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Introduction

The Forest Service is developing a new Forest Plan for the Colville, Okanogan, and Wenatchee National Forests that will guide management for the next decade or more. The last plan was published in 1990. Of interest to river advocates, these plans evaluate rivers for Wild and Scenic designation. Once a river is determined to be suitable for designation it is managed to protect its free-flowing nature until Congress has an opportunity to take action.

In its previous 1990 plan the Forest Service determined that the Little Wenatchee, Rattlesnake Creek, Tieton, Naches, and Cooper were not suitable for Wild and Scenic designation. They found that these rivers did not have outstanding remarkable values of regional or national significance. These rivers are obviously significant resources for the whitewater community and with the increase in creek boating since 1990, the Forest Service needs to reevaluate these rivers. We are working closely with our colleagues at American Rivers and other organizations to make sure this review happens but we need public support.

Action Item

We need your help in sending comments through the Forest Service website. Go to <http://www.fs.fed.us/r6/wenatchee/forest-plan/> and click on “Contact Us” or write directly to:

Margaret Hartzell
National Forests Plan Revision Team
1240 Second Avenue South
Okanogan, WA 98840

For your comments to be most effective pick a river or rivers that you know personally. If you are a guidebook author, frequent road tripper, or just love rivers reference your expertise. Make the case for what makes these rivers unique, rare, or exemplary and of regional or national significance that rise to the level of “outstanding remarkable values”. Note where you live and if appropriate make the case that you are willing to travel long distances to use the river resources for recreational purposes. We have provided the Forest Service review of selected rivers along with our own review that will hopefully provide the stimulus you need to provide effective comments.

Rivers that were found eligible in the 1990 plan include the Kettle and South Fork Salmo in the Colville; Canyon Creek, Chewuch, Granite Creek, Lost, Methow, Pasayten, Ruby Creek, Twisp, and Wolf Creek in the Okanogan; and American, Chiwawa, Cle Elum, Entiat, Icicle Creek, Napeequa, Waptus, Wenatchee, and White in the Wenatchee.

Background on Wild and Scenic Eligibility

To be eligible for designation, a river must be free-flowing and possess one or more Outstandingly Remarkable Values (ORV): these values can include scenery, recreation, geology, fish, wildlife, prehistory, history, or other values (e.g. hydrology, paleontology, botany, etc.) At least one of these must be an ORV for the river to be Wild and Scenic.

As outlined in Forest Service guidelines, the key point is that “in order to be assessed as outstandingly remarkable, a river-related value must be a unique, rare, or exemplary feature that is significant at a comparative regional or national scale.” Specifically the value must represent a “conspicuous example from among a number of similar values that are themselves uncommon or extraordinary.”

Of particular interest to kayakers are the scenery and recreation. The Forest Service goes on to describe guidelines for evaluating these specific values:

Scenery: The landscape elements of landform, vegetation, water, color and related factors result in notable or exemplary visual features and/or attractions. When analyzing scenic values, additional factors—such as seasonal variations in vegetation, scale of cultural modifications, and the length of time negative intrusions are viewed—may be considered. Scenery and visual attractions may be highly diverse over the majority of the river or segment.

Recreation: Recreational opportunities are, or have the potential to be, popular enough to attract visitors from throughout or beyond the region of comparison or are unique or rare within the region. Visitors are willing to travel long distances to use the river resources for recreational purposes.

When writing comments think about how the river meets these standards. If you would like to comment on other river values beyond just scenery and recreation and have an interest in viewing the complete standards the Forest Service uses please contact American Whitewater.

Detailed Review of Selected Rivers (please contact us if you'd like information on others).

LITTLE WENATCHEE

USFS Analysis:

Scenery: At its upper end, the Little Wenatchee River meanders across a broad, meadow-filled, hanging valley ringed by sharply incised, snow-capped peaks. The river plunges from this valley in a spectacular series of falls, tumbling through a series of gorges, to a more sinuous course in the wider valley of the lower reaches. Ranking: Above Average

Recreational: Recreation use along the river is primarily directed to camping, fishing, hiking and hunting. The drainage serves as a popular access route to the Henry M. Jackson and Glacier Peak Wilderness. Ranking: Average.

Conclusion: The lower eight mile segment of the Little Wenatchee River [this is downstream of the whitewater section] meets the eligibility criteria for Wild and Scenic River classification. It has “Outstandingly Remarkable” fish values. This segment should

be further evaluated for its suitability as an addition to the Wild and Scenic River System [in a subsequent analysis the Forest Service determined this section was not “suitable” for designation]. Although the remainder of the river has above average values, none are “outstandingly remarkable.” Classification of those segments [the ones enjoyed for whitewater] and determination of suitability is not recommended.

AW Analysis:

With the increase in creek boating since the last study of this river, the Little Wenatchee is clearly a destination of regional and national significance. It is one of the best class IV runs in the area. Paddlers come from around the region and across the country to enjoy the resources rivers in proximity to Leavenworth provide. In other words, the Little Wenatchee attracts visitors who are willing to travel long distances to use the river resources for recreational purposes. The landscape elements of landform (narrow bedrock canyons), vegetation (patches of majestic old-growth trees along the river), water (exceptional high water quality), color and related factors result in notable or exemplary visual features and/or attractions.

COOPER RIVER

USFS Analysis

Scenery: The land form is dissected by ridges and moderately steep slopes. The river and streams have rapids and cascades with meandering segments. Heavy timber stands occur with frequent natural openings and rock outcrops. Ranking: Above Average.

Recreational: Use along the river is primarily camping, fishing, and hunting. Serves as access to the Alpine Lakes Wilderness. Ranking: Above Average.

Conclusion: While there are two above average resource values within the Cooper River and its adjacent forests, none are “outstandingly remarkable.” The Cooper River is not eligible for Wild and Scenic consideration. Classification of the river segments and determination of suitability is not necessary.

AW Analysis

Of all the rivers in the Wenatchee National Forest, we believe the Cooper is one of the most deserving of protection under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. As with the Little Wenatchee the sport of creek boating has increased and the unique opportunities this river provides are now widely recognized. Note that the Forest Service review only mentions camping, fishing, and hunting as recreational activities in the river corridor. This river is clearly a destination of regional and national significance for whitewater paddlers attracting visitors who are willing to travel long distances to use the river resources. It is known as great class IV run that helps creek boaters build their skill set. The landscape elements of landform (deep bedrock canyons only accessible by kayak), vegetation (native forest), water (exceptional high water quality), color and related factors result in notable or exemplary visual features and/or attractions.

NACHES RIVER

USFS Analysis:

Scenery: The drainage is characterized by gently sloping to rolling terrain, rock outcrops and some basalt cliffs, and a meandering river course. Mixed conifer with hardwood types and some scattered old growth forest are found along the river. Ranking: Average.

Recreational: The drainage serves as an access route to Mt. Rainier National Park from the Yakima area. The river receives both transitory use due to the State Highway, and destination use primarily for camping, fishing, hunting and boating by Yakima and Tri-Cities area residents from the east and the Puget Sound area residents from the west. Ranking: Above Average.

Conclusion: While there are above average resource values within the Naches River and its adjacent forests, one are “outstandingly remarkable.” The Naches River is not eligible for Wild and Scenic River consideration. Classification of the river segments and determination of suitability is not necessary.

AW Analysis

This river is unique in the region in providing a high quality recreational resource for beginner boaters and family-oriented recreation that has high scenic value. The river has long been a destination for paddlers from throughout the region. While there is a dam on the Bumping River, major tributaries including the Little Naches and American are free-flowing resulted in a flow regime on the Naches that largely mimics a natural hydrograph. Boating opportunities suitable for beginner boaters that flow through the National Forest on eastside rivers are comparatively rare, and the Naches provides one of the best float trips in the region to meet this need.

RATTLESNAKE CREEK

USFS Analysis

Scenery: The drainage has steep sloping to rolling terrain, rock outcrops, talus river gorges, and basalt cliffs; with some waterfalls and cascading water through the creek gorges. Vegetation is mixed conifer, with some old growth forest. Ranking: Above Average.

Recreation: The drainage serves as an access route to the east side of the William O. Douglas Wilderness from the Yakima area. Use along the creek is primarily for fishing and hunting by local users, with a high opportunity for solitude within the wilderness. Ranking: Average.

AW Analysis

As with some of the other rivers on this list, whitewater paddling was not assessed in the 1990 Forest Plan. Note also that the Forest Service assessment only notes “local users”. While Rattlesnake Creek does not currently see heavy use it does provide an opportunity that is unique and rare within the region. It is important for paddlers to note that opportunities are utilized by individuals throughout the region—not just local users. Specifically this creek is one of the few easily accessible rivers in the region that does not have a road running along it. The significance is that paddlers have a unique

opportunity for solitude in a remote river canyon and impacts from roads in the form of sediment delivery, blown culverts, etc. are greatly minimized in comparison to other rivers throughout the region.

TIETON RIVER

USFS Analysis:

Scenery: There are snowfields, mountain meadows, steep slopes to rolling terrain, with old growth forests above the dams. River gorges, and mixed forest river bottom typify the river below dams. Ranking: Above Average.

Recreational: Highway 12 serves as the access route to the White Pass Ski Area from the Yakima area. There is both transitory use along the river from travelers of the State Highway, as well as destination camping, fishing, hunting, and boating by users from the Yakima and Tri-Cities areas from the east and the Puget Sound area from the west. Ranking: Above Average.

Conclusion: While there are above average resource values within the Tieton River and its adjacent forests, none are "outstandingly remarkable." The occurrence of dams causes a significant segment of the river to not meet the free-flowing criteria. The Tieton River is not eligible for Wild and Scenic

AW Analysis

The Forest Service does not provide sufficient information to evaluate the statement on the occurrence of dams and the impacts on free-flowing criteria. There are many cases where Wild and Scenic River segments are designated downstream of dams. These include rivers like the Skagit, Upper Klamath, Crooked, and Hell's Canyon of the Snake. In all cases dams impact the flow regime but the designated segment itself is free-flowing. AW will be seeking more clarification on the assessment of the Tieton but we believe the segment downstream of the dam should be considered eligible. The fall drawdown of the reservoir provides an exceptional and highly valued recreational opportunity of regional significance. We can use your help in making the case for the regional significance of this resource. To the extent you can make the case that it is used beyond just the Tri-Cities and Puget Sound that will also help.