

## Wild and Scenic Rivers

Let's Keep Them That Way By Merritt Frey When you read the words "the Green River," what comes to mind? Do you remember a raft trip through Desolation Canyon? Do you imagine one-armed John Wesley Powell charging through rapids in a rickety wooden boat? Or do you think of the photos of a beautiful river that you saw in a book recently?

No matter what those words create in your mind's eye, it's likely a vision you want to preserve. The Green River is a special river — a river that is uniquely Utah and closely connected to our lives of our citizens. Yet today the river and its tributaries are constantly threatened — proposals to divert, drill for oil, develop and otherwise harm the watershed are always on the horizon. And the Green is not alone. Utah's wild rivers flow unprotected into an onslaught of threats. From the Bear River in the north to the San Juan in the south, none of our river gems are permanently protected for future generations. Wild and Scenic Protections in Utah Last fall the Utah Rivers Council publicly launched a campaign to protect Utah's most outstanding rivers under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. Although the Act was passed in 1968, not one stretch of Utah's amazing rivers has received protection. In fact, Utah is one of only six states in the nation without a Wild and Scenic River.

Right now, federal agencies are at a key point in the Wild and Scenic River review process. National Forest and Bureau of Land Management offices around the state are deciding which rivers are eligible for protection. The fate of rivers like the Virgin, the Yellowstone, and the Green hang in the balance. Why does it matter? The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act provides: Real protection. Once designated Wild and Scenic, the river is protected from new dams and diversions — forever. In addition, a corridor of 1/4 mile from the banks is protected. Most human uses of the river corridor are allowed to continue, as long as those uses do not damage the outstanding values for which the river was protected. Flexible protection. The Act is extremely flexible. Rivers are granted varying types of protection based on the existing development along the corridor. A river-specific plan is then developed to protect the existing outstandingly remarkable values. Most uses are allowed on Wild and Scenic Rivers, as long as they do not harm these values. For example, some existing Wild and Scenic Rivers have roads, farmland, intense recreational uses, and more — this is not a cookie-cutter approach to conservation.

Locally driven protection. Once designated as a Wild and Scenic River, local management plans are developed allowing for extensive local input. A Case in Point: The Green River The Green is a remarkable river where the best qualities of Utah are still preserved, and provides the perfect example of the need for lasting protection. The Green deserves it in order to preserve the values of the river for future generations to use and enjoy. Safeguarding the Green will:

- Guarantee our children and their children can hunt, fish and recreate in the river corridor.
- Provide quality for diverse wildlife and fish.
- Protect the jobs and businesses that rely on a healthy Green River.

On a river this long and diverse, the list of outstanding values is equally extensive. The Green River is outstanding for its fish and wildlife values, recreational opportunities, historic and cultural references, scenic views, geologic diversity and more.

The Green supports an amazing fishery and a diverse array of wildlife. The section below Flaming Gorge Dam is renowned as a world-class trout stream, and is designated as a state "blue-ribbon" fishery. The river is also home to endangered native Utah fish species such as the bony-tail chub, humpback chub, razorback sucker and Colorado pike minnow. Wildlife species that call the corridor home include bighorn sheep, black bear, river otter, mountain lion, deer, elk, beaver, bobcat and many raptor species.

Recreational opportunities along the Green River draw people from around the world. The river offers a tremendous diversity of boating options — from the challenging rapids of Desolation and Gray canyons to the more placid flows of Labyrinth and Stillwater canyons. Angling opportunities are world-class, especially in the clear, cold flows of Red Canyon. Birders enjoy spotting countless species of waterfowl and other birds that rely on the environment for habitat. Hiking, biking and backpacking are popular throughout the river corridor. Camping opportunities range from extreme backcountry to developed state parks with recreational vehicle sites.

The historic and cultural values of the Green River watershed are truly outstanding. A multitude of petroglyphs, pictographs and domiciles provide evidence of ancient civilizations residing here. Paleo-Indian, archaic, Fremont, Ute, late-prehistoric and historic cultures are all in evidence. John Wesley Powell's journeys down the Green are the subject of much research and popular interest, and the subsequent history of white settlement is evident in historic homesteads. A trip down the Green provides dramatic instruction in geologic processes. The erosive power of water is demonstrated vividly at Split Mountain, where the river has cut a swath through the mountain that once blocked its path. Massive abandoned oxbows and meanders such as Horseshoe and Bowknot bends demonstrate how rivers migrate. Canyon walls tower 5,000 feet above the river and host spires, pinnacles, balanced rocks and arches. Dense stands of fir, pine and juniper cling to cliffs and terraces and contrast with riparian forests of towering cottonwood. The diversity of scenic views and geologic drama along the Green is second to none.

These values are worth protecting for future Utahns to enjoy. Wild and Scenic Rivers designation for the Green River will provide flexible, locally driven protection allowing human use while preserving the water quality and both the outstanding and economic values of the river. A Vision for the Future of Utah's Rivers Utah is home to more than 10,000 miles of fantastic rivers and streams. These rivers support our economy, offer diverse recreational opportunities, provide critical habitat for fish and wildlife, and form the landscapes we love. Utah's rivers draw people from around the world for fishing, boating, and other recreational activities. From the mighty canyons of the Green to the subtle pleasures of little Owl Creek, Utah's rivers have something for everyone.

Wild and Scenic Rivers protection is good for our rivers, good for Utah and good for the country. The beauty and diversity of Utah's rivers are second to none, and we all must take responsibility for the protection of these precious

resources for future generations. To learn more about the Wild and Scenic Rivers campaign, visit [www.utahrivers.org](http://www.utahrivers.org) or contact the Utah Rivers Council at 801-486-4776.