The Nature Conservancy
Protecting nature. Preserving life.™

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In Support
Raised Bill 81, AAC the Designation of Certain Areas of the Housatonic River as a Wild and Scenic River

David Sutherland – Director of Government Relations
Environment Committee
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The Nature Conservancy would like to express its support for Bill 81, which would designate the Northern portion of the Housatonic River in Connecticut as a Wild and Scenic River under the federal Wild and Scenic River Program.

Under the federal program, rivers can be designated as Wild and Scenic in two ways. For those rivers designated through an act of Congress, the provisions of the program, such as the development of a management plan, are administered by one of the agencies in the U.S. Department of Interior, in cooperation with local and state agencies. Rivers can also be included in the national Wild and Scenic system by request of the State's Governor and then designated by the Secretary of the Interior. The provisions of the program for those streams are administered by the State. In this case, Bill 81 specifies that the Northwest Hills Council of Governments, acting on behalf of the Housatonic River Commission, would be the administering agency.

One of the major focuses of the administering agency would be the formation of a steering committee, comprised of state and federal agencies, local municipalities, business representatives and river advocates to determine how best to balance protection of the river's resources with various uses and development interests.

The Nature Conservancy's Connecticut Chapter was very involved with the designation of the Eightmile River in Southeastern Connecticut as a Wild and Scenic River, and the development and approval of its watershed management plan. That experience confirmed for us what watersheds across the country have learned, that the Wild and Scenic program engages all sectors of local communities to determine the best ways in which to protect our nation's most ecologically and recreationally important rivers.

The Housatonic River is a critical natural resource in and of itself. Its ecological role is heightened, however, by its status as one of Connecticut's three major rivers emptying into Long Island Sound. The EPA's new Long Island Sound Nitrogen Reduction Strategy includes as one of its three major focuses: "Reducing nitrogen flowing out of the three biggest Connecticut rivers that contribute nitrogen pollution to the Sound – the Connecticut, Housatonic and Thames." A Wild and Scenic designation and planning process for the upper Housatonic would be an important component of a comprehensive initiative to reduce pollutants and excessive nutrients flowing from the watershed into Long Island Sound.

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