

Jackie Diedrich Excellence in Leadership Award
2018 — Cassie Thomas

As a founding member of the Interagency Wild and Scenic Rivers Coordinating Council (IWSRCC), Cassie provided much of the early leadership for the development of the shared program between the four river-managing agencies. With her exceptional knowledge of the legislative history of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers Act and agency river management responsibilities, Cassie has been instrumental in developing guidelines and reference material for the stewardship and management of our nation's most special rivers. Cassie has been the institutional memory, conscience, and interpreter of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers Act that both the National Park Service (NPS) and the IWSRCC have relied on for many years. She has been a mentor for many current agency staff who have taken on the responsibilities of wild and scenic river (WSR) protection since the establishment of the program. Her outstanding leadership and assistance to all, providing thoughtful detailed responses to any email or telephone call about nuances of WSR requirements, has truly gone above and beyond her assigned duties. She has provided assistance to NPS, but also to Bureau of Land Management (BLM), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and U.S. Forest Service (USFS) to protect and manage WSRs, build capacity for stewardship, and develop and transmit training programs. Most current members of the IWSRCC have at one time or another sought her advice and guidance and have benefitted from her generosity with both her time and expertise.

In addition to working hand in hand with Jackie Diedrich as founding members of the IWSRCC and creating much of the technical guidance and training about WSR studies, planning, management, and implementation, her forethought and expertise led to the establishment of the NPS WSR Program and Steering Committee in 2007. Cassie was first hired by NPS in 1991 to lead the congressionally authorized study of the Sudbury, Assabet, and Concord Rivers in Massachusetts. Her work on that study, combined with experience gained on other early NPS northeast rivers pioneering the "Partnership Wild and Scenic River" model (in particular the Farmington River in Connecticut) lay the foundation for Cassie's expertise and future dedication to WSRs and the eventual establishment of the NPS WSR Program.



Cassie's continued efforts were instrumental in developing the NPS Director's Order and Reference Manual. She led the planning and studies subcommittee for the reference manual, pulling together a significant portion of the manual. She also wrote park planning guidance on how to address wild and scenic rivers in NPS Foundation Documents and led efforts to create and conduct WSR values workshops for both existing and candidate WSRs. She was the primary person that provided explanation and interpretation of requirements for lawsuits that NPS has faced on WSR issues, and even when the outcome was not favorable (e.g., the multiple lawsuits on the Merced and St. Croix Rivers), Cassie has been steadfast in her support for WSRs and assistance in developing strategies to move forward to protect and enhance river values.

Cassie is a primary author on many WSR technical papers, including *Evolution of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act: A History of Substantive Amendments 1968-2013*; *Protecting Resource Values on Non-Federal Lands*; *Steps to Address User Capacities for Wild and Scenic Rivers*; *Wild & Scenic River Management Responsibilities*; *The Wild & Scenic River Study Process*; and *Wild and Scenic Rivers and the Use of Eminent Domain*.

She also contributed substantially to preparing guidance on the review of Federal Energy Regulatory Commission hydropower and water resources projects on WSRs, making tools available to professionals in the hydropower industry, such as the DOE Rapid Toolkit page about WSR and the development of FERC hydropower projects. Cassie also played a major role in guiding the development of new ways to present Section 7 flowcharts, playing the devil's advocate as NPS staff worked to refine definitions and present the process in a revised format.

Cassie is to be especially commended for her leadership in training interagency WSR managers in Alaska about the special responsibilities on these rivers, short weeks before her NPS retirement in March 2018. Those of us that remain carrying the torch to promote WSR protection, sorely miss her contributions in an official capacity. Yet, she continues to respond to requests for assistance post-retirement, which is just one more reason for the special recognition she deserves as the first recipient of the Jackie Diedrich Wild and Scenic Rivers Leadership Award.

