



# 2018 Frank Church Wild and Scenic Rivers Award Jim Eicher

This award recognizes contributions focused on the management, enhancement, or protection of designated Wild and Scenic Rivers. As with the Outstanding Contribution to River Management, this award recognizes a history of contributions with a broad geographic scope (as opposed to more recent or project/location-specific accomplishments). Jim Eicher was selected as the winner this year.

Jim Eicher was a river seasonal for seven years prior to his first permanent job. He first worked on the Wild and Scenic Rogue River in Oregon. His work since is a testament to his dedication, passion, and love of rivers. Jim's interest in river management started early in his career. He has been a River Management Society (RMS) member since 1989. He has served as the Pacific Chapter President on many occasions.

Jim has been a river ranger, manager, leader, networker, facilitator, expert negotiator with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC), mentor, consultant, and a strong proponent of the profession of river management. His history of accomplishments includes: community-based planning, an expert negotiator in the FERC relicensing process, Wild and Scenic Rivers Act and Section 7, partnerships, coordinating and cooperating whole river basin (multi-state) strategies; recreational law enforcement; river-based recreation management; allocation and carrying capacity techniques; negotiating political issues and dealing with special interest groups.

Jim leads by example and is a problem-solver and active field manager. He gets into the field where the action is. Until he retired in 2017, Jim managed all or portions of seven river segments, three of which are Wild and Scenic Rivers, the North Fork American, Merced, and Tuolumne. He also managed four non-designated rivers: South Fork American, Consumnes, Mokelumne, and Yuba rivers.

Jim has promoted interpretation, education and information on trails which parallel the rivers, e.g., Merced River Trail. He has floated hundreds of miles, driven the roads, hiked the trails, and sought out the public and outfitters to not only garner support for Wild and Scenic Rivers but to ask their advice in how to better care for them. Early in his career, Jim along with his field manager resolved a myriad of issues on the Merced Wild and Scenic River for the public to use and access this river.

Due to two drownings on the South Fork American in 1989, Jim with BLM took on a controversial issue to fix an unsafe public boating situation (foot entrapments) at Rhino Rock in Meat Grinder Rapid. Working with Pacific Gas and Electric (PG&E), the California Division of Water Rights,

and FERC, the issue was resolved by removing a three foot by five-foot granite rock. This solution also led to amending the FERC license to PG&E to allow the minimum flow to be temporarily modified if required in emergency situations.

Jim has used community-based planning and hosted multiple public workshops, meetings, open houses, and focus groups to gain input and support for rivers in his field office. He has also attended other agency, community, and outfitter meeting/gatherings to stand up and support Wild and Scenic Rivers.

In January 1997, the Merced WSR reached 91,500 cfs for more than 14 hours and wiped out many of the man-made structures along its banks for the previous 100 years. Damage was estimated in the hundreds of millions of dollars. Jim's entire field office shifted its priorities to repair much of what they had lost. In four months, the BLM repaired all three campgrounds, five miles of road, and a temporary suspension bridge along with the support of the county public works, chamber of commerce, board of supervisors, USFS, and NPS. This was in large part due to Jim's vision of public service and keeping the river open.

Jim was the primary author of BLM's Merced Wild and Scenic River Management Plan and was responsible for the Saxon Creek Water Project. He served on the Interagency Wild and Scenic Rivers Coordinating Council, and provided first-hand knowledge on technical papers and Council products. He actively consulted and coordinated with the National Park Service and contributed to the NPS Yosemite Valley Planning effort and the revised Merced River Management Plan.

To quote Jim, *"Awards are a reflection of what we have accomplished, but it is my belief that our real awards or rewards as river managers come from those we serve and the precious resources we work on every day in order to protect and enhance the watershed for future generations. I have dedicated my professional career to watershed and river management issues."*