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June 23, 2021

Chairman King Highlights Local Support for York River Wild and Scenic Designation, “It’s One of the Most Grassroots Initiatives I’ve Ever Been Involved With”

National Parks Subcommittee Chairman Senator King advocated for the passage of his bipartisan legislation to get the initiative closer to federal law

WASHINGTON, D.C. – U.S. Senator Angus King (I-Maine), Chairman of the Energy and Natural Resources Subcommittee on National Parks, today continued his advocacy to designate the York River as part of the National Park System’s “Wild and Scenic” Rivers program, which protects rivers and surrounding areas that have been determined to have high natural and cultural value from construction. During his opening statement in today’s Subcommittee on National Parks hearing, Chairman King highlighted **the bill that he reintroduced earlier this year** (<https://www.king.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/maine-delegation-reintroduces-legislation-to-add-york-river-to-the-national-park-services-wild-and-scenic-list>) with U.S. Senator Susan Collins (R-Maine) to finalize the designation and provide federal funds to the region. U.S. Representatives Chellie Pingree (D-Maine) and Jared Golden (D-Maine) have introduced identical companion legislation in the House. Among the witnesses at today’s hearing was Jennifer Hunter,

Coordinator of the York River Wild and Scenic Study, who spoke to the extensive work done in the local community to build consensus around a potential designation.

Chairman King's First Line of Questioning in Subcommittee on Nation...



Chairman King's Opening Statement in National Parks Subcommittee...



CHAIRMAN KING: "I'd like to turn to a bill that I've introduced with Senator Collins – the York River Wild and Scenic River Act. This bill is also supported by Maine's House delegation, the bill would designate a portion of the York River as a Wild and Scenic

River, protecting an important part of our state and many important historical sites from future development. This bill has been a long time in the making and frankly it's one of the most grassroots initiatives that I've ever been involved with. Beginning in 2009, locally based 'Friends of the York River' group made up of residents, town leaders, and others interested in river conservation led the effort to determine whether designation of a Wild and Scenic River was an appropriate way to recognize and protect the York River. The group held public meetings and collected letters of support from the four adjacent communities. My House colleague, Representative Pingree and I introduced the York River Wild and Scenic Study Bill – it was included in FY2015 National Defense Authorization Act. The Study Committee then began their work in partnership with local stakeholders. The study committee focused on designation as a partnership Wild and Scenic River given management models of other local rivers nearby in New Hampshire and Connecticut. The study committee identified a number of outstanding remarkable natural, recreational, and cultural resource values, associated with the study area, that they concluded made it eligible for designation. Anyone who has visited the York River designation watershed in Southern Maine knows the incredible landscape that the towns of York, South Berwick, Kittery, and Eliot have in their backyards. I'm honored to have Jennifer Hunter here to share with the Subcommittee the uniqueness of the area and why we should designate it as part of the Wild and Scenic River System."

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Later in the hearing, Chairman King and Jennifer Hunter emphasized the local support that the designation has received from the residents of York County.

CHAIRMAN KING: "Ms. Hunter, first question for you. You heard Senator Daines at the beginning talk about the importance of local support for these kinds of designations, and you mentioned this in your testimony, but could you elaborate a bit on the outreach that was done along the river in terms of both the communities and private land owners on the York river?"

HUNTER: "Yes, thank you, I'd be happy to. That was the goal of the York River study committee, it was to engage the community throughout this process. We held over 60 public meetings throughout our process. We held a number of watershed events, including watershed walks along the river so we could discuss different river resources. We attended any public event we were able to, including local fairs, festivals, and

meetings of the rotary, and other civil groups. We had several mailings that went to all the river landowners to inform them of upcoming meetings and our activities. We had several projects that were conducted in the field, and we invited citizen scientists to take part in those projects so that they could understand the resources and provide feedback to us in what was valuable to them."

CHAIRMAN KING: "And as I understand it, there were several referenda in two of the towns that were overwhelmingly positive. Is that correct?"

HUNTER: "That's correct. Part of the demonstration of suitability for a partnership designation includes town votes to endorse designation as well as accept our locally developed stewardship plan. The towns of York and Eliot had articles on the ballot in November 2018, the towns of Kittery and South Berwick had council votes on a resolution, and in the towns of York and Eliot, the measures were overwhelmingly approved by voters by 63% in one town and 73% in the other. In the case of the council votes they were all unanimous in support of designation."

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In addition to Ms. Hunter, today's hearing featured testimony from: Michael Caldwell, Acting Associate Director, Park Planning, Facilities, and Lands National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior; Jennifer Eberlien, Associate Deputy Chief, National Forest System, U.S. Department of Agriculture; and Andrea Malmberg of Union, Oregon.

Today's hearing also featured testimony from Representative Jared Golden, who spoke in support of legislation to authorize the location of a memorial on the National Mall to honor servicemembers and veterans who have taken part in the Global War on Terrorism. Representative Golden is a co-chair of the For Country Caucus, a bipartisan group of veterans in the House of Representatives that advocates for the construction of the memorial.

Senator King is among the Senate's loudest voices advocating for public lands and conservation. As Chairman of the National Parks Subcommittee, **last month** (<https://www.king.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/in-inaugural-hearing-as-chairman-of-national-parks-subcommittee-king-touts-ability-of-outdoor-spaces-to-restore-inspire-recharge>), Senator King convened a hearing to examine the current state

of the National Park System – focusing on the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on National Park Service (NPS) operations, staff, visitation and facilities. Senator King helped lead the **passage the *Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA)* into law** (<https://www.king.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/king-hails-landmark-conservation-accomplishment-as-great-american-outdoors-act-signed-into-law>); the legislation includes the ***Restore Our Parks Act*** (<https://bangordailynews.com/2020/06/21/opinion/contributors/saving-americas-best-idea-for-our-children-and-theirs-too/>) – a bill led in part by Senator King – and the ***Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) Permanent Funding Act*** (<https://www.king.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/collins-king-back-bipartisan-bill-to-permanently-fund-lwcf>). The historic legislative package continues Senator King’s career-long focus on conservation efforts, dating back to **his work prior to running for elected office** (<https://www.king.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/senator-king-to-chair-subcommittee-on-national-parks-for-117th-congress>) through his years as Governor and **his service in the Senate** (<https://www.themainemag.com/features/senator-angus-kings-restore-our-national-parks-act-brings-maine-values-to-the-nation/>). Over the course of his time in the Blaine House, Governor King was responsible for conserving more land across Maine than all Governors before him combined. In recognition of his lifetime of environmental advocacy, Senator King was recently awarded the inaugural **National Park Foundation (NPF) “Hero” Award** (<https://www.king.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/senator-king-receives-first-ever-national-park-foundation-hero-award>).

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