

TESTIMONY OF CONGRESSMAN JIM LANGEVIN
BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES
SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, FORESTS, PUBLIC LANDS
US HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

HEARING ON H.R. 3388, THE WOOD-PAWCATUCK WATERSHED PROTECTION ACT

APRIL 17, 2012

Chairman Bishop, Ranking Member Grijalva, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for holding this hearing on H.R. 3388, the Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Protection Act, and for inviting me to testify in support of this measure. I also want to thank my good friend Congressman Courtney, who has been an outstanding partner in this effort, and I am pleased to have his support on this bill.

The Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Protection Act proposes a study of segments of the Beaver, Chipuxet, Queen, Wood, and Pawcatuck Rivers in Rhode Island and Connecticut for potential addition to the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. Our states have long been outstanding stewards of these rivers, and I hope passage and completion of this study will affirm what we, who live near these rivers, already know – that they possess outstanding recreational, natural, and historical qualities that make them worthy of the designation of Wild and Scenic Rivers.

We are privileged as a nation to have such a diverse system of wilderness areas, not only in the remote expanses of our beautiful country, but also close to home – in our “backyard wilderness” such as the Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed. These rivers are within a 45 minute drive of every Rhode Islander, easily accessible for family outings and school field trips alike. Rhode Islanders have long enjoyed the recreational and scenic wealth of the Wood-Pawcatuck, and we are eager to share this natural treasure with the rest of New England and the Nation.

These rivers are not only an important part of our national heritage; they are a critical part of our daily lives, especially as much of our economy relies on the health of our waters. From Colonial battlegrounds to Native American fishing grounds, the Wood-Pawcatuck watershed offers diverse destinations for tourism – a vital industry to Rhode Island and Connecticut. These rivers offer exceptional trout fishing, canoeing, photography, and bird watching opportunities, with adjacent hiking and camping for our sportsmen.

While outstanding recreational features abound throughout the watershed, there are certain areas which hold natural qualities that I hope the study will recognize for their uniqueness and protect accordingly. Segments of the Wood, Queen and Beaver Rivers contain populations of rare and endangered species, and spawning grounds for native fish. These areas were found to be the most biologically diverse in all of New England by the National Parks Service in 1980, and they deserve special attention.

The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act offers the best guarantee that the Wood-Pawcatuck will be here for future generations to enjoy. Adoption and passage of this study is an important first step along that path. Nothing could have highlighted the need for conservation and preservation clearer than the 500-year flooding event throughout Rhode Island and the greater New England area in 2010. Protecting these areas may be our strongest tool in mitigating the impacts of flooding.

This study has overwhelming local backing. The Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association has been a steadfast ally in advancing this legislation; and I would like to extend my personal appreciation to Denise Poyer, their esteemed Program Director, who has taken time out of her busy schedule to testify at today's hearing. The Watershed Association, in partnership with the Nature Conservancy in Connecticut and Rhode Island, have received the support of every town and city within the boundary outlined in this legislation for the proposed study. Additionally, the bill is supported by the State of Rhode Island's Department of Environmental Management, the State of Connecticut's Department of Environmental Protection, and Save the Bay. This coalition has pledged to assist the Department of Interior in developing the study.

The rivers of the Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed contain outstanding recreational, scenic, and natural heritage qualities that would be an excellent addition to the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. I urge you to support this legislation and to approve it for floor consideration. Again, I appreciate your leadership and responsiveness in scheduling this hearing, and I would be pleased to respond to any questions.