



February 26, 2020

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
Chair
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment,
and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Tom Udall
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment,
and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Murkowski and Ranking Member Udall:

The undersigned representing local, state, and national river organizations seek adequate agency funding levels in support of Wild and Scenic River System management for the USDA Forest Service (Forest Service) and the Department of Interior's National Park Service (NPS), Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) for fiscal year 2021. This funding is needed to allow the agencies to meet their statutory requirements to protect and enhance those rivers that have been designated as nationally significant.

The passage of the federal Wild and Scenic Rivers Act in 1968 established one of our nation's strongest conservation tools for rivers. The law reflects Congress's commitment to balancing development of our rivers with a system of protected rivers. Wild and Scenic designation provides lasting protection for our best rivers, their free-flowing qualities and outstandingly remarkable values for the benefit of present and future generations.

October 2, 2018 marked the 50th Anniversary of the Wild and Scenic Rivers System that now includes 226 of our nation's most valued protected rivers. We respectfully request that you ensure that adequate funds are appropriated to meet these agencies' obligations. Investing in these resources pays back in multiple ways--tourism, hunting, fishing, other outdoor recreation, healthier ecological systems, abundant water resources-- and leverages local investments that strengthen local economies as well as the public's use and enjoyment of our country's natural resources. We appreciate your help providing stewardship resources for this uniquely American idea and establishing a legacy for local communities.

In early 2019, Congress passed the John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act that included nearly 620 miles of new Wild and Scenic Rivers in seven states demonstrating the broad support for permanent river protection from local communities. This is a fitting move in this 50th year of the Wild and Scenic Rivers System, yet creates new responsibilities for managing agencies. The new

Wild and Scenic River designations in the bill include: 256 miles for tributaries of the Rogue and Elk Rivers, the Molalla, and Nestucca Rivers in Oregon; 110 river miles in the Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed in Rhode Island and Connecticut; 76 miles of Amargosa River, Deep Creek, Surprise Canyon and other desert streams in California; 63 miles of the Green River in Utah; 60 miles of the Lower Farmington River and Salmon Brook in Connecticut; and 52.8 miles of the Nashua, Squannacook and Nissitissit Rivers in Massachusetts and New Hampshire. In addition, California has seven federal rivers designated in 2009 that still lack Comprehensive River Management Plans. Montana's East Rosebud Wild and Scenic River, designated during the anniversary in 2018, also needs adequate funding for a plan. Each of these nationally-significant rivers will require the implementation of a Comprehensive River Management Plan to guide its management and conservation.

Wild and Scenic River Agency Responsibilities:

The USFS, BLM, NPS and USFWS' responsibilities under the Act are numerous including:

- Meeting statutory conservation requirements despite a lack of staff training at the Regional, District, National Park or Refuge levels;
- Meeting planning requirements for rivers in the Wild and Scenic River System including a detailed description of outstandingly remarkable values; establishing classification and boundaries; and preparing a comprehensive river management plan;
- Actively managing each river either designated or eligible including conducting Section 7 reviews, monitoring and protecting values as water quality, fish and wildlife, managing recreation and working with cooperating agencies and partners;
- Conducting comprehensive river eligibility studies through plan revision processes;
- Maintaining partnerships with local and national organizations on management and public involvement;
- Working on and coordinating with the Interagency Wild and Scenic Rivers Coordinating Council;
- Working with leadership from the Washington offices;
- Coordinating and leading at the Regional, Park, Refuge or District level, and;
- Protecting and enhancing water quality.

The upcoming planning processes, especially across National Forests and BLM planning areas, offer an opportunity for the agencies to come into compliance with planning requirements, but adequate resources, staff and rivers training must be provided starting in FY21. The number of staff dedicated to Wild and Scenic Rivers at all levels (especially the field level) has declined dramatically over the past 20 years.

The areas of largest need to meet statutory and administrative requirements are:

- Increased field presence to assure management of designated and eligible rivers consistent with the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act;
- Increased field presence to assure proper planning during Resource Management Planning as required by the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act and under planning guidelines;
- Wild and Scenic Rivers management and planning training for staff;
- Development of active public-private partnerships for Forest Service Wild and Scenic Rivers;
- Increased scientific field-level data collection capacity to inform decision-making and ensure statutory compliance;
- Support for participation in the federal Interagency Wild and Scenic Rivers Coordinating Council;

Along with adequate funding we encourage you to institute transparency and accountability by creating a sub-category line item for the Wild and Scenic Rivers programs within the Forest Service, BLM and NPS' budgets to better track performance. The NPS' Partnership Wild and Scenic Rivers Program is the only program that has its own line items that provides the public with readily-accessible annual funding expenditures for Wild and Scenic Rivers within the agencies broader budget categories. Without true accountability it is difficult to measure results and to apply limited resources appropriately to meet the agencies' statutory mandates.

Wild and Scenic budget requests by agency:

USDA Forest Service

Support for operations and administration funding for the Forest Service's National Wild and Scenic Rivers Program within the Recreation, Wilderness and Wild and Scenic Rivers budget has been consistently cut which has led to a lack of resources for management of the Wild and Scenic Rivers under the agency's authority. This has left the Forest Service lacking adequate resources at the Forest, Region, and National levels to adequately meet its conservation mandate for the over 125 Wild and Scenic Rivers (more than 5000 miles or 40% of the river system) under its care and leaves the agency legally vulnerable.

Because of a lack of funding, Wild and Scenic River managers increasingly cannot adequately meet their statutory responsibilities. This leaves the agencies open to unnecessary exposure to litigation. Estimates indicate that two-thirds of Wild and Scenic Rivers are not currently managed to the statutory standard. Although the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act mandates that all managing federal agencies protect and enhance the outstandingly remarkable values for which the river was designated and preserve water quality on designated rivers, many do not even perform routine assessments or monitoring of these values. According to an analysis by the Forest Service, two-thirds of primary river managers have Wild and Scenic Rivers as collateral duties and spend 25% or less of their time focused on responsibilities related to their management. While the Act mandates that every river shall have a completed management plan within three years of designation, many Wild and Scenic Rivers still do not have completed plans decades after designation.

The most pressing areas of need are in day-to-day management of the Wild and Scenic Rivers System and support for Wild and Scenic Rivers planning. Management of the Wild and Scenic Rivers System embodies many of the long-standing priorities of the Forest Service, including water resource management, outdoor recreation, and sustainable economic development.

To help ensure that there is adequate capacity to provide adequate management for existing and new Wild and Scenic Rivers, we strongly recommend that the agency maintain a staff of at least 50 full-time river managers or one for every two rivers in the system. Finally, to develop and update Comprehensive River Management Plans the agency needs to hire at least 20 new staff along with necessary contract support.

Finally, the Forest Service has been a leader in helping build better local community involvement in management of our nation's public lands and waters by supporting the creation of a national network of organizations across the country that can assist the agency in meet its mission to protect and enhance

each Wild and Scenic River. Even with the important increases in the number of river managers described above, the volunteer support of a grassroots network is vital to effective management of these rivers. An investment of \$500,000 in a river stewards network over the next two fiscal years would pay enormous dividends for the Forest Service.

USFS FY 21 request:

\$15 Million in support of ongoing management of designated rivers, Forest Plan Revision planning, and necessary increases in river manager staffing.

Includes:

- \$150,000 for interagency Wild and Scenic River training
- \$500,000 for local community involvement Challenge Cost Share grant program
- \$2 Million to initiate, complete or revise Comprehensive River Management Plans for designated rivers.

Bureau of Land Management

The BLM has the responsibility of managing 81 Wild and Scenic Rivers in seven states including more than 2,700 river miles and more than one million acres (20% of the national system) as a part of the National Conservation Lands. The budget to manage this vast array of river resources is currently spread around 17 budget categories.

BLM FY 21 request:

\$8 Million in support of ongoing management of designated rivers and the State and District level.

Includes:

- \$150,000 for interagency Wild and Scenic River training
- Initiate new Comprehensive River Management Plans for recently-designated rivers.

National Park Service

The NPS manages almost 34% of the river miles or 63 rivers within the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. Seventeen of these are managed cooperatively under the Partnership Rivers program; 17 are co-managed by states; those remaining are within National Parks. Despite this responsibility there is currently no dedicated budget for Wild and Scenic River management, national coordination, or training of National Park staff at the Regional or Park level.

NPS FY 21 Request: \$6.525 Million total

- \$3.925 Million for Partnership Wild and Scenic Rivers
- \$2.6 Million for program assistance and to be put in a new line for the National Wild and Scenic Rivers Program

Includes:

- \$3.925 Million for implementation of Comprehensive River Management Plans for all 16 Partnership Wild and Scenic Rivers;
- \$150,000 for interagency Wild and Scenic River training;
- \$500,000 for National Program Coordination and 2 FTE;

- \$1 Million for Regional Program Assistance for coordination and technical assistance for all 6 NPS Regions;
- \$1 Million for the Challenge Cost Share program placed in the Operation of the National System Programs, Recreation and Partnership Project Funds, Challenge Cost Share Program line to support state agency staff river management training, resource protection, access improvements, leveraging community involvement, and youth engagement, and non-federal matching funds.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

FY 20 Request: \$450,000

Includes:

- \$150,000 for interagency Wild and Scenic River training;
- \$50,000 to improve resource protection and management capacity for Alaska Wild and Scenic Rivers
- \$200,000 for Comprehensive River Management Plan development
- \$50,000 for leveraging community involvement, and youth engagement including in urban refuges.

We appreciate your consideration of these recommendations as you consider the Fiscal Year 2021 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill.

Sincerely,

Wild and Scenic Rivers Coalition

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