

**STATEMENT OF MICHAEL A. CALDWELL, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE SENATE ENERGY & NATURAL RESOURCES SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS CONCERNING S. 432, TO AMEND THE WILD AND SCENIC RIVERS ACT TO DESIGNATE THE NULHEGAN RIVER AND PAUL STREAM IN THE STATE OF VERMONT FOR POTENTIAL ADDITION TO THE NATIONAL WILD AND SCENIC RIVERS SYSTEM, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.**

**June 21, 2023**

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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. 432, to amend the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act to designate the Nulhegan River and Paul Stream in the State of Vermont for potential addition to the national wild and scenic rivers system, and for other purposes.

The Department supports S. 432. We would like to note that there are 22 previously authorized studies for potential units of the National Park System, potential new national heritage areas, and potential additions to the National Trails System and National Wild and Scenic Rivers System that have not yet been completed and transmitted to Congress.

S. 432 would authorize a study to determine whether the following river segments meet the criteria for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System: The approximately 22-mile segment of the main stem of the Nulhegan River from the headwaters near Nulhegan Pond to the confluence of the Connecticut River, and any associated tributaries (including the North, Yellow, Black, and East Branches); and the approximately 18-mile segment of Paul Stream from the headwaters on West Mountain to the confluence with the Connecticut River, and any associated tributaries. The bill requires the study to be completed no later than three years after the date on which funds are made available to carry out the study.

The Nulhegan River and Paul Stream are known for clean, free flowing waters, exceptional recreational opportunities, and a rich cultural and natural history. The Nulhegan River is free flowing, wild, and scenic, and is home to boreal habitats, native fisheries, working forests, and small rural settlements. Paul Stream is mostly wild and undeveloped. The Nulhegan River watershed is home to the Nulhegan Basin Division of the Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge, the state's Wenlock Wildlife Management Area and conserved forestlands. The watershed drains approximately 145 square miles and encompasses the Vermont towns of Brighton, Bloomfield, Brunswick, Maidstone, and the Unified Towns and Gores of Essex County (Averill, Avery's Gore, Ferdinand, Lewis, Warren Gore, Warner's Grant). There is strong support from these communities, as well as from the Abenaki nation, for the study. Additionally, nearly a dozen conservation groups have issued letters of support for the study.

If enacted, the National Park Service intends to undertake the study in close cooperation with the affected communities, relevant state agencies, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and other interested stakeholders using a partnership-based study approach. The partnership-based

approach is recognized in Section 10(e) of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act as a means of encouraging state and local governmental participation in the administration of a component of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. This approach allows for development of a proposed river management plan as part of the study, which helps landowners and local jurisdictions understand their potential future roles in river management should Congress decide to designate part or all of the rivers being studied.

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