THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR
WASHINGTON

ORDER NO. 3321

Subject: Establishment of a National Blueways System

Sec. 1 **Purpose**. This Order establishes a program to recognize river systems conserved through diverse stakeholder partnerships that use a comprehensive watershed approach to resource stewardship. River systems designated as a National Blueway shall collectively constitute a National Blueways System. The National Blueways System will provide a new national emphasis on the unique value and significance of a "headwaters to mouth" approach to river management and create a mechanism to encourage stakeholders to integrate their land and water stewardship efforts by adopting a watershed approach. This Order also establishes an intra-agency National Blueways Committee to provide leadership, direction, and coordination to the National Blueways System. It further directs the bureaus of the Department of the Interior (Interior) to collaborate in supporting the National Blueways System, to the extent permitted by law and consistent with their missions and resources.

Sec. 2 **Background**. Rivers play a vital role in connecting Americans with the lands and waters that provide economic, recreational, social, cultural, and ecological value to their communities. Healthy rivers are integral to the quality of life for all Americans and their communities. Resilient rivers and watersheds are essential sources of clean water supplies for rural, agricultural, and urban communities alike. Rivers provide important habitat for fish and wildlife species and act as corridors for their migration and dispersal, providing ecosystem connectivity that supports resilience to environmental change. Rivers support our recreation and tourism economy by providing opportunities for boating, fishing, hiking, camping, swimming, and numerous other activities. Rivers offer a focal point for environmental education and outreach that helps communities understand and connect with the great outdoors.

Across the Nation, communities of stakeholders have formed partnerships focused on stewardship and sustainability of rivers and their watersheds. When these partnerships work successfully across Federal agencies, with state, local, and tribal governments, and with non-profit organizations, private landowners, and businesses, they are able to accomplish their shared stewardship and conservation objectives. National recognition and Federal agency coordination in support of river systems will inspire and help stakeholders to plan and manage for the resiliency and connectivity of their rivers, to seek cooperation and collaboration among communities and across jurisdictions, and to strive for an integrative, adaptive approach for sustaining the whole river system.

National Blueways will be nationally and regionally significant rivers and their watersheds that are highly valued recreational, social, economic, cultural, and ecological assets for the communities that depend on them. National Blueways encourage a landscape-scale approach to river conservation that involves a river from its headwaters to its mouth and across its watershed, rather than individual segments of the channel and riparian area alone. Establishment of a

National Blueways System will help promote best practices, share information and resources, and encourage active and collaborative stewardship of rivers across the country.

Sec. 3 **Authority**. This Order is issued in accordance with authority provided under the Take Pride in America Act, Public Law 101-628; the Outdoor Recreation Act, Public Law 87-714; and the Cooperative Watershed Management Program of the Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009, Public Law 111-11. The bureaus within Interior have a broad panoply of legal authority to carry out their respective missions that support enhancing river recreation, undertaking river restoration, and pursuing river protection initiatives to pass on healthy rivers to future generations. These authorities include the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act, 42 U.S.C. 9601 et seq.; the Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956, 16 U.S.C. 742 et seq.; the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act, 16 U.S.C. 661 et seq.; the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act of 1965, 16 U.S.C. 4601-4 et seq.; the National Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1968, 16 U.S.C. 1271-1287; the Federal Land Policy and Management Act, 43 U.S.C 1702 et seq.; the Reclamation Act, Public Law 57-161; the Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009, Public Law 111-11; and the National Trails System Act of 1968, 16 U.S.C. 1241 et seq.

Sec. 4 **Model National Blueway**. I hereby designate the Connecticut River and Watershed as the first National Blueway as a model for future designations. The Connecticut River Watershed exemplifies the National Blueways System with diverse partnerships of interested communities including over 40 partner organizations, protection of over 2 million acres of habitat, environmental and educational efforts aimed at urban and rural populations, and recreational access to the river, its tributaries, and public lands.

Sec. 5 **National Blueways Committee**. This Order establishes a National Blueways Committee (Committee), to be chaired by the Secretary or his or her designee.

a. Membership. Members of the Committee will include a representative designated by the Directors of the Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service, Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Geological Survey, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs; the Commissioner of Reclamation; and a representative designated by the Assistant Secretary – Policy, Management and Budget. The Committee may also include representatives of other Federal agencies, whose representatives shall participate through appropriate agreements.

b. Responsibilities. The Committee will:

(i) Oversee the process of National Blueways criteria development, assessment, and designation;

(ii) Make recommendations to the Secretary for the designation of National Blueways;

(iii) Oversee support provided by Interior to designated National Blueways; and

(iv) Report to the Secretary on the progress, accomplishments, opportunities, and challenges of the National Blueways System.

Sec. 6 **National Blueways System.** The National Blueways System program shall recognize and promote nationally or regionally significant rivers and their watersheds.

a. Nomination. Any established stakeholder partnership may, in collaboration with a sponsoring Federal or state agency, nominate a river and its associated watershed as a proposed National Blueway by submitting an application according to the nomination process and assessment criteria.

b. Assessment. The assessment criteria will evaluate the intrinsic values a river and its watershed possess and the interested communities' record of commitment to land and water management practices that provide or maintain outstanding recreational, social, and/or ecological benefits.

c. Designation. Following consideration of recommendations made by the Committee, the Secretary may designate the river and its associated watershed as a National Blueway that will become part of the National Blueways System.

d. Alignment. Bureaus within Interior, to the extent permitted by law and consistent with their missions, policies, and resources, shall endeavor to align the execution of agency plans and implementation of agency programs to protect, restore, and enhance the natural, cultural, and/or recreational resources associated with designated National Blueways.

e. Coordination. Bureaus will coordinate within Interior and with other participating Federal, state, local, and tribal agencies and partners to support designated National Blueways.

f. Partnerships. Bureaus are encouraged, to the extent permitted by law, to develop partnerships with other federal, state, local, and tribal governments, water and power authorities, and community and non-governmental organizations in support of designated National Blueways. Bureaus will be responsive to the diverse needs of different kinds of communities from, the core of our cities to the remote rural areas, and shall seek to ensure that the role played by the Federal Government is complementary to the plans and work being carried out by other Federal, state, local, and tribal governments. To the extent practicable, Federal resources will be strategically directed to complement resources being spent by these partner entities.

Sec. 7 **Disclaimer**. Nothing in this Order is intended to authorize or affect the use of private property. Nothing in this Order is intended to be the basis for the exercise of any new regulatory authority, nor shall this initiative or any designation pursuant to this Order affect or interfere with any Federal, state, local, and tribal government jurisdiction or applicable law including interstate compacts relating to water or the laws of any state or tribe relating to the control, appropriation, use or distribution of water or water rights.

Sec. 8 **Implementation**. The Deputy Secretary is responsible for ensuring the implementation of this Order. Nothing in this Order shall be interpreted as amending, revising, or modifying

either Executive Order 13061 of September 11, 1997, entitled, "Federal Support of Community Efforts Along American Heritage Rivers" or Secretarial Order 3319 of February 29, 2012, entitled, "Establishment of a National Water Trails System."

Sec. 9 **Expiration Date.** This Order is effective immediately. It shall remain in effect until its provisions are converted to the Departmental Manual or until it is amended, superseded, or revoked, whichever comes first.

Ken Salazar

Secretary of the Interior

Date: 5/24/2012