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September 19, 2005

Senator Craig Thomas, Chairman  
Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee,  
Subcommittee on National Parks

Dear Senator Thomas:

Thank you very much for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of Senate Bill 435, The Lower Farmington River and Salmon Brook Wild and Scenic River Study Act of 2005.

The lower Farmington River has been a vital resource for inhabitants of its valley for more than 10,000 years. This fact is amply demonstrated by the evidence we have recovered in an ongoing archaeological survey, The Farmington River Archaeological Project (FRAP). The more than 200 archaeological sites that we have investigated represent the remnants of ancient villages, quarries, burial grounds, fishing grounds, and hunting territories—in essence, the communities and work places of the past inhabitants of the valley. These archaeological sites are historical resources worthy of the consideration and protection that may be afforded by Wild and Scenic designation of the river.

For example, the Alsop Meadow site is located along the Farmington River in the town of Avon, Connecticut. Standard practice in archaeological research is to excavate only a small fraction of a site, providing for future excavation when new technologies and methods will allow for more complete recovery and analysis. In just the 25% of the site excavated, we recovered more than 16,000 artifacts, most reflecting the production of stone tools—spear points, drills, knives, scraping tools, and axes.



Stone tools recovered at the Alsop Meadow site in Avon, Connecticut, directly adjacent to the Farmington River. On the left is a stone drill, on the right, a spearpoint.

The Alsop Meadow site is particularly important because, until its excavation, it had been assumed that the ancient inhabitants of the valley largely were interlopers, people who actually lived in the Connecticut River Valley and who visited the Farmington only seasonally. However, virtually every one of the artifacts recovered at this site was made from a stone type available only in the Farmington Valley. Connecticut Valley residents visiting the Farmington might have been expected to bring some of their Connecticut Valley tools with them, but we found no such thing at Alsop. The site is nearly 5,000 years old and presents future archaeologists with a treasure trove of data, but only if the site is protected from destruction. Wild and Scenic designation of the Lower Farmington River can contribute to that protection.

In Windsor, Connecticut, just south of the confluence of the Farmington and Connecticut Rivers, people lived 2,000 years ago in a site we call Loomis II. The two rivers coming together served much in the manner of a modern highway interchange and the inhabitants of the Loomis II site, took advantage of their location. <sup>53</sup> There is direct evidence of this in the diversity of resources the inhabitants used to make their tools, and the distance and direction from which those resources came: quartz and basalt from western Connecticut, flint from the northwest in New York State, and jasper from the southwest, all the way from Pennsylvania. The Loomis II site provides a wealth of information about ancient trading networks and, as such, is a valuable historical resource

that deserves the measure of protection that Wild and Scenic designation might provide.

The Avon Old Farms Brook site, also in Avon, is located at the confluence of a spring-fed stream and the Farmington River. There, deep in the loam bordering the Farmington, we found a remarkably intact, 4,250-year-old roasting platform—a stone cobble surface on which the ancient inhabitants of the valley roasted deer meat.



Avon Old Farms Brook site roasting platform.



Spearpoint found adjacent to the Roasting platform at the Avon Old Farms Brook site.

I tell my students that archaeological research is the equivalent of detective work, but, unlike detectives, we don't examine the scene of a crime; we investigate the scene of a life. This can clearly be seen at Old Farms Brook. Burned wood from the cooking fire and bits and pieces of deer bone reveal the function of the platform. Immediately adjacent to the stone grilling surface we recovered an almost perfectly formed spear point that had been intentionally jabbed into the ground. Only its delicately flaked tip was missing, almost certainly broken off inside the animal it had killed. In other words, we detectives of the past were able to uncover the “smoking gun,” the bones of the deceased, and the platform on which it was cooked. This level of preservation which, in turn, supports a remarkable degree of precision in our interpretation, is stunning. Protecting a historical resource like the Avon Old Farms Brook site is enormously important and, again, Wild and Scenic designation for the lower Farmington River would be a significant step toward that protection.

Certainly, I recognize that many will submit testimony in support of this bill emphasizing the importance of Wild and Scenic designation in terms of very practical and undoubtedly significant issues including clean water, property values, pollution, and recreation. Some might consider the additional benefit of affording protection to resources of historical or cultural meaning a less

important contribution of Wild and Scenic designation. I suppose, as an archaeologist whose focus has long been on investigating the lives of the ancient inhabitants of the Farmington River Valley, I take a longer view than most on the proposed legislation. You will frequently hear people today talk about the obligation of our generation as “stewards” of the environment. I am here to tell you that the Farmington Valley has provided a way of life for more than \_\_\_\_\_ of such stewards. I respectfully suggest that we owe it to the next five hundred to carefully consider the important role played by the Farmington River in the lives of the residents of Connecticut and afford it the protection that Wild and Scenic designation along its lower reaches will provide.

Thank you very much for your kind attention to my testimony. I genuinely appreciate your consideration of a Wild and Scenic designation study for the lower reaches of the Farmington River and Salmon Brook.

Respectfully submitted,

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