

**UNCOMPAHGRE FIELD OFFICE
WILD AND SCENIC RIVER ELIGIBILITY STUDY
FACT SHEET**

What is Wild and Scenic River Designation?

The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act was passed in 1968 to preserve selected rivers or sections in their free-flowing condition to protect “the water quality of such rivers and to fulfill other vital national conservation purposes.” Only Congress can make Wild and Scenic River designations.

Why is the BLM conducting this Wild and Scenic River Evaluation?

The BLM is required by the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act to assess river and stream segments under its management jurisdiction as part of its Resource Management Plan revision process.

What segments were found to be eligible within the Uncompahgre Field Office?

Chapter 4 of the Eligibility Report details the findings and includes maps. The following rivers and streams had eligible segments on BLM lands:

- Lower Gunnison (11 segments)
- North Fork of the Gunnison (2 segments)
- San Miguel (12 segments)
- Lower Dolores (2 segments)
- Upper Dolores (8 segments)

What is the difference between the eligibility study and the suitability study?

To be designated as Wild and Scenic, a segment must have been determined to be both eligible and suitable. The eligibility study was done as baseline data for the RMP revision. It focused on the specific eligibility criteria described below. The suitability study will incorporate analysis of current and future uses (see below) of the eligible stream segments and will be included in the Draft RMP revision and will take into account land ownership constraints, potential competing uses of land and water, cost of acquiring lands, water rights, local and state plans, etc. The Draft RMP revision will analyze a range of possible management alternatives, including Wild and Scenic River recommendations.

What are the criteria for a stream segment to be eligible?

To be eligible for Wild and Scenic River designation, a river or stream segment must possess one or more “outstandingly remarkable value,” have sufficient water quality to support those values, and be free-flowing. Outstandingly remarkable values could be scenic, recreational, geological, fish related, wildlife related, historic, cultural, botanical, hydrological, paleontological, or scientific.

How will BLM management change as a result of this eligibility determination?

BLM policy is to protect any outstandingly remarkable values identified in the eligibility study until a decision on suitability can be made. The BLM must protect the free-flowing character, tentative classification of the segment (based on the level of stream corridor development), and identified

outstandingly remarkable values of eligible segments. Future BLM management actions will conform with interim protective management until a decision on suitability is made.

How does the BLM define “free-flowing”?

Free flowing does not mean that the stream has a completely natural flow regime. It means that within the analyzed stream segment, there are no dams or diversion structures that impound a significant amount of water for extended periods of time. Congress has designated Wild and Scenic Rivers immediately below major storage projects, even though the natural flow regime has been changed significantly by the project.

What specifically will be looked at during the suitability study?

During the suitability phase, the BLM will analyze all of the potentially competing uses for each segment, potential management prescriptions for each segment, and the positive and negative impacts of various management approaches. The process identifies how stream-related values can best be protected and enhanced. It fully considers the impact possible to other values, such as water supply. During this process, the federal agencies consider alternative approaches to managing water-dependent values, fully recognizing that wild and scenic river designation may not be the only way to protect these values.

How will stakeholder and public involvement be incorporated into the suitability determination?

The suitability process is designed to be a highly inclusive process. Personnel with knowledge in oil and gas development, grazing, water rights and water supply, and policy analysis must be involved for this analysis to be successfully completed. The suitability process will be conducted as part of the RMP revision process.

When will the suitability phase be complete?

The suitability phase is scheduled to be completed by with the completion of the RMP revision in 2013.

Do BLM’s eligibility and suitability determinations create any federal water rights to protect the outstandingly remarkable values?

No. A federal water right is not created unless Congress designates a stream segment as a Wild and Scenic River.

How could a BLM suitability determination affect a future water supply project?

If the BLM determines that a stream segment is suitable, it cannot take any actions that would significantly impact the outstandingly remarkable values, water quality, and free-flowing nature of the stream segment. If a proposed water supply project is located within a suitable stream segment, the project proponent can request that the BLM amend its resource management plan to allow the project to be built. The BLM may or may not grant that request, based upon an analysis of the importance of the water supply project relative to the impact it would have on outstandingly remarkable values, water quality, and free-flowing nature of the stream segment.