

Committee on Resources

Subcommittee on National Parks & Public Lands

Witness Statement

STATEMENT OF KATHERINE H. STEVENSON, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, CULTURAL RESOURCE STEWARDSHIP AND PARTNERSHIPS, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE HOUSE RESOURCES SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS AND PUBLIC LANDS CONCERNING H.R. 4312, A BILL TO DIRECT THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR TO CONDUCT A STUDY OF THE SUITABILITY AND FEASIBILITY OF ESTABLISHING AN UPPER HOUSATONIC VALLEY NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA IN THE STATE OF CONNECTICUT AND THE COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.

July 13, 2000

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to appear before the subcommittee to present the views of the Department of the Interior on H.R. 4312, a bill to direct the Secretary of the Interior to conduct a study of the suitability and feasibility of establishing an Upper Housatonic Valley National Heritage Area in the State of Connecticut and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, and for other purposes.

The Department of the Interior supports this legislation. H.R. 4312 would authorize a suitability and feasibility study to determine the potential for establishing a national heritage area along sixty miles of the Upper Housatonic River, in twenty-six towns in Connecticut and Massachusetts. State historic preservation officers, State historical societies and other appropriate organizations would be consulted in conducting the study.

The study would include a number of components we believe are helpful for public review. These components are based on our experience with heritage areas previously designated by Congress. The components include analysis and documentation that the study area:

1. Has an assemblage of natural, historic, or cultural resources representing distinctive aspects of American heritage worthy of recognition, conservation, interpretation, and continued use, and are best managed through partnerships among public and private entities, and by combining diverse and sometimes noncontiguous resources and active communities;
2. Reflects traditions, customs, beliefs, and folklife that are a valuable part of the national story;
3. Provides outstanding opportunities to conserve natural, cultural, historic, and /or scenic features;
4. Provides outstanding recreational and educational opportunities;
5. Contains resources important to the identified theme or themes of the study area that retain a degree of integrity capable of supporting interpretation;
6. Includes residents, business interests, non-profit organizations, and local and State governments involved in the planning who have demonstrated support for the concept of a national heritage area;
7. Has a potential management entity to work in partnership with residents, business interests, nonprofit organizations and local and state governments to develop a heritage area consistent with continued local and state economic activity;
8. Is depicted on a conceptual boundary map supported by the public.

In conducting the study, the National Park Service would assist the communities in the valley in determining their own

sense of how best to work together to protect those resources. A description of the area's resources would be developed and the theme or themes for the area would be identified. We would also work with State and local agencies to address the interests of local governments in preserving their heritage, maintaining their local economy and determining the means for that preservation, whether through a national heritage area, a state heritage area, or regional effort. Funding for this study would be subject to the availability of appropriations and National Park Service priorities among the many requirements for studies.

The Housatonic River has played an important role in the growth and development of the valley. The earliest residents were Native Americans who settled along the river's banks to farm and fish. The first English colonists arrived in 1639 at the mouth of the river and later began farming in the upper reaches. Agriculture was a major activity throughout the valley and is evident today.

During the 18th and 19th century, waterpower played a prominent role in the region's industrial development, with the remnants of dams, millraces, and furnaces still seen today. The iron industry evolved based on the high-grade ore found in the hills of northwestern Connecticut. Forged products included utensils and armaments used in the American Revolution. Throughout the valley more than forty blast furnaces were active over time. The last furnace closed in 1923.

In the 1800s, the area was known for manufacturing and mining. The region was the first in the country to make paper, and by the end of the Civil War there were at least twenty-eight paper mills in Berkshire County, Massachusetts, alone. However, the onset of the 20th century brought a decline of industrialization due to inadequate railroad and roadways, as well as competition from larger industries outside the region.

The resources that illustrate the area's history in agriculture, iron making and industry and the growing public commitment to heritage conservation, make the Upper Housatonic Valley worthy of the proposed study.

This concludes my prepared testimony. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

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