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WILD RIVERS RECOUNT OPEN TO COMMENT

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After receiving a letter from the congressional delegation for Northern New Mexico, officials with the Carson National Forest have reiterated they are still accepting public comments on the recount of river segments eligible for federal protections under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act.

In September, the Carson National Forest proposed to cut the number of rivers and river segments — some only a mile long — that are considered “eligible” under the benchmark environmental law from 103 to 48. By ranger district, there are seven eligible rivers in the Camino Real, three in the Canjilòn, five in the El Rito, two in the Jicarilla, four in the Tres Piedras and 27 in the Questa.

“Reducing the number of eligible rivers as well as deciding to reassess many previously assessed rivers is concerning in light of the limited public input the Forest has sought,” U.S. Rep. Ben Ray Luján and U.S. Sens. Tom Udall and Martin Heinrich wrote in a December letter to James Duran, Carson National Forest supervisor.

“In making these changes, we believe it is important that you increase public involvement to hear from the communities located in and around the Carson National Forest and the rivers being evaluated,” they wrote.

The evaluation of streams in the Carson is a component of the forest plan revision, a planning process that shapes local management of the forest for decades to come. The last forest-wide plan was finished in 1986.

The Carson initially requested feedback on the wild and scenic part of the forest plan revision by Nov. 15. However, comments on the preliminary draft proposed plan — which includes “management prescriptions for eligible rivers to preserve their free-flowing condition, outstandingly remarkable values and classification” — can be sent to carsonplan@fs.fed.us by Feb. 1.

“The public can continue to provide feedback after this date, but it will be most useful for us by Feb. 1,” Denise Ottaviano, public affairs officer for the Carson, told The Taos News via email.

The evaluation of wild and scenic rivers and all other parts of the forest plan revision will not be completed until late 2019, and the Carson “will continue to accept comments throughout the planning process,” she said.

To date, the Carson has received 74 comments regarding the wild and scenic evaluation.