

IMNAHA

Drawer 34

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PROPOSAL TO INCLUDE THE IMNAHA RIVER IN SECTION 5(d) CATEGORY UNDER THE WILD AND SCENIC RIVERS ACT

The Imnaha River in its present free-flowing state, and the adjacent landscape, possesses outstanding scenic, recreational, fish and wildlife, historical and archaeological values. It should be evaluated in planning reports by Federal agencies as potential wild, scenic, or recreational rivers under Section 5(d) of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act.

The limits of the river reach referred to are:

Imnaha River: The segment from its mouth to its junction with the South Fork of the Imnaha River, and the South Fork to its origin (71 miles).

The Imnaha River arises in the hub of the Eagle Cap Wilderness and starts its torturous, tumbling and sometimes meandering route downstream for about 71 miles until it empties into the Snake River. The flat alluvial floor of the valley bottom is heavily timbered in the upper half with some of the most beautiful stands of ponderosa pine to be found in the state of Oregon. From the old Palette Ranch downstream to the mouth of Horse Creek is predominantly in private ownership. The stream bottom in this vicinity is approximately one thousand feet wide, cultivated in spots and is normally used for grazing of domestic livestock and raising of hay. In contrast, the upper and lower reaches of the river have been little changed by man and present a scene of primitive ruggedness that can be found in very few places in the United States today.

Approximately two-thirds of the drainage is roaded, with the exception of the upper reaches located in the Eagle Cap Wilderness and the lower 10 miles above the confluence of the Snake River.

In its present free-flowing state, the Imnaha is a productive fish habitat and produces high quality stream fishing. It supports both resident and anadromous fish and in its free-flowing state is important as spawning grounds for anadromous fish such as steelhead and salmon.

In the lower reaches of the Imnaha River, the adjacent area is characterized by rugged slopes and benches that are primarily bunchgrass range lands with shrubby species along the water courses and interspersed with basalt rims and talus slopes.

There are numerous campsites along the river and the upper reaches of the river above the Palette Ranch that offer some of the greatest recreation areas of any stream site area within the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest. Here the fast-flowing, clear Imnaha River is in a picturesque forested surrounding with large flat areas admirably situated for recreational development and use. Seven developed recreation campgrounds are located within this area. In the lower reaches of the river, little development has been done to date, but there are innumerable campsites available for future development. The area is rich in cultural historic resources as well as numerous archaeological areas in the lower reaches of the river. Scientific investigation of the area's archaeological and anthropological heritage has only recently begun.

Mule deer, elk, black bear and small game animals, and waterfowl are to be found in abundance within this drainage. It offers some of the finest deer and elk hunting to be found in the state of Oregon and in its upper reaches the undeveloped state presents some outstanding challenges to the sportsmen pursuing hunting and fishing.

This river has been studied by the Forest Service to determine whether or not it should have 5(d) status under the Act. It is recommended that the Imnaha River be included in the select list of rivers to be evaluated in planning reports by all Federal agencies as potential alternative uses of the water and related land resources involved.