

THE BENEFITS OF CANADIAN HERITAGE RIVER DESIGNATION

What is in it for the river?

Initially, the river may benefit from monitoring and conservation measures taken by government agencies. This is just a start, however, and the river will benefit more in the long run if local residents and other stakeholders become the “stewards” of the river. Appreciation of the river by its resident community is the best way of ensuring long-term protection.

Co-ordinated River Management

The process of preparing a management strategy focuses on the heritage and recreational values of the river and its valley. It is not a general land-use plan. The strategy serves to draw together all parties interested in the river’s heritage and recreation to work together to a common end. These stakeholders include not only local residents, interest groups and river users, but also government agencies having environmental, heritage or recreational responsibilities. Co-ordinating the planning and management activities of these agencies inevitably results in better co-ordination of existing programs, reduced conflicts among different river users and creates more effective new programs for the river.

Greater Environmental Protection

Designation is an opportunity for not only the lead provincial or territorial agency, but also for local governments to adopt policies that will enhance protection of the river. Measures could include green space zoning of river banks or property tax rate adjustments to encourage stewardship of private lands. Local residents might be supported in setting up a “river watchdog network” or hotline. It is also a chance to address specific environmental issues on your river such as vegetation destruction, bank erosion, garbage, floodplain urbanization or fish stock depletion, as well as enforcement measures for resolving these.

Water Quality Improvement

All of the features for which a Canadian Heritage River is nominated must be monitored. The one feature that is probably most closely watched is water quality. Monitoring programs on water quality have been started or upgraded on a number of Canadian Heritage Rivers as a direct result of their designation.

Focus for Government Programs

Many federal and provincial government programs can affect the heritage and recreational features of a river (perhaps too many in the view of some). These include environmental research, water quality monitoring, tourism development, fishery enhancement, reforestation, wildlife studies, and so on. Each government agency needs criteria to select areas for their programs. Government agencies can, and have used the designation of a Canadian Heritage River as a deciding factor in choosing where their programs should be located.

