

DRAFT

Pilot State Scenic Waterway Management Plan

Molalla River

July 1 2015



Oregon Parks and Recreation Department
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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, an online survey and a local community meeting was to review preliminary findings, answer questions, and obtain public comments. All property owners with 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 indicates that there is strong support for designating the study area 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 13.2 mile stretch of the upper Molalla River, in Clackamas 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 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 20th, June 15th) and one public workshop (July 20th) for each waterway. 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, a Scenic River Area from the Confluence with the Table Rock Fork to Pine Creek, a Recreational River Area from the Pine Creek Confluence to Trout Creek and a River Community Area from the Trout Creek Confluence to Glen Avon Bridge.

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 were developing including those about improving public access, interpretive information and signage.

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 1180 miles on 20 waterways (Figure 1).

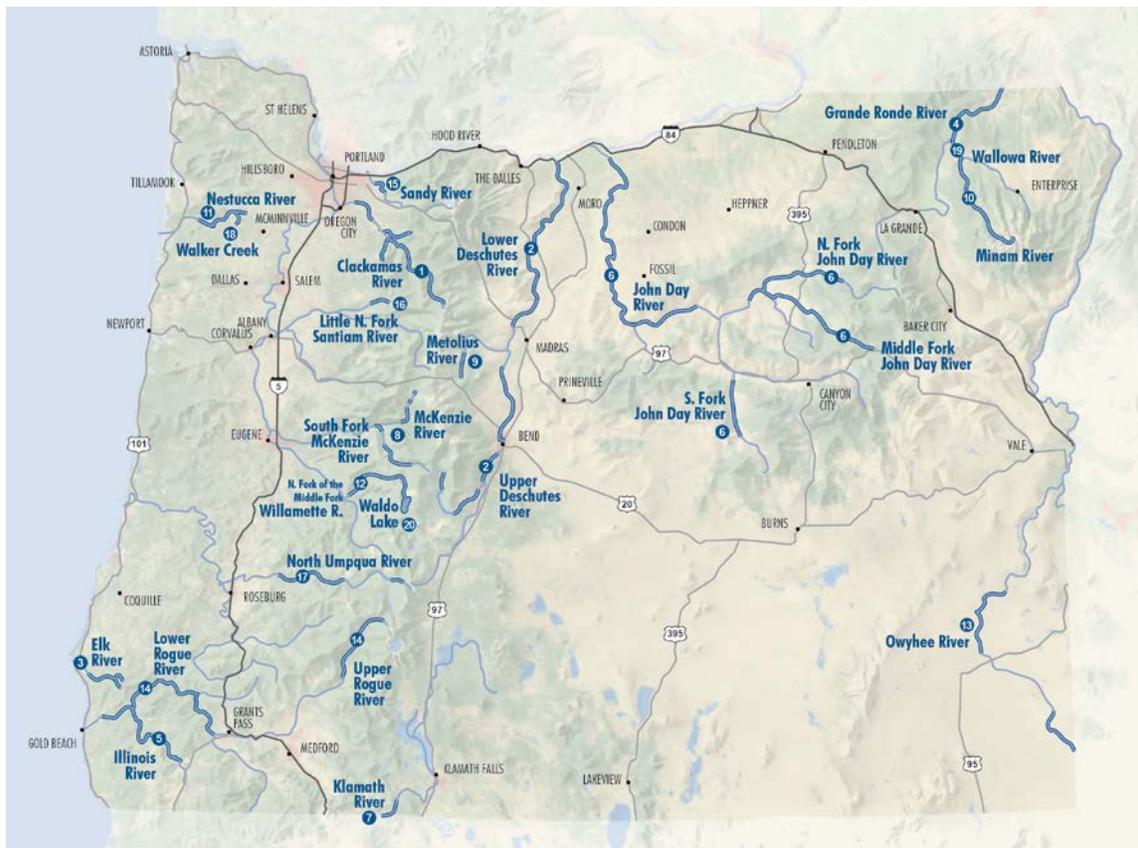


Figure 1. Oregon’s Existing State Scenic Waterways System

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 13 miles on the upper Molalla 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 Molalla River has its headwaters in the Table Rock Wilderness Area in the lower west slopes of Oregon's Cascade Range in rural Clackamas County, eventually flowing after around 51 miles into the Willamette River near Canby, Oregon. OPRD studied one ~13.2 mile upper river segment, beginning at the confluence of the Table Rock Fork and ending at Glen Avon Bridge, near the city of Molalla, Oregon (Figure 2). The study area ranges from a high elevation at around 1196 feet above mean sea level (MSL) to a low at the Glen Avon Bridge at 528 feet above MSL, with a drop of about 51 feet/mile. Other major rivers in the general vicinity include the Clackamas and Sandy Rivers, portions of which are both designated as both Federal Wild and Scenic and State Scenic Waterways. The study area on the Molalla River is shown below in red, in Figure 2 along with nearby State Scenic Waterways, shown in blue.

The Molalla River Study Area referred to in the scenic waterway study is defined as follows: The Molalla River Study Area referred to in this report is defined as follows: The Molalla River and all lands within ¼ mile of each bank, beginning at the confluence of the Table Rock Fork downstream approximately 13.2 miles to the Glen Avon Bridge, near the city of Molalla, Oregon.

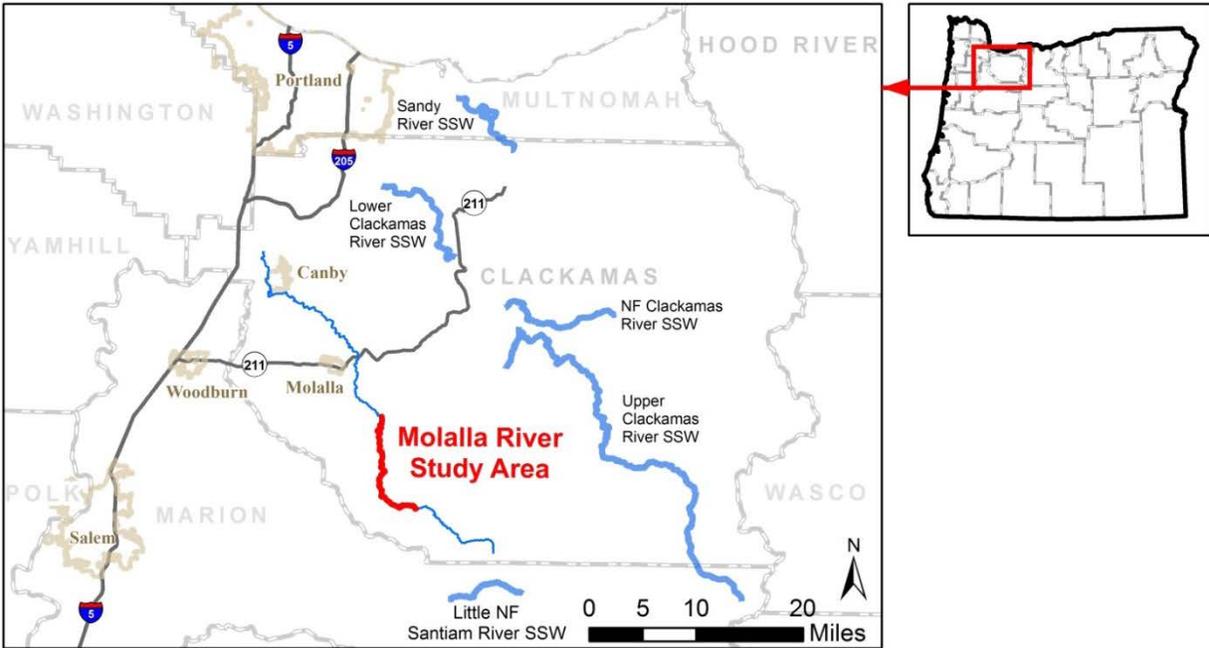


Figure 2. Location of the Molalla River Study Area in Clackamas Co., Northwest Oregon

While the upper wilderness section of the Molalla River is characterized as having steep gradients, the lower thirteen mile study area is less steep as it flows through a series of pools riffles, and rapids (Bureau of Land Management, 1993). In some sections, the river narrows as it crosses through rock outcrops with interesting rock formations, including a dramatic basalt rosette. The steep hill slopes, canyon walls, and stream terraces of the Molalla 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 the Table Rock Fork of the Molalla, Copper Creek Fork of the Molalla, Horse Creek, Bear Creek, Pine Creek, and Trout Creek. The North Fork of the Molalla enters the main-stem just below the study area. The upper study section is primarily composed of federal public lands, with some private industrial timberlands, while the lower portion is primarily 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 Canby and Molalla, 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 the Portland and Salem Metropolitan areas, the Molalla offers recreational opportunities including fishing, camping, swimming/wading, kayaking, rafting, picnicking, scenic enjoyment and adjacent trail-use for hiking, biking, and horseback riding. Fishing for salmon and steelhead is at its peak once the rains start along with whitewater kayaking, which extends through the spring. In the summer, swimming, fishing, camping, sightseeing and picnicking are the major attractions (Bureau of Land Management, 1993).

The clear water, forested setting, and interesting geological features provide interest in the landscape and enhance the recreational experience of floating the river or enjoying its banks. Thousands of visitors

are drawn to the river for the geology and other scenic and recreational qualities of the river corridor. An approximately 15.1 mile portion of the upper river (and a section of the Table Rock Fork) has been proposed as a Federal Wild and Scenic River and there have been several bills in Congress over recent past sessions.

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 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 meets the criteria (ORS 390.855) for eligibility as a state scenic waterway.

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

The Molalla River is completely free-flowing in nature in that it flows without impoundment, diversion, or major 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 Table Rock Wilderness to the Willamette River (e.g., there are no upstream or downstream dams). Notably, it is the Willamette’s longest un-dammed tributary. The Molalla flows within natural banks, with the exception of minor cultural modifications made for the bridges and roads (e.g., some bank stabilization efforts including retaining walls). The river has generally regular and somewhat predictable flows, although as with almost all rivers in Oregon, flow various seasonally but derives from naturally occurring phenomenon, including precipitation, and to some extent, 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.”

The scenery as seen from the riverbank and the river in the study area ranges from moderate, but pleasing to exceptional river-scape views with unique geology and clear water in a mostly remote-feeling (although it is close to the road in parts), forested setting. The BLM notes that scenery on the Molalla River is an “outstandingly remarkable value” due to the resources of regional significance and proximity to major metropolitan areas, setting it apart from other rivers (Bureau of Land Management, 1993). Water clarity, interesting geology and hydrology combine to create the overall visual quality of the river corridor.

The few developments that do exist are quite localized so their visibility does not detract noticeably from the general natural feeling of the area. A few bridges cross the river, and other developments along the river include some visible impacts from timber harvest and a few residential homes on private lands, although most of them are at least partially screened as viewed from the river. The only property

with a visible structure as seen from the river (in the upper segment of the study area) is the one known as “Bee Ranch” located near the confluence of the Table Rock Fork (see photo, below). At the very end of the study area, a few more homes are visible from the river. In a few places where the road is close to the river, structures created for erosion control (e.g., retaining walls) are quite visible, albeit localized in nature. The remote feeling of the area combined with views of forested slopes and interesting geologic features combine to provide outstanding to generally pleasing views of the river and its surrounding scenery.

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.”

The Molalla was listed in a 1987 study of recreational use of Oregon Waterways in which it was listed as having “outstanding recreational resources”, particularly for canoeing/kayaking, salmon and steelhead fishing and to a lesser extent (substantial to moderate) other types of boating including rafting, trout fishing, and “other recreation” which included hiking, swimming, camping and nature viewing (Oregon Department of Transportation, 1987). Boating, coupled with fishing and other activities reflects the importance of water dependent recreation and other water related activities on the Molalla River. The BLM estimates that approximately 50,000 visitors are attracted to the Molalla River corridor from the local and surrounding metropolitan areas, including Portland, Canby, and Salem (Bureau of Land Management, 2010).

The BLM notes that recreation on the Molalla River is an “outstandingly remarkable value” due to the river-related resources of regional significance and proximity to major metropolitan areas (Bureau of Land Management, 1993). Key recreational uses that were found to be exceptional include fishing, day-hiking, camping, non-motorized boating, picnicking, and swimming/wading. Recreational opportunities include day-use pursuits (e.g., hiking, scenic enjoyment, picnicking) and camping at newly developed BLM campgrounds, along with seasonal recreational fishing opportunities. Fishing, as allowed by fishing regulations (e.g., below Turner Bridge), is primarily from those that hike-in or fish from the banks from one of the many pedestrian access points on public lands. The BLM found that the “presence of year-round angling opportunities is important (Bureau of Land Management, 1993)”.

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. Boating is becoming increasingly popular in this section, with access possible via roads and floats possible for recreationists of a variety of skills levels, depending on the flow. During various water levels, kayaking the “3 Bears Run” is a regional favorite amongst intermediate to expert paddlers. Experienced whitewater kayakers, canoeists and some on rafts paddle the river during higher water months (typically Nov-May, depending on rains), when the challenging Class 3-4 (and higher depending on flows) rapids of the Molalla River “3 Bears Run” surrounded by unusual rock formations, including Mama, Papa, Baby-Bear, Porridge Bowl, and Goldilocks rapids are a draw.

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 nearby Clackamas, offer *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 notable.

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. Five species listed under the Federal and/or state Endangered Species Acts, and 31 federal and/or state sensitive species have the potential to occur or do occur in the study area. The steep and rocky hill slopes, canyon walls, and stream terraces of the Molalla River support typical riparian and upland vegetation types characteristic of the West Cascades Ecoregion. The abundant patches of Scouler's corydalis are the most notable botanical point of interest in the riparian areas, which also provide visual interest especially in areas with wet cliff walls that have hanging bryophytes, ferns, and saxifrages. While much of the forest present on hillsides visible from the river has been logged in the past, some impressive late-seral forest is present and unique habitats include "rocky outcrops, cliffs, tallus slopes, wetlands, and riparian areas (Bureau of Land Management, 1993)."

It appears that the study area meets the criteria of possessing *outstanding* recreation values and that it is large enough to sustain the existing, substantial, levels of recreation use. The nature of the existing water-based uses and surrounding lands in the study segment indicates it meets the eligibility standards for recreation set in state statute. The importance of the river as important habitat for fish and wildlife should not be overlooked; the statute 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 the protection of aesthetic, scenic, fish and wildlife, scientific, 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 20th, June 15th) and one public workshop (July 20th) for the waterway. The Advisory Group consists 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 plan.

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.

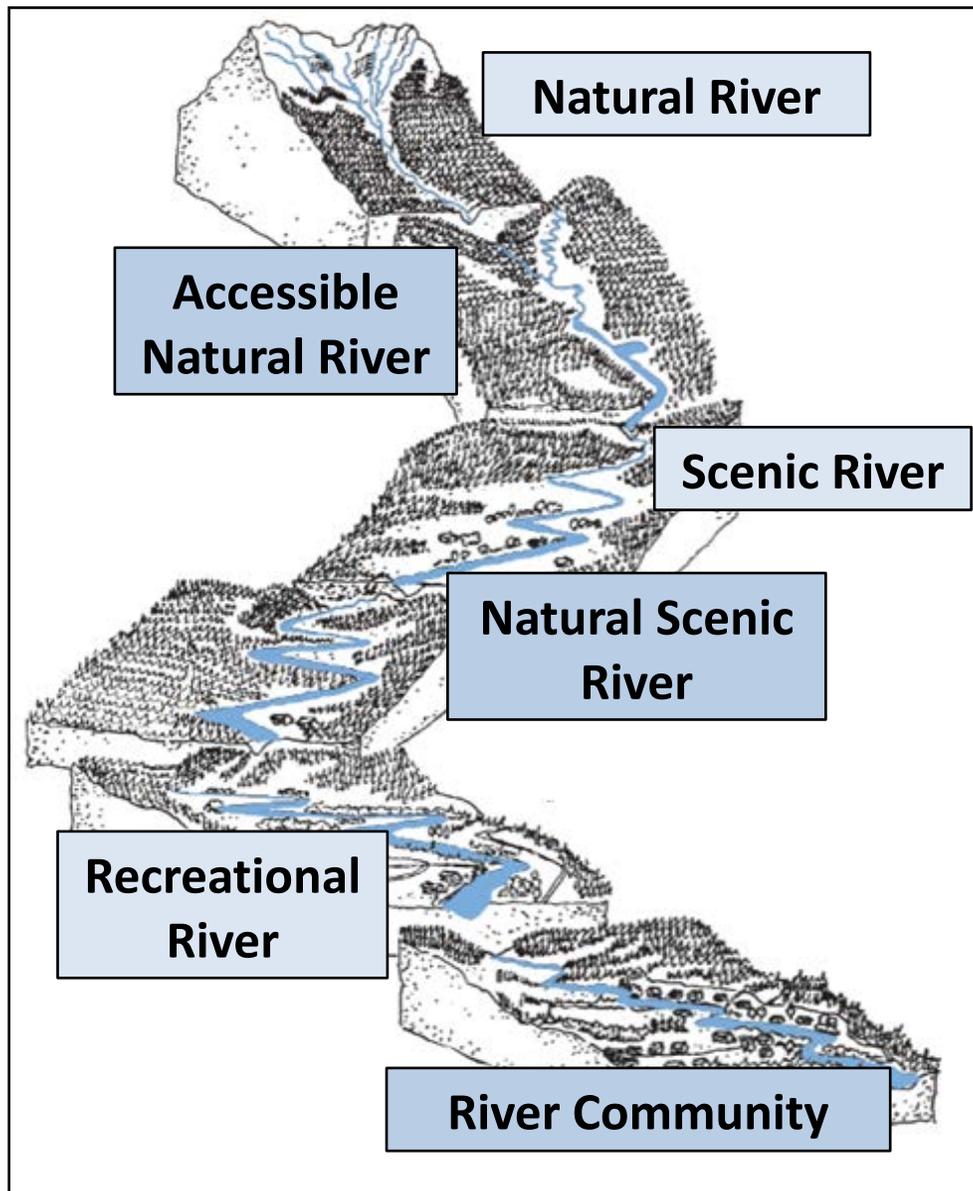


Figure 3. Diagram showing the six types of potential river classifications

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. 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](#).

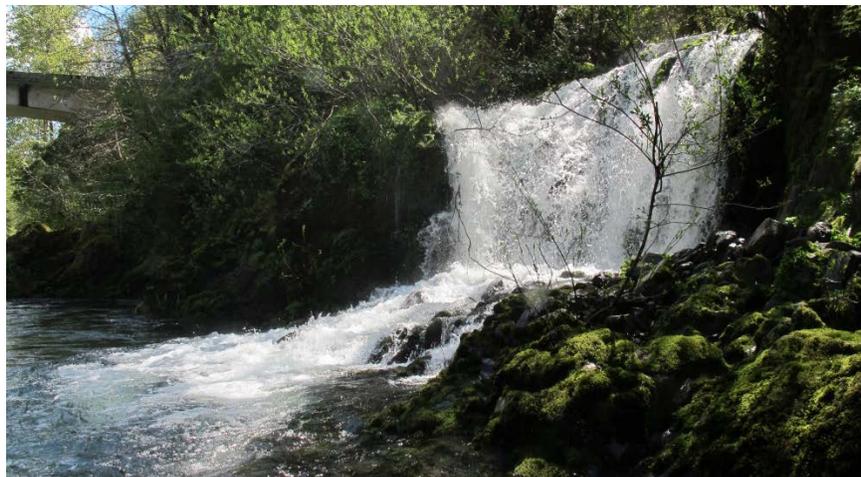
The rules established for each river classification generally allow some new construction and continued use of existing structures and improvements. Though some improvements require notification and approval, many others do not. For example, notification and approval is not generally needed for construction 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 of some new structures, placement of mobile homes, 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 Molalla State Scenic Waterway. Classification locations and explanations for each river segment are provided below (see **Figure 4** for map):

Table Rock Fork Confluence to Pine Creek Confluence: Scenic River Area

From the confluence with the Table Rock Fork to Pine Creek the river is proposed to be classified as a Scenic River Area. This section of river is accessible in a few places by roads and trails, but is largely undeveloped. The Table Rock Fork merges with what becomes the main-stem of the Molalla River at



Horse Creek Falls and Bridge on the Upper Molalla River

the beginning of this section, after which the river narrows (after approximately one mile) to form Horse Creek Canyon. In some sections, namely through a few narrow gorges, including Horse Creek Rapid, and an area of basalt canyon walls that surround the area known as the Molalla basalt rosette, or “eye of the Molalla”, where the river narrows as it crosses through rock outcrops with interesting rock formations.

The geology, hydrology (e.g., numerous small waterfalls), 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 segment is almost entirely in public (BLM) ownership with river access limited to a few undeveloped river access points, though hiking, kayaking, hunting, and primitive camping uses are evident. Turner Creek Bridge is the only trailhead along this road with parking and restrooms. River access is mostly undeveloped, with the exception of pedestrian trails down to the river. There are no designated paddling access points, however, the BLM has developed plans to construct a system of put-in and take-out locations to facilitate boating and improve safety. Potential sites for improvements (e.g, signing, pedestrian ramps for kayaks and rafts) include Turner Bridge. The BLM currently maintains two new seasonal campgrounds on the river banks (in the recreational section, see below) along with a planned campground near Pine Creek. BLM previously had dispersed campground along the corridor but are discontinuing that now that there are dedicated campgrounds.



Basalt rosette on the Molalla River

The area offers pleasing river-scape views with interesting and colorful vegetation, clear water in an area used seasonally by recreationists. The river is completely free-flowing within natural banks, with the exception of minor modifications made for the bridges and roads. The few developments that do exist are localized so their visibility does not detract noticeably from the general natural setting of the area. Horse Creek Bridge (shown above) and Turner Creek Bridge cross the river, and Pine Creek Bridge marks the end of this section. Other developments along the river include some visible impacts from

timber harvest and one residential home on private lands, although it is partially screened as viewed from the river and blends in with the scene.

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.

Pine Creek Confluence to Trout Creek: Recreational River Area

From the Pine Creek Confluence to Trout Creek, the river is proposed to be classified as Recreational River Area. Roads follow the river in some parts; however, some of the river cannot be viewed from a vehicle or from the side of the road. Frequent trails allow pedestrian access to the river. The road (S. Molalla Forest Road) provides the primary access to the river south of the Glen Avon Bridge and runs adjacent to BLM property starting about 1.5 miles after the bridge. The only major day-use trailhead along this road with parking and restrooms is Hardy Creek Trailhead. Other trailheads include Amanda’s Trailhead, Americorp’s Trailhead, Sandquist’s Trailhead, and Annie’s Cabin Trailhead. Paddlers typically put in for the “3 Bears Run” near Turner Bridge (in the scenic section, above) or higher up on the river for a longer run. Some kayakers will also put in higher up on the river (above the study area), both on the Table Rock Fork, or, for the challenging Copper Creek rapids known as Lightning Lonnie (Class IV) and Dungeon, located near Dungeon Cr. (Keller, 1998).



Rapids on the “3 Bears Run” of the upper Molalla River

Most of the recreation focal points are minimally developed and at dispersed locations within the Molalla River Recreation Area, operated by the Salem BLM District. River access is mostly undeveloped, with the exception of pedestrian trails down to the river. There are no designated paddling access

points, however, the BLM has it in their plans to develop a system of put-in and take-out locations to facilitate boating and improve safety. The BLM maintains several new seasonal campgrounds on the river banks in the study area including Three Bears Recreation Site and Cedar Grove. BLM previously allowed dispersed campgrounds along the corridor, but are discontinuing that now that there are dedicated campgrounds.

Annually, thousands visit the Molalla River Recreation Corridor for year-round recreation including hiking, kayaking and white water rafting (and the use of other types of floatation devices in the low-water months), touring and mountain biking, camping, horseback riding, hunting, fishing, swimming, picnicking, nature watching, or to simply enjoy the sounds and sights of the river. There are more than 30 miles of non-motorized trails which access numerous waterfalls and vistas.

The Molalla is well known as a recreational river for visitors from the surrounding metropolitan areas, including Portland and Salem. However, it is also beloved by locals from Molalla and surrounding communities in Clackamas County for its swimming holes, scenery, camping, hiking, fishing and hunting. Facilities include restrooms, fire-rings, picnic tables, potable water, restrooms and river access. Cedar Grove, a group-camp operated by special recreation permit, is located at milepost 6 on the Molalla Forest Road. The area offers pleasing river-scape views with interesting and colorful vegetation, and clear water in an area used seasonally by relatively large numbers of recreationists. A summer recreation user study conducted for the BLM (White & Virden, 2007) found that a majority of survey respondents noted that viewing the scenic beauty is very important to them along with recreation in the corridor (White & Virden, 2007).

The river is completely free-flowing within natural banks, with the exception of minor modifications, mainly those made for the bridges and roads. The few developments that do exist are localized so their visibility does not detract noticeably from the general natural setting of the area. Glen Avon Bridge crosses the river below this section and in a few places the road and associated structures (e.g., riprap, retaining walls) are quite visible, albeit localized disturbances. Other developments along the river include visible impacts from timber harvest (mostly outside of the study area and buffer) and a few residential homes on private lands, although most of them are at least partially screened as viewed from the river (and are concentrated at end of the study area in the proposed river community area). The remote feeling of the area combined with views of forested slopes and interesting geologic features provides outstanding to generally pleasing views of the river and its surrounding scenery.

While there is more private property in this section than the upper section, most existing development is focused to the north of Trout Creek (in the river community area, see below). Public access is available in this segment because of multiple public access points on BLM property. Existing development includes a few residential homes, although most of the homes are not visible from the river due to topography and existing vegetation. Those that are visible are usually partially screened and blend into the environment (e.g., occur in natural tone).

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.

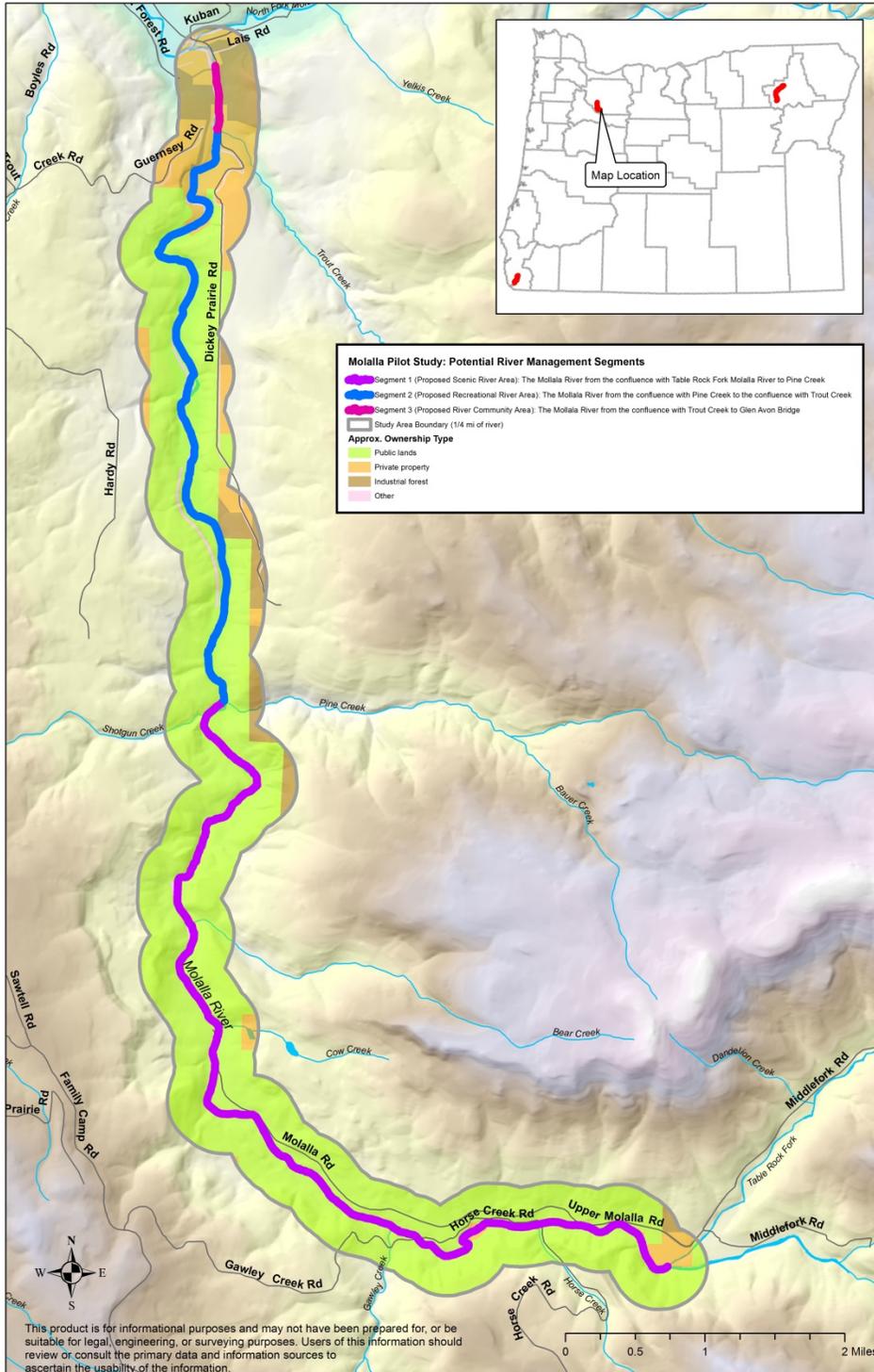


Figure 4. Draft proposed classification types and approximate land ownership

Trout Creek Confluence to Glen Avon Bridge: River Community Area

From the Trout Creek Confluence to Glen Avon Bridge, the river is proposed to be classified as River Community Area.

There is significantly more private property in this section than the other two sections with most existing development occurring north of the Glen Avon Bridge (and not visible from the proposed designated section, which ends at the bridge). A large percentage of the private property ownership in this section is industrial timberlands. Existing development includes a few residential homes, although most of the homes (including the Molalla Retreat buildings) are not visible from the river *upstream* of the bridge (the designated section, *from which any potential impacts of future (new) development would be determined*) due to topography and existing vegetation. Those few that are visible above the bridge are partially screened and blend into the environment (e.g., occur in natural tones). There is a primitive paddling access on river left (east bank) near the bridge.

The management goal in this section of river (as proposed) is 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.



The Molalla River as seen from below the Glen Avon Bridge

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 BLM and Clackamas County land use and development regulations.

Scenic River Area

From the Confluence with the Table Rock Fork to Pine Creek

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 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.

Note: The BLM *manages* this section of river as “recreational” as it was found to be “suitable” for inclusion into the National Wild and Scenic River System “ in recognition of its outstanding recreational, scenic and geologic values” (Bureau of Land Management, 2010). Rivers found suitable are managed with interim protections until the river is released from consideration or designated under the National Wild and Scenic Rivers Act (Bureau of Land Management, 2010). This management guidance is generally consistent with designation as scenic river area under the State Scenic Waterway program. BLM currently has assigned the area into Visual Resource Management (VRM) Class II (Bureau of Land Management, 2010). The objective of Class II is to retain the existing character of the landscape, with only low level changes allowed to the landscape that do not attract the attention of the casual observer.

Recreational River Area

From the Pine Creek Confluence to Trout Creek

Rule guidance:

- 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, mines and similar forms of development shall be set back from the river consistent with Clackamas County zoning and land development requirements and be screened from view from the river by topography or by existing or established evergreen vegetation.
- Existing natural evergreen vegetation will be maintained between new structures and the river, unless removal does not impact the view as seen from the river.

- 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.

Note: The BLM *manages* this section of river as “recreational” as it was found to be “suitable” for inclusion into the National Wild and Scenic River System “in recognition of its outstanding recreational, scenic and geologic values” (Bureau of Land Management, 2010). This management guidance is generally consistent with designation as recreational river area under the State Scenic Waterway program.

River Community Area

From the Confluence with Trout Creek to Glen Avon Bridge

Proposed draft rule guidance:

- No land north of the Glen Avon Bridge affects the view from the waters within the proposed scenic waterway, therefore those areas are deemed to be “non-related adjacent land” **and not subject to scenic waterway review.**
- For areas above the bridge, general scenic waterway rules (applicable to all scenic waterways) and other existing federal, state and local (e.g., Clackamas County’s river protection plan) rules are sufficient.
- Future development and land management activities should be consistent with Clackamas County’s river protection plan.
- Explore changing the boundary to exclude the river community area section of the proposed scenic waterway, which would end the scenic waterway designation at Trout Creek.

Note: The BLM *manages* this section of river as “recreational” as it was found to be “suitable” for inclusion into the National Wild and Scenic River System “in recognition of its outstanding recreational, scenic and geologic values” (Bureau of Land Management, 2010). Rivers found suitable are managed with interim protections (on federal lands) until the river is released from consideration or designated under the National Wild and Scenic Rivers Act (Bureau of Land Management, 2010). However, this section was not included in the various bills/proposed designation legislation. National Wild and Scenic designations apply primarily to federal lands, which is part of the reason for the establishment in many states of complementary state programs.

Potential Management Recommendations

1. Collaborate with local partners and public agencies to develop and install 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. Collaborate with local partners and public agencies to develop 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.
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 land managers to explore funding to improve river access points (including boat ramps and access roads) to facilitate river recreational opportunities and improve visitor safety.
5. Develop organized regular river clean-up activities (e.g., trash and other debris) within the Scenic Waterway, particularly at river access points.
6. Explore opportunities to form partnership to exploring improvements in water quality, planting native species and invasive species management and/or monitoring efforts.
7. Use the Oregon Forest Practices Act to manage forest management activities on non-federal lands.
8. Follow BLM's Management Plan to manage federal lands. This includes application of applicable visual resource management categories to BLM lands (currently assigned to VRM Class II).
9. Explore excluding the segment studied and found eligible between Trout Creek and Glen Avon Bridge from designation (see suggested rule language).

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

Works Cited

- Bureau of Land Management. (1993). *Resource Assessment of the Molalla River*. Salem, Oregon: Salem District.
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Appendix A

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