

**STATEMENT OF VICTOR KNOX, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, PARK PLANNING, FACILITIES AND LANDS, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE SENATE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES, CONCERNING S. 329, TO AMEND THE WILD AND SCENIC RIVERS ACT TO DESIGNATE CERTAIN SEGMENTS OF THE FARMINGTON RIVER AND SALMON BROOK IN THE STATE OF CONNECTICUT AS COMPONENTS OF THE WILD AND SCENIC RIVERS SYSTEM, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.**

**June 10, 2015**

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Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to appear before your committee today to present the views of the Department of the Interior on S. 329, a bill to amend the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act to designate certain segments of the Farmington River and Salmon Brook in the State of Connecticut as components of the Wild and Scenic Rivers System, and for other purposes.

The Department supports enactment of S. 329 with an amendment that is described later in this statement. The National Park Service's study of the Lower Farmington River and Salmon Brook, transmitted to Congress on October 17, 2013, determined that the segments proposed for designation under this bill are eligible for inclusion into the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System.

S. 329 would designate 35.3 miles of the Farmington River and the entire 26.4 miles of its major tributary, Salmon Brook, as part of the Wild and Scenic Rivers System, to be administered by the Secretary of the Interior. The segments would be managed in accordance with the Lower Farmington River and Salmon Brook Management Plan (June 2011) with the Secretary coordinating administration and management with a locally based management committee, as specified in the plan. The bill would authorize the Secretary to enter into cooperative agreements with the State of Connecticut, the adjoining communities, and appropriate local planning and environmental organizations. S. 329 would also make an adjustment to the upper Farmington Wild and Scenic River, which was designated in 1994, by adding 1.1 miles to the lower end of that 14-mile designation.

S. 329 would complete the wild and scenic river designation of the Farmington River in Connecticut by designating all of the mainstem Farmington River segments found to meet the criteria of eligibility and suitability. At the same time, S. 329 would provide for the continued operation of one existing hydroelectric facility – Rainbow Dam in Windsor – and allow for potential hydroelectric development of existing dams in the Collinsville stretch of the river, which is currently the subject of an active Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) licensing proceeding sponsored by the Town of Canton.

P.L. 109-370, the Lower Farmington River and Salmon Brook Study Act of 2005, authorized the study of the segments proposed for designation in S. 329. The National Park Service conducted the study in close cooperation with the adjoining communities, the State of Connecticut, the

Farmington River Watershed Association, the Stanley Black & Decker Corporation (owner of Rainbow Dam) and other interested local parties.

Although the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act requires the development of a comprehensive river management plan within three years of the date of designation, it has become the practice of the National Park Service to prepare this plan as part of a study of potential wild and scenic rivers when much of the river runs through private lands. This allows the National Park Service to consult widely with local landowners, federal and state land management agencies, local governments, river authorities, and other groups that have interests related to the river prior to any recommendation for designation. Early preparation of the plan also assures input from these entities as well as users of the river on the management strategies that would be needed to protect the river's resources.

Technical assistance provided as a part of the study made possible the development of the Lower Farmington River and Salmon Brook Management Plan (June 2011). This plan is based primarily around local partner actions designed to guide the management of the Lower Farmington River and Salmon Brook with or without a National Wild and Scenic River designation.

The study concluded that the proposed segments of the Lower Farmington River and Salmon Brook are eligible and suitable for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System because of their free-flowing nature and outstandingly remarkable geology, water quality, biological diversity, cultural landscape, recreation values and local authority to protect and enhance these values. These findings substantiate the widely held view of the Farmington River as Connecticut's premier, free-flowing river resource for a diversity of natural and cultural values, including one of New England's most significant whitewater boating runs, regionally unique freshwater mussel populations, and outstanding examples of archaeological and historical sites and districts spanning Native American, colonial and early manufacturing periods. Salmon Brook is, in its own right, highly significant for outstanding water quality and significant cold water fishery.

If S. 329 is enacted, the Lower Farmington River and Salmon Brook would be administered as a partnership wild and scenic river, similar to several other designations in the Northeast, including the upper Farmington River and the Eightmile River in Connecticut. This approach emphasizes local and state management solutions, and has proven effective as a means of protecting outstandingly remarkable natural, cultural and recreational resource values without the need for direct federal management or land acquisition.

We recommend amending S. 329 to ensure that if operations of the Rainbow Dam were to be changed, wild and scenic river values upstream and downstream of the hydro project would be protected. We would be pleased to work with the sponsor and the committee on the appropriate language for that purpose.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my statement. I would be happy to answer any questions you or other committee members may have regarding this bill.