

Testimony to the Environmental Committee of the CT State Legislature
Wild and Scenic River Designation for the Housatonic River – Northwest CT
Raised Bill 81

Good morning,

The Housatonic River is a valuable jewel of the Northwest Corner of Connecticut. It is a migratory bird flyway whose bald eagle populations have soared in the past twenty years. It is an abundant fishery with growing populations of now naturally breeding trout, relished by fishermen throughout the region. It is a paddlers paradise with exciting stretches of white water to augment long stretches of stunning scenery and relatively unspoiled landscapes.

The region was recognized over thirty years ago when the National Park Service first initiated its Wild and Scenic River designation process. At that time the towns along the Housatonic River declined the offer to make the river Wild and Scenic, and rather formed a local advisory body, the Housatonic River Commission to help protect and preserve the unique nature of this body of water. In that time, the HRC Housatonic Valley Association, the Connecticut Department of (Energy and) Environmental Protection and many other groups have worked together to make the River arguably in better shape today than it was decades ago.

Since our foundation we have looked many times at the value of having the Housatonic River be designated Wild and Scenic. HRC has met with and heard from representatives of many of the other regional rivers that have earned Wild and Scenic designation over the past few decades. ALL of our correspondence and feedback from other river groups is overwhelmingly positive about the process and how it can help to protect a valuable resource for the region. In truth, much of what these groups are excited about, we already have. The Housatonic River Commission provides feedback to towns about local development, and the River Commission and many other groups are actively involved in River issues including PCB contamination and development.

With the increase in extreme weather events (including an ice dam formed on the Housatonic currently flooding large parts of Kent today), flooding in river ways has increased and development along our waterways can be particularly problematic. We want to be sure to create the guidelines to ensure that when

development does happen it is done wisely. The Housatonic River Commission has worked hard to maintain the health of the River for ecological, cultural and scenic benefits. At this time, our analysis of the situation makes it quite clear that Wild and Scenic River designation can be an important part in our ongoing protection of our beloved River. This is because

Wild and Scenic designation will enable HRC to more effectively protect the River and implement the Housatonic River Management Plan,

Wild and Scenic designation will provide a platform to gain wider recognition of the unique nature of the Housatonic River,

Wild and Scenic designation will help ensure that federally funded or permitted projects are carried out in a way that will not adversely affect the outstanding resource values that make the Housatonic River worthy of Wild & Scenic status, and

Wild and Scenic designation will attract funding for protection and management of the River.

We are pleased that all the member towns of the Housatonic River – New Milford, Kent, Cornwall, Sharon, Falls Village, Salisbury and North Canaan – agree that Wild and Scenic River designation will be an important step in maintaining the quality of life for all of us in the Housatonic River valley.

Thank you,

Jesse Klingebiel
Secretary, Housatonic River Commission
Kent Representative
klingebielj@kent-school.edu