

**STATEMENT OF PEGGY O'DELL, DEPUTY DIRECTOR FOR OPERATIONS,
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE
THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS OF THE SENATE
COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES, CONCERNING S.
349, TO AMEND THE WILD AND SCENIC RIVERS ACT TO DESIGNATE A
SEGMENT OF THE BEAVER, CHIPUXET, QUEEN, WOOD, AND
PAWCATUCK RIVERS IN THE STATES OF CONNECTICUT AND RHODE
ISLAND FOR STUDY FOR POTENTIAL ADDITION TO THE NATIONAL
WILD AND SCENIC RIVERS SYSTEM, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.**

APRIL 23, 2013

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to present the views of the Department of the Interior on S. 349, a bill to amend the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act to designate a segment of the Beaver, Chipuxet, Queen, Wood, and Pawcatuck Rivers in the States of Connecticut and Rhode Island for study for potential addition to the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System.

The Department supports enactment of S. 349. The river segments and tributary areas proposed for study, which comprise the Wood-Pawtucket Watershed, exhibit the types of qualities and resource values that would make it a worthy and important candidate for potential addition to the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. However, we feel that priority should be given to the 31 previously authorized studies for potential units of the National Park System, potential new National Heritage Areas, and potential additions to the National Trails System and National Wild and Scenic Rivers System that have not yet been transmitted to Congress.

S. 349 directs the Secretary of the Interior to study named segments of the Pawcatuck, Beaver, Chipuxet, Queen and Wood Rivers. The bill also specifies that the headwaters segments of the Wood and Queen Rivers include all tributaries, ensuring that virtually the entire Wood-Pawtucket Watershed is assessed. The bill requires the study to be completed and transmitted to Congress within three years after funding is made available for it.

Several segments of the Pawcatuck, Wood and Chipuxet Rivers are listed on the Nationwide Rivers Inventory (NRI) as potential candidates for Wild and Scenic River designation. These NRI-listed segments were the focus of a 1980s planning and conservation study undertaken through the National Park Service's Rivers and Trails Conservation Assistance program, which concluded in part, "The Wood and Pawcatuck Rivers corridor is Rhode Island's least developed and most rural river system. Its waters are the cleanest and purest and its recreational opportunities are unparalleled by any other river system in the state." The Queen and Beaver Rivers have been recognized for their pristine headwaters nature, critical to the high water quality and biological diversity of the upper Pawcatuck, and have been the focus of significant conservation efforts by the Nature Conservancy and Rhode Island Audubon Society, among others. In 2004, the

legislatively-established Rhode Island Rivers Council classified the Wood-Pawcatuck watershed as “Rhode Island's premier freshwater recreational resource.”

If enacted, the National Park Service intends to undertake the study in close cooperation with the affected communities, the relevant agencies of the states of Rhode Island and Connecticut, and interest groups such as the Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association through a partnership-based study approach. This is the approach that has been used since the 1980s for studies of rivers located in New England and other parts of the Northeast Region. The partnership-based approach is recognized in Section 10(e) of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act as a means of encouraging state and local governmental participation in the administration of a component of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. The partnership-based approach also allows for development of a proposed river management plan as part of the study, which helps landowners and local jurisdictions understand their potential future roles in river management should Congress decide to designate part or all of the rivers being studied.

This concludes my prepared remarks, Mr. Chairman. I will be happy to answer any questions you or other committee members may have regarding this bill.