
5.15 WILD AND SCENIC RIVERS

This section evaluates the impacts of the alternatives on wild and scenic rivers in the vicinity of the Airport. The analysis in this section is based upon information and data presented in Section 5.7, Water Quality, and Section 5.13, Floodplains.

5.15.1 Background and Methodology

5.15.1.1 Regulatory Context

The *Wild and Scenic Rivers Act* (Public Law 88-29 and 90-542, as amended), describes those river areas eligible to be included in a national system to preserve certain rivers with outstanding natural, cultural, or recreational features in a free flowing condition. The U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service (NPS), is responsible for identifying and inventorying rivers or river segments that could be potential candidates for inclusion in the *National Wild and Scenic Rivers System*.¹ To develop an inventory of rivers eligible for inclusion in this System, the *Nationwide Rivers Inventory* (NRI) was compiled as a comprehensive source of consistent data on the nation's significant free-flowing streams. The NRI lists rivers based on the degree to which they are free flowing, the degree to which the rivers and their corridors are undeveloped, and the outstanding natural and cultural characteristics of the rivers and their immediate environs. In 1979, the President issued a directive to strengthen the *National Wild and Scenic Rivers System* and to take particular care not to harm those rivers that may qualify for inclusion in this system. The directive was issued to Federal agencies through the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) and stated that:

Each Federal agency shall, as part of its normal planning and environmental review process, take care to avoid or mitigate adverse effects on rivers identified in the Nationwide Inventory prepared by the [National Park Service] Department of the Interior. Agencies shall, as part of their normal environmental review process, consult with the [National Park Service] prior to taking actions which could effectively foreclose wild, scenic, or recreational river status on rivers in the Inventory.²

In accordance with the Presidential directive, FAA Order 1050.1E (Appendix A, 19.1b) states,

The President's 1979 Environmental Message Directive on Wild and Scenic Rivers directs Federal agencies to avoid or mitigate adverse effects on rivers identified in the Nationwide Rivers Inventory as having potential for designation under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. The August 11, 1980 CEQ Memorandum on Procedures for Interagency Consultation requires Federal agencies to consult with the NPS when proposals may affect a river segment included in the Nationwide Rivers Inventory.

¹ National Wild and Scenic Rivers System, National Park Service, November 1, 2004. <http://www.nps.gov/rivers/>

² Public Papers of the Presidents, Jimmy Carter, Volume 1979, Book II, Wild and Scenic Rivers and National Trails, Memorandums From the President August 2, 1979, Memorandum for the Heads of Departments and Agencies, pages 1379-1380, Office of the Federal Register, National Archives and Records Service, General Services Administration.

5.15.1.2 Thresholds of Significance

The FAA has not established any thresholds of significance associated with impacts to wild and scenic rivers or rivers that are included in the NRI. According to FAA Order 5050.4A, *Airport Environmental Handbook*, adverse impacts by a proposed action to a river included in the NRI could occur if: 1) the free flowing nature of the river is destroyed or altered, 2) visual, audible, or other sensory intrusions are introduced which are out of character with the river or alter its setting, 3) water quality is deteriorated, or 4) property interests are transferred without adequate restrictions for protecting the river or its surrounding environment.

5.15.1.3 Methodologies

The *National Wild and Scenic Rivers System* was reviewed to determine the nearest wild and scenic river to the proposed projects. The *Nationwide Rivers Inventory*,³ a listing of free-flowing rivers (or river segments), which based on preliminary studies, are considered to meet eligibility criteria for the National System. Consultation was conducted with NPS to determine the closest river or river segment in the vicinity of the proposed projects in accordance with the CEQ *Procedures for Interagency Consultation to Avoid or Mitigate Adverse Effects on Rivers in the Nationwide Inventory*.⁴ The response from the NPS⁵ indicated concurrence with the findings in the FAA's letter.

5.15.2 Baseline Conditions

No designated wild or scenic rivers exist in the vicinity of the Airport. The closest designated wild and scenic river is the Middle Fork of the Vermilion, located 100 miles south-southeast of the Airport near Danville, Illinois.

The closest river listed on the NRI is the Des Plaines River, which is approximately two miles east of the Airport (see **Exhibit 5.15-1**). The Des Plaines River was listed on the NRI in 1982 and is described as:

An interesting stream generally maintaining a wilderness character due to many parks, forest preserves, and areas along its course. Heavily used for many recreational purposes.

The NRI gives the Des Plaines River a classification of scenic and recreational. The river segments listed in the NRI are as follows:

- From several small dams near Melrose Park to Wheeling (33 river-miles);
- Wheeling to Libertyville (11 river-miles); and
- Libertyville to channelization near the Wisconsin state line (30 river-miles).

³ National Wild and Scenic Rivers System, National Park Service, November 1, 2004.
<http://www.nps.gov/ncrc/programs/rtca/nri/>

⁴ Letter to NPS from FAA, dated November 4, 2004; and Interagency Consultation to Avoid or Mitigate Adverse Effects on Rivers in the Nationwide Inventory, Council of Environmental Quality Memorandum, August 10, 1980.

⁵ Letter from NPS to FAA, dated November 30, 2004.

The three creeks that accommodate runoff from the Airport, Willow-Higgins Creek, Crystal Creek, and Bensenville Ditch / Silver Creek, are tributaries of the Des Plaines River. All three creeks (not listed on the NRI) empty into the Des Plaines River east of the Airport in the river segment between Melrose Park and Wheeling (see **Exhibit 5.15-1**).

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Source: Nationwide Rivers Inventory (NRI); StreetMapUSA, 2003.



Chicago O'Hare International Airport

**O'Hare Modernization
Environmental Impact Statement**

**Segments of Des Plaines
River Listed Under NRI**

► Exhibit 5.15-1

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5.15.3 Alternatives Analysis – Build Out

The following sections present information on the potential environmental impacts on wild and scenic rivers by each of the alternatives retained for detailed evaluation. Only the Build Out phase is presented because this represents the time at which all components of the Build Alternatives would be completed, operational, and all potential impacts would be realized.

5.15.3.1 Alternative A - No Action

Although the terminal, surface access, and supporting facilities for this alternative are essentially unchanged from the existing facilities, there would be slight changes in the amount of impervious surface under this alternative. The detention basins that exist and that are being constructed at the Airport would accommodate runoff from the Airport and release the runoff into the creeks (see **Section 5.13, Floodplains**). The amount of runoff into the creeks would be at the same flow rate that currently exists. In addition, runoff from specific locations on the Airport that contain glycol would continue to be treated so that no impacts to water quality would occur (see **Section 5.7, Water Quality**). Furthermore, the Airport had been in existence for many years when the Des Plaines River was added to the NRI in 1982 and the designation of scenic and recreational occurred in the context of the operations at the Airport. Thus, given the use of best management practices by the City, the continued operation at the Airport would not affect these river classifications. The No Action Alternative (Alternative A) would not affect the free flowing condition of the Des Plaines River and would not affect any of the natural, cultural, or recreational values of the river. Therefore, no impacts to wild and scenic rivers or rivers on the NRI would occur under this alternative.

5.15.3.2 Alternatives C, D, and G

Although the Build Alternatives differ only in the Build Out phase, effects on wild and scenic rivers for these alternatives are similar and are presented together.

Implementation of the Build Alternatives would result in an increase in impervious surfaces at the Airport (see **Section 5.13**). Thus, the amount of runoff from the Airport would increase compared to the amount of runoff under the No Action Alternative (Alternative A). To ensure that the volume of water in the creeks that drain the Airport is not increased above the current flows of the creeks, each of these alternatives would include the expansion of the North Detention Basin, the Central Detention Basin, South Detention Basin, and construction of a landside detention basin during Construction Phase I and Phase II. The intent behind these project components is to accommodate the increased runoff from the Airport and to release the runoff into Willow/Higgins Creek, Bensenville Ditch, and Crystal Creek at a rate that does not affect the existing flows of these waterways (see **Section 5.13**). Therefore, the amount of runoff into the creeks would be controlled through detention and the resulting discharge rate would be similar to that which currently exists. This would result in no significant change in the flows of the three creeks that empty into the Des Plaines River east of the Airport.

The increase in impervious surfaces to support seasonal deicing (October – March) for a larger number of aircraft utilizing the airport also would increase the amount of glycol used on an annual basis. Each of the alternatives would implement water quality control measures to ensure that the quality of the water entering the three creeks that drain into the Des Plaines River would not be significantly impacted (see **Section 5.7, Water Quality**). This would ensure that the water quality of the creeks that empty into the Des Plaines River would not be affected by the Build Alternatives.

Because the Airport had been in existence for many years when the Des Plaines River was added to the NRI in 1982 and the designation of scenic and recreational occurred in the context of the operations at the Airport, and provided best management practices are followed by the City, the continued operation at the Airport would not affect these river classifications.

Like the No Action Alternative (Alternative A), the Build Alternatives would not affect the free flowing condition of the Des Plaines River and would not affect any of the natural, cultural, or recreational values of the river. Therefore, no impacts to wild and scenic rivers or rivers on the NRI would occur under these alternatives.

The FAA has consulted with the NPS and requested concurrence with the determination that no affects to the free flowing condition or to any of the natural, cultural, or recreational values of the Des Plaines River would occur as a result of the proposed action. The response from the NPS⁶ indicated concurrence with the findings in the FAA's letter.

5.15.4 Potential Mitigation Measures

Based on the above analysis, and given the use of best management practices by the City, the continued operation at the Airport would not affect these river classifications. Therefore, the FAA concludes that no impacts related to wild and scenic rivers or rivers listed on the NRI are anticipated to occur under any of the alternatives. Therefore, no mitigation measures are warranted.

5.15.5 Summary

Under the No Action Alternative (Alternative A), the FAA concludes that no significant impacts to wild and scenic rivers would occur. Each Build Alternative includes similar increases in impervious surfaces and runoff. Because the Build Alternatives would include the expansion of detention basins at the Airport, these alternatives would not affect the free flowing condition of the Des Plaines River and, given the use of best management practices by the City in operating the airport, would not affect any of the natural, cultural, or recreational values of the river. The Des Plaines River is not on current or potential future Airport property and would not experience a deterioration in water quality from any of the alternatives. Therefore, no impacts to wild and scenic rivers or rivers on the NRI would occur under the Build Alternatives.

⁶ Letter from NPS to FAA, dated November 30, 2004.