

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5651

AS PASSED SENATE, MARCH 7, 1991

Brief Description: Adding the Little Spokane river to the Scenic river system.

SPONSORS: Senators Saling, Stratton, West and McCaslin.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT & NATURAL RESOURCES

Majority Report: Do pass.

Signed by Senators Metcalf, Chairman; Oke, Vice Chairman; Conner, Owen, Patterson, Snyder, and Sutherland.

Staff: Gabrielle Horner (786-7717)

Hearing Dates: February 21, 1991

BACKGROUND:

In 1977, the Legislature enacted the state Scenic River System program, administered by the State Parks and Recreation Commission. At the time the program was enacted, segments of the Skykomish River System were designated as the first, and only, river system within the Scenic River program. The Skykomish Scenic River System is comprised of the junction of the north and south forks downstream 14 miles to the Sultan River, upstream 20 miles on the south fork of the Skykomish to the junction of the Tye and Foss Rivers; upstream 11 miles on the north fork of the Skykomish to its junction with Bear Creek; the Beckler River from its junction with the south fork of the Skykomish upstream eight miles to the Rapid River; and the Tye River from its junction with the south fork of the Skykomish River upstream 14 miles to Tye Lake.

Since 1977, no other rivers have been added to the state Scenic River System.

The Legislature established criteria for considering a river, or river segment for state scenic river designation. A candidate river, or river segment, should be free flowing, without diversions hindering recreation; have a relatively unmodified streambank; have a relatively natural setting and adequate open space; have some land along its length already in public ownership or possibly available for public access and/or scenic easement; and benefit from a coordinated management plan along its length.

The commission may not use the power of eminent domain to make any purchase for state scenic river purposes. The law does not permit the commission or any other government agency to restrict the use of private land without written consent of the landowner or the voluntary purchase of property rights.

The law also does not prohibit the Department of Natural Resources from exercising its responsibilities to manage state trust lands.

The management of the state Scenic Rivers System program is overseen by a committee of participating agencies. The committee is composed of the executive head, or the executive's designee from the Departments of Ecology, Fisheries, Wildlife, Natural Resources, and Transportation, the Parks and Recreation Commission, the Interagency Commission for Outdoor Recreation, the Washington State Association of Counties, the Association of Washington Cities, and two public members appointed by the Governor.

The regulatory elements of the state Scenic Rivers System program apply only to land already in public ownership. The Parks and Recreation Commission adopts management plans for a river which are consistent with the local shoreline master plan. The committee of participating agencies reviews and approves management plans. Management plans may only affect public lands within a maximum of one-quarter mile of the river. The management plans exclude any publicly owned land which has been developed in a manner unsuitable for Scenic River System management. Before adopting a management plan, the committee must hold local public hearings.

In 1988, the Parks and Recreation Commission authorized an assessment of Washington rivers with outstanding characteristics and that have potential for Scenic River designation. The Little Spokane River was included in the 18 rivers identified as suitable additions to the Washington Scenic Rivers System, and was noted as an "undisturbed meandering river valley with a rich diversity of wildlife, waterfowl, Indian pictographs and passive recreation opportunities."

The area of the Little Spokane River proposed for Scenic River designation is primarily publicly owned park land. The seven river miles proposed for scenic designation includes the Little Spokane State Park Nature Area managed by the county, but jointly owned by both State Parks and the county; and four other private landowners. Private property within the proposed scenic river area would not be subject to Scenic River management policies.

SUMMARY:

The Little Spokane River from the upstream boundary of the state park boat put-in site near Rutter parkway and downstream to its confluence with the Spokane River is included within the State Scenic River System.

\$30,000 is appropriated from the general fund to the State Parks and Recreation Commission to offset costs for a management assessment plan, an inventory of river resources, the preparation of maps, public hearings, and production of river management reports.

Appropriation: \$30,000 to the State Parks and Recreation Commission

Revenue: none

Fiscal Note: requested February 19, 1991

TESTIMONY FOR:

The Little Spokane River area is delightful. An abundance of wildlife exists, including a heron rookery and many deer. The area is a favorite of recreationists who enjoy floating and canoeing down the river. Some private landowners have already donated land to the existing park.

TESTIMONY AGAINST: None

TESTIFIED: Senator Saling, prime sponsor; Cleve Pinnix, State parks (pro)