



Farmington River Watershed Association, Inc.

749 Hopmeadow Street, Simsbury, Connecticut 06070
(860) 658-4442 Fax (860) 651-7519 www.frwa.org

TESTIMONY OF ERIC HAMMERLING, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

FARMINGTON RIVER WATERSHED ASSOCIATION

ON S.435

BEFORE THE SENATE ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS

SEPTEMBER 22, 2005

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Energy Committee, my name is Eric Hammerling and I am the Executive Director of the Farmington River Watershed Association (FRWA), a 501©(3) non-profit organization founded in 1953 with the ongoing mission to protect the Farmington River Watershed and its amazing natural resources. I am extremely pleased to be here to testify on behalf of S. 435, “The Lower Farmington River and Salmon Brook Wild & Scenic River Study Act of 2005.” At the onset, I’d like to recognize Skip Alleman, Director of the Salmon Brook Watershed Association, who made the trip down from Connecticut along with me and who represents a valued partner in conserving natural resources in our shared watershed. The Salmon Brook Watershed Association, Farmington River Coordinating Committee, Farmington Valley Archaeology Project, and American Rivers have all assembled testimony supporting this Act, and at this time, Mr. Chairman, I’d like to submit their letters of support to be incorporated into the Record of this hearing. Thank you.

This legislation would initiate a 3-year study of the Lower Farmington River and Salmon Brook to ascertain whether they meet the criteria for being potentially designated as Wild & Scenic. This bill is a critical step that will inform our ongoing efforts to conserve the most outstanding cultural, natural, and recreational resources of our region, and we believe there is a substantial benefit of this Study even if the final result of the Study is not the designation of the Lower Farmington or Salmon Brook as Wild & Scenic.

That being said, we are confident that these two waterbodies already merit strong consideration for gaining Wild & Scenic status because of the outstanding cultural, natural, and recreational resources that we have identified in preparation for this hearing. A few examples of this follow and are included in greater detail in the attached testimonies from other supporters:

- Botanist William Moorhead III has identified several native, rare plants in the floodplain of the Farmington River including 99% of the Starry campion found in New England, the only known population of Dwarf bulrush in a river ecosystem, the largest known population of Davis’ sedge in New England, and the only known population of Purple giant hyssop in Connecticut.
- Mussel biologist Ethan Nedeau with BioDrawiversity in the summer of 2005, identified the Lower Farmington River as having the largest cluster of the federally endangered dwarf wedgemussel in Connecticut, as well as hosting the greatest diversity of freshwater mussels (9 species) found in any River in southern New England.
- The Farmington River has been identified by the CT DEP as one of the most important rivers in the Connecticut River system for the restoration of Atlantic Salmon. To these migrating fish heading upstream in the Connecticut River from Long Island Sound, the Farmington River is the largest River in Connecticut they migrate into. Salmon Brook is the most important tributary to the Farmington for Atlantic salmon restoration due to the few obstructions to their migration.

- There are significant Tunxis and River Tribe native American archaeological sites throughout the floodplain. Spear and arrow points abound at Alsop Meadows in Avon, and Simsbury has identified its entire floodplain as a sensitive archaeological area. The town of Windsor, located at the confluence of the Farmington and Connecticut Rivers, is Connecticut's first town and it boasts a rich river history. Remnants of the historic folly known as the Farmington River Canal still exist in several areas throughout the floodplain of the Farmington and Salmon Brook.
- Churning through Bloomfield, East Granby, and Simsbury, the combined waters of the Farmington and Salmon Brook course through Tariffville Gorge to provide Class II-IV whitewater kayaking 12 months a year. The Gorge is one of the only places to consistently paddle in whitewater during the summer in Southern New England. The Gorge has been the site for many whitewater canoe and kayaking competitions, and twice has included the U.S. Olympic Team whitewater slalom trials. Just upstream, the flat water section of the Farmington provides a training ground for local crew teams and for thousands of canoeists and kayakers every year sustaining local water-focused businesses like Huck Finn Adventures.
- The Farmington Valley Greenway and a spur route, the Farmington River Trail, are part of the Farmington Canal Heritage Trail covering 60 miles along the abandoned rail corridors from the Massachusetts border to New Haven. In the Farmington Valley, 25 miles of these hiking, biking, and dog-walking trails have the Farmington River as the central attraction.
- The East and West branches of Salmon Brook are both in the top 12 in the State of Connecticut for the diversity of aquatic insects that they host. Aquatic insect diversity is a good indicator of high water quality, and this is further shown by the presence of native brook trout and slimy sculpin – two fish species that are only found in areas with high water quality (source: Rapid Bioassessment in Wadeable Streams and Rivers by Volunteer Monitors – 2004 Summary Report, CT DEP Bureau of Water Management).

Not only do we believe the requisite outstanding cultural, natural, and historic resources exist, but also we know that our communities are ready and eager to participate in the Partnership Wild & Scenic River model because they have witnessed it working for 11 years along a 14-mile stretch of the Upper Farmington that was designated as Wild & Scenic in 1994. Management activities along this 14-mile stretch are overseen by the Farmington River Coordinating Committee -- a combination of representatives from 5 river-adjacent towns, the National Park Service, a large local water utility (the Metropolitan District Commission which provides water from the Farmington Watershed to over 400,000 people in the Greater Hartford area), the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection, FRWA, and the Farmington River Anglers Association. The FRCC has demonstrated for 11 years that collaborative river management works.

The management philosophy that underlies the Partnership Wild & Scenic River model (as included in the Upper Farmington River Management Plan) is worth reiterating here:

- “1. Resource conservation should be fully integrated with traditional patterns of use, ownership, and jurisdiction;
2. River management should be accomplished through cooperation amongst all public and private organizations with an interest in the river;
3. Long-term resource protection should rely on existing programs and authorities rather than on new layers of bureaucracy; and
4. Future management should be based on a cooperatively developed plan which establishes resource protection standards and identifies key actions.

This management philosophy is built on the assumption that, for the most part, existing river protection mechanisms are adequate to protect river resources. If a resource value has been protected by existing management, and if existing management seems adequate to address issues that can reasonably be expected to appear in the future, then the existing mechanism should be left alone. If the existing mechanisms could be improved or made more efficient by better coordination or enforcement, then they should be pursued. New or stricter regulations, or other actions, should only be undertaken when needed, not used as a primary management tool.

The Study Committee is firm in its resolve that this management plan must not pre-empt existing rights or management responsibilities. Rather, the plan should create a common vision for the future and an environment in which those concerned with the river can focus their collective energies on making this vision a reality.”

As if it were not enough to appreciate ones local waterbodies and witness a model of river conservation that works, there is also strong evidence that Wild & Scenic protection provides communities with direct economic benefits. A study on the Upper Farmington River conducted by the Economics Department of North Carolina State University and funded by the National Park Service and American Rivers, documented a total annual economic benefit of \$3.63 million to the 5 towns along the River and a \$9.5 million benefit to recreational users. Also, land values within the river corridor have increased by an estimated \$3.76 per square foot (over \$163,785/acre) beyond increases in other town lands due to Wild & Scenic protection and recognition.

At the same time that the Lower Farmington River and Salmon Brook are both unique, cherished, and valuable resources, we are concerned that we are on the verge of losing the bounties that these waterbodies provide. In 2002 a 19.6 mile section of the Lower Farmington River (stretching from Farmington to Windsor) was included in the state’s 303(d) “impaired waters” list for elevated bacteria levels for the first time ever. The 303(d) listing will not affect the ability of the River to be considered as Wild & Scenic; however, this serves as a reminder that we must take action now to conserve these special resources to stem further declines in their beauty and value to the region. The Feasibility Study process that we are asking the Congress to authorize would enable town representatives, the National Park Service, FRWA, the State of Connecticut (DEP) and

other interested parties to assemble a River Management Plan to address resource management issues impacting the River in the short-and long-term. This management plan process -- even if the River isn't recommended for Wild and Scenic designation -- can be a powerful way to address this bacteria problem with all of the affected towns working collaboratively to find a mutually beneficial solution.

We already know that the communities of the Farmington Valley in Connecticut are highly interested in finding collaborative ways to protect natural resources. Earlier this year, the book "Nature Friendly Communities: Habitat Protection and Land Use Planning" (C. Duerksen & C. Snyder, Island Press, 2005) tabbed the Farmington Valley as one of the 19 most nature friendly communities in the United States due to its efforts with FRWA and others to protect species diversity at the local level. Towns like Farmington, Granby, and Simsbury have been particularly strong in going above and beyond to foster interest and conservation of local natural resources. The process initiated by S. 435 would complement the local interest and involvement.

Before concluding my testimony, I'd like to take a moment to thank Senators Dodd and Lieberman who not only are proponents of this bill, but were original co-sponsors of the Wild & Scenic designation bill that passed 11 years ago. Also, in the House, Representatives Nancy Johnson and John Larson have been incredibly supportive of this bill moving forward, but the decision now rests with your Committee.

Quite simply, approval of S. 435 will help our region to leverage the knowledge and collaborative will necessary to protect and restore two of its crown jewels -- the Lower Farmington River and Salmon Brook. We thank you for your consideration of this bill.