

# PRINEVILLE DISTRICT OFFICE ELIGIBILITY INVENTORY OF POTENTIAL WILD AND SCENIC RIVERS IN THE JOHN DAY BASIN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN PLANNING AREA

## I. INTRODUCTION

As part of the planning effort for development of the John Day Basin Resource Management Plan (RMP), the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Interdisciplinary (ID) Team initiated a Wild and Scenic Rivers (WSR) inventory of approximately 1,400 miles of waterways within the John Day Basin RMP planning area. This inventory was to determine if any of these waterways that flow through public lands meet the WSR eligibility criteria as identified in the WSR Act of 1968, as amended.

### A. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT AND COORDINATION

The results of this WSR eligibility inventory will be included in the Prineville RMP planning effort. The public will be given the opportunity to comment on the WSR eligibility inventory results during the normal planning process for the RMP planning effort. Concerns voiced by the public will be included in deciding if those waterways recommended eligible in this report are also suitable to be recommended to Congress for inclusion into the WSR National System.

## II. PROCESS

The following definitions apply to key terms used in the WSR eligibility inventory process.

- **River (or waterway):** A flowing body of water or estuary or a section, portion, or tributary thereof, including rivers, streams, creeks, runs, kills, rills, and small lakes. For purposes of this review, a river is not required to have water in it year-round as long as flows are regular and predictable, even though intermittent, seasonal, or interrupted (BLM 2004).
- **Public lands:** The BLM-administered public land surface along waterways within a planning area. Those "split estate lands," where the land surface is state or privately owned and the federal mineral estate is administered by the BLM, are not involved with these reviews. This study involves the review of public lands; data on segments, parcels, corridors, rivers, and waterways were collected on public lands only, and are the basis for this review.

This WSR eligibility inventory of waterways in the John Day RMP planning area entails a three-step process:

1. Evaluate each river segment in the study area to recommend whether or not it is eligible for inclusion into the national WSR system;

2. Tentatively classify each segment recommended eligible as either wild, scenic, or recreational;
3. Identify and make recommendations for interim protection.

The subsequent step in the process, determining if any of those public lands that meet the eligibility criteria also meet WSR suitability factors, is not addressed in this report.

## **STEPS I & II: WILD AND SCENIC RIVERS ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA REVIEW AND TENTATIVE CLASSIFICATION**

### **Eligibility Criteria**

To meet the eligibility criteria, a waterway must be "free-flowing" and, along with its adjacent land area, must possess one or more "outstandingly remarkable" values. Only those portions of waterways flowing through public lands are to be considered. The following are the guidelines used in applying the eligibility criteria:

- **Free-flowing:** As applied to any river or section of a river, free-flowing means existing or flowing in natural condition without impoundment, diversion, straightening, rip-rapping, or other modification of the waterway. The existence, however, of low dams, diversion works, and other minor structures at the time any river is proposed for inclusion in the national WSR system shall not automatically bar its consideration for such inclusion; *provided*, that this shall not be construed to authorize, intend, or encourage future construction of such structures within components of the national WSR system (WSR Act Sec. 16(b)).

A river need not be "boatable or floatable" in order to be eligible as long as the volume of flow is sufficient enough to maintain the outstandingly remarkable values identified within the segment (BLM 1993). In addition, flows need not to be permanent but can be intermittent, seasonal, or interrupted, as long as they are regular and predictable and derived from naturally occurring circumstances (BLM 2004).

- **Outstandingly Remarkable Values:** The public lands along waterways must also possess one or more outstandingly remarkable values to be eligible for further consideration. Outstandingly remarkable values relate to scenic, recreational, geologic, fish and wildlife, historic, cultural, or other similar resource values.

In order to be assessed as outstandingly remarkable, a river-related value must be "a unique, rare or exemplary feature that is significant at a comparative regional or national scale," that is, such a value "would be one that is a conspicuous example from among a number of similar values that are themselves uncommon or extraordinary" (USFS and NPS 1999, p. 13). In addition, all such values should be directly river related. That is, they should be located in the river or on its immediate shorelands (generally within one-quarter mile on either side of the river); contribute substantially to

the functioning of the river ecosystem; and/or owe their location or existence to the presence of the river.

The following criteria for outstandingly remarkable values were used in assessing waterways in the John Day Basin RMP planning area:

- **Scenic:** The landscape elements of landform, vegetation, water, color and related factors result in notable or exemplary visual features and/or attractions within the geographic region. When analyzing scenic values, additional factors such as seasonal variations in vegetation, scale of cultural modifications, and the length of time negative intrusions are viewed may be considered. Scenery and visual attractions may be highly diverse over the majority of the river or river segment and not common to other rivers in the geographic region.
- **Recreational:** Recreational opportunities are or have the potential to be unusual enough to attract visitors to the geographic region. Visitors are willing to travel long distances to use the river resources for recreational purposes. River-related opportunities could include, but are not limited to, sightseeing, wildlife observation, camping, photography, hiking, fishing, hunting, and boating. Interpretive opportunities may be exceptional and attract or have the potential to attract visitors from outside the geographic region. The river may provide or have the potential to provide settings for national or regional commercial usage or competitive events. In addition, the river may be eligible if it is determined to provide a critically important regional recreation opportunity, or be a significant component of a regional recreation opportunity spectrum setting.
- **Geologic:** The river or the area within the river corridor contains one or more example(s) of a geologic feature, process, or phenomenon that is unique or rare within the region of comparison. The feature(s) may be in an unusually active stage of development, represent a textbook example, and/or represent a unique or rare combination of geologic features (erosional, volcanic, glacial, or other geologic structures).
- **Fish:** Fish values may be judged on the relative merits of either fish populations, habitat, or a combination of these river-related conditions:
  - a **Populations.** The river is nationally or regionally one of the top producers of resident, indigenous, and/or anadromous fish species. Of particular significance may be the presence of wild stocks or unique stocks, or populations of state, federally listed, or candidate threatened and endangered species.
  - b **Habitat.** The river provides exceptionally high quality habitat for fish species indigenous to the region. Of particular significance is habitat for state, federally listed, or candidate threatened and endangered species.

- **Wildlife:** Wildlife values may be judged on the relative merits of either wildlife populations or habitat, or a combination of these conditions:
  - a **Populations.** The river or area within the river corridor contains nationally or regionally important populations of resident or indigenous wildlife species dependent on the river environment. Of particular significance may be species considered to be unique or populations of state, federally listed, or candidate threatened or endangered species.
  - b **Habitat.** The river, or area within the river corridor, provides exceptionally high quality habitat for wildlife of national or regional significance, and/or may provide unique habitat or a critical link in habitat conditions for state, federally listed, or candidate threatened or endangered species. Contiguous habitat conditions are such that the biological needs of the species are met.
- **Cultural:** The river, or area within the river corridor, contains a site(s) where there is evidence of occupation or use by Native Americans. Sites must be rare, have unusual characteristics, or exceptional human interest value(s). Sites may have national or regional importance for interpreting prehistory; may be rare; may represent an area where a culture or cultural period was first identified and described; may have been used concurrently by two or more cultural groups; or may have been used by cultural groups for rare sacred purposes.
- **Historic:** The river or area within the river corridor contains a site(s) or feature(s) associated with a significant event, an important person, or a cultural activity of the past that was rare or unusual in the region. A historic site(s) and/or features(s) in most cases is 50 years old or older. Sites or features listed in, or eligible for inclusion in, the National Register of Historic Places, may be of particular significance.
- **Other Similar Values:** While no specific national evaluation guidelines have been developed for the other similar values category, additional values deemed relevant to the eligibility of the river segment should be considered in a manner consistent with the foregoing guidance -- including, but not limited to, hydrology, ecologic/biologic diversity, paleontology, botanic, and scientific study opportunities.

### **Tentative Classification**

At the same time that eligibility recommendations are made, rivers that meet the eligibility criteria are also given a tentative classification (either wild, scenic, or recreational), as required by the WSR Act. Tentative classification is based on the type and degree of human developments associated with waterway and adjacent lands as they exist at the time of the review. This classification, however, is a planning recommendation and is tentative to Congressional legislative determination.

The tentative classifications are further defined as follows:

- **Wild River Area:** Wild river areas are those where the rivers or sections of rivers that are free of impoundments and generally inaccessible except by trail, with watersheds or shorelines essentially primitive and waters unpolluted. These represent vestiges of primitive America. Wild means undeveloped; roads, dams, or diversion works are generally absent from a one-quarter mile corridor on both sides of the river.
- **Scenic River Area:** Scenic river areas are those where the rivers or sections of rivers that are generally free of impoundments, with shorelines or watersheds still largely primitive and shorelines largely undeveloped, but accessible in places by roads. Scenic does not necessarily mean the river corridor has to have scenery as an outstandingly remarkable value; however, it means the waterway or waterway segment may contain more development (except for major dams or diversion works) than a wild segment and less development than a recreational segment. For example, roads may cross the river in places but generally do not run parallel to it. In certain cases, if a parallel road is unpaved and well-screened from the river by vegetation, a hill, etc., it could qualify for scenic river area classification.
- **Recreational River Area:** Recreational river areas are those rivers or sections of rivers that are readily accessible by road or railroad, that may have some development along their shorelines, and that may have undergone some impoundment or diversion in the past. Parallel roads or railroads or the existence of small dams or diversions can be allowed in this classification. A recreational river area classification does not imply that the river or section of river will be managed or have priority for recreational use or development.

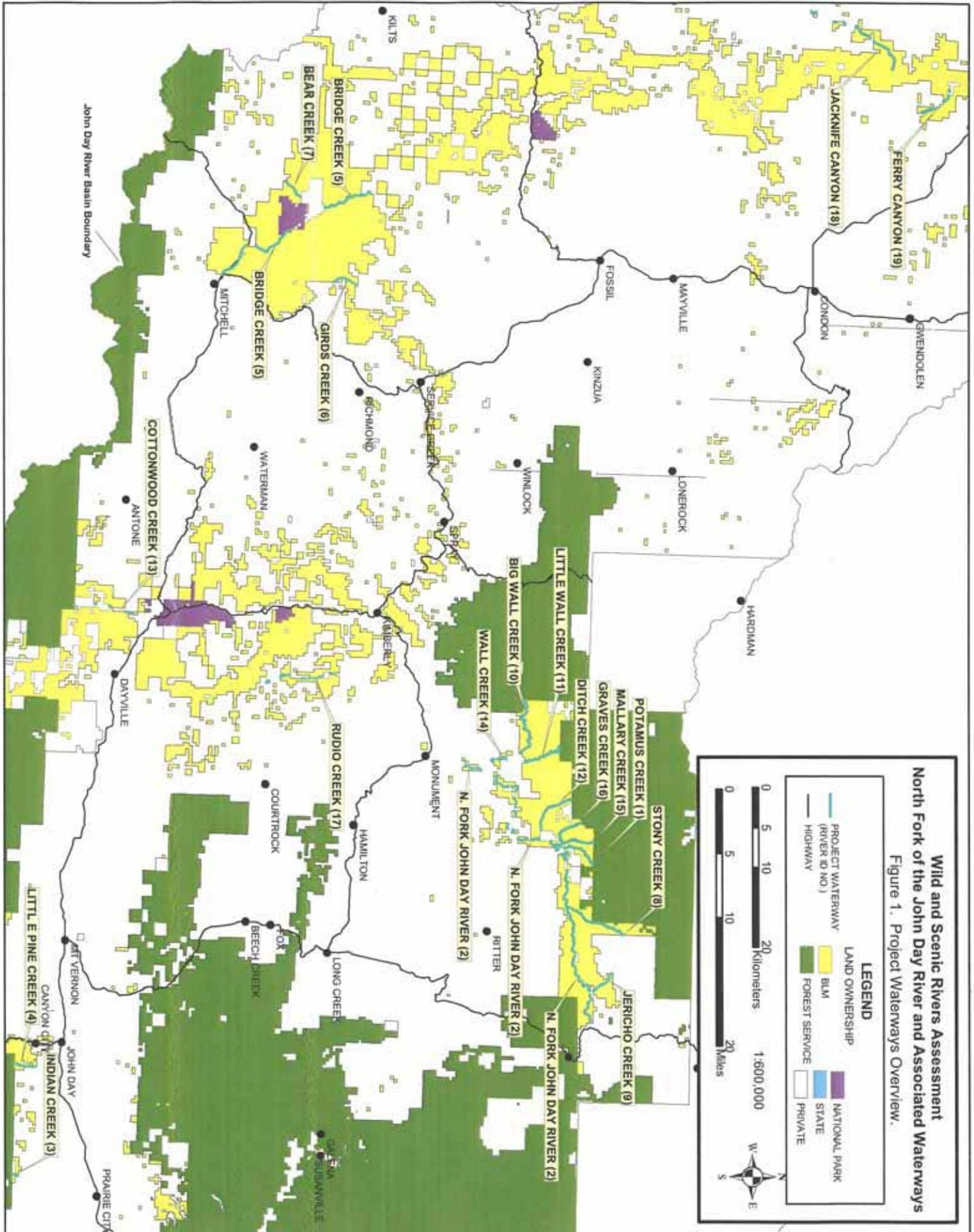
### **Results of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Eligibility Inventory for the John Day Basin Resource Management Plan Planning Area**

Members of the BLM ID Team, consisting of resource specialists from the Prineville District Office and the John Day Field Office, met on May 20, 2005 to examine approximately 1,400 miles of perennial and intermittent waterways within the John Day Basin RMP planning area. Existing designated WSRs were not re-evaluated. During this review, it was recommended that 39 waterways (many with more than one segment) needed further review. Out of these 39 waterways, the BLM ID team suspected that 18 waterways totaling approximately 93 miles had potential or may have potential to possess outstandingly remarkable values and thus required further review. These waterways include one river (North Fork John Day) and 17 creeks (Bear, Big Wall, Bridge, Cottonwood, Ditch, Ferry Canyon, Graves, Indian, Jackknife, Jericho, Little Pine, Little Wall, Mallory, Potamus, Rudio, and Stony). Approximately two miles along one additional creek, Wall Creek, was later added for further review. The remaining 20 waterways were dropped from further consideration due to lacking the potential outstandingly remarkable values and/or not crossing public lands.

The 19 waterways (1 river and 18 creeks) suspected to potentially possess outstandingly remarkable values were contracted out for further review. The locations of these waterways are presented in Figure 1. Each of these waterways was visited to document their free-flowing nature and to identify

# Wild and Scenic Rivers Assessment North Fork of the John Day River and Associated Waterways

Figure 1. Project Waterways Overview.



existing outstandingly remarkable values, where possible. Data were gathered only on those waterway segments that cross public lands; that is, no private, state, or other federal lands were reviewed. Fieldwork was conducted between October 2005 and March 2006. Digital photos were taken and GPS referenced as part of the documentation process. Existing pertinent data from state, federal, and local sources were also reviewed to substantiate or refute the existence of outstandingly remarkable values. Finally, BLM staff at the Prineville District Office and the John Day Field Office was consulted for their expertise on specific river-related values along the 19 studied waterways.

Eighteen of the 19 waterways with potential to possess outstandingly remarkable values (Bear, Big Wall, Bridge, Cottonwood, Ditch, Ferry Canyon, Graves, Indian, Jackknife Canyon, Jericho, Little Pine, Little Wall, Mallory, Potamus, Rudio, and Stony creeks) were found not to meet the WSR eligibility criteria and dropped from further consideration. Table 1 below summarizes these findings. One River (North Fork John Day) was identified as possessing outstandingly remarkable values and is thus recommended as eligible.

**Table 1. Summary of the John Day Basin RMP Planning Area WSR Potential Eligibility Review**

River/Stream (Waterway) Reviewed	Free-flowing	Estimated Flows During Study Period*	Outstandingly Remarkable Values on BLM Lands	BLM Lands Recommended
<i>North Fork John Day River</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>197, 205, &amp; 207 cfs</i>	<i>Scenic Recreational Fish</i>	<i>Yes</i>
Bear Creek	Yes	0-3 cfs	None	No
Big Wall Creek	Yes	15 cfs	None	No
Bridge Creek	Yes	15-18 cfs	None	No
Cottonwood Creek	Yes	2-3 cfs	None	No
Ditch Creek	Yes	4-8 cfs	None	No
Ferry Canyon Creek	Yes	7-10 cfs	None	No
Girds Creek	Yes	0	None	No
Graves Creek	Yes	1-7 cfs	None	No
Indian Creek	Yes	7-10 cfs	None	No
Jackknife Canyon Creek	Yes	5-10 cfs	None	No
Jericho Creek	Yes	0-3 cfs	None	No
Little Pine Creek	No	0-5 cfs	None	No
Little Wall Creek	Yes	15 cfs	None	No
Mallory Creek	Yes	2-12 cfs	None	No
Potamus Creek	Yes	7-10 cfs	None	No
Rudio Creek	Yes	0-10 cfs	None	No
Stony Creek	Yes	0-10 cfs	None	No

\*Flows are measured in cubic feet per second (cfs). These measurements are based on estimates made during field work, with the exception of the North Fork John Day where flows were taken from the USGS gauge in Monument, Oregon. Flows often varied along different waterway segments, with some waterways experiencing no flows along some segments but steady flows along other segments.

Attachment A (WSR Outstandingly Remarkable Value Summary Table) provides details on scenic, fisheries, recreation, wildlife, historical, geologic, cultural, and similar values for all 19 waterways,

and identifies why such values were or were not considered outstandingly remarkable. Attachment A also includes maps illustrating all segments of the North Fork John Day recommended as eligible as well as identifies the location of outstandingly remarkable values. Those values identified as outstandingly remarkable for the North Fork John Day River are discussed in greater detail below. Attachment B, Table B1, is a narrative table that provides details for each segment of the 19 waterways reviewed and shows the tentative classification (either scenic or recreational) suggested for each of the North Fork John Day segments that meet the eligibility criteria.

***Outstandingly Remarkable Values along the North Fork John Day River:***

Sixteen segments of the North Fork John Day River that flow through public lands were reviewed, totaling 25.55 miles. The shortest segment is 0.13 mile and the longest segment is 7.79 miles. All 16 segments are located within a section of the river that is 36.24 miles long, beginning along County Road 31 (Wall Creek Road, roughly 3 miles northeast from Monument) in Section 23, T. 7 S., R. 28 E., in Grant County, and ending in Section 26, T. 6 S., R. 31 E., in Umatilla County. The 16 review segments through public lands make up 70.5 percent of this section of river. All 16 segments possess outstandingly remarkable scenic, recreation, fish, and wildlife values.

**Scenic values:** The review segment North Fork John Day River “flows through some of the finest scenery in Oregon” (BLM 2000, p. 110), which involves a river valley bordered by steep, rugged hillsides with rock outcroppings and a variety of vegetarian types, including strands of ponderosa pines and Douglas fir, grassy meadows, and lush riparian vegetation. Views of adjacent mountain peaks are offered along some sections of the river. This mix of landform, vegetation, water, and color add to the visual values along the river. While such features are not unique among rivers in the Blue Mountains ecoregion of northeastern Oregon, they are notable and of a quality to attract visitors from outside the area. The scenic values were also considered important enough to protect that the entire river section, including all 16 segments through public lands, were included into the State Scenic Waterway System under the Oregon Scenic Waterways Act (ORS 390.826). Only 18 other waterways and 1 lake in Oregon are afforded such protective status.

A well-maintained gravel road runs adjacent to the river from Hwy 395 to Potamus Creek, which occasionally can intrude on the scenic nature of the river, while, at the same time, provides easy access for visitors to view the scenery. The river corridor in this section is narrow and the hills rise over 2,000 feet, with dense strands of ponderosa pines on north-facing slopes. A few houses and ranches are located along this section of the river.

A primitive road (with no public easement through private sections) located from Potamus Creek downstream to the confluence with Wall Creek, is less conspicuous and the scenery more primitive. Only a few human-made structures and 4x4 roads are seen along this segment of the river, leaving much of the area in a more natural state. Here, the river flows through a wide valley with adjacent mountain peaks rising less than 2,000 feet. The area is mostly rangeland, with steep hillsides dotted with strands of ponderosa pine.

**Recreation Values:** The North Fork John Day offers numerous recreational opportunities, including boating, hunting, fishing, camping, hiking, sightseeing, watchable wildlife, recreational gold panning, nature study, and photography. The boating opportunities are particularly rare or unique in northeastern Oregon as visitors are offered opportunities for solitude and a natural environment without extremely challenging white water (only Class I & II rapids) or access issues that could otherwise make the trip too difficult or dangerous for less experienced river runners. It also provides opportunities for various trip lengths, from day trips to trips lasting a few days. While the mainstem John Day, from Service Creek to Clarno, offers similar river rafting experiences (e.g., Class I & II rapids and numerous access points) the North Fork (from Dale to Monument, which encompasses the study section) is considered by some as having better scenery and whitewater (Cassady et al. 1994).

Boater registration (albeit incomplete) collected between 1998 and 2005 documented that nearly one third of trip leaders traveled from outside of Oregon to float the river, while the majority those coming from Oregon (all except one) traveled over 100 miles. This data suggest that visitors are willing to travel long distances to use the river resources for recreational purposes.

**Fish Values:** All steelhead trout in the John Day River Basin are genetically grouped into the Middle Columbia Evolutionarily Significant Unit (ESU). Steelhead in this ESU were listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) on March 25, 1999 ([64 FR 14517], effective May 24, 1999, with threatened status reaffirmed on January 5, 2006). The John Day basin is included in the ESU. The North Fork subbasin supports the largest and most important run of anadromous fish within the basin (ODFW 2005a), producing approximately 43 percent of the total summer steelhead population in the basin (BLM 2000). This estimate may have increased in recent years as trend estimates for the lower segment of the North Fork John Day, including the study section, showed an 11 percent increase in population abundance between 1997 and 2001 (Cooney 2005). During this same period, the mainstem John Day River and South and Middle Forks have experienced downward trends. Consequently, the North Fork John Day is an important contributor to the total population of Middle Columbia summer steelhead trout in the Middle Columbia ESU. The 25.55 miles of river that flow through BLM land serve an important role in this contribution.

In addition, the North Fork John Day population of the Middle Columbia Summer Steelhead Species Management Unit meets all six criteria used to determine near-term sustainability (e.g., existing populations, distribution, abundance, productivity, reproductive independence, and hybridization; ODFW 2005). This includes the study segment as well as approximately 54 miles upstream from the study segment through US Forest Service lands that are currently part of the national WSR system. This designation is partially due to possessing outstandingly remarkable fisheries values, including steelhead trout. The protection afforded by the upstream WSR designation adds to the integrity of the fisheries in the review segments and helps ensure that the biological needs (i.e., migration corridor) of the species are met.

### STEP III: MANAGEMENT OF RIVERS RECOMMENDED ELIGIBLE

Waterways determined eligible and given a tentative classification as wild, scenic, and/or recreational require protective measures necessary to preserve their free-flowing nature, protect their identified outstandingly remarkable values, and maintain their tentative classification. Specific management prescriptions for eligible river segments provide protection in the following ways (BLM 1993):

- a **Free-Flowing Values:** The free-flowing characteristics of eligible river segments cannot be modified to allow stream impoundments, diversions, channelization, and/or rip-rapping to the extent the BLM is authorized under law.
- b **River-Related Values.** Each segment shall be managed to protect identified outstandingly remarkable values (subject to valid existing rights) and, to the extent practicable, such values shall be enhanced.
- c **Classification Impact.** Management and development of the eligible river and its corridor cannot be modified, subject to valid existing rights, to the degree that its eligibility or tentative classification would be affected (i.e., its tentative river area classification cannot be changed from wild to scenic, or from scenic to recreational). Should a nonsuitable determination be made in the RMP process, then the river shall be managed in accordance with management objectives as outlined in the plan document.

Although this report only recommends the North Fork John Day River as eligible, it includes interim protection measures for each of the outstandingly remarkable values identified. These recommendations are presented in Attachment C (Interim Protection Measures for Outstandingly Remarkable Values identified along the North Fork John Day River). Comprehensive protective management as identified in BLM Manual 8351 would be applied to the North Fork John Day River if it were determined eligible and include management objectives, management actions, and appropriate allocations of land and resource uses that would maintain or enhance the outstandingly remarkable values and tentative WSR classification identified on the public lands involved. Such protective measures would be subject to valid existing rights and would remain in effect until eligibility determinations are superseded.

**ATTACHMENT A**

**OUTSTANDINGLY REMARKABLE VALUES SUMMARY TABLE**

**June 11, 2006**

## ATTACHMENT A: OUTSTANDINGLY REMARKABLE VALUES SUMMARY TABLE

OUTSTANDINGLY REMARKABLE VALUES SUMMARY TABLE
<p><b>01 Potamus Creek</b></p> <p><b>Scenic:</b> The scenery along the creek is common to that found along other creeks in the geographic region, and it does not appear to be of a quality that would attract visitors from outside the area.</p> <p><b>Fisheries:</b> While the creek has suitable habitat for Mid Columbia steelhead trout, and the species is known to spawn in the creek, it is not a top producer for the species, and the habitat is not exceptional in terms of quality due to grazing and past logging.</p> <p><b>Recreation</b> While a number of recreational opportunities are provided (hunting, hiking, backpacking, horseback riding), these are not unique enough to attract visitors from outside the region.</p> <p><b>Wildlife.</b> In general, wildlife diversity along the creek is relatively high due to riparian vegetation and a perennial source of water. However, this characteristic is not unique to Potamus Creek as it is common along tributaries of the North Fork John Day. The creek corridor supports a number of wildlife species, including bighorn sheep that were reintroduced to the area in 2002. The sheep, however, have a wide range and are not confined to the creek corridor.</p> <p><b>Historical:</b> While no formal historic surveys have been conducted, it is most likely that the public lands do not contain any sites or features associated with a significant event, important person, or cultural activity of the past that was rare or unusual in the area.</p> <p><b>Geologic:</b> No rare, unusual, or unique geologic features, processes, or phenomena are located along the creek.</p> <p><b>Cultural:</b> Little is know about the specific cultural resources along Potamus Creek as no formal inventories of cultural values have been conducted. In fact, there have been few formal studies in the geographic area. No archaeological sites are known to occur within the creek corridor and none have been observed during field work.</p> <p><b>Similar Values:</b> Potamus Creek contains no other significant hydrological, paleontological, botanical, scientific, or ecological resources that are waterway related.</p>
<p><b>02 North Fork John Day</b></p> <p><b>Scenic:</b> River flows through extremely step hillsides with rock outcroppings and a variety of vegetation types, including stands of ponderosa pine, grassy meadows, and lush riparian vegetation. In portions of the study area, the river flows through a wide valley with adjacent mountain peaks in clear view. This mix of landform, vegetation, water, and color results in notable or exemplary visual features and/or attractions within the geographic region. A well-maintained gravel road runs adjacent to the river from Hwy 395 to Potamus Creek, which occasionally can intrude on the scenic nature of the River, while, at the same time, providing easy access for visitors to view the scenery. A primitive road (with no public easement through private sections) located from Potamus Creek downstream to the confluence with Wall Creek, is less conspicuous and the scenery more primitive. The entire segment is designated a State Scenic Waterway.</p> <p><b>Fisheries:</b> All steelhead trout in the John Day River Basin are genetically grouped into the Middle Columbia Evolutionarily Significant Unit (ESU). Steelhead in this ESU were listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) on March 25, 1999. According to the Oregon Native Fish Status Report (ODFW</p>