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King, Collins Introduce Legislation to Designate York River as ‘Wild and Scenic’

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today, U.S. Senators Angus King (I-Maine), a member of the Senate Energy & Natural Resources Committee, and Susan Collins (R-Maine) will introduce legislation to officially designate the York River as part of the National Park Service’s Wild and Scenic River System. Today’s legislation comes after [a National Park Service study proposed by Senator King](#) determined the river is eligible and suitable for designation. In addition, a number of surrounding communities have expressed their support for this designation through public referendums and town council votes, as the change would open up new funding to maintain and protect the health of the river, while ensuring that land use management is regulated through existing local and state authorities, the same as before the designation. Companion legislation has been introduced in the House by Representative Chellie Pingree (D-Maine) and is cosponsored by Representative Jared Golden (D-Maine).

“Generations of Southern Maine people have built their communities around the York River’s important ecological benefits and the economic opportunities it creates,” **said Senators King and Collins.** “After an extensive process, including a study from the National Park Service, years of engagement with local communities and residents, and working with the state of Maine, we’re proud to introduce legislation to designate this important waterway as a partnership Wild and Scenic River. This designation will allow new sources of funding to support both the health of the York River and the economic prospects of the communities that rely on it.”

Local voices expressing their support for the Senators’ bill include the York Lobstermen’s Association, local community leaders, and leading environmental groups:

“The York Lobstermen’s Association strongly supports the designation of the York River into the Partnership Wild and Scenic Rivers program,” **said York Lobstermen’s Association President Jeff White.** “We are delighted to learn that this proposed legislation will be introduced by Senator King and Senator Collins. The York River is the lifeblood for the commercial fisheries off of York Harbor and is vital to having a sustainable local commercial fishery. The establishment of the York River into the Wild and Scenic Rivers program helps to ensure that the York River will be preserved for the future and that a robust local commercial fishery will be sustained into the future.”

“Few local issues have seen the broad and passionate support that York River designation has,” **said Judy Spiller, Kittery Town Councilor and Member of the York River Study Committee.** “The reasons are simple. With the tide, one can float from the headwaters down the River through history from remnants of precontact settlement through marshes and forests that nourish a rich biota ending at the River mouth with stately colonial homes and a thriving lobster fishery. The watershed - a shared York, Eliot, Kittery, and South Berwick resource - buffers us from intense regional development pressure and the pristine forested areas supply clean drinking water. And in the future, if protected, the watershed will provide resilience in the face of rising sea levels. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the York River and its tributaries are at once reassuringly always the same yet always subtly different: inspiration to all those who encounter it. Designation will preserve that for us and our children and our children’s children and on.”

“A Wild and Scenic River designation for areas within the York River would promote better access and protect the river’s natural resources that so many communities depend on for clean water and outdoor recreation like fishing, paddling and more,” **said Lauren Cosgrove, Northeast Senior Program Manager, National Parks Conservation Association.** “As a convergence of salt and freshwater, the York River and its many tributaries are home to rare spawning fish like Smelt, and vast wildlife from spotted salamanders to the long-eared bat. Its wetlands improve the overall health of the watershed and serve as a natural barrier to help absorb storm surges and filter nutrients, combatting the threats of climate change. We welcome the additional protection this designation provides and the benefits it will have for generations to come.”

If the York River is designated as a Wild and Scenic River, it will become eligible for increased federal funding and other resources to help maintain the river in its current healthy, natural, and free-flowing state. These funds can be used for education and outreach; historic, scientific, and economic research; and conservation efforts.

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