Created by Congress in 1968, the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System was enacted “to preserve certain rivers with outstanding natural, cultural, and recreational values in a free-flowing condition for the enjoyment of present and future generations.” The goal is to protect the nation's most pristine rivers and streams while balancing recreation, water quality, fish, wildlife, and other values.

Currently, only 2% of Oregon’s 110,000 miles of rivers and streams have been protected as Wild & Scenic, including some of the state's most treasured waterways like the John Day, Metolius, and Rogue Rivers. Many of our key sources of clean drinking water, recreational opportunities, and wildlife habitat remain unprotected.

Now, there is an historic opportunity to add nearly 4,700 miles of Oregon’s most pristine rivers, streams, and lakes to the Wild & Scenic Rivers system, increasing protected streams to 6%, thanks to the River Democracy Act recently introduced by Senator Ron Wyden (and cosponsored by Senator Jeff Merkley).

This legislation is the result of a multi-year grassroots process, and the work of hundreds of river enthusiasts nominating their favorite rivers, drinking watersheds, fishing holes, hiking trails, and kayak routes. Years in the making, the bill has broad support from small business owners, sportsmen, and other community members who all depend on these waterways.
Wild & Scenic Rivers benefit both human communities and natural ecosystems.

- **Drinking water.** Millions of Oregonians across the state depend on rivers as their primary source of drinking water. Wild & Scenic protections can ensure that these sources remain clean and plentiful for future generations.

- **Local economies.** Outdoor recreation in Oregon supports 224,000 jobs and generates $15.6 billion in consumer spending. Rivers are a big draw. Many of our best trails and campgrounds are found along rivers, and people come from across the globe to fish and paddle here. Communities that integrate recreation into their economy benefit from higher average incomes, faster earnings growth, a reliable stream of new residents, higher quality of life, and more stability during economic downturns.

- **Fish habitat.** Oregon’s clean, natural rivers and streams are critical to sustain salmon and steelhead populations. These native fish are a vital part of our ecosystems and economies.

- **Wildlife habitat.** Protected river corridors are generally more intact than surrounding landscapes, and these habitats can be integral in helping wildlife travel or move to higher altitudes as the climate changes.

- **Climate change mitigation and carbon storage.** The lush vegetation and forests that grow near waterways absorb vast amounts of carbon pollution, and provide a cooling effect on streams.
WHAT DOES THE RIVER DEMOCRACY ACT INTRODUCED BY SENATOR WYDEN MEAN?

This legislation would designate a half mile protected corridor along either side of the nearly 4,700 miles of streams proposed in Senator Wyden's bill.

Each Wild & Scenic River will have its “Outstandingly Remarkable Values” (ORVs) identified. These values may include fish, wildlife, recreation, scenery, geology, cultural, wilderness, or other values. Management plans are created by the U.S. Forest Service or Bureau of Land Management, with public input, to guide the protection and maintenance of these ORVs, as well as what activities will be encouraged within the corridor.

Designation will also mean the following:

- **It prohibits dams**; limits the amount of new mineral, oil, gas, and geothermal extraction; and prevents new claims.
- **Activities that would degrade the values** for which the river was designated (such as clearcut logging) are not allowed, while other activities - including restoration that benefits fish and riparian ecosystems - are allowed to continue as long as they don’t degrade these values.
- **Private property rights** are protected and not affected.
- **Existing water rights and mining claims** are not affected.
- It would neither limit the public from accessing public lands within designated river corridors nor open private lands to public access.
- There would be no effect on **fishing and hunting**, as those activities are regulated under state laws.
- **Boating access** would not change unless specific issues are identified in the river management planning process.
- **Fire fighting** is explicitly allowed to continue in the Wild & Scenic corridors.
We can help ensure the protections for Wild & Scenic Rivers in Oregon by letting our Congressional representatives know we support the River Democracy Act of 2021.

Learn more & take action!
www.oregonwild.org/rivers
www.ouroregonrivers.org