

Committee on Resources

Subcommittee on National Parks & Public Lands

Witness Statement

STATEMENT OF KATHERINE STEVENSON, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR FOR CULTURAL RESOURCE STEWARDSHIP AND PARTNERSHIPS, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS AND PUBLIC LANDS OF THE HOUSE RESOURCES COMMITTEE CONCERNING H.R. 3520, TO AMEND THE WILD AND SCENIC RIVERS ACT TO DESIGNATE SEGMENTS AND TRIBUTARIES OF THE WHITE CLAY CREEK IN DELAWARE AND PENNSYLVANIA AS A COMPONENT OF THE NATIONAL WILD AND SCENIC RIVERS SYSTEM.

JUNE 8, 2000

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to present the Department of the Interior's views on H.R. 3520, a bill to designate segments and tributaries of the White Clay Creek, in Delaware and Pennsylvania, as a component of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System.

The Department supports H.R. 3520 if amended in accordance with this testimony.

The White Clay Creek watershed is one of only a few relatively unspoiled river systems remaining in the highly developed corridor between Philadelphia and the Wilmington-Newark metropolitan areas. This watershed, which encompasses urban, suburban and rural areas, is renowned for its scenery, opportunities for birding and trout fishing, and historic features. The watershed is also an important source of drinking water for residents of Pennsylvania and Delaware. Community interest in designating White Clay Creek as a national wild and scenic river was prompted by concerns about increased pollution, a decline in migrating birds, and receding forests resulting from urbanization.

In 1991, Congress directed the Secretary of the Interior to undertake a study for potential inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System of the White Clay Creek from its headwaters in Pennsylvania to its confluence with the Christina River in Delaware. The study was also to include the East, West, and Middle Branches, Middle Run, Pike Creek, Mill Creek and other tributaries of the White Clay, as identified by the Secretary of the Interior. The legislation required that the study contain a recommended watershed management plan.

Between 1995 and 1998, a management planning committee developed the White Clay Creek Watershed Management Plan through a public planning process. The plan calls for a management framework for the White Clay Creek and its tributaries that relies heavily on local land use decisions and zoning to provide protection for the watershed. It also recommends the establishment of a White Clay Creek Watershed Management Committee, an advisory committee that would promote and facilitate implementation of the management plan. The plan has been endorsed by numerous local governments in Pennsylvania and Delaware.

The White Clay Creek and Its Tributaries Watershed Management Plan is summarized in the draft report on the study that the National Park Service issued in October 1999. Consistent with the management plan and the guiding principles, the report contains a preferred alternative for designation and management of the White Clay Creek watershed. It calls for designating 191 miles of the White Clay Creek and its tributaries as a unit of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System.

The preferred alternative further recommends that a watershed management committee assume lead responsibility for coordination and implementation of the watershed management plan. Affected communities, agencies, organizations and citizens would be active partners in the protection and enhancement of the many public values of the watershed. The National Park Service would act as the coordinator of the management committee and provide technical and

financial assistance, but there would be no federal land acquisition or direct federal management.

H.R. 3520 reflects the recommended management plan and the preferred alternative contained in the study. The bill designates as a component of the Wild and Scenic Rivers System the 191 miles of segments and tributaries of White Clay Creek that were found to be eligible and suitable for designation by the study. H.R. 3520 also provides that the administration of the designated river segments by the Secretary of the Interior is to be consistent with the White Clay Creek and Its Tributaries Watershed Management Plan and to be undertaken in cooperation with federal, state, county and municipal governments. In addition, the bill identifies segments that would be considered suitable for designation at a later point if they are removed from consideration as locations for a reservoir under the comprehensive plan of the Delaware River Basin Commission.

H.R. 3520 follows a recent trend in legislation designating wild and scenic rivers, in which the Secretary of the Interior, through the National Park Service, has oversight, administrative, and planning responsibilities, but the State and local governments bear the primary day-to-day responsibility for management of the river. This arrangement has worked well in other areas where Congress has provided for a similar division of responsibilities, and we believe it will be appropriate and effective for the White Clay Creek watershed as well.

While we support the intent of the bill, we recommend two changes to the bill as introduced. We will be happy to work with the committee on the appropriate language.

First, we recommend that the management prescriptions that are specific to White Clay Creek be written as free-standing provisions, rather than as amendments to the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. This change would make H.R. 3520 consistent with other wild and scenic river designation bills that have been enacted in recent years for rivers that are to be managed under an exception to the usual management rules. This practice keeps the National Wild and Scenic Rivers Act focused on designations and avoids complicating that law with management directives that apply to only one river.

Second, we recommend providing the Secretary of the Interior with the authority to add certain segments of the White Clay Creek watershed to the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System in the future. H.R. 3520 provides that Churchman's Marsh, Lamborn Run, and other properties on which intake structures and pipelines for the proposed Thompson's Station Reservoir would be located shall be considered suitable for designation if they are removed from consideration as locations for the reservoir. If those segments are found to be suitable, the Secretary would be required to offer assistance in securing their designation. We believe in such a case it would be appropriate to allow the Secretary to designate those segments without further legislation.

That completes my prepared statement. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have regarding this bill.

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