

Written Statement regarding H.R. 1307 submitted to the
Subcommittee on National Parks, Recreation and Public Lands
On November 10, 2005 by
Susan Dickey, Chairwoman of the Musconetcong Advisory Committee

The Musconetcong Watershed Association wishes to express their support for this bipartisan legislation that will designate segments of the Musconetcong River as a federal Wild and Scenic River. Passage of the Musconetcong Wild and Scenic Rivers Act by this committee is critical to the future protection of one of New Jersey's great rivers.

Specifically, this distinguished recognition of the river will:

- Help maintain existing water quality in the Musconetcong River and its tributaries, as well as improve water quality.
- Protect the recharge area and aquifers that supply drinking water to residents of Hunterdon, Warren, Sussex and Morris counties and beyond.
- Help to promote preservation of farmland and open space within the river corridor and the watershed.
- Encourage recreational use that is compatible with the preservation of natural and cultural qualities of the river corridor while respecting private property.
- Promote eco-tourism in the form of fishing, boating, hiking and bird watching etc. that will translate directly into an economic benefit for the region.
- Preserve, restore and enhance the outstanding natural resources in the river corridor and the watershed, including rare and endangered species, forests, floodplains, headwaters and wetlands.
- Support uses that are compatible with the River Management Plan and that preserve the existing character of the Musconetcong River Valley.

Geophysical Properties

The Musconetcong River drains a 157.6 square mile watershed area in northern New Jersey, and as a major tributary to the Delaware River, is part of the 12,755 square mile Delaware River watershed. For its entire length the Musconetcong River is a boundary water, first dividing Morris and Sussex counties, then Hunterdon and Warren counties. All or portions of 26 municipalities lie within the natural boundaries of the Musconetcong watershed. Fourteen municipalities fall within the river segments eligible for National Wild and Scenic Rivers designation.

Citizens Unite in River Protection Effort

The impetus for the Musconetcong National Wild and Scenic Rivers study can be traced back to 1991 when petitions were circulated calling for the protection of the Musconetcong River under both the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System and New Jersey Wild and Scenic Rivers

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program. In 1992 Congress passed legislation authorizing the National Park Service to study the eligibility and potential suitability of the Lower Delaware River for addition to the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System.

The Musconetcong Watershed Association (MWA) was formed in 1992, and in 1993 the MWA and the National Park Service (NPS) organized two Roundtable Meetings to discuss the problems, amenities and opportunities associated with the Musconetcong River. In 1995, the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) Office of Natural Lands Management recommended to the NPS that the Musconetcong River be included in the Nationwide Rivers Inventory of “candidate” rivers that are considered to have the appropriate characteristics for wild and scenic designation. Two years later, 18 of the 19 municipalities along the river voted to request the NPS to study the Musconetcong River to determine its eligibility and suitability for inclusion in the National System. An initial meeting was held in July 1997 and included representatives from eighteen river corridor municipal governments, National Park Service, Musconetcong Watershed Association, county and state officials, major industries, Heritage Conservancy, Highlands Coalition, and Trout Unlimited, as well as interested citizens and river front property owners.

Study Approach

A Musconetcong Advisory Committee, consisting of municipal representatives was formed to work with the NPS and the Musconetcong Watershed Association in completing the National Wild and Scenic study. It was agreed by all parties that the Musconetcong Advisory Committee and local municipalities would have the final say as to whether the Musconetcong River is recommended for designation. Subcommittees were formed to address public involvement needs and to conduct the resource assessment for the Resource Assessment, Eligibility & Classification Report. The study area included the main stem of the river and the river corridor from the outlet at Lake Musconetcong to the Delaware River, a distance of approximately 42 miles.

Eligibility and Classification Report

The Eligibility & Classification Report, completed in August 1999, recommended that three segments of the river, representing 28.5 miles of river, were eligible for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System based on flow characteristics and natural and cultural resources. The committee then conducted an analysis of existing resource protection in the river corridor and developed draft management goals, objectives and key actions. The advisory committee served as the coordinating body for the study, guiding all major study activities. In order to facilitate the compilation of information about the river’s resources and suitability, the NPS established cooperative agreements with the Musconetcong Watershed.

Segment A: Saxton Falls to the Rt. 46 Bridge (3.5 miles)
Classification: Scenic

Segment B: Kings Highway Bridge to the Railroad tunnels at Musconetcong Gorge (20.7 miles)
Classification: Recreational

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Outstandingly Remarkable Values

The study documented an outstanding diversity of farms, historic villages and outstanding natural areas. The Musconetcong River Valley is a primary source of drinking water, clean air critical wildlife habitat and abundant recreational activities. Its protection is vital to the environmental social and economic health of the country's most densely populated region.

Recreational

The Musconetcong River Valley features a diversity of recreational opportunities that are popular enough to attract visitors from throughout the region. The river corridor provides a high-quality environment for a wide variety of recreational activities which are important to the local economy. State, county and local parklands within the river corridor provide significant opportunities for hiking, fishing, canoeing, camping, nature study and other outdoor activities. The Musconetcong River and its tributaries are regionally important trout fishing streams. Approximately 20 of the tributary streams support naturally reproducing trout populations. The river is also eligible for designation to the State Trails System as a Waterways Trail. The river-related recreational resources are considered to be regionally exemplary.

Historic and Prehistoric

The Musconetcong River Valley contains many river-related historic bridges, mills and historic districts that are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. One river-related resource, the Morris Canal Historic District, is a National Historic Landmark and was judged to be nationally exemplary. The Plenge Paleo-Indian Archaeological site within the river corridor is eligible for National Landmark designation study. River-related historic resources were judged overall to be regionally exemplary.

Scenic

Several locations in the river corridor offer outstanding views of the agricultural river valley, Highland Ridges, Kittatinny Mountain and Delaware Water Gap. These views of landforms and vegetation throughout the seasons are only minimally interrupted by cultural intrusions. River-related scenery was judged to be regionally exemplary.

Wildlife and Critical Habitat

Regionally important populations of wildlife and critical habitat for state listed threatened, endangered or rare species are present within the river corridor. The Musconetcong River watershed lies entirely within the New Jersey Highlands Region, a landscape of national importance as determined by the U.S. Forest Service and within the Atlantic Flyway, one of four major migratory bird routes in North America.

Segment-by-Segment Analysis

The following is a categorical description of outstanding resources found within each study segment.

Segment A: Saxton Falls to Rt. 46 Bridge

Recreational: Allamuchy/Stephens State Park

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Eligible State Waterway Trail

Historic: Morris Canal National Historic Landmark

Scenic: Largely primitive, undeveloped river corridor through state and municipal parklands

Wildlife: Barred Owl: State threatened

Brook Floater: Critically imperiled in NJ

Segment B: Kings Highway Bridge to the railroad tunnels at Musconetcong Gorge

Recreational: Musconetcong River Reservation

Eligible State Waterway Trail

Numerous state-owned access points for fishing, boating and hiking

Historic: Beattystown Historic District: National Register

Miller Farmstead and stone bridge: National Register

New Hampton Pony Pratt Truss Bridge: National Register

New Hampton Historic District: National Register

Imlaydale Historic District: National Register

Asbury Village Historic District: National Register

North Bloomsbury Historic District: National Register

Scenic: Outstanding views of agricultural river valley, Highland Ridges, Kittatinny Mountain and Delaware Water Gap

Outstanding views of agricultural river valley from Highway 639, Franklin Township

Wildlife: Wood Turtle: State threatened

Fleshy Hawthorn: State endangered

Historic and Archeological Resources

Human habitation in the Musconetcong valley has been traced back to as early as 12,000 years ago when Paleo-Indians occupied the region during the final retreat of the Wisconsin glacier. Evidence of their presence in the valley was documented at the Plenge Site, which is located along the lower Musconetcong River in Warren County. The Plenge Site was the first of only two major Paleo-Indian archaeological site excavations in New Jersey, and it is considered to be one of the most important in the northeastern United States.

Outstanding river-related historic features – many of which are listed on the New Jersey and National Registers of Historic Places – can be found in Stanhope, Waterloo Village, Asbury, Finesville and several other Musconetcong River communities. These features contribute greatly to the scenic character and overall quality of life in the Musconetcong valley, and are important to the local economy as key components of regional tourism.

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By the time European settlement came to the Musconetcong valley during the early 18th century, the Lenape Indians were already in a state of decline, and the several thousand-year-old aboriginal occupation was coming to an end. While the Lenape Indians burned off significant areas of forest to plant crops and attract game, their only lasting imprint on the landscape were the major trails that European colonists eventually adapted to roads. One of these was the Malayelick Path which ran from the head of the tidal Delaware River to the Musconetcong River “gap” between Musconetcong and Schooleys Mountains. The path was the forerunner of State Highway 31, which begins in Trenton and crosses the Musconetcong River at Hampton Borough. Portions of State Highway 206 are part of the Minisink Trail, which linked the New Jersey coast with Minisink Island in the Upper Delaware River.

Subsistence agriculture took root in the lower Musconetcong valley at the beginning of the 18th century. The fertile limestone valley was rapidly cleared for croplands, and subsistence agriculture gradually evolved into commercial grain and dairy farming. Villages sprang up around the many gristmills and iron forges built along the Musconetcong River from Finesville to Hackettstown. The charcoal iron industry was also established during the early 18th century on the lower Musconetcong River, and was supported by abundant supplies of ore from the surrounding ridges. The iron industry faced a precipitous decline when wood supplies were depleted by the early 19th century. However, the industry was rescued when one of early America’s truly amazing engineering feats – the Morris Canal – was built to carry coal from the Pennsylvania coalfields to fuel the iron furnaces. The Morris Canal was a world-famous engineering marvel that required abundant supplies of water. Lake Hopatcong, which was originally a small natural glacial lake, was dammed to supply water to the entire canal system, but it was found to be an inadequate source. To augment the flow of water to the canal, several other dams were built on the Musconetcong River and Lubbers Run, its largest tributary.

River Management Plan

Next, an analysis of land ownership, land use regulation and physical barriers to development in the river corridor was completed to determine the effectiveness of existing mechanisms in management of the river and its outstandingly remarkable values, and to identify gaps which could be addressed by the implementation of a comprehensive management plan. Development of a river management plan is a requirement of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers study and becomes the basis for protection of the river now and into the future.

This management plan was the result of cooperative efforts of the Musconetcong Advisory Committee, Musconetcong Watershed Association, Heritage Conservancy, the National Park Service, and a variety of local, county and state representatives. The management plan sets forth five major goals and recommends actions to maintain and improve the Musconetcong River corridor, its tributaries and watershed, and surrounding natural, cultural and recreational resources.

Goal 1. Encourage recreational use that is compatible with the preservation of natural and cultural qualities of the river corridor while respecting private property.

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Goal 2. Preserve and protect the character of archaeological sites and historic structures, districts, sites, and landscapes in the river corridor.

Goal 3. Preserve farmland and open space within the river corridor and the watershed.

Goal 4. Preserve, protect, restore and enhance the outstanding natural resources in the river corridor and the watershed, including rare and endangered species, forests, steep slopes, floodplains, headwaters and wetlands.

Goal 5. Maintain existing water quality in the Musconetcong River and its tributaries and improve where possible.

Successful implementation of the management plan will require cooperation between all levels of government, individual landowners and non-governmental organizations. The plan recognizes that local municipalities play a key role in implementing the recommended management actions.

Conclusion

The Musconetcong is one of New Jersey's great rivers. The Musconetcong River Valley is a primary source of drinking water, critical wildlife habitat and abundant recreational activities. Passage of this bill will protect an outstanding diversity of farms, historic villages and outstanding natural areas. S.1096 recognizes the exceptional value of the Musconetcong River and the importance of its protection under the National Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. I urge your favorable consideration of this bill.