

SNAKE RIVER HEADWATERS COMPREHENSIVE RIVER MANAGEMENT PLAN PLANNING ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Planning issues define opportunities, conflicts, or problems regarding the use or management of public lands—in this case, Snake River Headwater’s designation as a wild and scenic river. The public; National Park Service staff; local, state, and federal agencies; and organizations identified several planning issues during scoping (early information gathering). These issues generally involve protection of significant resources, public access and opportunities, development, and use. The issue of climate change has also been included in this section because it is an emerging, long-term issue that would be encountered in the future in the area.

The following section describes the issues that were identified during scoping, as well as how the plan seeks to address these issues.

Kinds and Amounts of Recreational Use

A wide range of recreational activities and experiences were identified during scoping as important to visitors of the Snake River Headwaters area, including river sports (rafting, paddling, floating, swimming); hiking, walking, and backpacking; fishing, including fly fishing; snowboarding and cross-country skiing; photography, wildlife viewing, and bird watching; climbing; camping; horseback riding; and hunting for wildlife or edible plants.

Of these recreational activities and experiences, public comments mainly centered on river sports, and there was not consensus as to how recreation on the river should be managed. Although most comments did demonstrate preference for nonmotorized boating, some people encouraged opening more sections of the river to boating/paddling/floating, whereas others urged public land managers to close or keep closed certain segments of the river. Several comments also requested that overnight camping be permitted on the Snake River. Other comments addressed amounts of use generally and supported current use levels or lower use levels and some specifically suggested permitting systems.

This plan explores different options for providing a range of recreational use opportunities along the river corridors, including the preservation of traditional uses; exploring additional uses; reducing uses; modifying existing recreational use opportunities and/or use limitations. This plan also determines the kinds and amounts of use for the river consistent with the protection and enhancement of river values. All options would ensure the protection and enhancement of river values while avoiding conflicts and crowding among visitors.

Types and Levels of Development

Several comments emphasized the types and levels of development within the river corridor should be *appropriate* (i.e., appropriate facilities should be located at appropriate locations, consistent with the needs of users and the setting in which the facilities are located). In some cases, upgrading or enhancing existing boat ramps were recommended to handle the volume of current use. One comment noted that riverbank stabilization and other developments should not adversely affect free-flowing condition or associated resource values of the rivers. Several specific developments were also identified as facilities that are not appropriate, and many comments stated generally that no more development was necessary.

This plan determines what types of facilities are needed and where they should be located within the river corridors, including access. It also determines which areas should be free of developments. It

evaluates the compatibility of existing and/or new developments to protect and enhance of river values and determines appropriate management strategies to achieve river management goals.

Free-flowing Condition

During the scoping period, several comments were received regarding how the plan should address free-flowing condition. Suggestions included quantifying the federal reserved water right associated with the designation; completing an in-stream flow plan with agency partners; increasing flows and diverting water back to the main channel; and reclaiming unused irrigation structures. It was recognized in the comments that free-flowing condition is important to fish. One comment also noted that per the Craig Thomas Snake Headwaters Legacy Act, no actions in this plan should affect the management and operation of Jackson Lake Dam.

This plan determines appropriate strategies to protect and enhance free-flowing conditions, including necessary flows, federal reserved water rights, and ways to address existing impediments to free-flowing conditions. This plan determines appropriate partnership opportunities with the Bureau of Reclamation and other agencies, organizations, and individuals to achieve river management goals.

Water Quality

Many comments received during scoping emphasized that water quality, including temperature, should be protected and enhanced. Air quality, mining, cattle grazing, and snowmobiling were all identified through various comments as having an influence on water quality.

This plan addresses factors that have the potential to affect the water quality of designated river segments, in particular ongoing visitor and administrative uses and existing infrastructure. Management strategies include ways to protect and enhance water quality and mitigate for existing and/or potential impacts.

Natural Resources

Natural resources-related comments that were consistently mentioned during scoping include emphasis on native species; removal of nonnative species, especially aquatic nuisance species; migration/migratory corridors; and protection and restoration of critical habitats, including winter habitats, nesting habitats, aquatic habitats, and foraging habitats. Specific native fish and wildlife species that were mentioned as important to the river corridor included Yellowstone cutthroat trout, fine-spotted cutthroat trout, beavers, pronghorns, moose, river otters, bald eagles, and ospreys; plant species that were mentioned included willows, musk thistle, and knapweed.

This plan determines appropriate management strategies to protect and enhance natural resources within the river corridors, particularly the maintenance and restoration of native species and their habitats and the ecological processes that sustain them. This plan explores ways to mitigate human-caused impacts to river-related natural resources.

Cultural Resources

Comments identified cultural resources that should be maintained, restored, enhanced, and/or protected including historic trails used by Native Americans, fur trappers, and others; historic buildings within designated river corridors; and archeological sites.

This plan explores ways to protect and improve the education and interpretation of cultural resources within the river corridors, especially sites that preserve the history of human use of the river segments, and explores ways to mitigate human-caused impacts to cultural resources.

Climate Change

Several comments called for the plan to consider the effects of climate change. Some comments were more specific, noting that monitoring the effects of climate change on flows, water temperatures, and invasive species was important. One comment suggested that this plan be “the model of addressing climate change for river management in the 21st century.”

This plan describes potential climate change influences on river-related values and determines appropriate management strategies to reduce the impacts of climate change on river values.