

ISSUE #7

Should any rivers be recommended for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers system?

The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1968, as amended, provides for protection of outstanding river resources. It requires the identification and study of rivers or portions of rivers, and directs Federal agencies to cooperate with state governments. Section 5(d)(1) of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act provides that wild and scenic river considerations be made during Federal agency planning. Either Congress, or the Secretary of the Interior on the nomination of the Governor of Montana, may designate rivers as part of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers system. It is the responsibility of the BLM to make recommendations and complete appropriate environmental studies through the planning process. Because of this mandate, an evaluation of river resources in the Dillon planning area is being completed.

The evaluation of river resources under the Wild and Scenic River Act has two steps:

- determination of ELIGIBILITY (for further study)
- recommendations on SUITABILITY

A determination of ELIGIBILITY looks at two factors. These are:

- Whether the river is free-flowing
- Whether a value considered outstandingly remarkable is present

The SUITABILITY study looks at the following factors:

- characteristics of the areas
- ownership of surface and subsurface and associated uses
- uses that would be enhanced, foreclosed, or curtailed
- Federal, public, State, tribal, local or other interest
- estimated costs of administration
- ability of agency to manage river as Wild and Scenic River, and other mechanisms to protect values other than Wild and Scenic River designation
- historic or existing rights which could be affected
- other issues and concerns

These evaluations result in recommendations that are included in the plan alternatives, along with disclosure of the impacts that would occur. The final plan determines whether any rivers in the planning area are recommended as suitable for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic River system.

Most concerns about Wild and Scenic River recommendations revolve around management that could be applied along the rivers in the event a river is found eligible, and eventually suitable, in the planning process.