



THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR  
WASHINGTON

ORDER NO. 3319

Subject: Establishment of a National Water Trails System

**Sec. 1 Purpose.** The National Trails System Act (Act) authorizes the Secretary of the Interior to designate national recreation trails, including trails that incorporate water. This Order establishes national water trails as a class of national recreation trails and directs that such trails collectively be considered in a National Water Trails System.

**Sec. 2 Background.** The Act allows the Secretary to designate national recreation trails “which will provide a variety of outdoor recreation uses in or reasonably accessible to urban areas.” The Act envisions different types of national recreation trails and expressly authorizes the Secretary to supplement the statutory criteria for designation of a national recreation trail with such additional “criteria as he may prescribe.”

Americans across the country are working together at the local level to create accessible, community-scale water trails that connect people to their water resources close to home. Water trails are often developed and maintained through partnerships that foster a shared mission of conservation and environmental stewardship. They promote public service, foster awareness and appreciation of natural areas, and encourage citizens to actively care for the waterways and the landscapes they traverse. Water trails can enhance communities, highlight cultural values, and invigorate, diversify, and support local economies. Water trails can encourage close-to-home and accessible outdoor recreation for local residents as well as promote tourism and recreation destinations for visitors.

Designation of these waterways as national water trails and incorporation into a National Water Trails System will help Americans discover water-based recreational opportunities and encourage their stewardship of America’s treasured waterways. This National Water Trails System is premised on the belief that American quality of life is strengthened when more people are able to enjoy their local waterways. Designation as a national water trail also provides an opportunity for Federal agencies as well as other public and private entities to identify and nominate water trails that will connect people to recreational amenities at Federal facilities. Trail designation can highlight the success of investments that are restoring our Nation’s waterways and reconnecting the public to these important natural areas. It also provides an opportunity to celebrate partnerships among Federal agencies and local, state, and tribal governments that encourage access to shared resources.

**Sec. 3 Authority.** This Order is issued in accordance with the authority provided by Section 2 of Reorganization Plan No. 3 of 1950 (64 Stat. 1262), as amended, and the National Trails System Act of 1968, 16 USC 1241-51. Nothing contained in this Order shall be deemed to transfer among Federal agencies any management responsibilities established under any other law for federally administered lands which are designated as components of the National Water Trails System.

#### Sec. 4 **Establishment of National Water Trails and the National Water Trails System.**

a. There is hereby established a class of national recreation trails to be designated as national water trails, which collectively shall be considered as a National Water Trails System focused on building a national network of exceptional water trails that can be sustained by an ever growing and vibrant water trail community. The National Water Trails System shall be a distinctive system that connects Americans to the Nation's waterways and strengthens the conservation and restoration of those waterways by becoming a catalyst for protecting and restoring the health of local waterways and surrounding lands and by establishing a community that mentors and promotes the development of water trails. Water trails are recreational routes with a network of public access points connecting people, places, and communities to the waterways that provide high quality outdoor recreational opportunities.

b. A national water trail is a stretch of river, lake, shoreline, bay, stream, estuary, ocean, canal, or any combination of waterway that has been designated, mapped, and publicly identified with the intent to provide high quality outdoor recreational experiences through the application of Best Management Practices (BMP) in the following categories:

(1) Recreation Opportunities. The water trail route has established public access points that accommodate a diversity of trip lengths and provides access to a variety of opportunities for recreation, and education.

(2) Education. The water trail users are provided with opportunities to learn about the value of natural resources, cultural heritage, boating skills, and outdoor ethics.

(3) Conservation. The water trail provides opportunities for communities to develop and implement strategies that enhance and restore the health of the local waterways and surrounding lands.

(4) Community Support. Local communities provide support and advocacy for the maintenance and stewardship of the water trail.

(5) Public Information. The public is provided with accessible and understandable water trail information, including details for identifying access and trail routes, cultural, historic, and natural features, hazards, and water quality. The water trail is promoted to the community and a broad national audience.

(6) Trail Maintenance. There is demonstrated ability to support routine and long-term maintenance investments on the water trail. Facilities are designed, constructed, and maintained incorporating sustainability principles.

(7) Planning. Maintain a water trail plan that describes a vision, desired future conditions, and strategies to strengthen best management practices.

**Sec. 5 Policy.**

a. Only exemplary water trails that meet the considerations in Sec 6(a), including BMPs, will be recommended to the Secretary for designation as a national water trail.

b. A trail designated as a National Water Trail will receive, at a minimum, Secretarial recognition, signs, and entry into a publicly accessible database.

**Sec. 6 Nomination Procedures.**

a. The Director, National Park Service (NPS), shall provide for a nomination process in which a sponsoring entity (public or private) submits an application to the NPS describing how the following considerations are to be achieved:

(1) Availability for public use of the water trail for at least 10 consecutive years after designation.

(2) How the trail best meets the BMPs in Sec. 4(b).

(3) Compliance with applicable land use plans and environmental laws.

(4) Support of landowner(s), both public and private, who provide access.

b. Upon verification and recommendation by an interagency team, the NPS then submits water trail nominations to the Secretary for designation.

c. The Secretary will designate water trails from a list of nominations.

**Sec. 7 Implementation.** The Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks is responsible for ensuring the implementation of this Order. The Director, NPS, is responsible for implementing the policy and coordinating the National Water Trails System.

**Sec. 8 Expiration Date.** This Order is effective immediately. It shall remain in effect until its provisions are converted to the Departmental Manual or until it is amended, superseded, or revoked, whichever comes first. The termination of this Order will not nullify the policy effected herein.



Secretary of the Interior

Date: FEB 29 2012