



Farmington River Watershed Association, Inc.

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February 19, 2016

Testimony in support of Raised Bill 81, AAC the Designation of Certain Areas of the Housatonic River as a Wild and Scenic River.

To Sen. Ted Kennedy, Rep. James Albis, Co-Chairs, and Members of the Environment Committee:

As Executive Director of the Farmington River Watershed Association, I can explain how a Wild & Scenic River designation has worked out over the last 22 years in the river valley next door to the Housatonic. In 1994, fourteen miles of the Farmington River's West Branch were designated a Wild and Scenic River. At the time, Wild & Scenic River designations had not been tried on East Coast rivers, and there were understandable doubts about the outcome.

We now know that the designation process brought together representatives from towns, conservation organizations, river-based businesses and industries, state agencies, water utilities, paddlers, and anglers. They were charged with developing an advisory management plan that all could endorse. That provided a forum where people who should talk to each other about river management were communicating. That stakeholder group, the Farmington River Coordinating Committee, has now worked together for more than two decades. We learn from each other, share ideas and leverage resources. We have become allies in promoting good land stewardship, water quality monitoring, river habitat restorations, cleanups, and responsible low-impact recreation.

Because we belong to this committee, my organization is more networked, more connected, and more capable of its mission than it would be otherwise. I'm sure that the other Committee members feel the same about their agencies. We find that Wild & Scenic designation provides extra status for the river when needed— for example, in seeking funds for river restoration from competitive grant programs. The designation gives cachet to a community's natural assets. It's a reminder that the river's scenic and natural values enhance our state's economy. Perhaps best of all, we make decisions about river stewardship locally. A federal agency has never dictated or overridden those decisions, nor is it supposed to. In fact, federal condemnation of property is expressly forbidden.

When the Housatonic River receives federal Wild & Scenic status, I'm confident that similar benefits will follow. And I'd like to emphasize that designation as described in this bill entails no fiscal obligation for the State of Connecticut.

From long involvement with a Wild & Scenic River right here in Connecticut-- and from living within two miles of the Housatonic River-- I can say with confidence that this bill will do good, not harm, for a river that's stunningly beautiful, full of fish and wildlife, and a terrific place to fish and paddle. I encourage you to pass it.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Eileen Fielding". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Eileen Fielding, Executive Director, FRWA