

STATEMENT OF MICHAEL A. CALDWELL, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, PARK PLANNING, FACILITIES, AND LANDS, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE SENATE ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS CONCERNING S. 4122, A BILL TO AMEND THE WILD AND SCENIC RIVERS ACT TO DESIGNATE CERTAIN SEGMENTS OF THE HOUSATONIC RIVER IN THE STATE OF CONNECTICUT AS COMPONENTS OF THE NATIONAL WILD AND SCENIC RIVERS SYSTEM, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.

SEPTEMBER 21, 2022

Chairman King, Ranking Member Daines, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to present the Department of the Interior's views on S. 4122, a bill to amend the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act to designate current segments of the Housatonic River in the State of Connecticut as components of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System, and for other purposes.

The Department supports S. 4122.

This bill would amend Section 3(a) of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act (16 U.S.C. 1274(a)) to designate the following segments of the Housatonic River in the State of Connecticut, to be administered by the Secretary of the Interior. The river segment designations include: the approximately 14.9 mile segment from the Massachusetts-Connecticut boundary to the covered bridge in West Cornwall as a scenic river; the approximately 4.1 mile segment from the covered bridge in West Cornwall to the Cornwall Bridge, as a recreational river; the approximately 9.1 mile segment from the Cornwall Bridge to the Route 341 bridge in Kent, as a scenic river; and the approximately 12.2 mile segment from the Route 341 bridge in Kent to the Boardman Bridge in New Milford, as a recreational river.

The bill mandates that the designated river segments shall not impact or alter the existing terms of permitting, licensing, or operation of the Falls Village Hydroelectric Generating Station located in Falls Village, Connecticut (FERC P-2576) or the Bulls Bridge Hydroelectric Generating Station located in New Milford, Connecticut (FERC P-2576). The designation shall not preclude the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission from licensing, relicensing, or otherwise authorizing the operation or continued operation of these facilities.

The segments would be managed in accordance with the 2006 Housatonic River Management Plan and approved amendments with the Secretary coordinating administration and management with the Housatonic River Commission, a locally based management committee, as specified in the plan. The bill would authorize the Secretary to enter into cooperative agreements with the State of Connecticut, the seven adjoining communities, and appropriate local planning, environmental, and recreational organizations.

This proposal builds on the previous findings and recommendations of the 1979 Congressionally authorized Wild and Scenic River Study of the Housatonic River in Connecticut which found 41

miles of the river eligible but recommended designation under Section 2(a)(ii) of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. In 2016, Connecticut Governor Daniel Malloy proposed to the Secretary of the Interior that the Housatonic River from the Massachusetts/ Connecticut border to Boardman Bridge in New Milford, Connecticut be included in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System under Section 2(a)(ii). Following that request, the National Park Service (NPS) completed the Housatonic River Wild and Scenic River Evaluation in 2021.

The evaluation concludes that the 40.3-mile section of the Housatonic River proposed by Governor Malloy meets eligibility and suitability requirements for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System as either a 2(a)(ii) state-administered segment or a congressionally designated segment under the NPS' Partnership Wild and Scenic model. This section of the Housatonic River includes outstandingly remarkable values that warrant protection and enhancement, including scenic beauty, recreational opportunities, historic value, and wildlife and vegetation, consistent with the 1979 Study findings.

If S. 4122 is enacted, the designated segments of the Housatonic would be administered based on the Partnership Wild and Scenic River model, similar to several other designations in the northeast, including the Sudbury, Assabet and Concord Rivers in Massachusetts, and the Lamprey River in New Hampshire. While a federal Wild and Scenic River designation protects the free-flowing character of the river, this collaborative approach emphasizes local and state management solutions, oversight, and day-to-day cooperation with community partners and has proven effective as a means of protecting outstandingly remarkable natural, cultural, and recreational resource values without the need for direct federal management or land acquisition.

Chairman King, this concludes my statement. I would be pleased to answer any questions you or other members of the Subcommittee may have.