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How wild river conservation happened

In 1968, an unusual mix of politics, idealism and concern for legacy led the U.S. Congress to pass the National Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. It was a visionary, bipartisan effort that would likely be unfathomable today: the Senate unanimously approved the bill, and only seven congressmen voted against it in the House of Representatives.

Next year marks the 50th anniversary of this legislation, and Port Orford author Tim Palmer has chronicled its successes and challenges almost from the beginning.

As a college student in 1970, Palmer was given an assignment to develop a watershed protection plan for one of the 27 rivers named for consideration under the then-new Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. This spurred a lifelong love affair with rivers.

After graduating, Palmer worked as a land-use planner, but by 1980 he was writing full-time with a strong focus on river conservation. For 11 years, he and his wife lived and worked out of a van as they researched rivers across the country. Of the 26 books Palmer has written, more than half are about rivers.

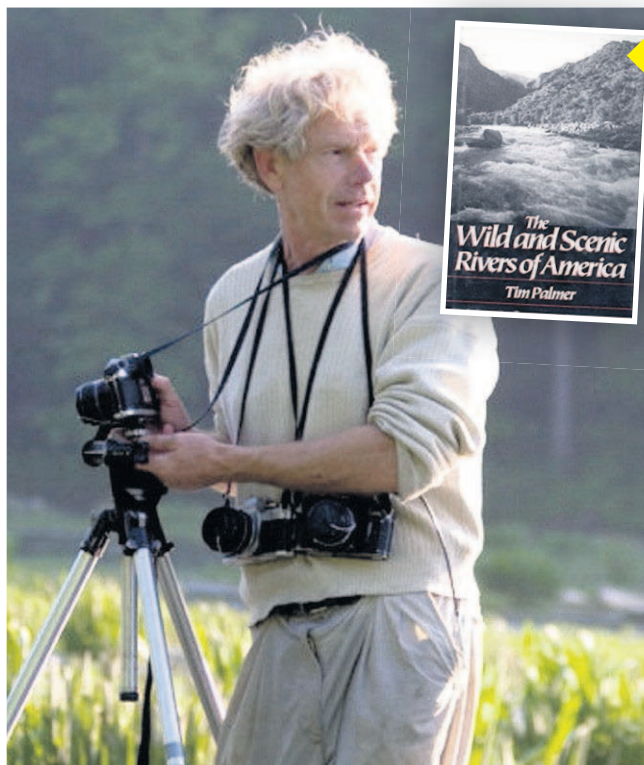
His latest effort, "Wild and Scenic Rivers," celebrates the conservation law that was enacted five decades ago. In it, Palmer traces the progress of a revolving cast of conser-

vationists, paddle-sport enthusiasts, property owners and politicians who have found common cause over the years in protecting stretches of free-flowing streams. From the Allagash River in Maine to the Zig-Zag River in Oregon, some 13,000 miles of rivers in 40 states have been preserved for their "outstandingly remarkable" scenic, recreational, geologic, historic, cultural or fish and wildlife value — thanks to the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act.

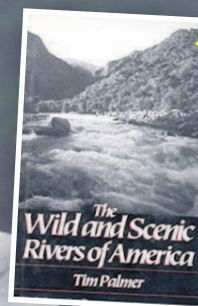
Thirteen thousand miles seems like a lot, until Palmer points out that this amounts to only 0.4 percent of all rivers and streams in the U.S. There are also 80,000 dams in this country that account for somewhere near 600,000 miles of water penned behind reservoirs. Another 235,000 miles of America's waterways have been channeled (mostly for irrigation), while 25,000 more miles have been dredged (for industrial navigation).

Palmer's message: more wild streams and rivers ought to be protected.

On the West Coast, Alaska, Oregon and California have ensured significant protections of their wild water resources, but Washington could do more. And there are 10 states, including Nevada and Hawaii, that have not availed themselves of the federal Wild and Scenic designation for any of their free-flowing streams.



Tim Palmer



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"The Wild and Scenic Rivers of America"
By Tim Palmer
OSU Press
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Crossword Answer

O	P	E	N	E	R	A	G	A	T	E	W	A	Y	A	R	S	O	N	
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The Bookmonger is Barbara Lloyd McMichael, who writes this weekly column focusing on the books, authors and publishers of the Pacific Northwest. Contact her at bkmonger@nwlink.com.

1046 Grand Avenue
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503-325-2280

**240 11TH STREET
ASTORIA, OR 97103**