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Testimony on WOOD PAWCATUCK WATERSHED PROTECTION ACT
April 17th, 2012

United States House of Representatives
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands

Re: Support for H.R. 3388 (Langevin): Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Protection Act/ Amending the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act to designate segments of the Wood, Pawcatuck, Beaver and Queens Rivers in Rhode Island and Connecticut for study for addition to the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System

Dear Chairman Bishop and Honorable Members of the Subcommittee,

My name is Denise Poyer, Program Director for the Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association based in Rhode Island near the Connecticut border. I am here today to voice our support of H.R. 3388, a bill to study the Wood and Pawcatuck Rivers and tributaries for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers system. I am honored to be here today to tell you about our rivers. The Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association was founded in 1983, in part because of a National Parks Study that identified the Wood and Pawcatuck Rivers as possible candidates for inclusion in the Wild and Scenic Rivers system. Today my organization is the region's preeminent watershed organization, working to protect and restore these beautiful and essential rivers for the benefit of all citizens.

The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act is designed to recognize and protect those rivers that possess nationally significant, outstanding and remarkable scenic, recreational, geologic, fish and wildlife, historic, or cultural values. Our rivers meet and exceed these criteria on all counts especially scenic, recreational, fish and wildlife.

Our watershed is unique and truly extraordinary. Paddling or fishing on these rivers is the closest thing to a true wilderness experience anywhere in Southern New England. They are the most important rivers in Rhode Island for the depleted native brook trout, river herring, American eel and countless other plant and animal species of national significance. The great majority of threatened or endangered species in Rhode Island are located in this watershed. The National Parks Service study done the 1980s identified the Wood River as having the highest biological diversity of any river in New England. Because of the diversity of wildlife, wetlands, and forests, these rivers provide wonderful recreational opportunities like trout fishing, kayaking, bird watching, and hiking.

These rivers are not just beautiful and wild places. They represent the core of our local economy and serve as the foundation of our culture, our history, and our identity in the region. There is

evidence of our rich American history everywhere in the watershed, from Native American fishing grounds to Colonial and early industrial mill ruins. Tourism is important to the state of Rhode Island. These rivers provide extraordinary trout fishing, the best scenic canoeing routes, and an abundance of bird life for birdwatchers.

Any investment in protecting and restoring these rivers is an investment in our economy and in the future of our children and grandchildren. Local businesses depend on clean and healthy rivers to attract tourists and visitors. People are encouraged to come to our region and locate their homes and businesses here because of the natural beauty that is so close to major metropolitan centers.

The Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed and its rivers are extraordinarily valuable natural resources tucked into the southwest corner of RI and south eastern CT. The watershed covers 300 square miles, about 25% the land mass of RI. Small as RI is, the total population is over one million, making it the second most densely populated state in the nation. Despite this, the Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed is primarily forested. This has allowed the remarkable natural landscape of the watershed to remain relatively pristine.

The educational value of these rivers cannot be overstated. Students of all ages have come to these rivers to learn about water quality, data collection, and scientific analysis. They learn how to kayak and how to collect bugs. They learn about the food web and how it starts with the smallest creatures that need clean water to proliferate. This type of education can spark an interest in science, math and technology that is hard to achieve in a classroom setting.

One of the important attributes of the Wood-Pawcatuck watershed is how accessible it is to so many. The good news is that every student, every Rhode Islander, and many in south eastern CT, are within a 45 minute drive to one of these outstanding rivers. The downside is that this many people can have an adverse impact on the very features that make this river system so remarkable.

There are no planned energy or economic development projects that would conflict with this designation. This year the Rhode Island Renewable Energy Siting Partnership is conducting a study of rivers with utility-scale hydropower potential in the state. The preliminary report rules out the rivers of the Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed. Their low volume and low gradient make any type of hydropower projects economical unfeasible. There is just not enough water. However, these same aspects of the rivers, slow and shallow, provide a wide variety of wetlands types, adding to their high habitat value.

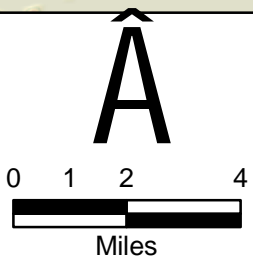
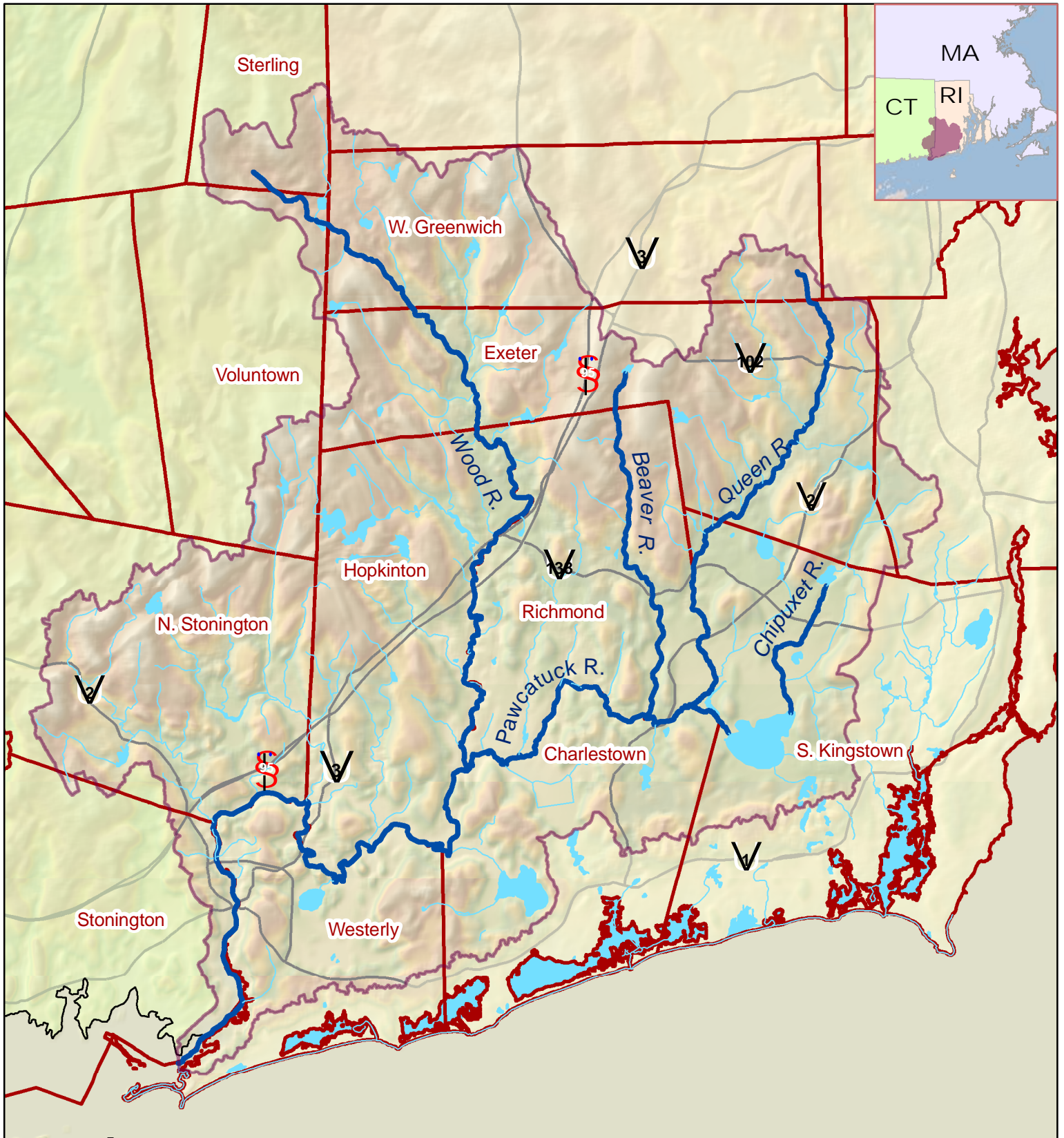
By allowing us to study these rivers for designation as wild and scenic, you will be giving us the opportunity to demonstrate the public benefits these rivers offer to the people of southern New England, and a chance to distinguish them as the national treasures we already know they are. At the same time we welcome the chance to develop management plans to protect these valuable assets while allowing the greatest number of people to access the rivers. Having a Wild and

Scenic Rivers designation would assist in promoting the fisheries and eco-tourism that help create an economic boon for the region.

As part of this process we have already secured support from all of the towns in the watershed. The Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association and its many partners and supporters in the region have the energy, the capacity, and the ability to make this designation happen. Please give us the chance. We are grateful to Congressman Langevin and Congressman Courtney for their efforts on our behalf. We respectfully thank this committee for your consideration and for this opportunity to testify.

Attachment: Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed map

Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed



Rivers Proposed for
Wild & Scenic
Designation Study