

Committee on Resources,

Subcommittee on National Parks, Recreation, & Public Lands

[parks](#) - - Rep. Joel Hefley, Chairman

U.S. House of Representatives, Washington, D.C. 20515-6207 - - (202) 226-7736

Witness Statement

STATEMENT OF JOSEPH E. DODDRIDGE, ACTING ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR FISH AND WILDLIFE AND PARKS, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, RECREATION AND PUBLIC LANDS OF THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES CONCERNING H.R. 182, A BILL TO AMEND THE WILD AND SCENIC RIVERS ACT TO DESIGNATE A SEGMENT OF THE EIGHT MILE RIVER IN THE STATE OF CONNECTICUT FOR STUDY FOR POTENTIAL ADDITION TO THE NATIONAL WILD AND SCENIC RIVERS SYSTEM.

March 13, 2001

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the views of the Department of the Interior on H.R. 182. H.R. 182 would amend the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act by designating segments of the Eight Mile River for study and potential addition to the Wild and Scenic Rivers System.

The Department of the Interior recommends that the Committee defer action on H.R. 182 until the National Park Service (NPS) is able to make further progress on the President's Initiative to eliminate the deferred maintenance backlog within five years. We are seeking a temporary moratorium on new park unit designations or authorizations of new studies so that we can focus our existing staff and resources on taking care of what we now own. We also want to use our available planning funds to complete previously authorized studies with a close examination of the life-cycle costs of establishing a new park unit, expanding an existing unit, or adding new NPS funding obligations.

The Eight Mile River is located in the lower Connecticut River watershed in south central Connecticut. Fifteen miles of the Eight Mile River and its East Branch through the communities of Lyme, East Haddam, and Salem, Connecticut are included on the National Park Service's Nationwide Rivers Inventory of potential Wild and Scenic River segments. Both segments are included on the Inventory for outstanding scenic, geologic, fish and wildlife values. Over eighty percent of the Connecticut River watershed is still forested, including large tracts of unfragmented hardwood forests that are home to a diverse assemblage of plants and animals including bobcats, Great Horned Owls, red foxes, and the Cerulean Warbler.

Over the course of the past two years, the National Park Service has responded to interest and inquiries from local advocates and town officials regarding a potential Wild and Scenic River study for the Eight Mile River. There appears to be strong local support for protecting the river system, as evidenced by the communities' formation of an inter-municipal watershed committee and the signing of an innovative "Eightmile River Watershed Conservation Compact." This compact, signed by the communities of East Haddam, Lyme and Salem, acknowledges their commitment to protect and enhance water resources, wildlife habitats, and rural landscapes in the watershed.

Notwithstanding the strong local support, we again recommend that the Committee defer action on the bill until the National Park Service is able to make further progress to eliminate the deferred maintenance backlog.

This concludes my prepared remarks, Mr. Chairman. I will be happy to answer any questions you or other committee members may have regarding this bill.

#