

Summary – Principal Findings and Recommendations

Eligibility

The Wild and Scenic River Study of the Eightmile River concludes that the entire mainstem and East Branch congressionally authorized study area, plus additional tributary areas of the watershed, are eligible for designation into the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System based on free-flowing condition and the presence of one or more outstandingly remarkable resource value. Specific resource values covered in this report include outstanding watershed hydrology, water quality, unique species and natural communities, geology, watershed ecosystem and cultural landscape.

Classification

The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act provides for three possible classifications of eligible river segments: wild; scenic; and recreational. The criteria distinguishing these classifications are based on the degree of human modification of the river and its adjacent shorelines. Based upon the applicable criteria, the most suitable classification for the proposed designated segments of the Eightmile and its tributaries is 'scenic'.

Suitability

The Study concludes that 25.3 miles of the Eightmile and selected tributaries are suitable for designation.

This suitability is based on:

1. The adequacy of long-term protection afforded to the river's free flowing character and outstanding resources through conservation land ownership, state and local land use controls, and topography. These forms of protection serve to prevent land use changes that would significantly degrade the outstanding resource values of the Eightmile River Watershed.
2. The development of a comprehensive watershed management plan which provides a clear guide for ensuring the long term protection of the Outstanding Resource Values of the Eightmile River Watershed as identified through the Eightmile River Wild and Scenic Study.

3. The strong support for designation and the Watershed Management Plan expressed by the study area towns through town meeting votes and the endorsements from land use commission and governing bodies.

4. The existence of an appropriate river management framework, the Eightmile River Wild and Scenic Coordinating Committee, to implement the Watershed Management Plan and to administer the watershed in partnership with the federal government if designation occurs.

Alternatives Considered

This report evaluates two Wild and Scenic River designation alternatives in addition to the 'no action' ALTERNATIVE A:

ALTERNATIVE B: Designation of the entire Mainstem of the Eightmile River, East Branch of the Eightmile River and additional third order tributary streams totaling 25.3 miles.

ALTERNATIVE C. Designation of all second order and higher streams in the watershed.

Alternative B is selected as environmentally preferred based on analysis of the principal factors of Wild and Scenic River suitability.

Eightmile River Watershed Management Plan

The Eightmile River Watershed Management Plan (Management Plan) has been the primary focus of the Wild and Scenic River Study. A product of an extensive collaborative effort between the Study Committee and local citizens, land use commissioners and elected officials, the Plan contains the strategy and vision for preserving the Eightmile River Watershed and the outstanding resource values it contains. The Eightmile River Wild and Scenic Study Committee determined that these outstanding resource values depend on sustaining the integrity and quality of the Eightmile River Watershed, that these values are manifest within the entire Watershed and furthermore that the Watershed as a whole, including its protection, is itself intrinsically important to this designation. Based on this determination, the Study Committee took a watershed approach in studying and recommending management

25.3 miles of the Eightmile River and tributaries are recommended for designation.



Chapman Falls in East Haddam

options for the river segments and the Eightmile River Watershed as a whole. The Management Plan has been reviewed and endorsed by the full range of stakeholders as noted below.

The Management Plan should be read as a companion document to the Study Report. *The Study Report adds to the Management Plan only in the specific areas of Wild and Scenic River Eligibility, Suitability, and Alternatives/ Environmental Assessment – in all other areas, the more complete source is the Watershed Management Plan.*

Support for designation

Citizens from all three towns voted at separate town meetings to support the Eightmile River Watershed Management Plan and Wild and Scenic designation. Each land use commission from the three towns, and the Boards of Selectmen have voted in favor of the Management Plan and designation. The Connecticut General Assembly and Office of the Governor also supported Wild and Scenic

designation of the Eightmile by means of an endorsement bill. Lastly, the Eightmile River Wild and Scenic Study Committee have voted unanimously to recommend Congressional Wild and Scenic River designation.

Recommendation

25.3 miles of the Eightmile River and tributaries are recommended for designation as “scenic” under the national Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, to be managed in accordance with the Eightmile River Watershed Management Plan dated December 8, 2005. The river segments meet the eligibility and suitability criteria for such a designation, and the towns making up the study area have expressed strong support for the designation. In support of the watershed approach, the Watershed Management Plan, and to formally establish the importance of protection of the watershed as a whole, the Study Committee recommends additional language be included in the designation legislation which establishes the importance of all streams within the watershed (as detailed in section 4D).