



PRINTABLE VERSION: Thursday, June 14, 2007

9. WILD AND SCENIC RIVERS: Utah offers many possibilities for W&S designation (06/14/2007)

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Until now, the state of Utah has not had a single stretch of free-flowing waterway given the "wild and scenic" designation by Congress. That is likely to change in the next few years, as the U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management are currently in the process of preparing the environmental documentation to make recommendations to lawmakers sometime next year.

Together, the two agencies have evaluated thousands of miles of rivers and creeks that flow through their lands, winnowing down the list of river segments that meet eligibility criteria to nearly 230 river segments totaling over 2,000 miles.

The Forest Service has listed 80 eligible segments with about 735 miles located in 19 ranger districts of six national forests. As part of management plan revisions for a half dozen field offices in the state, BLM has identified 118 segments with some 1,127 miles of water flowing through its land.



Running rapids on the Colorado River near Moab, Utah. Federal agencies are considering eligible candidates for wild and scenic river designation in the state, with some 230 candidate river segments covering over 2,000 miles of passage through public lands. Photo courtesy of BLM.

could be some places where it becomes a question of which value is determined to be more important," Kelsey said.

The agencies are accepting public comment on their lists through June 30. The Forest Service expects to prepare a draft environmental impact statement on its proposed package by November, with a final document ready by next summer. BLM also hopes to make final recommendations to Congress in 2008.

[Click here](#) for information on the Forest Service's proposed segments.

[Click here](#) to review BLM's rivers Web site.

In addition, BLM also identified 30 segments totaling 173 miles as suitable river candidates under past planning efforts at the Grand Staircase Escalante National Monument area and its St. George field office.

These segments vary greatly in size, from just a mile or two in many locations to as much as a 35-mile stretch of Upper Lake Fork River. In order to be eligible, the river segment must be free flowing and possess at least one "outstandingly remarkable value."

Cathy Kahlow, Forest Service's Scenic River Project team leader in Utah, said these features might be outstanding fishing, beautiful scenery, wildlife or cultural resources. "It needs to be something representative of Utah," she added.

Her counterpart at BLM's Utah State Office is Wild and Scenic Rivers coordinator Maggie Kelsey. She said the agency's list was derived with "a lot of public input" to identify eligible segments. Some of the rivers are subject to competing uses, so winning a designation under the Wild and Scenic River Act could well affect future developments in the areas. "There