

The River Democracy Act

America's rivers are loved by millions of Americans. The national Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, established in 1968, protects and preserves the character of our nation's most important rivers while balancing recreation, habitat, and conservation—and encourages public participation in developing goals for river protection. In Oregon, these rivers are an inherent part of our state's livability, economy, and nature. Despite the importance of rivers and streams, only a small percentage of Oregon's total river mileage—2,173 miles out of 110,994 total miles of rivers and streams—are protected as Wild and Scenic.

In order to ensure Oregon's rivers remain intact for future generations, Senator Wyden began a public process in October, 2019, to solicit recommendations from Oregonians on rivers and streams that deserve protection under the national Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. Since then, nearly 2,500 Oregonians submitted over 15,000 nominations. This bill is a product of the Oregon Way, with every Oregonian given the chance to nominate their favorite Oregon river or stream. The rivers proposed for protection in this bill, and the Oregonians that champion them, sustain our thriving outdoor recreation economy, nurture the salmon and steelhead that fuel our important fishing industry, and provide drinking water to communities across Oregon.

The River Democracy Act does the following:

- Designates nearly 4,700 miles of rivers in all corners of Oregon as “Wild and Scenic Rivers,” with the goals of expanding recreation access, protecting drinking water, reducing wildfire threats, and sustaining endangered fish and wildlife species;
- Requires federal land managers to assess wildfire risks in Wild and Scenic River corridors, implement a plan to reduce wildfire risks to homes and businesses near Wild and Scenic Rivers, assist local governments mitigate wildfire risks, and restore water quality should a fire strike near a Wild and Scenic River;
- Encourages federal land managers to develop river management plans in collaboration with Native American tribes, and ensures Native American tribes have a voice in how rivers are managed; and
- Ensures valid existing rights-of-way, permits and contracts affecting federal land can continue, pursuant to the conditions of those existing rights-of-way, permits or contracts (including mining and grazing permits).
- Ensures that only federal lands are affected by Wild and Scenic designations, while protecting private property rights and water rights.