

LAWMAKERS INTRODUCE FARMINGTON RIVER BILL Examines Protections for Lower Farmington River

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WASHINGTON, D.C. - Congresswoman Nancy Johnson (R-5th) and Congressman John Larson (D-1st) introduced legislation this week to examine adding the lower Farmington River to the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. The Lower Farmington River and Salmon Brook Wild and Scenic River Study Act of 2004 (H.R. 4070) would commission a feasibility study of the Lower Farmington River and Salmon Brook for potential addition to the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System.

"The Farmington River and Salmon Brook's recreational and environmental contributions to our state are well-known, and we must protect them for future generations," Johnson said. "The western branch of the Farmington River has flourished as a Wild and Scenic river and its designation has fostered important public-private partnerships. This new legislation builds on that success by taking necessary steps to add the lower sections of the river to the program."

"The Farmington River and Salmon Brook are unique cultural and recreational resources for my district and the State of Connecticut," said Larson. "Threats to the Lower Farmington's water quality demonstrate the urgent need for a cooperative effort among federal, state, and local interests to preserve the river for future generations. The Lower Farmington clearly deserves federal protection and would make a valuable addition to the Wild and Scenic River System."

"We are fortunate in Connecticut to have true river champions like Congresswoman Nancy Johnson and Congressman John Larson. Their environmental records are both outstanding and their shared commitment to long-term river protection is admirable," said Eric Hammerling, Executive Director of the Farmington River Watershed Association.

"Fourteen miles of the river were designated in 1994. Ten years later, it's showing benefits to towns and maintaining protections for the river. This new initiative is an ideal way to extend that protection and showcase the river. It's about recognizing cultural, natural, and recreational resources, and the Farmington River has them in abundance."

In 1994, Johnson successfully passed legislation into law designating 14 miles of the Farmington River's West Branch as a Wild and Scenic Partnership River. A 2003 report by North Carolina State University highlighted some of the direct economic benefits experienced by five towns -- Barkhamsted, Canton, Colebrook, Hartland, and New Hartford -- in the 14-mile "Wild and Scenic" designated stretch of the River:

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Recreational river use generates an estimated annual economic impact of \$3.63 million for the five towns nearest the river stretch studied;

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Proximity to the Farmington River accounts for approximately 8 percent of the value of nearby residential land; and

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The total economic benefit to recreational users was estimated to be \$9.45 million. This represents the total social value of the river segment to users over and beyond what they spend to visit.

The feasibility study will evaluate whether the Lower Farmington River, stretching from Canton to Windsor in the First and Fifth Congressional Districts, should be added to the national Wild and Scenic Rivers list. The Lower Farmington River is defined as the 40 mile stretch between the lower Collinsville Dam in Burlington and the Rainbow Dam in Windsor. Canton, Burlington, Simsbury, Avon, the Farmington Land Trust, and the Farmington River Watershed Association support the legislation.

"We're thrilled with this legislation," said Canton First Selectman Mary Tomolonius. "It enables communities to preserve the quality and integrity of the river and the property that abuts it. The previous designation of the western branch has had a very positive effect."

Congress created the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System in 1968 to preserve the character of scenic, recreational, or historic rivers and their immediate environments, as well as to ensure development preserves the free-flowing condition of these rivers. More information on the Wild and Scenic River System can be found at www.nps.gov/rivers.

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