

Good Morning my name is Gil Willis I'm a business owner in Pocahontas County West Virginia. I would like to thank Congressman Rahall & the sub committee members for considering this study and providing the time to hear our comments. My wife and I have been in business 29 years. We currently provide 15 full and part time jobs related to the outdoor hospitality industry. In the winter this number doubles. This business is located on a 150 acre family farm on the headwaters of the Elk River in Slatyfork. My home and business is directly above the proposed study area. Several of the springs that feed the upper section of the river resurface in our yard and flow into the proposed study area. I am here to express my support for the a wild & scenic study on 5 miles of the upper section of the Elk River commonly referred to in today's hearing as the Slatyfork section of the Elk.

The Elk River is over 75 miles in length. It begins in our remote mountain valley then flows eventually into the Kanawha River in Charleston our state capital. Many small towns, farms and individual property owners rely on it clean water for everyday use. Not to mention the thousands of recreation users who fish, hunt, camp, swim, hike and float in the river and along its banks. This is only one of eight rivers which begins in Pocahontas County West Virginia. This region receives large amounts of rain and snow which provides a large amount of pure drinking water for this section of the mid Atlantic region. Our upper headwaters begin in thick red spruce forests reaching almost 5000ft. These waters then start a journey that takes them into some of the most prized hardwood forests home to hard cherry, red oak, sugar maple and many more species. As these waters get closer to the valley floor they become small feeder streams which still provide a safe haven for native brook trout. The valley floor is limestone. Over the last several thousand years it has carved large caves which the river and its spring use to travel the upper reaches of the watershed. This process over time has graced us with some of the cleanest drinking water in the eastern US.

I like to think of this whole headwaters area as a huge system both underground and on the surface. This system is connected by surface water runoff and our unique underground springs and caves. The water levels ebb and flows depending on rainfall amounts, snow and the time of year.

Pocahontas County is over 65 percent federal and state managed. These state and federal lands include Wilderness, National Forest and State parks. Hopefully a Wild & Scenic study then designation in the future will provide long term high quality outdoor experiences for our state and county residents. It will also keep West Virginia competitive with other outstanding natural areas in the country while preserving our valuable resources.

Thank You,
Gil Willis
Elk River Touring Center
Slatyfork, WV