

Virginia Scenic Rivers Program

Evaluation Criteria

Rivers or river segments are evaluated for scenic designation on the following factors from which a cumulative score is derived.

Stream corridor vegetation

Wide buffers with tree canopies are significantly weighted criteria.

Streambed or stream flow modifications

Because the intent of the program is to keep designated rivers in a native or natural state, significant channelization or impoundments of any kind negatively impact the scenic quality of the river.

Human development of visual corridor

Development impacts on the river are scored in two parts. The first focuses on development related to the concentration of buildings in predominately urban areas as they are observed from the river. The second is for predominately rural areas, where single residences or groupings are seen as separate individual units or clusters. Higher scores are a result of having no urban development and no visible buildings.

Historic features

Rivers were the primary transportation corridors in early America. Historic features in the river viewshed improve score, especially if they are on the National Register of Historic Places.

Landscape

When the term “scenic” is used, it is most frequently applied to the natural environment or

landscape. Here, two specific scenic attributes — diversity and views — are identified and considered for scoring along the proposed river section.

Quality of fishery

Fish and wildlife assets along a scenic river are important because of their intrinsic and recreational value. The quality of fish in a river corridor is based on the abundance of recreational varieties, the number of varieties, the uniqueness of the varieties and opportunities along the river for legal fishing.

Additional natural features

This section refers to the wildlife and plants along the corridor. Data from the Natural Heritage Data Explorer is used to identify species of statewide or greater significance that are present along the corridor. Additional points may be granted for the presence of plant or animal species within 1,000 feet of the river.

Water quality

Water quality is based on the visible turbidity or siltation during the growing season and the amount of litter in and adjacent to the river corridor.

Parallel roads

The scenic river designation process considers the perceived remoteness of the river corridor. Since many of Virginia’s rivers were major transportation routes, roads often followed the rivers. How visible the roads are is key to a high rating in the parallel roads category.

Crossings

Crossings refer to roads, railroads, major telephone lines, transmission lines and any other manmade structure that crosses over the river. Pipelines and other crossings that go under the riverbed and are not seen from the river are not counted in the scoring.

Special features affecting aesthetics

The purpose of this category is to list all the stream and corridor features that singly or in combination make the river resource visually attractive.

Overall aesthetic appeal

An overall aesthetic appeal rating considers all of the special features and then a score is applied. A river or segment with an exceptional ranking would have many features, a high level of diversity, and extreme or dramatic contrasts.

Public recreational access

During the evaluation, reviewers will record specific types of water-based recreation that occur on the river segment, such as boating, fishing, swimming, tubing and body surfing.

Significant permanent protection

Special consideration is given to river segments where at least 25 percent of adjacent land is in significant permanent protection.