

OPPORTUNITIES FOR WILD & SCENIC RIVER DESIGNATION IN SOUTHWEST WASHINGTON'S "VOLCANO COUNTRY"

Washington's legendary volcanoes - Mount St. Helens, Mount Rainier and Mount Adams - are the source of wild, free-flowing rivers and streams that rush through deep gorges and basalt canyons on their way to the Columbia. Rivers like the Cispus, Green, and Lewis are well-known for their outstanding recreational, fisheries, wildlife, historical, and scientific values.



Mount Rainer and Mount Adams are sources of wild, free-flowing rivers
(Joel Mann, www.flickr.com)

Major portions of the most unique and wild rivers in Volcano Country have no permanent protection from new hydropower, water storage dams, or other harmful projects. Protecting the wild rivers of Southwest Washington's Volcano Country under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act - the strongest protection we can give to rivers - would permanently safeguard this region's unique and treasured natural heritage. In Oregon, 60 of the state's most exceptional rivers are protected as Wild and Scenic. Yet in Washington, only six rivers have this status.

BENEFITS OF DESIGNATION

- Protects the river's free-flowing character, water quality and outstanding values
- Promotes river-friendly land use practices
- Protects important fish and wildlife habitat
- Protects existing, compatible uses of the river corridor

In 1990, the U. S. Forest Service evaluated over a dozen rivers in the Gifford Pinchot National Forest and found them eligible for inclusion in the national Wild and Scenic Rivers system. Now, a diverse array of interested citizens and organizations are teaming up to build the widespread public support necessary to pass legislation designating these outstanding rivers as Wild and Scenic - thereby keeping them intact for fish, wildlife, and future generations.

WHAT WILD AND SCENIC RIVER DESIGNATION WILL DO:

- Prohibit dams and other federally-assisted water projects that will impair the river's free-flowing character, water quality, or outstanding values.
- Establish a protected corridor extending ¼ mile from the ordinary high-water mark on both sides of the river.
- Encourage partnerships among landowners, river users, tribal nations and all levels of government to protect the river's outstanding values and water quality.
- Bring river stakeholders together in a collaborative process to develop a river management plan within three years of designation.



Wild and Scenic designation protects important habitat for fish and wildlife (Shutterstock)

WHAT WILD AND SCENIC RIVER DESIGNATION WILL NOT DO:

- The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act carries no authority to regulate the use of privately-owned land; land use controls on private lands are a matter of state and local zoning.

THE WILD RIVERS OF VOLCANO COUNTRY: ~ GREEN RIVER ~

THE DRAMATIC 1980 ERUPTION of Mount St. Helens shapes the spectacular Toutle River system, including its major tributary, the Green River. The scientific, geologic, and recreational and scenic resources of this area and the Green River are of national significance and have been determined to be “Outstandingly Remarkable.”

RECREATION

Mount St. Helens is one of the state’s most popular tourist destinations, drawing over 500,000 visitors a year. The Green River is popular for scenic viewing and photography, horseback riding, hiking, hunting, and camping.

FISH, WILDLIFE AND ECOLOGICAL VALUES

The Green River valley is home to some of the most unique ecological features in the country. Patches of ancient forest that survived the eruption are next to areas that were stripped entirely by the blast and its massive lahars. These recovery areas provide unsurpassed opportunities for scientific interpretation of the effects of the eruption and natural restoration processes. They also provide unique habitats for a host of native species, including northern spotted owl and a growing population of elk.



Green River Trail (Russ Jolley)

THREATS

In March 2010, Ascot Resources, Inc., a Canadian corporation, signed an option agreement to purchase interests in the Mount Margaret deposit, which lies in the Gifford Pinchot National Forest on the southern slope of Goat Mountain, east of (and adjacent to) the Mount St. Helens National Volcanic Monument. The exploratory drilling being pursued by Ascot will open the door to mine development. A large copper mine at the edge of the Mount St. Helens National Volcanic Monument and in a seismically active region poses a serious risk of releasing toxins that could devastate threatened fish runs in the Green River and contaminate community drinking water supplies downstream. A mine will also likely impact ancient forests, the Tumwater Roadless Area, and popular recreation sites in the area. The mine proposal highlights the need for permanent protection through Wild and Scenic River designation to protect the Green River’s free-flowing nature and its nationally-significant values for future generations. Designation would also assist in protecting the drinking water supplies of Kelso, Longview and other downstream communities, as well as the popular Green River horse camp and Green River and Goat Mountain Trails.



The Green River Valley and Goat Mountain were recently threatened by a proposed mine (Darryl Lloyd)

ELIGIBILITY

The Green River is eligible from its source to the western boundary of the Mount St. Helens National Volcanic Monument (upper 10 miles).

THE WILD RIVERS OF VOLCANO COUNTRY:

~ CISPUS RIVER ~

INCLUDING YELLOWJACKET CREEK

THE CISPUS RIVER and its major tributary, Yellowjacket Creek, originate in the high country of the Goat Rocks Wilderness and Dark Divide Roadless Area. The river flows through spectacular geology in its upper reaches and then meanders through a unique section with high channel complexity that provides ideal fish habitat. The lower section of the river includes the stunning Tower Rock formation and provides many opportunities for good fishing, family-oriented whitewater boating and riverside camping.



Cispus River and Tower Rock
(Thomas O'Keefe)

RECREATION

The Cispus River is well known for its outstanding recreation. With the Pacific Crest Trail crossing through the headwaters, one of the region's most challenging whitewater runs on the cascades below the Adams Fork, opportunities for family raft trips on the Lower Cispus, great fishing along the entire river, and several scenic campgrounds, the Cispus offers a rich diversity of recreational opportunities.

FISH, WILDLIFE AND ECOLOGICAL VALUES

The Cispus River and Yellowjacket Creek both provide important habitat for federally-listed Lower Columbia chinook and Lower Columbia steelhead. Those who float the Cispus River know it as one of the best rivers in the entire region for viewing wildlife. Elk, black bear, bald eagle and other species frequent the river corridor. There is also significant suitable forest habitat for the spotted owl.

CULTURAL VALUES

Native Americans have used the Cispus River corridor for hundreds of years. Numerous stripped cedars or 'basket trees' have been located, and rock shelters as old as 8,000 years have been discovered in the corridor. Over a dozen Native American fishing sites once existed along the river.

THREATS

This river and its major tributaries have attracted the attention of hydropower developers. As recently as 1994, construction of the Cowlitz Falls hydropower project was completed where the Cispus River joins the Cowlitz River. Another project known as Cispus 4 was proposed and proceeded through the licensing process until the Washington Department of Ecology denied the required water quality permit on the grounds that recreational values of the river would be degraded. Several other hydro projects have been proposed in the watershed.



Cispus Headwaters (Susan Saul)

ELIGIBILITY

The U.S. Forest Service recommended the Cispus River for Wild and Scenic designation from its headwaters to the Cowlitz Falls Hydroelectric project. A significant portion of Yellowjacket Creek is also eligible for designation.

THE WILD RIVERS OF VOLCANO COUNTRY:

~ LEWIS RIVER ~

INCLUDING CLEAR, QUARTZ, SIOUXON, PINE, RUSH, SMITH CREEKS & THE MUDDY RIVER

THE LEWIS RIVER originates high on the northwest flank of Mount Adams at the base of Adams Glacier and flows around Mount St. Helens before emptying into the Columbia River. The river and its upper tributaries – Rush, Clear and Quartz Creeks – offer powerful waterfalls, deep canyons clothed in magnificent old-growth forest, and green gardens of hanging ferns and mosses clinging to vertical basalt cliffs. The Muddy River and Pine and Smith Creeks begin on the slopes of Mount St. Helens with mist-shrouded waterfalls amid the roar of cascading water, displaying the effects of the 1980 eruption and the recovering landscape. Further downstream, Siouxon Creek is a crystal-clear stream flowing to the Lewis River, and Pine and Rush Creeks provide critical habitat for threatened bull trout.



Lewis River Meadows (Susan Saul)

RECREATION

The Lewis River and its tributaries provide more than 40 miles of trails for hiking, backpacking, horseback riding and bicycling in the river corridor. Lower Falls Campground, located at Lower Lewis River Falls, is a highly popular and scenic recreation site. The lower reaches of the Lewis River and Siouxon Creek provide challenging whitewater boating. Trout fishing for native rainbow and cutthroat offer great opportunities for anglers, and the area is very popular with deer and elk hunters.



Hiking along Clear Creek
(Larry Svart)

FISH, WILDLIFE AND ECOLOGICAL VALUES

The largest block of old-growth forest remaining on the Gifford Pinchot National Forest lies on the north slope of the Lewis River, encompassing the Clear Creek and Quartz Creek tributaries. Clear Creek, Quartz



Black Bear (Chad Teer/Flickr)

Creek and Siouxon Creek are three of only five low-elevation, unroaded valleys in southern Washington. These valleys provide critical habitat for the federally-listed northern spotted owl and the entire North Fork Lewis watershed is important habitat for deer, elk, bear, cougar and other wildlife.

Rush and Pine Creeks are two of the last strongholds for bull trout in Southwest Washington. Both Pine and Rush Creeks are proposed by the Washington State Dept. of Wildlife as critical habitat for bull trout, a federally-listed ‘threatened’ species.

SCENIC AND GEOLOGIC VALUES

Steep gorges, waterfalls and plunge pools, whitewater rapids, and many waterfalls more than 10 feet high are part of the beauty of the Lewis River and its tributaries. Over time, the relentless power of water



Upper Clear Creek (Susan Saul)

carved Cascade Gorge up to 800 feet deep and a mile wide through ancient volcanic formations. Upper, Middle and Lower Lewis River Falls spread in wide fans over massive blocks of basalt in a wall of water with many separate cascades. Rock layers have eroded at different rates, leaving behind the harder layers that create waterfalls and natural bridges, such as the one at Curly Creek Falls. On Mount St. Helens, the roaring, waterfall-laden Muddy River flows through a lahar (giant mud flow)-swept canyon scoured during the 1980 eruption. The canyon walls reveal ancient lava flows and spectacular cliffs of columnar basalt from previous eruptions.

THREATS

In the early 1990s, Lewis Basin Limited Partnership applied for preliminary permits for small hydroelectric projects on many tributaries to the Lewis River including Big Creek, Rush Creek, Tillicum Creek, Curly Creek, Siouxon Creek and North Siouxon Creek. The projects would have built powerhouses, pipelines, dams, powerlines and roads in the stream corridors. These projects were eventually dropped because they were not economically viable. Currently, however, the hydropower industry is seeking new tax incentives for hydropower, which could quickly make these projects attractive for development.

ELIGIBILITY

The U.S. Forest Service has determined that the Lewis River is eligible from its headwaters to the upper end of Swift Reservoir and has recommended it for designation. The Muddy River, Smith Creek, Quartz Creek and Siouxon Creek are eligible for their entire lengths. Clear Creek is eligible for the lower 10 miles, but the upper four miles that the Forest Service found ineligible should also be included since the stream corridor in this reach is healthy, scenic and deserving of protection. The Forest Service did not study eligibility for Rush and Pine Creeks, but these tributaries should be protected for their outstanding fisheries values and free-flowing character.



Middle Lewis River Falls (Susan Saul)

THE WILD RIVERS OF VOLCANO COUNTRY: ~ EAST FORK LEWIS RIVER ~

FLOWING FROM ZIG ZAG MOUNTAIN high in the Gifford Pinchot National Forest, the East Fork Lewis is one of the few major undammed rivers in Volcano Country. The East Fork Lewis is regarded as one of the most important rivers for producing wild anadromous (sea-going) fish in the Pacific Northwest, and is famous for its record-breaking winter-run steelhead. The East Fork Lewis is arguably the most popular recreational river in Southwest Washington other than the Columbia River.



East Fork Lewis River (WA Ecology)

RECREATION

With its close proximity to Vancouver and Portland, the East Fork Lewis provides a broad range of highly-popular recreation opportunities for thousands of people, including fishing, boating, hiking, picnicking, swimming and camping. Paradise Point State Park, four county parks, and a Forest Service campground are major recreation sites. Clark County has established a 20-mile-long greenway between Moulton Falls and Paradise Point and has spent significant resources to acquire property in the river corridor to permanently protect it from development. Sunset Falls, Moulton Falls and Lucia Falls mark the scenic middle segment of the river

FISH, WILDLIFE AND ECOLOGICAL VALUES

The East Fork Lewis is home to winter and summer-run steelhead, fall chinook, coho and a significant resident trout fishery. East Fork Lewis River wild winter steelhead are world famous for their size; 20-pound wild steelhead are caught each year with an occasional 30-pounder being reported. All Lower Columbia runs of chinook, coho and steelhead are listed as ‘threatened’ under the Endangered Species Act. Local grassroots groups and Clark County have committed significant resources in an ongoing effort to restore these runs and protect important habitat.

The marshes in the Daybreak and La Center areas provide important habitat for wintering bald eagles and large concentrations of migratory waterfowl. A wide variety of wildlife utilizes the river corridor, including beaver, river otter, muskrats and bobcat.

CULTURAL USE

The East Fork Lewis River was used extensively as a travel corridor for approximately 9,000 years by Native Americans. Numerous prehistoric shelters and archaeological sites exist along the river.

THREATS

The Northwest Power Planning Council has included this river on its “Protected Areas”- which limits but does not prohibit new hydropower development – due to the value of its anadromous fishery. More immediately, the East Fork is threatened by proposed expansion of the Storedahl gravel mine operation in the river’s floodplain, which could reduce river flows, degrade fish spawning sites, increase bank erosion and raise summer water temperatures which can adversely affect fish. Increasing residential development is also a threat to the health of the East Fork Lewis River.

ELIGIBILITY

The U.S. Forest Service has determined that the East Fork is eligible for Wild and Scenic designation from the headwaters to its confluence with the Lewis River, a distance of 43.3 miles.