

escape into the present waiting at the next horizon line.

There is a danger, though, in succumbing to the hypnotic forces of moving water without occasionally taking the time to look around. Experiencing a river is one thing, but knowing a river and caring for it requires us to look beyond the confines of its banks to the tributary creeks, seeps and springs...the cliffs, trees, organisms and upland areas that are just as much a part of the river as the stream of cold water that shows up as a squiggly blue line on a map.

Wild and Scenic “in name only”

The White Salmon River is one of only three congressionally designated Wild and Scenic Rivers in the state of Washington. A 7.7 mile segment of the White Salmon (from Gilmer Creek at river mile 12.7 to Buck Creek at river mile 5) was brought into the National Wild and Scenic River System in 1986, after it was determined that this stretch possessed the following “outstandingly remarkable values”: whitewater boating, cultural resources, resident fisheries, hydrology and geology.

Many residents of the White Salmon River Valley — along with other proponents of healthy, free-flowing rivers — viewed this designation in a positive light, as the Wild and Scenic River System was established 18 years prior in order “to preserve certain rivers with outstanding natural, cultural and recreational values in a free-flowing condition for the enjoyment of present and future generations.”

Today, the White Salmon is still recognized as a hydrological wonder and whitewater mecca in the Northwest. Meltwater from glaciers on Mt. Adams, combined with a plethora of natural springs, provide in-stream flows that are consistent enough to paddle year-round. (It’s estimated that roughly 25,000 boaters use the river each year.) The breaching of Condit Dam in 2011 also brought national attention the river, as it opened up a new stretch for paddlers, and allowed salmon and steelhead to return to upriver areas that were inaccessible for nearly a century.

In an era when most of our nation’s rivers have either been dammed, diked, polluted, over-allocated or mistreated, the White Salmon River is still in a class of its own.

