



Ross Lake National Recreation Area



Dear Friends of North Cascades,

I am pleased to announce that the National Park Service (NPS) is conducting the Skagit Wild and Scenic River (WSR) Eligibility and Suitability Studies as part of the Ross Lake National Recreation Area (NRA) General Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement (GMP/EIS). The focus of this wild and scenic river analysis is on the Skagit River below Gorge Powerhouse near the town of Newhalem to the Ross Lake NRA boundary. The analysis also includes Goodell Creek, the largest and most important tributary to fishery resources in this reach of the Skagit River.

Evaluating wild and scenic river status is one of many issues being considered in the GMP which will outline the vision for Ross Lake NRA for the next 15-20 years. Last March, we released a summary newsletter and held public workshops on our draft alternatives. Since the preliminary elements of the studies were not part of this discussion, and it is an important consideration, the National Park Service is providing this additional public involvement opportunity to focus on the wild and scenic river studies.

This newsletter presents draft findings of the Wild and Scenic River Eligibility Study. Public input as well as additional analysis are needed for the suitability study, the second step in the study process. We want to hear from you about your thoughts on WSR designation. As you may know, the Skagit River, from the Ross Lake NRA boundary downstream to Sedro-Woolley, and its main tributaries (the Cascade, Suiattle, and Sauk) are designated wild and scenic rivers and administered by the Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest. A designation from Gorge Powerhouse to the Ross Lake NRA boundary would complete this section of the Skagit River, creating potential opportunities for holistic watershed management. The NPS is currently managing the Skagit River within its boundaries to protect resources consistent with the intent of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. If the suitability analysis is favorable, the NPS would recommend to Congress that the river be included in the National Wild and Scenic River system. Actual wild and scenic river designation would require an act of Congress.

Please read this newsletter to learn about the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act and our current studies. I hope to see you at one of the upcoming workshops and look forward to hearing your thoughts on wild and scenic river designation. Your continued involvement and input is appreciated.

Sincerely,

Palmer (Chip) Jenkins
Superintendent, North Cascades National Park Service Complex

You're Invited to a Workshop

- Learn about the Skagit Wild and Scenic River Eligibility and Suitability Studies
- Hear about the preliminary results of the Skagit Wild and Scenic River Eligibility Study
- Understand the Wild and Scenic River designation process
- Discuss your ideas, concerns, and thoughts

We strongly urge you to attend one of the workshops. Also, please take some time to fill out the comment form enclosed in this newsletter and mail it by **October 31, 2008**. Comments can also be submitted online at <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/rola>.

Tuesday, October 14, 2008

4:00 pm – 6:00 pm

Seattle, Washington

Klondike National Historic Park
Classroom on museum's lower level
319 Second Avenue South
www.nps.gov/klse

Wednesday, October 15, 2008

6:00 pm – 8:00 pm

Sedro-Woolley, Washington

North Cascades NPS Complex Headquarters
Baker and Shuksan Rooms
810 State Route 20



National Park Service

General Management Plan

Ross Lake National Recreation Area

Skagit Wild and Scenic River Eligibility and Suitability Studies

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Planning Website

http://parkplanning.nps.gov/rola

If you have questions or would like to contact someone directly about the Skagit Wild and Scenic River Studies, please contact Susan Rosebrough, by telephone (206) 220-4121 or e-mail: susan_rosebrough@nps.gov

The National Park Service cares for the special places saved by the American people so that all may experience our heritage.

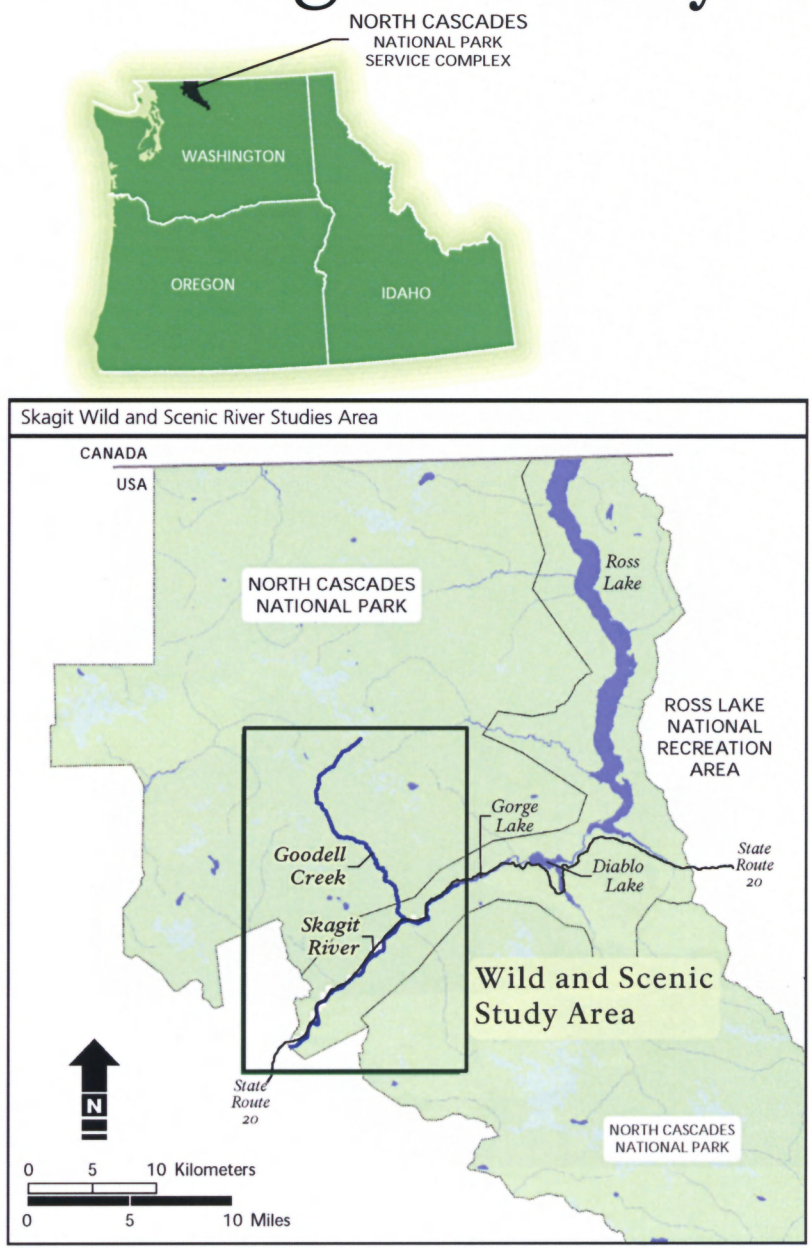


Why is the NPS doing this study?

SKAGIT RIVER WATERSHED & STUDY AREA

The headwaters of the Skagit River begin in British Columbia, Canada in the North Cascades Mountains and the Skagit River flows approximately 150 miles before emptying into Puget Sound. The Skagit River is the third largest river on the West Coast of the United States, and the largest one draining into Puget Sound. Abundant glaciers from the surrounding scenic jagged peaks and regulated water flow from Seattle City Light (SCL) dams provide stable flows creating homes for numerous fish and wildlife and enjoyment by recreationists.

The Wild and Scenic River (WSR) Act requires federal agencies to evaluate a river's eligibility for inclusion in the WSR system as part of their land management planning processes. Because the NPS is currently conducting a General Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement (GMP/EIS) for Ross Lake NRA, this planning process provides an opportunity to efficiently evaluate rivers within the boundary for WSR status. The NPS is focusing the current WSR studies on the main-stem of the Skagit River below Gorge powerhouse to the Ross Lake NRA boundary near Bacon Creek to complete designation of this river from Sedro-Woolley to the Skagit Hydroelectric Project and to potentially create more opportunities for holistic watershed management. This section of the river is also entirely within the Ross Lake NRA, which is the focus of the GMP/EIS.



Eligibility Study and Preliminary Findings

The NPS evaluated the eligibility of the Skagit River from below Gorge Dam to the Ross Lake NRA boundary for inclusion in the WSR System. Goodell Creek, the largest and most important tributary to fishery resources in this reach, was also evaluated.

The Skagit River below Gorge Dam to the Gorge Powerhouse was found ineligible since the limited water in this reach does not meet the free-flow requirement. The Skagit River from below Gorge Powerhouse to the Ross Lake NRA boundary and Goodell

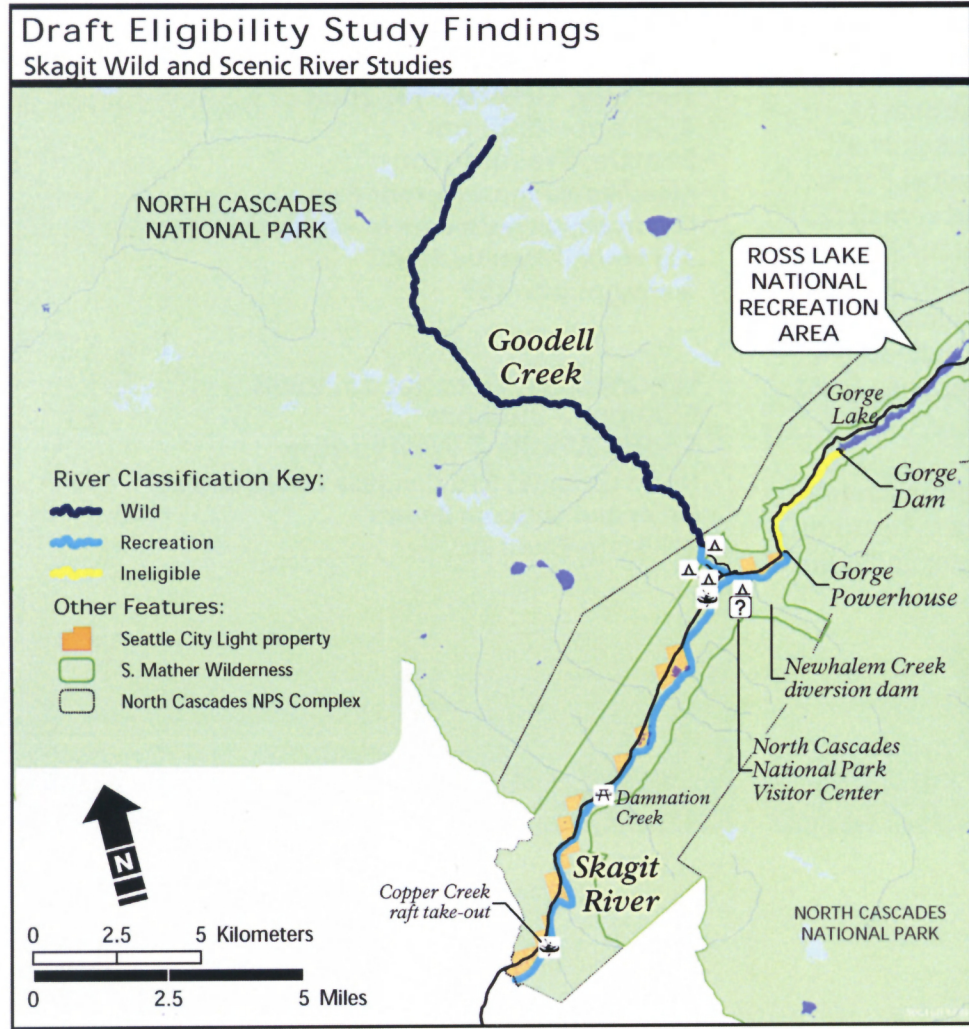
Creek were found to be eligible; they meet the free-flow requirement and possess a number of outstanding remarkable values as described below.

- **Fishery:** The Skagit River provides essential habitat for all ten salmonid stocks and is one of the most important rivers for natural fishery stocks in Washington.
- **Wildlife:** The Skagit River is very important to wintering bald eagles and has one of the greatest concentrations of any river in the lower 48 states.

- **Geology:** The Skagit River Watershed is the most glaciated river system in the lower 48 states, with over 300 active glaciers.
- **Pre-history:** The prehistoric site at Goodell Creek, representing six hundred years of Native American river-use, is unique. It is the only site that illustrates the complete process of soapstone creation and the only site where salmon remains from prehistoric human use, including teeth and head parts, have been found near a river segment.
- **Scenery:** Goodell Creek was found to have scenery as an outstanding remarkable value due to the location of its headwaters in the heart of the remote, scenic and rugged Picket Range, its picturesque mountain views, numerous cascades, and limited human-made features.

Skagit Hydroelectric Project

The Skagit River is a significant source of hydroelectric power, supporting 25-percent of Seattle's electrical power needs. Seattle City Light (SCL) operates the 690 MW project consisting of three dams (Ross, Diablo, and Gorge). River flows are controlled by the dams which are located above a natural fish barrier at Newhalem Gorge. Water is diverted at Gorge Dam, located furthest downstream, through penstocks or large pipes, creating a 2.5 mile long bypassed reach of the Skagit River. The bypass reach remains either dry or with limited water throughout much of the year. The project below Gorge Dam is operated in peaking mode, meaning water is stored and released in accordance with energy needs; the flows fluctuate on a daily and seasonal basis. Once reservoirs fill in the spring, summer runoff in the river becomes more natural. The project is managed to generate electricity and protect fishery resources.



The study also identified preliminary classifications – wild, scenic or recreational largely dependent on the level of human development. The Skagit River was classified as recreational due to the hydropower dams upstream and presence of the North Cascades Highway paralleling the river this entire stretch. Goodell Creek, located primarily within the wilderness boundary, was classified as wild, except for the lower one-half of a mile which was also classified as recreational.



2 Skagit Wild and Scenic River Eligibility and Suitability Studies

About the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act

The WSR Act is celebrating its 40th anniversary. It protects the free-flowing waters of many of our nation’s greatest rivers, while also recognizing the potential for appropriate use and development. The Act ensures the public’s enjoyment of the river and its resources for present and future generations. New dams and other water resources projects that would have adverse impacts are prohibited on WSR segments. There are three different classification types –wild, scenic, and recreational.

To be eligible for inclusion in the WSR system, a river must be (1) free-flowing and (2) possess at least one river-dependent outstanding remarkable value (ORV) or characteristic that is regionally/nationally unique, rare, or exemplary. If a river is found eligible, the next step is a suitability analysis which assesses whether or not eligible segments should be included in the WSR system. It is based on public input and an assessment of the ability of the river segment(s) to be managed to protect the river values. If the suitability analysis supports designation, then the recommendation is forwarded to Congress. Designation of the river into the National WSR system can happen through two ways: (1) by act of Congress and (2) by the Secretary of the Interior through a recommendation from a state’s Governor. While over 100 rivers in Washington State are eligible for WSR status, only the following six rivers are designated rivers in the WSR system: Skagit; Cascade; Suiattle; Sauk; White Salmon; and Klickitat Rivers. To learn about the WSR system, see www.rivers.gov.



What Happens Next?

The comments received through the upcoming workshops and formal comment period, which ends October 31, 2008, will be used to develop the suitability study, the next step in the planning process. These studies will be incorporated into the overall draft GMP/EIS which is scheduled to be completed in fall 2009. Once the draft plan is complete, the document and summary newsletters will be mailed to the public for review and comment. A final round of public workshops will be held to discuss the contents of the draft GMP/EIS including findings and recommendations on WSR designation. The draft plan will then be revised and a final GMP/EIS will be published and available in fall 2010. If WSR designation is recommended then, the report and draft bill language would be forwarded to Congress. Wild and Scenic River designation would require an act of Congress.

Suitability Study and Designation

WILL THE SKAGIT RIVER & GOODELL CREEK BECOME WILD AND SCENIC RIVERS?
The preliminary findings indicate that the river segments are eligible, therefore the NPS is currently conducting a suitability analysis assessing whether or not the eligible segments should be recommended for designation. This study takes into account any potential trade-offs with water resource developments, such as construction of new dams. Initial communication with SCL indicates previous plans to construct a new dam in this segment have been abandoned and SCL tentatively supports designation. Public involvement is an important element of the suitability study. Public comments will assist the NPS in making its recommendation on whether or not the river segments should be designated and formally included in the WSR System. Results of the eligibility and suitability studies will be incorporated in the Ross Lake NRA GMP/EIS. If the NPS recommends designation, then the final report would be forwarded to Congress. Congress and the President are the final decision makers regarding designating rivers into the WSR system.

HOW WILL MANAGEMENT CHANGE IF THE RIVERS ARE DESIGNATED?
Regardless of whether the rivers are designated as wild and scenic, the GMP/EIS will outline the vision and management guidance for the next 15-20 years. Since the rivers are eligible, the NPS will continue to manage them to protect their special resources. If the rivers are designated, a comprehensive management plan focusing on the designated segments will also be conducted. Designation would create more opportunities to focus on protection, interpretation, and enjoyment of the river segments and their special resources.

OTHER ELIGIBLE WILD AND SCENIC RIVERS WITHIN THE NORTH CASCADES NPS COMPLEX
While there are no designated WSR segments within the North Cascades NPS Complex, previous analyses and studies have found other rivers eligible for WSR status including: Big Beaver Creek, Ruby Creek/Granite Creek/Canyon Creek, Thunder Creek/Fisher Creek, Chilliwack River, Stehekin River watershed, North Fork Nooksack River, and Baker River. The draft GMP/EIS may recommend that the NPS evaluate and/or update eligibility analysis for all necessary river and river segments in the Skagit River Watershed within the whole North Cascades NPS Complex and pursue suitability analysis as appropriate.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS & PROTECTIONS FROM WSR DESIGNATION

- Designation could protect the river from any proposed federally-assisted water resources projects such as new dams/reservoirs that would cause adverse effects to the river and its resources.
- The Skagit River is designated from the park boundary to Sedro Woolley and under USFS management. Designation of this 11-mile segment would complete the upper Skagit River designation and could create opportunities for holistic watershed management.
- Designation could enhance protection of water quality and outstanding natural and cultural values.
- Designation could create opportunities for the public to learn how the NPS and SCL are working together to manage the river to enhance fishery and wildlife resources.
- Designation could attract national public recognition of the river as a special place.
- Designation would require the creation of a comprehensive management plan, allowing focus on river protection and interpretative opportunities.





National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

North Cascades National Park Service Complex
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Sedro-Woolley, WA
98284-1239

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EXPERIENCE YOUR AMERICA

View of the Skagit River



Ross Lake National Recreation Area

General Management Plan
Special Edition: Skagit Wild and Scenic River Eligibility & Suitability Studies

Newsletter #3, Fall 2008

{ Cut here, fold, tape [DO NOT STAPLE], and mail form }

Send us your comments

If you would like to provide written comments, you can write your comments on the form enclosed with this newsletter or submit them online at <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/rola> by October 31, 2008. The draft eligibility report is also available upon request.

Questions

1. Do you agree with the findings of the draft Wild and Scenic River Eligibility Study for the Skagit River?
2. Do you support WSR designation of the Skagit River below Gorge Powerhouse to the Ross Lake NRA boundary and its largest tributary Goodell Creek? Why or why not?
3. Do you have any other thoughts or comments you would like to share?
4. Do you want to be on the mailing list for the GMP? Also if the mailing label is incorrect, please indicate the corrections below.

☐ Please send updates via e-mail rather than paper copy (enter e-mail address below)

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Before including your address, phone number, e-mail address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, you should be aware that your entire comment – including your personal identifying information – may be made publicly available at any time. While you can ask us in your comment to withhold your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so. Thank you

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