

DRAFT

Pilot State Scenic

Waterway Management

Plan

Chetco River

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Executive Summary

Background

The Oregon Parks and Recreation Department (OPRD) is responsible for administering the State Scenic Waterways Program, which is designed to protect the existing scenic, natural, and recreation values of 20 designated waterways throughout the State. OPRD is directed by statute (ORS 390.855) to periodically study new waterways for potential inclusion in the program, though no new waterways have been designated since 1988.

In September 2013, the Governor directed OPRD to analyze at least three waterways for potential designation every two years. An initial screening of all Oregon waterways by OPRD resulted in a list of approximately 80 river segments which have the potential to meet the State's waterway designation criteria. Based on a broad coalition of agencies and stakeholders, OPRD's capacity to complete the waterway assessments, and to provide geographical distribution throughout the State, sections of the Molalla, Chetco, and Grande Ronde Rivers were included in the 2013-15 pilot study.

In November 2014, the Oregon State Parks and Recreation Commission recommended designation of segments of the Chetco and Molalla Rivers. This decision was based on the waterway eligibility findings and public support. OPRD evaluated stakeholder and community input to gauge public support and understand issues and concerns associated with the potential Scenic Waterway designation. A webpage was established for the study to provide information on the waterway assessment process and to solicit feedback from the public. Community input was collected through a designated email address and an online survey. In addition, a local community meeting was held to review preliminary findings, answer questions, and obtain public comments. All property owners within the study area received an invitation letter to the meeting and it was advertised through a news release and public notice in the local paper. Public input received at the community meeting and through written comments indicated that there is strong support for designating the Chetco and Molalla study areas into the State Scenic Waterway Program.

The Commission also directed OPRD staff to cooperate with local advisory groups to pilot test the development of draft management plans for the recommended scenic waterway segments on the Chetco and Molalla rivers, and append the pilot draft management plan reports to the existing scenic waterway qualification [reports](#) for Commission review by November, 2015. This document is that pilot draft management plan for a 14 mile stretch of the Chetco River in Curry County, Oregon.

Management Planning

The goal of the scenic waterway management planning process is to develop a comprehensive and workable management plan which will protect or enhance the special attributes of the designated river corridor. Primary emphasis is on the protection of scenic, fish and wildlife and recreational features. The

intent is to maintain the *existing* scenic condition of the area, without “turning back the clock” on existing land uses.

OPRD held two Advisory Group meetings (April 14th, June 9th), open to the public, and one public workshop (July 14th) designed to obtain public feedback on the draft plans for the waterways. The Advisory Groups consist of local landowners, recreational users, local business owners, and local government members. Input provided in these meetings provided the foundation for the final recommendations contained in the draft management plans. *Update with information from public meetings in July, 2015.*

In order to define and achieve management goals, if designated, the river is classified into one or more of six possible classifications according to the present level of land development, committed land uses, or landscape alterations (Fig. 3). Once the classifications are set, appropriate guidelines for new development or landscape alterations are established as rules. The major aim of the program is to maintain *the existing* scenic condition of the river. As proposed, the river would be managed (if designated and not altered during public rule-making) in three segments, an Accessible Natural River Area from the Steel Bridge to Eagle Creek, a Scenic River Area from Eagle Creek to the South Fork confluence and a Recreational River Area from the South Fork Confluence to the southern boundary of Alfred A. Loeb State Park.

All new structures, improvements and development should be in compliance with the Public Use of Scenic Waterways Rules ([OAR 736-040-0025](#)) and Land Management Rules ([OAR 736-40-030 and 0035](#)) and be consistent with applicable BLM and Clackamas County land use and development regulations, along with proposed regulations specific to each management category. Additionally, a set of proposed management recommendations (designed to help enhance the recreational experience on the Chetco) were developed from advisory committee and public input, including several about improving public access, facilities and interpretive information.

Concurrently, the Oregon Water Resources Department (OWRD) staff began preparing a scenic flow recommendation to assist the Water Resources Commission in their consideration of designation of the proposed scenic waterways. Following designation (if that occurs), the Water Resources Commission will request that the Water Resources Department (WRD) identify flow quantities necessary for recreation, fish and wildlife uses before issuing new water rights within or above designated Scenic Waterways (ORS 390.835(1)).

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Background

The Oregon Scenic Waterway Program, established by a ballot initiative in 1970, is administered under the authority of the Oregon State Parks and Recreation Commission through the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department (ORS 390.805 to ORS 390.925). The scenic waterway program seeks to preserve, protect and enhance scenic, recreational, fish and wildlife and cultural values possessed by each individual scenic waterway. The Scenic Waterways Act was created to strike a balance between protecting the natural resources, scenic value, and recreational uses of Oregon’s rivers on the one hand, and adjacent property rights on the other. Rivers can be added to the system through designation by the Governor, the legislature, or by the citizens of Oregon through ballot initiative. For example, in 1988, Oregon voters passed the Oregon Rivers Initiative (Ballot Measure #7), which added 573 river miles to the system. The state program currently includes approximately 1,180 miles on 20 waterways (Figure 1).

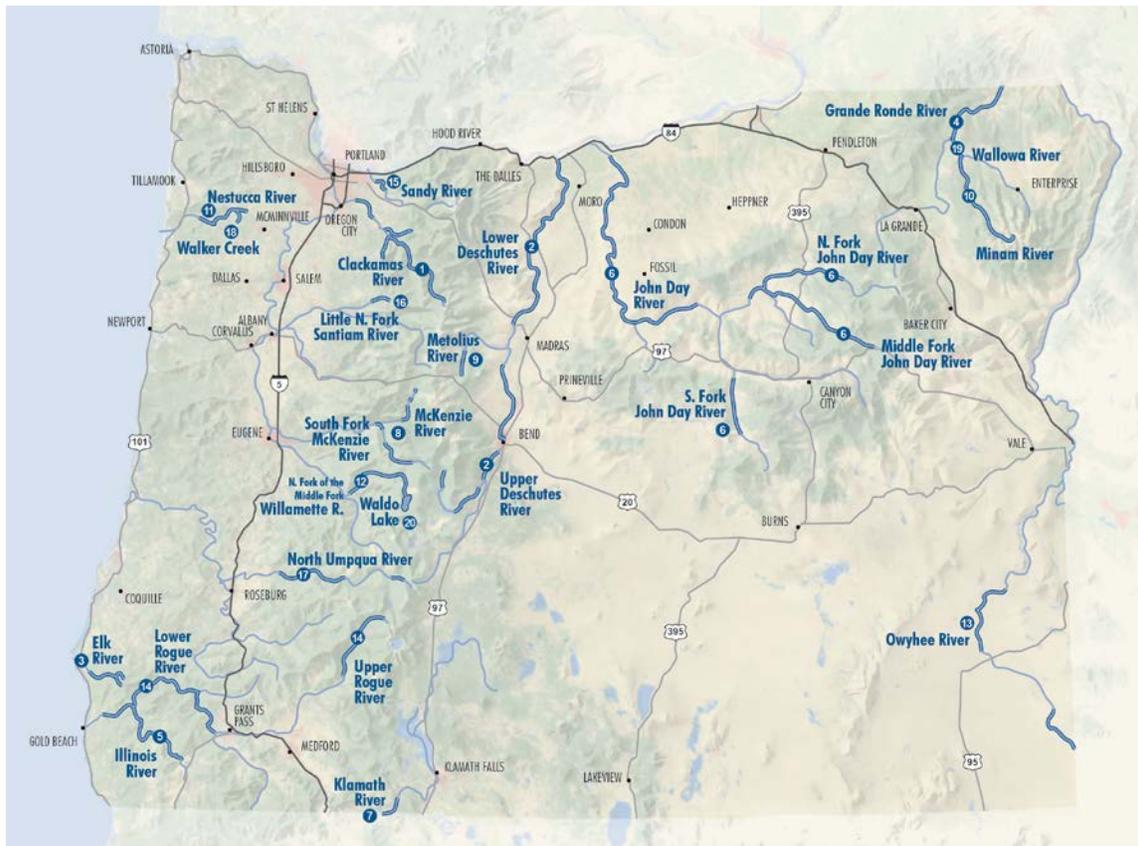


Figure 1. Oregon’s Existing State Scenic Waterways System

Scenic Waterway Eligibility Study

Oregon Parks and Recreation Department (OPRD) is directed by statute (ORS 390.855) to periodically

study new waterways for potential inclusion in the program, though no new waterways have been designated since 1988. In September 2013, the Governor directed Oregon Parks and Recreation Department to analyze at least three waterways for potential designation every two years. An initial screening of all Oregon waterways by OPRD resulted in a list of approximately 80 river segments which have the potential to meet the State’s waterway designation criteria. Based on a broad coalition of agencies and stakeholders, OPRD’s capacity to complete the waterway assessments, and to provide geographical distribution throughout the State, sections of the Molalla, Chetco, and Grande Ronde Rivers were included in the 2013-15 pilot study. In November 2014, the Oregon State Parks and Recreation Commission recommended designation of segments of the Chetco and Molalla Rivers. The Commission also directed OPRD staff to cooperate with advisory groups to pilot test the development of draft management plans for the recommended scenic waterway segments on the Chetco and Molalla rivers, and append the pilot draft management plan reports to the existing scenic waterway qualification reports for Commission review by November, 2015. This document is that pilot draft management plan (see: The Management Planning Process). A summary of the eligibility study results is included below as background information.

Eligibility Study Purpose

An Oregon Scenic Waterway study, initiated by OPRD in 2014, serves as the statutorily required first step in the process to possibly designate a new Oregon Scenic Waterway. That process, established by ORS 390.855, allows for the Governor to designate new scenic waterways following study and approval of the Oregon State Parks and Recreation Commission and the Oregon Water Resources Commission. The study, covering approximately 14 miles on the Chetco River, constitutes the first step - a report to the OPRD Commission. The study was done to accomplish two objectives:

1. Determine if the river segments meet the qualifications for designation as an Oregon Scenic Waterway (ORS 390.855); and
2. If the qualifications are met, outline, in *general*, what type of management designation would be appropriate for waterway, *if* it is found to be eligible, suitable, and ultimately designated.

Study Location and Area

The Chetco River has its headwaters in the Kalmiopsis Wilderness in southwestern Oregon, near the junction of the Oregon Coast Range and Klamath Mountains, eventually flowing after around 55 miles into the Pacific Ocean between the cities of Brookings and Harbor, near the Oregon-California border (Figure 2). The river ranges from a high elevation at around 3700 feet above mean sea level (MSL) to a low where it enters the Pacific Ocean at MSL, with an average drop of about 67 feet/mile (USFS, 1993). Other major rivers in the general vicinity include the Rogue, Elk, and Illinois River, portions of all three are designated as both Federal Wild and Scenic and State Scenic Waterways along with the North Fork of the Smith. The study area on the Chetco River is shown below in red, in Figure 2 along with nearby State Scenic Waterways.

The Chetco River Study Area referred to in the scenic waterway study is defined as follows: The Chetco River and all lands within ¼ mile of each bank, beginning at where the Steel Bridge crosses the river within the Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest downstream approximately fourteen miles to Alfred A. Loeb State Park, near the city of Brookings, Oregon.

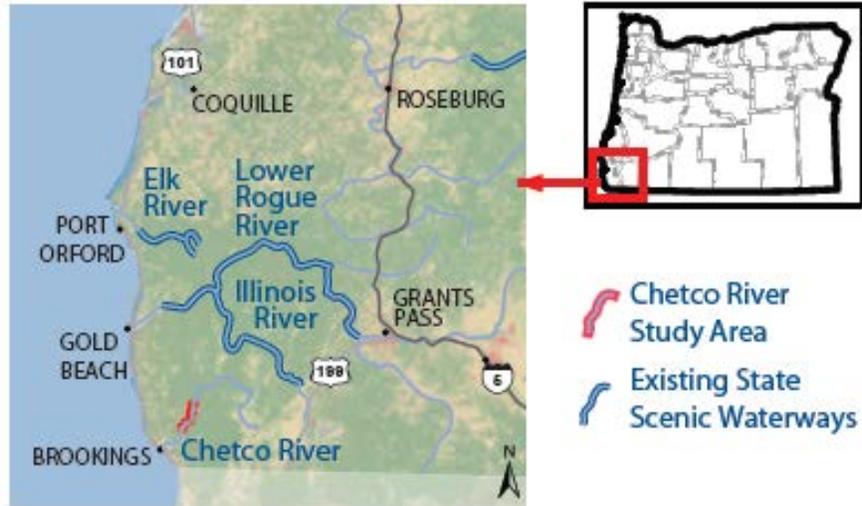


Figure 2. Location of the Chetco River Study Area in Curry Co., Southwest Oregon

While the upper wilderness section of the river is characterized as steep and heavily dissected, the lower fourteen mile study area is less steep with a wider river bottom and more densely forested surrounding hill slopes. In some sections, namely the Chetco River Gorge, the river narrows as it crosses through rock outcrops with interesting rock formations, including large colorful boulders in the riverbed. After the gorge, the river widens and sand and gravel bars become more frequent along the banks. The steep and rocky hill slopes, canyon walls, and stream terraces of the Chetco River support a variety of riparian and upland vegetation characteristic of the botanically interesting and diverse Klamath Mountains Ecoregion. Major tributaries in the study area include Eagle Creek, South Fork and Emily Creek. The upper study section is primarily composed of federal public lands, while the lower portion is a mix of federal, state and private lands with a mix of rural residential development and forestry being the dominant land use types on private lands.

The free-flowing river provides drinking water for the residents of Brookings-Harbor, is home to native fish runs including wild salmon and steelhead trout, and attracts a variety of recreational users. Only a day-trip away from Brookings-Harbor, Oregon and Crescent City, California, the Chetco offers recreational opportunities including fishing, camping, swimming/wading, kayaking, picnicking, and adjacent trail-use for hiking. Fishing for salmon and steelhead is at its peak in the winter months along with whitewater kayaking. In the summer, swimming, fishing, boating, camping, sightseeing and picnicking are the major attractions (U.S. Forest Service (USFS), unpublished report). The meandering nature of the river, forested setting, and unique water clarity provide interest in the landscape and enhance the recreational experience of floating the river or enjoying its banks. Many visitors are drawn to the river for the striking water color and clarity. An approximately 44.5 mile portion of the upper river (from the headwaters to the Forest Service boundary) has been designated as a Federal Wild and Scenic River since 1988.

Waterway Eligibility Findings

An evaluation of the various natural, scenic and recreational features of the study area was done. This information gathered following research, interviews and on-site observations was compared with the scenic waterway qualifications (i.e. free flowing; pleasing to look at, primitive, rural-pastoral; large enough to sustain recreation use without harming the recreational and natural resources). The approximately fourteen-mile long study area was divided into three segments. The Upper Section, includes the Chetco River from the Steel Bridge to the Old Low Water Bridge (USFS Rd 1846). The Middle Section, includes the Chetco River from the Old Low Water Bridge to the confluence with the South Fork of the Chetco River. The Lower Section includes the Chetco River from the South Fork to Alfred A. Loeb State Park. An evaluation for each segment was done to determine how well it met the scenic waterway qualifications. The criteria (ORS 390.855) were broken down into specific scenic, natural and recreational factors.

Based on the results of this evaluation, the entire study area along the Chetco River met the eligibility qualifications for inclusion into the Scenic Waterways Program (ORS 390.855).

Free-flowing: The first criterion that must be met is that “the river or segment of river is relatively free-flowing.”

The Chetco River is completely free-flowing in nature in that it flows without impoundment, diversion, major rip-rapping or modification of the waterway along the entire study segment. The river is also naturally flowing (without dams or diversion) throughout the whole length of the river from the headwaters in the Kalmiopsis to the Pacific Ocean (e.g., there are no upstream or downstream dams). The Chetco flows within natural banks, with the exception of minor cultural modifications made for the bridges. The river has generally regular and somewhat predictable flows, although as with almost all rivers in Oregon, flow varies seasonally and derives from naturally occurring phenomenon, including precipitation, springs, and some seasonal snow-melt.

Scenery: The second criteria that must be met is that the “scene as viewed from the river and related adjacent land is pleasing, whether primitive or rural-pastoral, or these conditions are restorable.”

Upper-section: The scenery as seen from the riverbank and the river in this section ranges from moderate, but pleasing to exceptional river-scape views with unique geology, dramatic colors in a remote, forested setting. The few developments that do exist are quite localized so their visibility does not detract noticeably from the general remote feeling of the area. The “steel bridge” crosses the river at the starting point of the study area. Other developments along the river include remnants of the old low water bridge (NF-1846), which is the start of the next study segment. It is possible to obtain views *from* the river itself throughout this section by floating the river, when water levels allow. Roads follow the river in some parts; however, the majority of this segment cannot be viewed from a vehicle or from the side of the road. It is possible in a few areas to access the river banks themselves without a great deal of effort, although the only obvious river access point is at the put-in (off the USFS road near the Steel Bridge) or above the study segment across the river from the Tolman Ranch property (off the USFS Rd). USFS maintains a trail in the area, the Chetco Gorge Trail, near the location of the old low water

bridge. The remote feeling of the area combined with views of forested slopes, interesting geologic features and striking water clarity and color combine to provide outstanding to generally pleasing views of the surrounding scenery of the area.

Middle and Lower sections: The scenery as seen from the riverbank and the river in these sections is typically moderate, but pleasing with a few areas that have more dramatic river-scape views with unique geology, dramatic colors (e.g., rocks and water clarity) in a largely primitive and undeveloped, forested setting. In the lower sections, there are some rural-pastoral features due to grazing that occurs on private lands. The few developments that do exist are quite localized so their visibility does not detract noticeably from the general natural feeling of the area. Cultural modifications include those made for the roads and former bridge (remnants of the low water bridge are visible from the river and banks), along with some impacts from timber harvest, grazing and a few residential homes (and one vacation rental) on private lands and the recreation areas at the USFS managed river bars (e.g., South Fork, Nook, Miller, Redwood) and at Loeb State Park. The state park campground is minimally visible from the river with only the river access road and a few rustic log cabins visible. Recreation, including vehicles and RV's are present, seasonally in large numbers, on all of the river bars in this section.

It is possible to obtain views *from* the river itself throughout these sections by floating the river, when water levels allow. Roads follow the river in some parts; however, and some of these segments can be viewed from a vehicle, although there are very few places to pull over on the side of the road. It is possible in a few areas to access the river banks; primarily at the USFS managed South Fork dispersed/minimally developed campground and the day-use areas on the river bars. The remote feeling of the area combined with views of forested slopes, interesting geologic features and striking water clarity and color combine to provide outstanding to generally pleasing views of the surrounding scenery of the area.

Recreation and natural resources: The final two criteria that must be met are that the river or segment of river and its setting must “possess natural and recreation values of outstanding quality” and be “large enough to sustain substantial recreation use and to accommodate existing uses without undue impairment of the natural values of the resource or quality of the recreation experience.”

Upper Section: This section of river has been designated as a Federal Wild and Scenic River since 1988. The river has been found outstanding for its recreation, water quality and fisheries (USFS, 1993). Fishing on the upper sections, as allowed by fishing regulations, is primarily from those that hike-in or float down the river and fish from their kayaks. Since access for drift boats is limited (in the past the low water crossing was a put-in), commercial use is limited as compared with the lower section. The river is known for its unique water clarity and as a world-class fishing river with some of the largest steelhead on the west coast. The Chetco is on various lists of the best fishing streams, primarily for salmon and steelhead, in the state (Schuhmann, 2012); (Palmer, 2014).

Recreational boating is becoming increasingly popular in the upper section, with access possible via USFS roads and floats possible for recreationists of a variety of skills levels, depending on the flow. During various water levels, kayaking the “Lower Chetco Gorge” is a regional favorite amongst

intermediate to expert paddlers. The two named major rapids in this section, Candycane and Conehead, rate between 4-5+ during higher flows for those favoring the “big water” experience. However, at lower flows, the most difficult sections can be by-passed by portaging. This section of the river is likely too narrow for rafts due to narrow chutes and portaging required at low water, however, it is floatable at various water levels in both hard-shell and inflatable kayaks. At the time of the site visit, some portaging around Candycane and a portion of Conehead Rapids was necessary due to water levels and obstructions. Fishing is possible, however recreational fishing use, is much lower than the other sections in the study area. Hike-in access to the Lower Chetco Gorge for day-use and camping is possible via USFS roads and trails. This segment includes dispersed camping on USFS property. Hunting for deer and elk in the forests surrounding the river is possible along this section during the appropriate seasons.



Kayaking on the Chetco River

Overall the recreation opportunities on this section of the river have the potential to be (and currently are) popular enough to attract visitors from beyond the local area, additionally they are relatively rare within the region with only a few rivers, like the Illinois and Smith R. offering somewhat similar experiences. While several rivers in the region offer somewhat similar scenery, the diversity of recreation opportunities and year-round nature of recreation on this river is quite unique.

Natural resources of national and state importance exist in the study area as there are quite a few rare and listed species known to occur or that have the possibility of occurring because of habitat and proximity to known occurrences. Three species listed under the federal and/or state Endangered Species Acts, and 40 federal and/or state sensitive species have the potential to occur or do occur in the study area. The Chetco River Population of coho salmon has recently been identified as a core population that is at high extinction risk by the NMFS (National Marine Fisheries Service, 2014). While only a few rare species of plants have been documented in the study area, the condition of the riparian and forest ecosystems of this upper segment is more pristine than the lower reaches, which are more impacted by

human uses. Some of these forests are very old and have large diameter trees with interesting branching. Other areas are younger, either because of logging history or wildfire. Sparse live oak and madrone are abundant on rocky promontories and outcroppings, and these features provide interesting contrast with mesic forest.

Middle and Lower sections: These sections of the river have been designated as a Federal Wild and Scenic River (until just above Loeb) since 1988. The river was found to be outstanding for recreation, water quality and fisheries (USFS, 1993). The river is known for its unique water clarity and as a world-class fishing river with some of the largest steelhead on the west coast. The Chetco is on various lists of the best fishing streams, primarily for salmon and steelhead, in the state (Schuhmann, 2012); (Palmer, 2014).

Recreational opportunities in this section include day-use pursuits (e.g., hiking, scenic enjoyment, swimming, non-motorized boating, hunting etc.) and camping on both state and USFS property, along with significant seasonal recreational fishing opportunities. Recreational boating (e.g., kayaking, rafts and other float devices) is possible throughout this whole stretch during much of the year with multiple put in and take out spots on public lands. Alfred A. Loeb State Park (Loeb) provides developed camping along the river with trail access to day-use picnic areas and a small network of family-friendly trails along the river and up into the redwoods (which are also located on adjacent USFS property). The Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest maintains campgrounds on the river banks in the study area including South Fork Camps, Redwood Bar, Nook Bar, and Miller Bar, all easily accessible from Brookings. Activities include picnicking, fishing, swimming and water play, scenic enjoyment, floating and other forms of non-motorized water sports, along with tent, camper and small trailer camping.



Fishing on the Chetco (photo courtesy of Tim Palmer)

Overall the recreation opportunities on these sections of the river have the potential to be (and currently are) popular enough to attract visitors from beyond the local area. While several rivers in the region offer somewhat similar scenery, the diversity of recreation opportunities and year-round nature

of recreation on this river is quite unique. The fishing on this section of river is often described as “world-class” and people come from all over the state, region, country, and in some cases the word to experience fishing on the Chetco River.

Natural resources are similar to those described for section 1, above. In summary, natural resources of national and state importance exist in the study area as there are quite a few rare and listed species known to occur or that have the possibility of occurring because of habitat and proximity to known occurrences. Notable for this section are the rare plant communities found in the vicinity of Loeb State Park, which include some of the only coast redwood association (coast redwood-tanoak/Pacific rhododendron forest) in Oregon that is also the “most northerly naturally occurring redwood stand in the world (Kagan, 1998).” The myrtlewood grove near the campground at Loeb is notable since many such communities have been removed by historic logging and other development; the grove at Loeb contains some of the largest remaining trees in Oregon (Kagan, 1998).

It appears that all three sections section meets the criteria of possessing *outstanding* recreation values and that it is large enough to sustain *substantial* recreation use. The nature of the existing water-based uses and abundance of public access to the river or surrounding lands meets the eligibility standards for recreation set in state statute. The importance of the river as critical habitat for fish and wildlife should not be overlooked; the statue requires that both criteria be met.

Program Goals

The scenic waterway program promotes cooperative protection and wise use of rivers in the system by all agencies (federal, state and local), individual property owners and recreation users.

Five general program goals include:

1. To protect the free-flowing character of designated rivers for fish, wildlife and recreation. No dams, reservoirs, impoundments and some forms of placer mining activities are currently allowed on scenic waterways.
2. To protect and enhance scenic, natural, recreation, scientific, fish and wildlife values along scenic waterways. New development or changes of existing uses proposed within a scenic waterway are reviewed before they may take place.
3. To protect private property rights. The Act discourages unsightly structures or inappropriate development that could be a nuisance to neighboring landowners and/or even depreciate property values. It prohibits pollution and the disturbance of adjacent surface lands by dredging. It also prohibits public use of private property without explicit consent of the landowner.
4. To promote expansion of the scenic waterway system. The Act sets up a process for adding new rivers to the system and establishes criteria for candidate rivers.
5. To encourage other local, state and federal agencies to act consistently with the goals of the program, the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department reviews plans and decisions made by other agencies to ensure consistency with the scenic waterways program.

Administration of the Oregon Scenic Waterways Program

Scenic waterways are administered under the authority of the Oregon State Parks and Recreation Commission (ORS 390.805 to ORS 390.925). Administrative rules (OAR 736-40-005 to 736-40-040) have been adopted to govern the program. In addition to the general rules governing the program, specific rules are generated for management of each river segment in the system. These rules are created through the management planning process, and tailored to the actions necessary to maintain the existing character of the designated river corridor.

The Act and the Commission's rules require the evaluation of proposed land use changes within one-quarter mile from the ordinary high water line, on each side of the river, for their potential impacts on the existing special attributes of the river. Property owners wanting to build roads or houses; extract minerals and aggregate, harvest timber, or other similar projects, may need to provide written notification to the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department (OPRD). OPRD's evaluation of the project will be coordinated with other natural resource agencies (federal and state) having regulatory responsibility and with the local jurisdiction. OPRD relies on its river classification and administrative rules for each segment of the scenic waterway to determine whether the proposed project is inconsistent with the designated classification. OPRD works with the landowner to reach a resolution of conflicts. Where such resolution cannot be reached the Commission must decide within one year of the original notification whether to pay the property owner for the land or the development rights. If the Commission does not decide within one year to acquire the land or development rights, then the landowner may proceed in accordance with the original development proposal.

OPRD coordinates the program with local, state, and federal agencies to assure their actions are compatible with Scenic Waterway Act, administrative rules and resource management plans.

Management of Scenic Waterways

The Management Planning Process

The goal of the scenic waterway management planning process is to develop a comprehensive and workable management plan which will protect or enhance the special attributes of the designated river corridor. Primary emphasis is on the protection of scenic, fish and wildlife and recreational features. The intent is to maintain the existing scenic condition of the area, without “turning back the clock” on existing land uses.

Pilot: Advisory Groups and Draft Management Plan

OPRD held two Advisory Group meetings (April 14, June 9th) and one public workshop (July 14) for each waterway. The Advisory Groups consist of local landowners, recreational users, local business owners, and local government members. These meetings provided the foundation for the final recommendations contained in the draft management plans.

The mechanisms for protection and enhancement to be included in this draft management plan are:

Scenic Waterway Classification - Within the management plan, scenic waterways are classified into one or more of six possible classifications, according to the character of the landscape and the amount and type of existing development.

Administrative Rules – If scenic waterway designation occurs, classifications are set in a management plan and specific guidelines for new development are established as state administrative rules through a public rule-making process.

Other Management Recommendations - Suggestions for actions to protect or enhance corridor values are also included in the management plan. Implementation could be through the OPRD, other state agencies, federal agencies or local agencies, organizations or persons. This includes input to OWRD’s recommendation of scenic flows to the Water Resources Commission.

Concurrently, the Oregon Water Resources Department (OWRD) staff began preparing a scenic flow recommendation to assist the Water Resources Commission in their consideration of designation of the proposed scenic waterways. Following designation (if that occurs), the Water Resources Commission will request that the Water Resources Department (WRD) identify flow quantities necessary for recreation, fish and wildlife uses before issuing water rights within or above designated Scenic Waterways (ORS 390.835(1)). WRD recommends Scenic Waterway flows to the Water Resources Commission through a formal staff report. The Commission then amends and/or approves the staff report and flow protections are implemented through the water right process for new water rights within and above the scenic waterway. Input from the OPRD Pilot Advisory Group and Public Comment regarding the recreational flow needs of the Scenic Waterway informs the recommendation that WRD puts forward to the Commission.

Scenic Waterway Classification

Under Oregon law (ORS 390.345), the scenic waterway program is administered by the Oregon State Parks and Recreation Commission, and staffed by Oregon Parks and Recreation Department. OPRD works to protect scenic values, recreation and fish and wildlife, based on special attributes of each river. OPRD strives to protect special attributes of the river while recognizing existing land uses and management practices on adjacent lands.

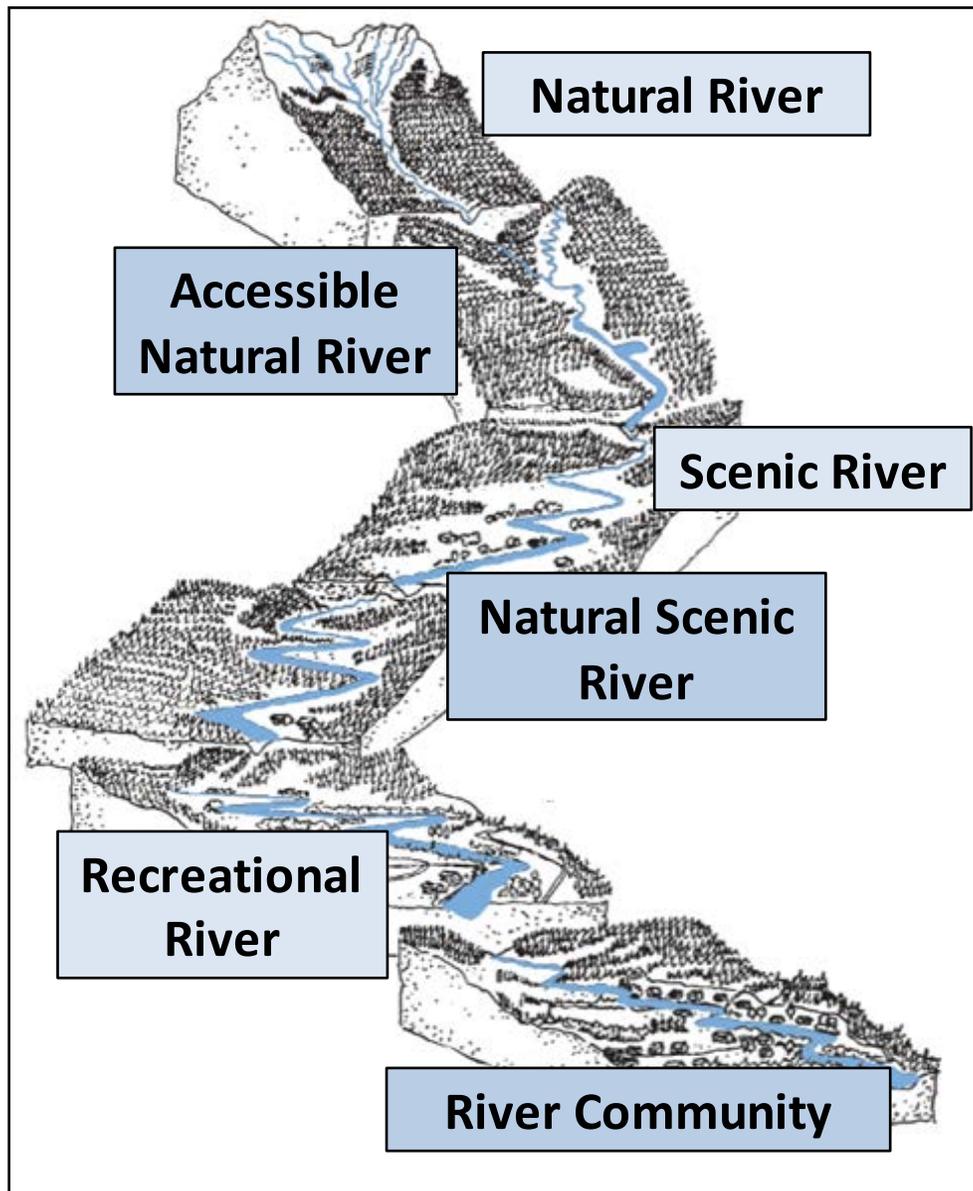


Figure 3. Diagram showing the six types of potential river classifications

In order to define and achieve management goals, the river is classified into one or more of six possible classifications according to the present level of land development, committed land uses, or landscape alterations (Fig. 3). Once the classifications are set, appropriate guidelines for new development or

landscape alterations are established as rules. The major aim of the program is to maintain *the existing* scenic condition of the river.

The following are existing land use and land alteration conditions usually associated with each of the six river classifications; and how each kind of classification should be administered (managed) in the scenic waterways program:

1. Natural River Areas are generally inaccessible except by trail or river, with related adjacent lands and shorelines essentially primitive. These areas may include an occasional lightly traveled road, airstrip, habitation or other kind of improvement already established, provided the effects are limited to the immediate vicinity. These areas will be administered to preserve their natural, wild and primitive condition while allowing compatible recreational and other uses. Preservation and enhancement of the primitive character of these areas is the goal of this and the next two classifications.

2. Accessible Natural River Areas are relatively primitive, undeveloped areas with access by railroad or lightly traveled road but otherwise possess the qualities of a Natural or Scenic River Area. These areas are administered to protect or enhance their scenic character, while allowing compatible outdoor recreational use.

3. Scenic River Areas may be accessible in places by roads, but are largely undeveloped and primitive except for agriculture and grazing. Scenic River Areas may not include long stretches of conspicuous or well-traveled roads paralleling the river in close proximity, but may include extensive areas in agricultural use. River segments considered “Scenic” are managed to maintain or enhance their high scenic quality, recreation value, fisheries and wildlife habitat. The intent is to preserve their largely undeveloped character while allowing continued agricultural land use.

4. Natural Scenic View Areas are designated where one riverbank is inaccessible, undeveloped or primitive in character (possesses the qualities of a Natural or Scenic River Area) while the opposite bank and related lands are accessible and developed. These areas are administered, as appropriate, to preserve or enhance their essentially primitive scenic character, while allowing compatible public outdoor recreational use.

5. Recreational River Areas are readily accessible by road or railroad, with some agricultural, commercial and/or residential development along the banks; the river may have undergone some impoundment or diversion in the past. River segments considered “Recreation” are managed to allow continuance of a wide range of compatible river-oriented public outdoor recreation opportunities, to the extent that these do not substantially impair the natural beauty of the scenic waterway or diminish its aesthetic, fish and wildlife, scientific and recreational values.

6. River Community Areas are river segments where the density (residential tract or platted subdivision) of existing structures or other developments precludes application of a more restrictive classification. River segments considered “Community Areas” are managed to allow development that is compatible

with county zoning and blends into the natural character of the surrounding landscape. This also means protecting riparian vegetation, and encouraging activities that enhance the landscape.

Due to the individual character of each scenic waterway, administrative criteria within each of the six classifications may vary from one scenic waterway to another. Examples can be found in the [administrative rules for existing state scenic waterways](#).

The rules established for each river classification generally allow some new construction and continued use of existing structures and improvements. Though some improvements require notification and approval, many others do not. For example, notification and approval is not generally needed for construction of new fences; maintenance of farm buildings, fences or outbuildings; laying of irrigation lines; crop rotation; removal of danger trees; construction of grain storage facilities under certain conditions; maintenance of existing residences and outbuildings; minor residential remodeling; construction of garage adjacent to existing homes; certain changes in landscaping; maintenance of roads and bridges; and firewood cutting for personal use.

Mining, road building, construction and placement of some new structures, land clearing and timber harvest are examples of activities typically requiring approval. River classifications and the associated rules or guidelines determine how the natural and scenic beauty of the river will be maintained.

Scenic Waterway Land Management Program

The Oregon Parks and Recreation Department, in collaboration with the Advisory Committee, proposes to apply three classifications to given segments of the proposed Chetco State Scenic Waterway.

Classification locations and explanations for each river segment are provided below (see Fig. 4 for map):



Below Candycane Rapids at low water in the Lower Chetco River Gorge

Accessible Natural River Area

From the Steel Bridge to Eagle Creek the river is proposed to be classified as an Accessible Natural River Area. The “Steel Bridge” crosses the river at the beginning of this section, after which the river quickly narrows to form the Lower Chetco River Gorge. Within the gorge, the river channel crosses through rock outcrops with interesting rock formations, including large colorful boulders in the riverbed, namely two sets of whitewater rapids (Candycane and Conehead). The geology, remote setting and water clarity combine to make this section of river outstandingly scenic.

It is possible to obtain views *from* the river itself throughout this section by floating the river, when water levels allow. This entire segment is in public (USFS) ownership with river access limited to a small undeveloped area near the Steel Bridge or by paddlers putting in higher up on the river (e.g., across the river from the Tolman Ranch property off the Forest Service Road) and floating down through the Chetco River Gorge. There are no developed recreation facilities, though hiking, kayaking, fishing, hunting, and primitive camping uses are evident. Hike-in access to the Lower Chetco Gorge for day-use and camping is possible via USFS roads and trails. This segment includes some dispersed camping on USFS property. The proposed management goal is to protect or enhance the scenic character of the area while allowing compatible outdoor recreational uses.



Conehead Rapids at low water in the Lower Chetco River Gorge

Scenic River Area

From Eagle Creek to the South Fork confluence the river is proposed to be classified as Scenic River Area. This section of river is accessible in a few places by roads, but is largely undeveloped except for some grazing, rural residential and recreational uses near the South Fork.



The view just upstream of Rainbow Creek on the Chetco River

Other developments along the river include remnants of the old low water bridge (NF-1846) and a trail maintained by the USFS, the Chetco Gorge Trail, with a trailhead near the location of the old low water bridge. The USFS has also maintained a small reservation only hike-in tent site near Rainbow Creek. Of the few developed private properties, very few are visible from the river. The upper section is under public ownership, while there is mixed federal/private ownership as you get closer to the South Fork confluence, including South Coast Lumber and private lands used for grazing and the Chetco River Inn. The proposed management goal is to preserve the area's high scenic quality, recreation value and fisheries and wildlife habitat by ensuring that all new developments blend into the natural character of the surrounding landscape while preserving the largely undeveloped character associated with existing uses.

Recreational River Areas

From the South Fork Confluence to the southern boundary of Alfred A. Loeb State Park, the river is proposed to be classified as Recreational River Area. Roads follow the river in some parts; however, the majority of this segment cannot be viewed from a vehicle or from the side of the road except from vehicular access point on the various the river bars (e.g. South Fork, Redwood, Nook, and Miller). The road (NF 1376) crosses the river at Second Bridge just above Loeb where it eventually becomes the North Bank Chetco River Road. The area offers pleasing river-scape views with interesting and colorful vegetation and exceptionally clear water in an area used seasonally by relatively large numbers of recreationists.

While there is more private property in this section (focused around the area just to the south of the South Fork and around Loeb State Park) public access is available throughout this segment because of the multiple public access points on the river bars and at the state park. Existing development includes residential homes, mostly in the area known locally as “Wilderness Retreat”. The “Wilderness Retreat” parcel was sub-divided into 47 lots, ranging between 0.6-1.3 acres with half of the lots lining a high embankment above the river and the other half across the road from the Forest Service Road #1376 (USFS, 1993). Few of these homes are visible from the river due to topography and existing vegetation. Those that are visible are partially screened and blend into the environment (e.g., occur in natural tone). Curry County zoning requirements enacted after this subdivision was developed generally limit dwelling density to one dwelling for every 5-10 acres. Additionally, Curry County ordinances generally require structural development setbacks within riparian areas.

The management goal in this section of river (as proposed) is to preserve and promote the area’s recreational quality by ensuring that any new developments blend into the natural character of the surrounding landscape and are compatible with existing county zoning.



The view just upstream of 2nd bridge and Loeb State Park

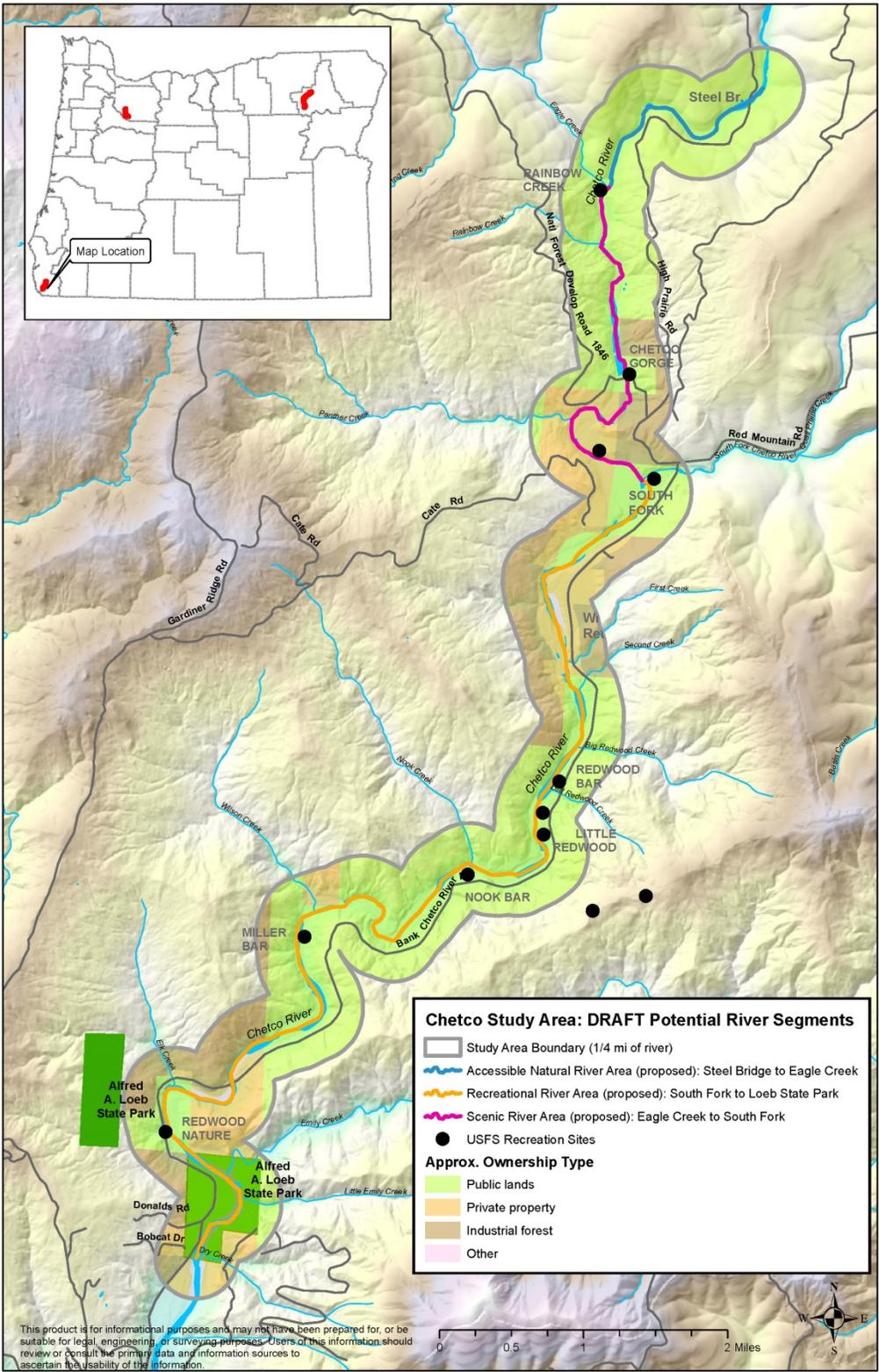


Figure 4. Draft proposed classification types and approximate land ownership

Potential Land Management Rules

For all scenic waterway areas

All new structures, improvements and development should be in compliance with the Public Use of Scenic Waterways Rules ([OAR 736-040-0025](#)) and Land Management Rules ([OAR 736-40-030 and 0035](#)) and be consistent with applicable Forest Service and Curry County land use and development regulations.

Accessible Natural River Area

From the Steel Bridge to Eagle Creek

Proposed draft rule guidance

- In order to preserve the river and related adjacent lands in a semi-primitive condition, only improvements made in connection with a compatible existing use (e.g., those needed for public recreation use or resource protection) should be allowed.
- Any new improvements permitted should be primitive in character and include screening from the river by topography.
- New roads and similar forms of development should only be permitted when fully screened from view from the river by topography. Any existing roads should not be extended or realigned unless fully screened by topography.

Note: The Forest Service manages this section of river as “scenic” and note in their management plan that the desired future condition of this segment is “to maintain a semi-primitive type of recreation experience” (USFS, 1993). Proposed improvements are minimal and are intended to “enhance the recreational experience without altering the semi-primitive quality of the area” (USFS, 1993). This management guidance is consistent with designation as an accessible natural river area under the State Scenic Waterway program.

Scenic River Area

From Eagle Creek to the South Fork Confluence

Proposed draft rule guidance:

- Improvements needed for public recreation use or resource protection shall be designed to blend with the natural character of the landscape.
- Natural evergreen vegetation shall be maintained between the new improvements and the river. The establishment of additional vegetative screening (preferably native vegetation) may be required to further mitigate the visual impact of new structure(s) as seen from the river if not blocked by topography.
- New roads and similar forms of development shall be screened from view from the river by topography.

Note: The Forest Service manages this section of river as “recreational” and note in their management plan that the desired future condition of this segment is “to maintain a semi-social type of recreation experience” (USFS, Year). Proposed improvements are moderate and are designed to meet the “existing demand for recreation facilities” along with planning for “a gradual increase in demand” (USFS, Year). This management guidance is generally consistent with designation as scenic river area under the State Scenic Waterway program.

Recreational River Area

From the South Fork Confluence to the southern boundary of Alfred A. Loeb State Park.

Rule guidance:

- New structures and improvements shall be permitted only when at least partially screened from view from the river by topography or vegetation and shall be designed to blend with the natural character of the landscape as much as possible. The establishment of additional vegetative screening (preferably native vegetation) may be required to further mitigate the visual impact of the new structure(s) as seen from the river, if not otherwise blocked by topography or existing vegetation. The condition of “vegetation screening” shall consist of a density and mixture of native evergreen and deciduous vegetation to obscure or allow only a filtered view of the proposed structures or improvements.
- Improvements needed for public recreation use or resource protection may be visible from the river but shall be designed to blend with the natural character of the landscape as much as possible.
- New roads and similar forms of development shall be set back from the river consistent with Curry County zoning and land development requirements and be screened from view from the river by topography or by existing or established evergreen vegetation.

Potential Management Recommendations

Advisory Committee and public input on priorities for management that could enhance the recreational experience and protect fish and wildlife on the Chetco River are summarized here. Ideas expressed pertain to actions that could be carried out by landowners and managers, partners in collaboration with land managers or other agencies, or by other groups or agencies independently.

1. Collaborate with local partners and public agencies towards the development and installation of small interpretive signs with messages about the river corridor (*potential topics* include: river stewardship, leave no trace, recreation, cultural resources, fisheries, wildlife, geology, water quality, hydrology, respecting private property) in key areas.
2. Work in partnership with local groups and public agencies towards the development of a water trail recreation guide to facilitate river-based recreation opportunities, protect natural resources and private property. The guide may include maps and information showing property boundaries, river launch sites, day use areas, camping areas, other facilities, along with safety and other interpretive information. Use this and other resources to work toward expanding educational opportunities to learn about river recreation on the Chetco and other nearby scenic waterways.
3. Develop signs that identify public access for put in and take outs and/or developed recreation areas that are visible from the river and from the road access points.
4. Collaborate with local partners and public agencies to identify user conflict areas that may not currently be adequately addressed in the Forest Service Management Plan due to changes in visitor use patterns (e.g., RVs often camp in the middle of boat ramps restricting drift boat launch at South Fork).
5. Cooperate with local partners and land managers to explore funding opportunities and any existing regulatory limitations to *improving* existing river access points (e.g., boat ramps, access roads, and other facilities such as restrooms and trash receptacles) to facilitate river recreational opportunities and improve visitor safety. Suggest that existing river access points continue to be maintained.
6. Develop organized regular river clean-up activities (e.g., trash and other debris) within the Scenic Waterway, particularly at river access points.
7. Explore opportunities to form partnership to exploring improvements in water quality, planting native species and invasive species management and/or monitoring efforts.
8. Do not modify existing or construct new structures within the high water channel unless they enhance river related (e.g., fish, wildlife, recreation) resources and comply with free-flow standards.
9. Public agencies in collaboration with local partners should work towards scoping for ways to improve hiking trail opportunities on public lands in the river corridor.
10. Federal agencies (e.g., USFS) should provide the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department draft plans, environmental assessments or environmental impact statements on activities that may affect the Scenic Waterway.

11. OPRD shall seek the cooperation of all local, state and federal agencies in meeting the objectives of this program and complying with the State Scenic Waterway Act and State Park Commission rules.

For a summary of recommendations on flow levels necessary to protect the recreation, fish, and wildlife needs of the Chetco River, refer to Appendix A.

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Appendix A

This is a placeholder for the Draft Water Resources Commission staff report on scenic waterway flow recommendations.