

**STATEMENT
JOEL HOLTROP
DEPUTY CHIEF FOR NATIONAL FOREST SYSTEMS
FOREST SERVICE
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE**

**BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, FORESTS, AND PUBLIC LANDS
COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
JULY 30, 2009**

CONCERNING

**H.R. 3113, TO AMEND THE WILD AND SCENIC RIVERS ACT TO DESIGNATE A
SEGMENT OF ELK RIVER IN POCAHONTAS COUNTY, WEST VIRGINIA,
FOR STUDY AS A POTENTIAL ADDITION TO
THE NATIONAL WILD AND SCENIC RIVERS SYSTEM**

Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to provide the views of the Department of Agriculture on H.R. 3113.

This bill amends section 5(a) of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, Public Law 90-542 (16 U.S.C. 1271 – 1287) to designate a segment of Elk River in Pocahontas County, West Virginia, for study as a potential addition to the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. The segment that would be authorized for study lies entirely within the Monongahela National Forest, and is an approximate five-mile segment of the Elk River from the confluence of the Old Field Fork and the Big Spring Fork in Pocahontas County to the Pocahontas and Randolph County line.

The bill provides that the study determine if the river is qualified for designation and, if so determined, evaluate the potential benefits and consequences of its designation, including an assessment of whether its addition to the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System is the best method to protect river values.

This section of the Elk River flows through a small canyon with a parallel, non-operational railroad the only sign of human activity. The overall appearance of the river corridor from the stream is one of hardwood forests and large boulders with occasional views of the railroad. The river is dominated by many pools, separated by stretches of riffles. The stream is popular with anglers and supports populations of wild brown and rainbow trout; populations of native brook trout occur in the tributaries within one-quarter mile of the main channel. Karst limestone outcrops along the river bed create the conditions that cause the river to “sink”, or go underground, during low flows.

Of the land contained within a quarter mile of each side of the river segment, two-thirds is in federal ownership, with the remaining acreage in private ownership for a total of approximately 1500 acres. The bill provides that the study address both Federal and non-Federal lands.

The Department supports this legislation as it provides an opportunity to work with interested parties including state and local governments and landowners to identify river values and thoughtfully evaluate whether and, if desirable, how these values should be protected.

This concludes my prepared statement and I would be pleased to answer any questions you may have.