



# John Day River Study

Service Creek to Cottonwood

## Quick Review

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### Background

The Prineville Bureau of Land Management (BLM) in partnership with the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs, Oregon Department of State Lands, Oregon Parks and Recreation Department, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, and the John Day Coalition of Counties has responsibility for management of the John Day Wild and Scenic River in Eastern Oregon (see map). The 118 mile section of river from Service Creek to Cottonwood is very popular with boaters. Monitoring shows that increased boating use, among other factors, has resulted in changes to both social and resource conditions over time. The purpose of the John Day River Study is to present management options for controlling impacts to river values.

### Current Management Direction

Direction for managing the John Day Wild and Scenic River comes from several sources including the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act; BLM Recreation, Wilderness, and Visual Resource Management policies; Oregon Administrative Rules for the John Day Scenic Waterway; and the Record of Decision for the John Day River Plan.

The *Wild and Scenic Rivers Act* (1968) protects certain rivers with outstanding natural, cultural or recreational features in a free-flowing condition for the enjoyment of present and future generations. The Act requires agencies which administer Wild and Scenic Rivers to prepare management plans that address resource protection, development of lands and facilities, user capacities, and other management practices necessary or desirable to achieve the Act's purposes. River management plans must state the kinds and amounts of public use a river can sustain without adverse impacts to the values for which it was designated Wild and Scenic, and establish management actions to control use.

*BLM policy* directs the BLM to establish an appropriate carrying capacity in areas where visitor use has potential to adversely impact significant resource values and/or the quality of visitor experience. Where capacities are exceeded, use limits may be considered.

*The John Day Wild and Scenic River Management Plan* (River Plan, 2001) directed the BLM to use a LAC study to determine the appropriate level of boating use on the river from Service Creek to Cottonwood. The River Plan stated that management decisions would be based on resource conditions, social preferences, and maintaining the desired future condition of these river segments.



## Brief History

- 1970 Portions of the river are designated as an Oregon State Scenic Waterway.
- 1988 Congress passes the Oregon Omnibus Wild and Scenic Rivers Act which designated portions of the John Day River as Wild and Scenic. The “outstanding and remarkable values” for which the river was designated include scenery, recreational opportunities, fish, wildlife, geological, archeological, and historical. The river is classified as *Recreational*.
- 1990s Recreation use on the John Day River increases significantly
- 1998 Data on boating use is collected from boaters at launch points along the river.
- 1999 BLM begins extensive data collection of campsite conditions along the river.
- 2001 5 partners, with primary management interests in the John Day River, complete a Management Plan for the John Day Wild and Scenic River. The partners are the BLM, State of Oregon, Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs Reservation, Bureau of Indian Affairs, and the John Day River Coalition of Counties. The plan directs the BLM to study the recreation use of the river, using the Limits of Acceptable Change (LAC) process, to determine appropriate use levels for all activities, including boating.
- 2001 BLM begins the LAC process and conducts a social study of the John Day River boaters to assess existing social conditions, and boater preferences and opinions about possible management actions. Data collected from previous efforts is included in LAC process.
- 2006 Review of LAC study results (8 yrs of data and monitoring results) find that high levels of boating use are resulting in social and resource impacts.

## Limits of Acceptable Change Process

Limits of Acceptable Change is a process for identifying the desired resource, social, and managerial conditions for an area, and maintaining these desired conditions over time. *Indicators*, which measure the state of these desired conditions, have *standards* or thresholds, which determine the amount of change that will be allowed. The standards then serve as “triggers” which alert managing agencies to an unacceptable change in conditions. If monitoring indicates that standards for protecting river values are exceeded, then river managers can apply one or more of the proposed management options, listed under each of the following indicator discussions, to help reverse or prevent unacceptable impacts.

The LAC process was selected to assess conditions on the John Day River because it is a method for making informed recreation management decisions that are based on physical and social monitoring information. The River Plan directs the BLM to continue to use this process to develop management options for protecting river values which are being impacted.

## Summary of Findings

- Trees are an important component of riverside campsites because they provide shade. However, trees are being damaged or killed as campers cut them up for fuel wood. Campsite trees are becoming a scarce resource along the river, and need protection.
- Desirable campsites along the river (those with adequate flat ground, distance or screening from adjacent campsites and shade trees) are limited.
- Intensive use from mid- May through mid-July has resulted in some unacceptable social impacts including: the # of overnight boating groups exceeds the # of available public land campsites forcing boaters to “share” camps or camp on private property and a high # of encounters with other groups reduces the opportunity for solitude.
- Congestion mostly occurs at launch and take-out points. Competition for campsites is increasing.
- Occasional conflicts occur between private land owners and boaters who camp on their lands without permission. Land owners are concerned about impacts to their private property including litter, wildfire risk, liability for accidents and vandalism.

## Indicators, Standards and Management Options

Eleven physical, social, and managerial indicators have been selected for field monitoring. These indicators were selected based on their relevance in measuring the identified desired future conditions, their repeatability and consistency in a field monitoring setting, and their cost effectiveness. Management options have been proposed to reduce impacts to within acceptable levels, based on the desired future condition. When considered collectively, these indicators will provide a barometer to measure whether desired future conditions are being met.

The management options are sorted into several groups: #1 option are those that would either be the least restrictive for visitors, or least cost to implement, while options under #2 and #3 would be progressively more restrictive for visitors or higher cost to implement. The strategy is to implement #1 options first, to see if impacts can be controlled within acceptable levels, prior to implementing the more restrictive or costly approaches.

| Indicators of Desired Conditions which will continue to be Monitored   |   |
|--|---|
| Campsite Trees<br>Campsite Availability<br>Campsite Access<br>Camp to Camp Solitude<br>Boating Encounters<br>Firerings<br>Litter<br>Human Waste<br>Camp Structures<br>Human-caused Intrusions Outside of Camp<br>Livestock Grazing |  |

**A complete discussion of Indicators, Standards and Possible Management Actions begins on Page 28 of the Full Text Version of the John Day River Study. Also, please see definitions on page 25.**