Frequently Asked Questions

1. **Will WROS help managers and local government officials make better decisions?** Yes, WROS is a framework and procedure to help make better decisions and it can be used by agency planners and managers, county planning commissions, city councils, and stakeholder groups. It is not intended to make decisions or to take the place of sound professional judgment. It is intended to help yield decisions that are principled, reasoned, systematic, deliberate, trackable, and legally defensible.

2. **Does WROS give managers flexibility?** WROS is flexible. WROS recognizes that there will be special circumstances and situations in which flexibility and adaptation is necessary. There may be instances where the mapping criteria or certain standards will not work. That is acceptable. On the other hand, maintaining the integrity of WROS as a professional tool is very important. Changes and adaptations to WROS should be made only with reasonable care and clear justification.

3. **Will WROS constrain reservoir operations?** WROS will not constrain any resource use, purpose, or public or private priorities of water resources, but rather, will help to optimize the net public benefits for reservoir operations. It is a tool that helps to integrate recreation considerations into complex water use allocation decisions and helps to recognize and assess the tradeoffs and consequences of proposed alternatives.

4. **Will water drawdown or flows affect WROS?** Water drawdown and flows can affect the type and amount of recreation opportunities on a water resource and the WROS classification. For example, the water surface acres classified as "rural natural" in early spring (high water level) may change to "rural developed" in the late summer. For many reservoirs, it would be useful to have two or more WROS maps (e.g., early, middle, and late season) to help understand change in recreation opportunities. The reservoir drawdown effect on WROS should not be viewed as a constraint or limitation, but rather as one of many factors that contributes to the diversity of WROS.

5. **Can WROS change by season?** Yes, WROS can change by season. Features such as ice, snow, road closures, wildlife migration, and special activity seasons (e.g., waterfowl hunting) can affect WROS. For many water bodies, there is considerable change and difference from season to season or even within a season. Having a WROS map for each of the primary seasons of interest would help to understand the recreation situation.

6. **How does WROS help protect important natural and cultural resources?** Early in the mapping of the WROS classifications, areas of known or suspected important natural and cultural resources are identified. These areas are provided special deliberation in terms of the types and amounts, if any, of recreation opportunities that may be appropriate. Special management and mitigation measures, along with heightened monitoring, may be required. It is important to understand that the loss of an important natural or cultural resource is also, in effect, the loss of a recreation opportunity. It is the loss of an opportunity to experience and enjoy these very special or unique features.

7. **Can the public understand WROS?** The public can understand that there is a range or spectrum of recreation settings from urban cities to remote primitive settings. Most can also relate to participating in a favorite activity in a specific setting and being rewarded with a memorable experience. Perhaps most importantly, water resources can be mapped with the six WROS classifications, providing a very effective visual presentation for public review and discussion or a visitor information tool at a boat ramp. On the other hand, WROS is a tool for agency professionals, and there may be situations where the WROS class names (e.g., primitive) may not be understood by the general visiting public.

8. **How does WROS relate to tourism?** While academic distinctions label people fishing in streams next to their homes as recreationists and people who travel 50 miles or more as tourists, these distinctions serve little purpose in the WROS system. Tourists pursuing outdoor recreation opportunities are recreationists, and in this guidebook the words are used interchangeably. Thus, WROS is, in effect, a water-based tourism opportunity spectrum system.

9. **Can recreationists and tourists use WROS?** Yes, WROS can provide an informative map for the public, indicating the supply of available recreation opportunities in an area. A major problem in managing public lands and waters is that recreationists and tourists do not have adequate visitor information and are not aware of what recreation opportunities are available and where. While many maps show facilities and transportation, few convey the type of experience available or how the area is being managed. Often, a visitor capacity problem is really a visitor distribution problem caused by the visitor's lack of awareness of alternative locations and times to visit. WROS can help to show the diversity of water recreation opportunities for a single water resource, or better still, for a large region or watershed.

10. **Can a WROS classification be subdivided into subclasses or zones?** WROS reflects a national spectrum of opportunities from urban cities to remote primitive areas. Each of the six classifications can be viewed as a small spectrum within a larger national spectrum. There may be situations where it is advantageous to subdivide one of the WROS classifications to more effectively deal with a particular field situation. Division of a WROS class is acceptable as long as the new subclass or zone is compatible with the overall WROS.

11. **How does WROS deal with exceptions or unique field situations?** WROS recognizes that it is not practical or desirable for a national system to try to address every field situation. WROS is not intended to replace sound professional judgment and reasonable decisions. On the other hand, WROS provides a framework for analyzing special situations and for making good decisions. It would be advisable to document the circumstances and rationale used in the administrative record.

12. **How does WROS interface with site-level planning?** WROS is a landscape-level tool that applies to water resources. WROS provides guidance for the entire spectrum of opportunities in its management guidelines, yet recognizes that another planning level might be necessary to make site specific decisions about the type, location, design, or appropriateness of facilities or actions. Site design plans, interpretive plans, monitoring plans, and engineering and architectural plans can tier off WROS and provide the necessary detail.

13. **How does WROS accommodate special areas or management units?** WROS is a landscape-level tool that applies to large water resources, yet recognizes and accommodates special circumstances at the site level. There will be instances where areas within a WROS zone will need additional site-specific management direction to accommodate the special needs, circumstances, or opportunities associated with the area. WROS encourages managers to "tier down" and provide additional management direction. Examples of such special areas or management units include:

- Security areas
- Wildlife protection areas
- No-wake zones
- Seasonal resource closures
- No-motor zones
- Special recreation use areas
- Travel corridors
- Conflict mitigation areas
- Overnight areas
- Administrative sites
- Destination areas
- Cultural resource areas
- Hazard areas
- Recreation day-use areas

Some recreation activities such as hunting are very seasonal.

14. **Does WROS require a special planning process?** WROS does not require a special planning process. By analogy, if the main stem of a tree is considered the agency planning process, WROS is part of the recreation branch that brings recreation information into the main stem. WROS is a tool that helps to integrate recreation considerations into a larger comprehensive planning effort where multiple uses and allocation decisions are necessary. Although the Bureau of Reclamation has taken the lead in developing WROS, the system has been designed to interface with any local, State, or Federal agency planning process.

15. **Can WROS help make daily management decisions?** Yes, WROS can help make daily management decisions. The WROS map representing the desired recreation opportunities or the preferred alternative can help remind managers of the appropriate activities, setting attributes, and experiences for each WROS zone. Invariably, there are requests and appeals for special exceptions that may not be appropriate for a specific time or location. An understanding of WROS can help managers make better decisions and can provide a logical and defensible explanation for the decision. Furthermore, the management guidelines are very useful for daily or annual operation and maintenance activities, budget planning and justification, assigning volunteer work crews, responding to media and local tourism boards, dealing with visitor capacity and conflict issues, and mitigating unforeseen impacts.

16. **How does WROS help justify budgets and personnel?** A key component of WROS is a set of management guidelines for many of the components requiring time or effort (e.g., budget and personnel). For example, the maintenance and patrol standards will differ between a semi primitive and a rural developed WROS class. While many of the guidelines are of a qualitative nature, continuing research and professional experience with WROS will help in developing more quantitative standards that can be more easily expressed as cost items in a budget or personnel request.

17. **What if current conditions are not consistent with the WROS guidelines?** WROS helps to determine where inconsistencies might exist; that is, locations or situations where the current conditions are not consistent with the WROS management guidelines. Inconsistencies are often found in the initial application of WROS to an area, and over a number of years they would be expected to decline as management makes adjustments. Inconsistencies can be mapped and prioritized on a scale of

negligible, minor, moderate, or major consequence. WROS does not obligate and direct any action, but rather helps to identify the type and location of inconsistencies and helps to mitigate them over time.

18. **What size river, stream, inlet, or other water resource is practical for WROS?** WROS can be applied to any water resource, although its practicality on very small areas should be limited. Use of WROS would be justified when the planning area has water-related recreation use that is a value to the public. The water resources are a dominant natural resource feature, or water management is a significant public issue, management concern, or future opportunity. Sound professional judgment is the standard to make this decision.

19. **Should WROS be used on streams and rivers above and below a lake or reservoir?** Recreationists visit a geographic area called a "visitation range," analogous to an animal's home range or a river's watershed. From their overnight locations, visitors take short excursions to experience different locations throughout the visitation range. For example, a family might camp for several days at a full service State park campground on a large lake, but also spend one day fishing10 miles downstream and another day hiking upstream into the headwaters to visit a popular vista. Thus, a recreation management decision in one location may affect the quality or nature of the recreation opportunity in another location within the visitation range.

    The answer to this question is answered by another question: What is the visitation range for the most of the recreationists and tourists visiting the area? Of course, the final decision must also consider other factors such as the practicality of the size of the study area and the number of other agencies that would need to collaborate.

Fishing is a recreational activity possible in virtually all areas.

20. **How does WROS blend with ROS?** ROS (Recreation Opportunity Spectrum) was developed for land areas managed by the United States Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management. WROS builds upon ROS and provides more detailed guidance for water resources such as lakes, reservoirs, rivers, coastal zones, bays, estuaries, inlets, and marine protected areas. Both ROS and WROS use a similar type and number of classifications or zones, names, mapping criteria, descriptions of recreation experiences, and steps. In cases where large land areas (e.g., wilderness and national forest) are adjacent to the water resources under consideration, ROS can be used and blended with the WROS classes. In

cases where the planning area contains a relatively small terrestrial area and the primary visitation is water-based recreation, WROS can be used for the land and water resources.

21. **How does WROS interface with ROS in dealing with streams, rivers, and wetlands?** ROS was developed for large terrestrial landscapes and provides a small amount of management direction for some water resources (e.g., wild and scenic rivers). WROS is a logical extension of ROS and has greatly expanded the water recreation management guidelines. A reasonable rule of thumb is that if the stream, river, or other water resource is incidental to the primary recreation opportunities in the planning area, ROS may be the preferred tool. Conversely, WROS may be the preferred tool where the water-recreation opportunities are significant (not incidental), distinct from adjacent land-based recreation, and highly valued by the visitors and local communities.

22. **Can WROS be applied to water resources in other countries and international protected areas?** Yes. WROS is a tool with universal appeal. Its overarching goal is to provide planners and managers with a framework and procedure for making better decisions for conserving a spectrum of high quality and diverse water recreation opportunities. WROS improves our understanding of the complexity of outdoor recreation and tourism management, strengthens sound professional judgment, and enables a manager to make better and more defensible decisions.

    For example, many international protected areas have significant marine, coastal zone, reef, lake, and river resources. These areas are very popular for tourists and adventure travelers and can be both a bane and blessing for a local community and a nation's welfare. The management challenges and opportunities associated with visitors to the world's protected areas, be they called recreationists or tourists, are basically the same.

    The underlying foundation and strategy employed by WROS to conserve water resources and recreation opportunities have universal application. They also have the flexibility and adaptability for managers to tailor parts of WROS (e.g., some terms, pictures, descriptions, standards) to more closely reflect their local social, cultural, and environmental situation.