

Committee on Resources

Subcommittee on National Parks & Public Lands

Witness Statement

Testimony of Edward J. O'Donnell
Vice-president, White Clay Watershed Association
Board Member, White Clay Fly Fishers
Before
The House Subcommittee on National Parks
and Public Lands
Committee on Resources
The Honorable James Hansen, Chairman
on
H.R. 3520
White Clay Creek and its Tributaries
Wild and Scenic River Act
June 8, 2000

Mr. Chairman, members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on H.R. 3520, a bill to designate White Clay Creek in Delaware and Pennsylvania as an addition to the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. My name is Edward J. O'Donnell, and I reside at 103 St. Regis Drive, Newark, Delaware. I am vice-president of the White Clay Watershed Association and also serve on the board of White Clay Fly Fishers.

The movement to save White Clay Creek as a free-flowing stream has been ongoing for over thirty years. In 1984, after plans for a proposed dam on the main stem of the Creek were abandoned, White Clay Creek Preserve was created from properties donated to Pennsylvania and Delaware by the Du Pont Company. Then began cooperation between the two states with formation of a bi-state council to advise on management of these shared public lands.

Although legislators from all levels of government consistently provided funds for purchase of parcels adjacent to publicly-owned lands, it became apparent that the cost of continued public acquisition for stream protection would be prohibitive. Therefore, with a ground swell of grassroots and government support, White Clay Creek became a Study River in the National Wild and Scenic River program.

From this Study there has emerged a Management Plan utilizing existing procedures of local governments in both states for its implementation. This Plan evolved by consensus of all affected parties and enjoys their full support.

Designation of White Clay Creek as a Wild and Scenic River will ensure that most of its major tributaries will remain free flowing. In addition, water quality will benefit from proper maintenance of riparian buffers. This is important since White Clay Creek serves as a major water supply source for both Chester and New Castle Counties.

Protection will also benefit natural and cultural attributes of the Valley enjoyed by so many. Hundreds of freshwater fishermen can be found casting for trout along the Creek in all seasons. Small armies of bird watchers descend each spring as neotropical migrant birds return north from southern climes. History buffs are often seen exploring old stone ruins or searching fields for artifacts. These are but a few of the recreational, historical, geological and biological activities that occur almost continuously.

These activities attest to immeasurable educational and recreational opportunities for citizens of the larger Philadelphia/Baltimore region. This region is currently undergoing increasing developmental pressure, especially in Chester County, Pennsylvania, and New Castle County, Delaware. Therefore, White Clay Creek has become a resource treasure of immense importance to the quality of life for current and future generations.

The White Clay Creek Study has already fostered increased cooperation among all segments of the community in developing a coherent strategy to protect this Valley. Coincidentally, the study process has taught both residents and governmental leaders the necessity of being good stewards.

As current stewards, we can give a great gift to future generations. We believe inclusion of White Clay Creek in the National Wild, Scenic or Recreational River system will help achieve that objective.

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