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**York River Study Committee
Designation Recommendation and Upcoming Presentations**

ELIOT, KITTERY, SOUTH BERWICK & YORK – Since its formation in late 2015, the York River Study Committee has been exploring whether the York River would benefit from being designated in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. After two years of study, the Committee now unanimously endorses a Partnership Wild and Scenic River (PWSR) designation for the York River and its major tributaries. “Receiving a Partnership Wild and Scenic River designation is a unique opportunity to garner support that would help protect the York River’s remarkable value to the communities,” said Committee Chairperson Chuck Ott. The rivers recommended for designation include the York River from the outlet of York Pond in Eliot to the Route 103 bridge in York, Cutts Ridge Brook, Rogers Brook, Smelt Brook, Bass Cove Creek, Libby Brook, Dolly Gordon Brook, and Cider Hill Creek. “These rivers collectively contribute to the region’s character, economy, and biodiversity,” said Ott, who further noted, “We’re confident that the rivers are a good fit for designation, and that this program is a good fit for our communities.”

There are 208 rivers in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers program, including 13 designated Partnership rivers. A local committee involved with a PWSR receives about \$120,000 each year to implement its stewardship plan. Funds can be used to undertake activities such as outreach programs, habitat restoration projects, educational programming, and historic site research. There is no federal land ownership or management for designated PWSRs; there are no new land use restrictions; and there are no required changes to local regulations. A locally approved plan that will guide river-related community outreach and preservation actions must be in place for a PWSR designation, so the Committee now is turning its efforts toward completing a York River Watershed Stewardship Plan. This advisory plan will identify the many watershed resources, threats, and actions that can be undertaken to help protect or enhance resources for the long term.

Ultimately each watershed community will decide in late 2018 whether to approve the stewardship plan and the designation. If supported locally, Congress then would need to vote on authorizing designation of the York River in the national system as a PWSR.

“There is no shortage of valuable resources in this watershed,” said Eliot Committee member Stefan Claesson. The York River watershed is particularly notable for its rich and well-preserved history and its natural intact habitats that support one of Maine’s most biodiverse regions. “That we can have these high-quality resources in a populated area is pretty remarkable, but not something we can take for granted with the continued development pressures and climate change impacts that will affect our landscape,” noted Claesson.

The Committee has gathered information and data over the last year, and it commissioned two new studies in 2017 – a survey of historic resources for the upper York River in parts of Eliot and York, and a survey of migratory fish at four river sites. The fish study revealed strong runs of key fish species, including rainbow smelt and alewife, and that the York River is providing quality habitat for fish. The historic resources surveys identified new Native American archaeological sites, investigated areas suspected of containing historic artifacts, and better documented previously known historic structures. Contractors involved with the historic resources surveys will present their findings at the Eliot Historical Society meeting at 7pm, January 8, 2018 at the John F. Hill Grange Hall (1412 State Road, Eliot). The meeting is free and open to the public.

Information on the Committee's designation recommendation, reports, and upcoming meetings and events is available on the website: <http://www.YorkRiverMaine.org>.

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