



# Wild and Scenic River Preliminary Evaluation Framework

## Lolo National Forest Land Management Plan

### Introduction

The Lolo National Forest Land Management Plan Revision process includes a wild and scenic river eligibility study to evaluate all named, free-flowing rivers and streams wholly or partially within the Lolo National Forest administrative boundary (planning area). Please refer to the document titled “Wild and Scenic River Eligibility Process: Lolo National Forest Land Management Plan” for more information on this process.

The eligibility process has been developed to support an efficient and transparent assessment of potential wild and scenic rivers during the Lolo National Forest Land Management Plan Revision. The intent of this process is to ensure that the interdisciplinary team and the public are aware of past studies, understand the qualifications for eligibility, and can actively participate in evaluating rivers and streams for potential inclusion into the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. This coordination ensures that the inventory includes all qualified rivers and streams, portrays an accurate representation, and supports a meaningful evaluation of outstandingly remarkable values for potentially eligible streams, as intended by the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act and other relevant regulations.

This process includes the following steps:

1. Identify named, free flowing rivers and streams.
2. Establish framework to evaluate outstanding remarkable value criteria.
3. Evaluate rivers and streams for outstanding remarkable values.
4. Determine potential classification: wild, scenic, and/or recreational.
5. Document findings and interim protections for eligible rivers and streams.

This document provides preliminary information regarding Step 2 and Step 3 in terms of proposed criteria, region of comparison for outstanding remarkable values, and draft information to be included in the evaluation.

### Step 2: Establish framework to evaluate outstandingly remarkable value criteria

To be eligible for possible inclusion in the National System, named, free-flowing rivers and streams, and/or the adjacent land area, must have at least one outstandingly remarkable value that is unique, rare, or exemplary when compared to others within their region of comparison. The categories of outstandingly remarkable values include: “scenic, recreational, geologic, fish and

wildlife, historic, cultural, or other similar values” (section 1(b)). River values should meet at least one of the following criteria:

- Located in the river or on its immediate shorelands (within 0.25 mile on either side),
- Contribute substantially to the functioning of the river ecosystem, and/or
- Owe their location or existence to the presence of the river.

An interdisciplinary team approach was used to establish a preliminary evaluation framework. The team reviewed minimum criteria established under section 1(b) of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act and included in Forest Service Handbook 1909 82.73a to determine if modifications or additional criteria were necessary to complete a meaningful evaluation and comparison. The team concluded that the criteria were specific enough to ensure the team, the public, and external groups could understand how river-values would be considered and compared, yet general enough to capture all possible unique, rare, or exemplary river-values found across the Lolo National Forest. The team did include examples, in some instances, to clarify what types of features may be present in a river and stream corridors. Additionally, the team included the direction to consider and document aquatic and semi-aquatic species other than fish. See Table 1 for the criteria to support evaluating the occurrence of outstandingly remarkable values.

A “region of comparison” is assigned for each outstandingly remarkable values category to support consistent evaluation of each river and stream segment included in the inventory. The region of comparison is the geographic area of consideration for each outstandingly remarkable value that will serve as the basis for meaningful comparison to other rivers and streams. The interdisciplinary team defined the region of comparison based on commonly understood geopolitical and ecological boundaries to ensure the clear and consistent evaluation of river values associated with rivers and streams across the Lolo National Forest.

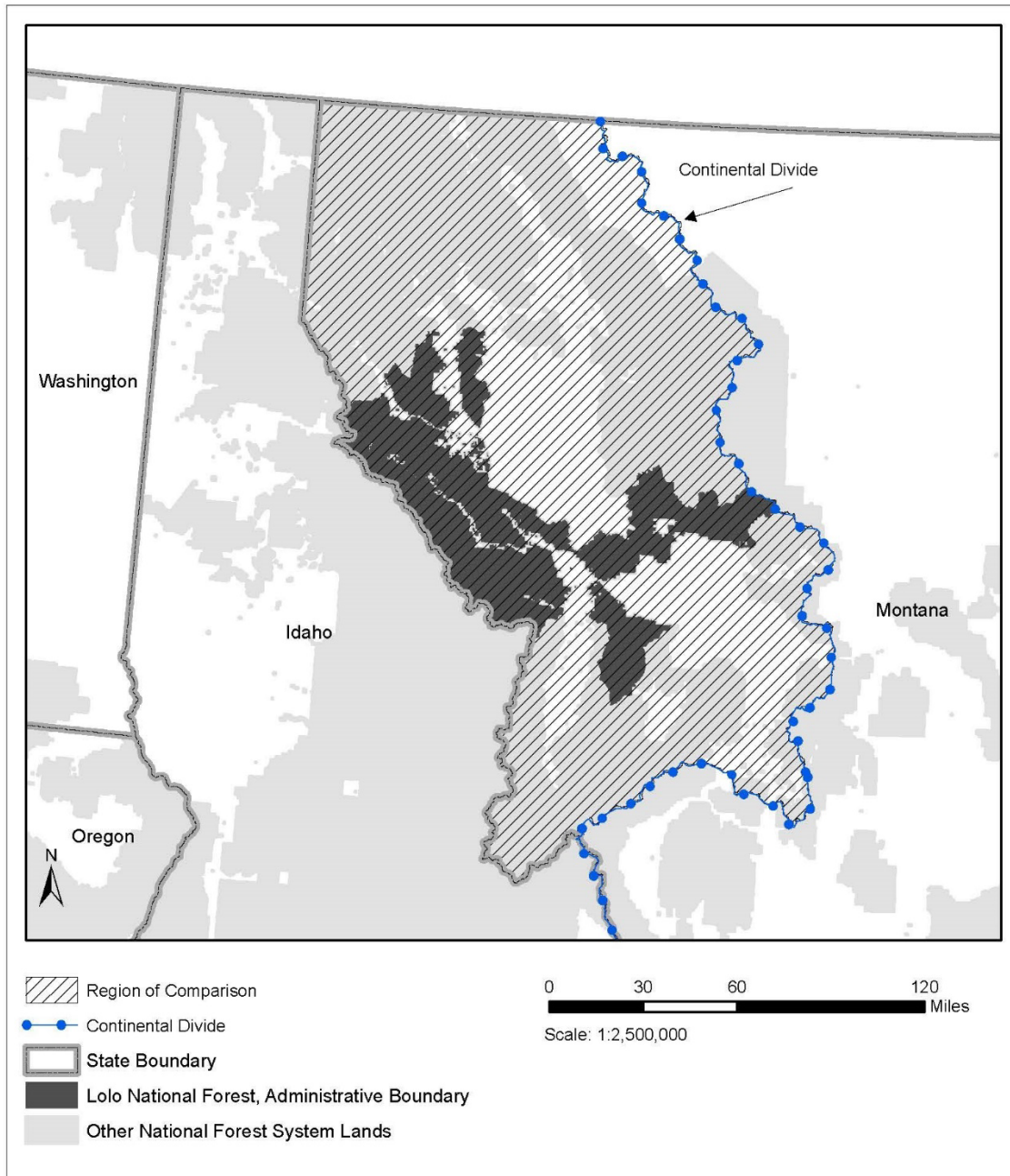
Due to the similar ecological, social, and cultural resource conditions, the team recommended focusing river value comparisons within the western Montana region (Figure 1); this area encompasses those lands within Montana from the Continental Divide to the Montana-Idaho border. This is a similar region of comparison that was used for the Flathead National Forest’s Wild and Scenic River Eligibility Study (U. S. Department of Agriculture 2018) and supports a meaningful evaluation of potential eligibility that extends beyond the Lolo National Forest to ensure a comprehensive representation of unique, rare, and exemplary river values. As rivers and streams are evaluated, documentation supporting nearby eligible and suitable or already designated Wild and Scenic Rivers can inform the relative importance of outstanding and remarkable values identified for this eligibility study.

**Table 1. Preliminary outstanding and remarkable value categories, criteria, and region of comparison<sup>1</sup>**

Category	Criteria	Region of Comparison
Scenery	<p>Landscape elements of landform, vegetation, water, color, and related factors result in notable or exemplary visual features or attractions. 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 different parts of the river or river segment. Outstandingly remarkable scenic features may occupy only a small portion of a river corridor. Examples may include, but shouldn't be limited to:</p> <p>A variety of rock, land, and water forms that provide dramatic contrasts in line, color, or form with the surrounding vegetation or adjacent rocks.</p> <p>Old 'character' trees framing the water channel or providing dramatic contrast along banks, or the vegetation provides striking seasonal color, unique and rare wildflower displays, or texture variations, such as meadows intermixed with large, towering conifer stands.</p> <p>Visible historic or cultural features or remnants of historic uses that contribute to the sense of place, such as old water wheels, historic mines, Civilian Conservation Corps structures, or old wooden fences.</p>	Western Montana
Recreation	<p>Recreational opportunities are high quality and attract, or have the potential to attract, visitors from throughout or beyond the region of comparison; or the recreational opportunities are unique or rare within the region. River-related recreational opportunities include, but are not limited to, sightseeing, interpretation, wildlife observation, camping, photography, hiking, fishing, hunting, and boating. The river may provide settings for national or regional use or competitive events.</p>	Western Montana
Geology	<p>The river corridor contains one or more examples of a geologic feature, process, or phenomenon that is unique, rare or exemplary within the region of comparison. The feature(s) may be in an unusually active stage of development, represent a "textbook" example, or represent a unique, rare or exemplary combination of geologic features (erosional, volcanic, glacial, or other geologic structures).</p>	Western Montana
Fish	<p>Fish values may be evaluated on the relative merits of either fish populations, habitat, and/or a combination of river-related habitat conditions.</p> <p>Populations: The river habitat is nationally or regionally an important producer of highly valued resident fish and/or anadromous fish species. Of particular significance are a diversity of fish species or the presence of wild stocks and/or Federal- or State-listed, candidate threatened, endangered, or species of conservation concern, sensitive species, or those of public interest. Additionally, unique species or species in decline within the region of comparison will be evaluated and documented.</p> <p>Habitat: The river provides uniquely diverse or high-quality habitat for indigenous to the region of comparison. Of particular significance is exemplary habitat for wild stocks and/or Federal or State-listed or candidate threatened or endangered species, or species of conservation concern. In addition to rare and unique habitats within the corridor, the evaluation will consider the connectivity needs, security, crucial habitat, and habitat quality for these species.</p>	Western Montana

Category	Criteria	Region of Comparison
Wildlife	<p>Wildlife values may be judged on the relative merits of either terrestrial, semi-aquatic-, or aquatic wildlife populations or habitat, or a combination of these conditions.</p> <p>Populations: The river, or area within the river corridor, contains nationally or regionally important populations of indigenous wildlife species, including aquatic and semi-aquatic species. Of particular significance are species diversity, species considered to be unique, and/or populations of Federal or State-listed or candidate threatened or endangered species, or species of conservation concern.</p> <p>Habitat: The river, or area within the river corridor, provides uniquely diverse or high-quality habitat for terrestrial, aquatic, and semi-aquatic wildlife species of national or regional significance, and/or may provide unique habitat or a critical link in habitat conditions for Federal or State-listed or candidate threatened or endangered species, or species of conservation concern. Contiguous habitat conditions are such that the biological needs of the species are met. In addition to rare and unique habitats within the corridor, the evaluation will consider the connectivity needs, security, crucial habitat, and habitat quality for these species.</p>	Western Montana
Historic and Cultural Values	<p>The river, or area within the river corridor, contains important evidence of historic or precontact occupation or use by humans. Sites may have national or regional importance for interpreting history or prehistory.</p> <p>Site or features on or eligible for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) may be of particular significance: Sites or features are associated with a significant event, an important person, or a cultural activity of the past that is now rare or unique in the region. A historic site or feature, in most cases, is 50 years old or older.</p> <p>Areas within the river corridor may have been used and may be currently used for traditional uses, may have unique and rare sacred purposes, characteristics or exemplary anthropological value, or represent the origin or conflict of cultures.</p>	Western Montana
Other Similar River-related Values	<p>While no specific national evaluation guidelines have been developed for this category, other values that may be outstandingly remarkable, including but not limited to botanic, hydrologic, paleontological, scientific, and heritage values will be documented and considered across the region of comparison to determine if these river-related values are unique, rare, or exemplary.</p> <p>Specific to Botanical:</p> <p>Botanical values may be judged on the relative merits of either riparian populations or plant associations, or a combination of these conditions and may include the following factors.</p> <p>Populations: The river, or area within the river corridor, contains nationally or regionally important populations of plant species. Of particular significance are species considered to be unique due to their rarity based upon potential species of conservation concern that are ranked as globally imperiled or critically imperiled (G1, G2).</p> <p>Habitat: The river, or area within the river corridor, provides uniquely diverse or high-quality habitat of national or regional significance, and/or may provide unique habitat that are ranked as globally imperiled or critically imperiled (G1, G2).</p> <p>Other botanical diversity factors are covered under scenic considerations.</p>	Western Montana

<sup>1</sup>Forest Service Handbook 1909.12, Chapter 80, Section 82.73a describes categories and criteria that will be refined through coordination with the public.



**Figure 1—Map of the Region of Comparison for all outstandingly remarkable value categories**

### Step 3: Evaluate rivers and streams for outstandingly remarkable values.

Using the region of comparison and criteria established in Step 2, the interdisciplinary team will evaluate each river and stream inventoried in Step 1 to determine if they possess at least one outstandingly remarkable value. See “LNFPR: Wild and Scenic River Preliminary Inventory” for more information on the inventory process and the full inventory of rivers. Additionally, eligible and suitable rivers from past studies will be reviewed to confirm no change of circumstances for their eligibility and preliminary classifications since their evaluation. The interdisciplinary team will also evaluate those rivers and streams found ineligible in past studies. The determination that a river area does or does not contain one or more outstandingly remarkable values is a professional judgment on the part of the Responsible Official informed by the interdisciplinary team, best available scientific information, and public participation (FSH 1909.12, Ch 80). A preliminary template of information to compile that provides consistent documentation for all rivers and streams studied is shown in Table 2.

**Table 2. Template to capture eligibility information for each inventoried river and stream from Step 1**

<b>River Name</b>	<b>GNIS name or as noted on USGS 7.5-minute quadrangle map</b>
Ranger District(s)	Enter Ranger District(s)
County(ies)	Enter County(ies)
USGS 7.5-minute Quadrangle Map(s)	Enter USGS Quad name(s)
Legal Description	Township/Range/Section info
Is the river or stream free flowing?	Yes or No
Potential Outstandingly Remarkable Value(s)	S = Scenery, R = Recreation, G = Geology, F = Fish, W = Wildlife, C = Historical/Cultural, O = Other, or None
Eligible Segments	Segment: Description of Beginning and End Point
Miles of each segment	Segment: Mileage calculated in ArcGIS
Potential Segment Classification(s)	Segment: Wild, Scenic, Recreational
Previously ineligible, eligible, or suitable?	Ineligible, Eligible, or Eligible and Suitable
If previously eligible or suitable, what outstandingly remarkable values were present?	S = Scenery, R = Recreation, G = Geology, F = Fish, W = Wildlife, C = Historical/Cultural, O = Other
If previously eligible or suitable, what was the preliminary classification(s)?	Wild, Scenic, Recreational
<b>Potential Outstandingly Remarkable Values</b>	
Scenery	Yes/No. If Yes, describe in context of region of comparison:
Recreation	Yes/No. If Yes, describe
Geological	Yes/No. If Yes, describe
Fisheries	Yes/No. If Yes, describe
Wildlife	Yes/No. If Yes, describe
Historical or Cultural	Yes/No. If Yes, describe
Other similar river value	Yes/No. If Yes, describe
<b>Preliminary Classification Criteria</b>	
Water Resource Development	Describe the existing condition at time of evaluation.
Shoreline Development	Describe the existing condition at time of evaluation.

River Name	GNIS name or as noted on USGS 7.5-minute quadrangle map
Accessibility	Describe the existing condition at time of evaluation.
Water Quality	Describe the existing condition at time of evaluation.

## Literature Cited

U. S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service. 2018. Volume 4- Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Land Management Plan Flathead National Forest. U.S. Department of Agriculture,,Forest Service, Kalispell MT.