

STATEMENT OF P. DANIEL SMITH, DEPUTY DIRECTOR, EXERCISING THE AUTHORITY OF THE DIRECTOR, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE SENATE ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, CONCERNING S. 3533, A BILL TO AMEND THE WILD AND SCENIC RIVERS ACT TO DESIGNATE CERTAIN RIVER SEGMENTS WITHIN THE WOOD-PAWCATUCK WATERSHED AS COMPONENTS OF THE NATIONAL WILD AND SCENIC RIVERS SYSTEM, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.

December 12, 2018

Chairman Daines, Ranking Member King, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to present the Department of the Interior's views on S. 3533, a bill to amend the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act to designate certain river segments within the Wood-Pawcatuck watershed as components of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System, and for other purposes.

The Department has preliminarily concluded through the National Park Service's draft study of the Wood-Pawcatuck watershed that the segments proposed for designation under this bill are eligible for inclusion in the Wild and Scenic Rivers System. However, we recommend that the committee defer action on S. 3533 until the study is completed.

This bill would amend Section 3(a) of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act (16 U.S.C. 1274(a)) to designate segments of the Beaver River, Chipuxet River, Green Fall River, Ashaway River, Pawcatuck River, Queen River, Usquepaugh River, Shunock River, and the Wood River within the Wood-Pawcatuck watershed in Rhode Island and Connecticut, to be administered by the Secretary of the Interior. The river segments range from 3 miles to 21 miles in length and the designation would encompass over 100 miles of wild, scenic, and recreational rivers.

The segments would be managed in accordance with the Wood-Pawcatuck Wild and Scenic Stewardship Plan (June 2018) with the Secretary coordinating administration and management with a locally based management committee, as specified in the plan. The bill would authorize the Secretary to enter into cooperative agreements with the States of Connecticut and Rhode Island, the adjoining communities, and appropriate local planning and environmental organizations.

Public Law 113-291, the Carl Levin and Howard P. "Buck" McKeon National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2015, authorized the study of Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed in December 2014. The National Park Service conducted the study in close cooperation with the adjoining communities, the States of Connecticut and Rhode Island, the Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association, Save the Bay, the Audubon Society of Rhode Island, The Nature Conservancy, and other interested local parties.

Technical assistance provided as a part of the study made possible the development of the Wood-Pawcatuck Wild and Scenic Stewardship Plan. This plan is based primarily around local partner actions designed to guide the stewardship of the river segments within the Wood-Pawcatuck watershed with or without a National Wild and Scenic River designation.

While the study has not been finalized, the data collected and presented in the preparation of the Stewardship Plan support the conclusion that the segments proposed for designation by S. 3533 exhibit free-flowing character and the presence of outstandingly remarkable natural, cultural and recreation resource values consistent with Wild and Scenic River eligibility. We expect the study to be finalized in 2019. The study process, which culminated in local government votes supporting both the Stewardship Plan and Wild and Scenic River designation in all 12 affected Rhode Island and Connecticut communities, has also demonstrated strong local, state and partner support crucial to successful long-term management and protection of partnership-based Wild and Scenic Rivers. The Wood-Pawcatuck watershed has long been recognized as one of the most ecologically and recreationally significant in southern New England, exhibiting outstanding water quality, biological diversity, cold water fishing and paddling. The region is also rich in historic and cultural resources, including Native American archaeology, and colonial and early industrial mill development.

If S. 3533 is enacted, the designated river segments within the Wood-Pawcatuck watershed would be administered based on the Partnership Wild and Scenic River model, similar to several other designations in the Northeast, including the upper Farmington River and the Eightmile River in Connecticut, and the Lamprey River in New Hampshire. This approach emphasizes local and state management solutions, and has proven effective as a means of protecting outstandingly remarkable natural, cultural, and recreational resource values without the need for direct federal management or land acquisition.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my statement. I would be pleased to answer any questions you or other members of the Subcommittee may have.