



Forest Service
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE



Wild and Scenic River Eligibility Study Process Webinar

Questions & Answers

March 20, 2024

1) What type of criteria would you use for streams with large salmon runs? The runs on the Tongass are outstanding on a global scale, even though they are common on the Tongass. The importance to tribes is also a big part of the importance of salmon.

The proposed inventory protocol compares rivers to each other within a geographic area on the Tongass, not on a global scale, to determine if values are outstandingly remarkable. By comparing rivers to each other, we are able to find those rivers with the most outstanding or most exemplary values. The eligibility study process document includes detailed eligibility criteria and is open for feedback and input through mid-May 2024. Related to salmon, we encourage you to share your thoughts on the sections for “Fish (Population or Habitat) Outstandingly Remarkable Value (ORV),” “Recreation ORV,” and “Cultural ORV,” as well as the associated “Regions of Comparison.”

2) Who nominates a river for consideration?

Rivers are not “nominated” for consideration during the eligibility study process that we are conducting as part of Forest Plan revision. Our policy requires that the eligibility study process be an “inventory” of “all potential wild, scenic, and recreational rivers flowing wholly or partially on National Forest System lands...named on a standard U.S. Geological Survey...quadrangle map” (Forest Service Handbook 1909.12, Chapter 80, Section 82.2). To meet this requirement in Alaska, we are using named rivers in the Alaska Hydrography Database.

3) What is a terrestrial ecological unit? Where is it defined?

A Terrestrial ecological unit is a system to classify ecosystem types and map ecological units at a variety of spatial scales. The system distinguishes among land areas that differ in important ecological factors, such as geology, climate, soils, hydrology, and vegetation. More detailed information can be found at <https://www.fs.usda.gov/soils/teui.shtml>.

4) How will input on the Draft Inventory of Waters be collected through the upcoming community workshops? For example, will there be a specific WSR station for folks to provide feedback?

Yes, there will be a specific WSR station, with maps, to provide feedback. The Draft Inventory of Waters will also be available for the public to review on the [plan revision WSR webpage](#).

5) Is Wild and Scenic protection different from rivers that are within Wilderness areas??

Yes, wild and scenic rivers protection is different from wilderness protections, and rivers that flow through wilderness areas may be found eligible for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. For rivers found eligible, the Forest must provide interim management direction in the land management plan to protect free flowing condition, the outstandingly remarkable values that resulted in the river's eligibility, and the river's preliminary classification as wild, scenic, or recreational. Management direction for rivers found eligible for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System may be different than management direction for existing designated wilderness areas and waters within those designated areas. More detailed information on interim management for eligible wild and scenic rivers can be found at FSH 1909.12, Chapter 80, Sections 84.2, 84.3, and 84.4.

6) Do you consider the cultural value to be tied to Indigenous history when determining ORVs?

Yes. Both cultural and historic criteria are used to determine if there is an ORV. Values considered must be river-dependent and river-specific.

7) Within the group of rivers not examined previously, how do you select or prioritize rivers next in line? Alphabetically, geographically, or some other criterion?

In an eligibility study, there is no prioritization between rivers in the inventory. We will be studying all rivers in the inventory simultaneously. This study, combined with earlier studies in the 1990s, should result in all named waters on the Tongass National Forest having been studied at least once for their eligibility.

8) When you're thinking of eligibility criteria, would some linkages, such as salmon providing food for bears, tip the scales toward an ORV?

It depends—ORVs must meet at least one of the following criteria:

1. Be located in the river or its corridor
2. Contribute substantially to the functioning of the river ecosystem
3. Be river-dependent and owe their location or existence to the presence of the river

In the case of bears and salmon, salmon is a major food source for bears and salmon are clearly river-dependent; the relationship between bears and salmon may be considered in the evaluation of ORVs.

9) For the recommended rivers, are they then managed as wild and scenic rivers until they are designated?

The end result of an eligibility study is a “finding,” not a recommendation. Management of rivers found eligible for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System depends on the preliminary classification of the eligible river and the river’s ORVs. Eligible rivers must be protected sufficiently to maintain free flow, ORVs, and preliminary classification prior to a congressional decision whether to designate them. More detailed information on interim protections can be found in Forest Service Handbook 1909.12, Chapter 80, Sections 84.2, 84.3, and 84.4. Rivers that are found to be not eligible would not have protective management direction applied to them, and they would be managed like the surrounding National Forest System lands.

10) Will there be formal consultation with Tlingit and Haida governments specific to this piece of the revision?

Yes. The Tongass National Forest has invited tribes for consultation and has invited tribes to meetings scheduled to start in April. Tribal consultation will occur for all land management plan topics, including the wild and scenic river eligibility study.

For more information or to sign up for our email distribution list, please refer to the Tongass Revision Website: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/tongass/landmanagement/planning/?cid=fseprd1105492>