orthwest Rivers Study

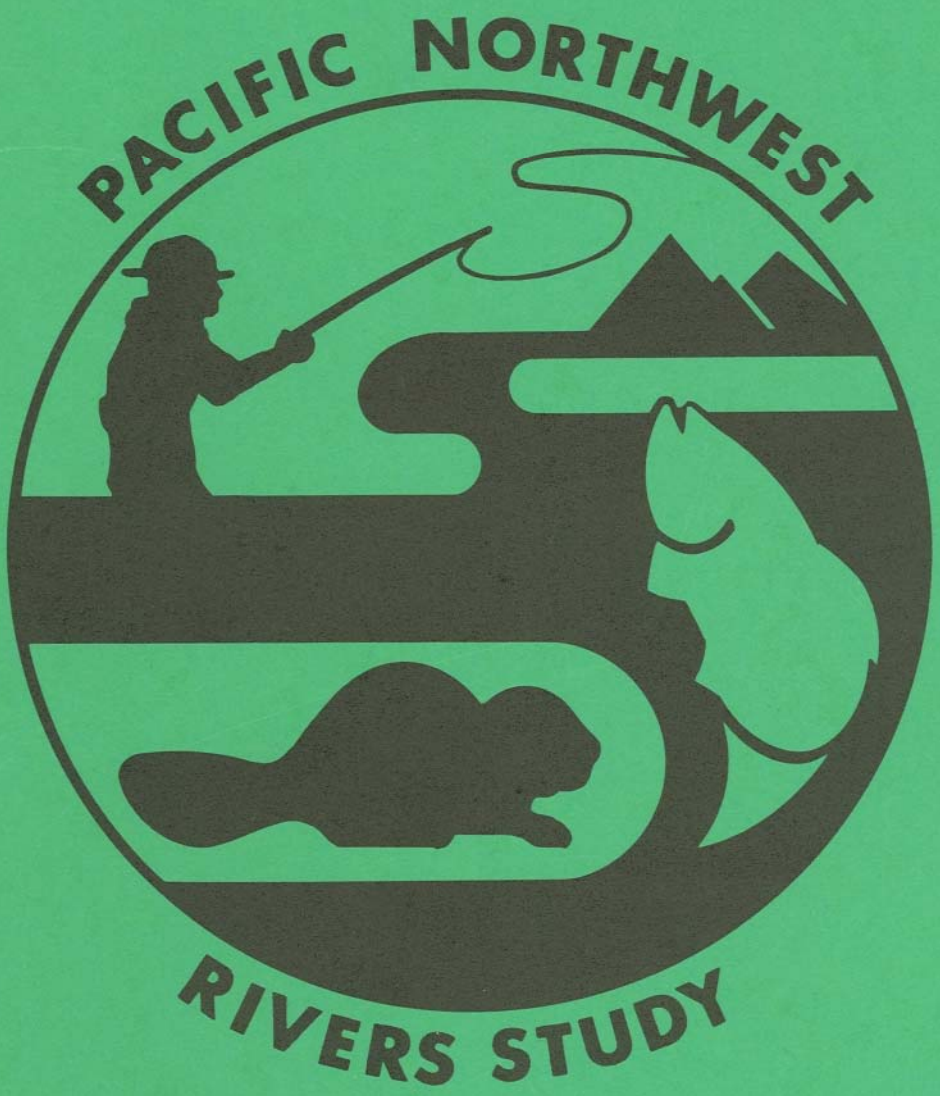
Project Summary: Idaho

State of Idaho
State of Montana
State of Oregon
State of Wasington

NW Indian Tribes

USDA Forest Service
USDI Bureau of Land Management
USDI Fish and Wildlife Service
USDI National Park Service
NW Power Planning Council
Bonneville Power Administration

April 1986



April 1986

PACIFIC NORTHWEST RIVERS STUDY: PROJECT SUMMARY
STATE OF IDAHO

This report presents a brief description of the assessment process and preliminary findings for each of the resource categories analyzed in the Idaho component of the Pacific Northwest Rivers Study.

The Pacific Northwest Rivers Study was initiated to assess the significance of river segments for a variety of environmental values. The expressed purpose of the project is to identify environmental and institutional considerations which might have a bearing on hydropower development in the Northwest. Information produced through this project will provide input into a variety of regional and state power planning and resource management activities.

The State of Idaho coordinated the assessment process within state boundaries. The project itself is a cooperative effort of the four Northwest states, federal land management agencies, and Indian tribes. The Bonneville Power Administration provided regional coordination and funding.

The resource assessment phase of the Rivers Study was initiated in June 1985, and completed in January 1986. This phase produced both tabular information regarding each river segment in the state and a series of maps identifying the location of river segments. Each segment was also assigned to one of a series of resource value classes depending on its relative significance within a given resource category. Subsequent to the initial assessment, information was encoded into computer format and made available for review by project participants.

Separate yet coordinated resource assessments were conducted for each of five resource categories. A summary is provided for each. They are presented in the following order:

1. Resident Fish
2. Wildlife
3. Natural Features
4. Cultural Features
5. Recreation

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RESIDENT FISH RESOURCES

The Pacific Northwest Rivers Study was initiated to assess the value of river segments for a variety of resources. The Idaho Department of Fish and Game was designated to take the lead in assessing the fisheries values of river segments in Idaho.

Resident fish included game fish, federal and state threatened and endangered species, and nongame fish. Resident fish resources were rated using two criteria, the habitat and species value of the stream reach and the sport fishery value of the stream reach.

Study participants included biologists and resource experts from Idaho Department of Fish and Game, U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Nez Perce Indian Tribe, Coeur d'Alene Indian Tribe, Shoshone-Bannock Indian Tribes, Kootenai Tribe, and Shoshone-Paiute Tribe. Assessment values for individual study reaches were determined by group consensus at meetings.

The fisheries inventory assessed 1,536 stream segments. Of these, 577 (37 percent) were rated as Class 1 (highest value), 409 (27 percent) as Class 2, 126 (8 percent) as Class 3, 75 (5 percent) as Class 4 and 349 (23 percent) as unknown (Class 5). Ratings will continue to change as the review process continues and/or new information is obtained. There were 27 different species evaluated with cutthroat and rainbow trout the predominant species. Resident fish resource values were color-coded and placed on a 1:500,000-scale map for public informational meetings and future reference.

Eventually, maps will be produced through the Bonneville Power Administration's Geographic Information System (GIS) at a scale of 1:500,000. Further expansion of the GIS system will produce 1:100,000-scale maps by sometime next year.

Expansion and updating of the resident fisheries data base will continue to make this a useful product.

Data were collected on a broad, general basis and should not be used for site-specific evaluation.

WILDLIFE RESOURCES

The Pacific Northwest Rivers Study was initiated to assess the value of river segments for a variety of resources. The Idaho Department of Fish and Game was designated to take the lead in assessing the wildlife values of river segments in Idaho.

Species evaluated included game, furbearing, and nongame wildlife. Special recognition was accorded federal and state threatened and endangered (T&E) wildlife and state species of special concern (SSC). The wildlife resources assessment was based on the level of habitat quality, species composition and abundance, and level of recreational use.

Because of the movement patterns and home range activities of certain species and recreational use, it was not always possible to limit the assessment to within 1,000 feet of a stream. This was especially true for big game winter range, migration corridors, and T&E species habitat.

The assessment was made by biologists from Idaho Department of Fish and Game, U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and The Nature Conservancy. Indian tribes accomplished the evaluation within the boundaries of their reservations. Evaluations were based on expert opinion and available data. Substantive data was available for T&E species and SSC. Stream reaches within wilderness areas and those designated as wild and scenic rivers were not evaluated. Five value classes were used to evaluate wildlife: Class 1 (highest value or unique wildlife resource); Class 2 (substantial wildlife resource); Class 3 (moderate wildlife resource); Class 4 (limited wildlife resource); Class 5 (unclassified or unknown wildlife resource).

There were approximately 1,520 stream reaches and reservoirs evaluated in Idaho. The final value placed on a stream reach was based on either: (1) habitat quality; (2) species present including T&E and SSC; or (3) a combination of at least two recreational criteria. Geographic importance was also considered in the final evaluation.

There was a total of 534 Class 1 ratings involving T&E species; 92 Class 1 ratings reflecting habitat quality, species composition and abundance, or high level recreational use; 175 Class 2 ratings involving species of special concern; 328 Class 2 ratings based on habitat quality, species composition and abundance, or substantial recreational use; 343 Class 3 ratings; and 44 Class 4 ratings. Some information was available for every reach; thus, no class 5 ratings were given.

Expansion and updating of the wildlife data base will continue to make this a useful product.

Data were collected on a broad, general basis and should not be used for site-specific evaluation.

NATURAL FEATURES RESOURCES

The Pacific Northwest Rivers Study was initiated to assess the value of river segments for a variety of resources. The Idaho Natural Heritage Program was designated to take the lead in assessing the natural features values of river segments in Idaho.

Three major categories of natural features were considered: (1) botanical features, including threatened, endangered and sensitive plant species found in river-related habitats, as well as exceptional examples of native plant associations; (2) undeveloped river corridors; and (3) hydrological and geological features.

The assignment of value classes for natural features was based on four criteria: (1) scarcity; (2) quality; (3) vulnerability; and (4) scientific value. River segment values were assigned on the basis of the individual natural feature values identified. The Value Classes assigned to river segments were as follows: (1) Outstanding; (2) Substantial; (3) Moderate; (4) Limited; (5) Unknown; and (6) Resource Not Present.

Rare plant information was based primarily on the Heritage Program data base which includes the locality information collected by the Idaho Rare and Endangered Plants Committee. Geological and Hydrological data came primarily from the National Park Service's National Natural Landmark studies and the map of geothermal resources published by the Idaho Department of Water Resources.

Additional information was provided by the Idaho Natural Areas Coordinating Committee, U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, and unpublished and published sources.

Over 1,100 individual natural features were identified as occurring on approximately one-third of the more than 1,600 river segments used for the study; i.e., about two-thirds of the segments were assigned Value Class 5. The distribtuion of value classes on the river segments with identified natural features is as follows: Value Class 1 - 46 percent; Value Class 2 - 29 percent; Value Class 3 - 24 percent; Value Class 4 and 6 - 1 percent.

River segments with high value classes were distributed throughout the state making the identification of significant resource areas difficult. For this reason, resource ratings must be considered specific to identified river segments and not extrapolated to adjacent drainages. Furthermore, information on river segments is intended as a broad indicator of resource values and should not be used for decisions on specific sites or uses. Nor should the absence of an assigned value class be taken as an indication that no resource is present. Insufficient inventory of statewide natural features, especially riparian and wetland features, has been conducted to permit such a conclusion.

CULTURAL RESOURCES

The Pacific Northwest Rivers Study was initiated to assess the value of river segments for a variety of resources. The Idaho State Historic Preservation Office was designated to take the lead in assessing the value of rivers for cultural resources (archaeological and historic sites) in Idaho.

Specific river segments were evaluated with regard to the presence or absence of recorded archaeological or historic sites, factors such as National Register status or site density, and the presence or absence of archaeological and historical resource survey information. Data for the study has been gathered and organized in a manner thought to be appropriate for broad-based initial planning efforts. The study information is in no way intended as a substitute for permitting and consultation procedures required by law.

Five value classes were established. Four were used for actual cultural resource potential ranging from Class 1, highest potential, to Class 4, limited potential. The fifth class, unknown potential, was assigned to river segments where no information exists concerning the presence or absence of archaeological or historic sites. The results of the study indicated that there is not enough information to evaluate 53 percent of the included river segments. Of the remaining 47 percent, 4 percent of the segments were classified as having highest potential (Class 1), 18 percent as having substantial potential (Class 2), 16 percent as having medium potential (Class 3), and 8 percent as having limited potential for cultural resources (Class 4).

RECREATIONAL RESOURCES

The Pacific Northwest Rivers Study was initiated to assess the value of river segments for a variety of resources. The Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation was designated to take the lead in assessing the recreational values of river segments in Idaho.

The major factors that contributed to the rivers' recreational values were land-based and water-based recreation. Land-based recreation included activities that occurred within 1,000 feet of the river or stream. Water-based recreation included any activities that occurred on the water. Other factors such as the accessibility, type of experience desired, water level, and difficulty also played important roles in the assessment of the recreational values.

Data were collected from the participating resource experts with Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Forest Service, and Idaho State Parks and Recreation. Idaho Whitewater Association and Friends of Whitewater also supplied data. Assessment values for the individual study reaches were determined by group consensus at meetings.

Of the 354 river segments assessed, 14 percent were rated Class 1 (highest value), 25 percent rated Class 2, 36 percent rated Class 3, 6 percent rated Class 4, and 19 percent were unclassified or unknown (Class 5). Ratings may change as the review process continues, as recreation changes and expands, and as new information is obtained. The recreation values were color-coded onto a 1:500,000-scale map for the public information meetings, and for future reference.

Information on river segments is intended to be a broad indicator of recreational opportunities and should not be used for decision making on specific sites. The lack of inclusion of stream segments reflects a lack of information for those segments rather than a lack of river recreation. As more information is obtained it will be included in the data base.

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