



America's Great Outdoors Listening Session Preparation

The Obama Administration is seeking the public's advice on how the federal government can better connect Americans with the outdoors, and better protect natural landscapes. This marks a great opportunity for paddlers to share the often overlooked value of rivers as public backyard recreational treasures, and to share examples of successes and challenges to protecting and enjoying those rivers. We strongly encourage paddlers to attend the remaining public listening sessions. Have an open mind, speak from experience, and seek to represent all of us that spend time on rivers. Participants were asked the following questions at the first listening session. While the session format may have changed, considering these questions and some possible content for responses should help you frame your thoughts.

1. What strategies for conservation or connecting people with the outdoors have worked in your area?

Think of your favorite nearby rivers and what makes them your favorites. Did Wilderness or Wild and Scenic designation protect the landscape and water quality, did the Forest Service build a nice river access area, are there good flows below a dam or is your river wild and free flowing, does your state have good stream access laws that support public enjoyment, do you benefit from the USGS gage program, does your club collaborate with agencies on a public access or conservation project? This is your chance to highlight something positive.

2. What are the obstacles to effective conservation or connecting people to the outdoors?

Are federal agencies unreasonably limiting your ability to paddle a river (e.g. Chattooga, Tuolumne, Yellowstone, etc.), is a dam or land owner making river access or enjoyment challenging, have you been frustrated by working with an agency on a conservation or access issue, have you witnessed environmental impacts? This is your chance to highlight something that is not working, and just as importantly to propose a solution.

3. How can the federal government be a better partner?

Support of paddling as a beneficial use of rivers at a federal level is critical. Too often the value of river recreation falls through the cracks. Guidance from the federal level could support stronger navigability determinations, more Wild and Scenic River designations, better flows below dams (e.g. at Army Corps of Engineers facilities like the West, VT or Green, WA), and perhaps most importantly better management decisions by agencies that encourage rather than tolerate whitewater paddling.

4. What additional tools would help your efforts be even more successful?

Direction from federal agency leadership encouraging their employees to support whitewater paddling through increased funding for river access, increased funding for the agencies' river programs, and maintaining strong environmental laws like the Clean Water Act, the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, and the National Environmental Policy Act are all examples of valuable tools.