



Press Releases

Maine Delegation Reintroduces Legislation to Add York River to the National Park Service’s ‘Wild and Scenic’ List

Bicameral legislation initiates final step in decade-long effort to provide York River with federal protection & funding

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Maine’s U.S. Senators Angus King and Susan Collins and U.S. Representatives Chellie Pingree and Jared Golden reintroduced the bipartisan York River Wild and Scenic River Act, bicameral legislation to initiate the final step in the process to add the York River into the National Park System’s Wild and Scenic Rivers Program. If the bill is passed by Congress and signed by the President, the York River will finally receive long-awaited federal protection and funding.



“The York River is an incredibly important resource for Southern Maine. After legislation to study it and years of outreach with the towns of York, Eliot, Kittery, and South Berwick and residents of the communities, it is clear how meaningful the river is to the character of the region,” **said the**

Maine delegation. “That’s why, in partnership with local leaders, we introduced a bill to add the York River to the National Park Service’s ‘Wild and Scenic’ List, initiating the final step in the process to secure federal protection for the river. The culmination of this collaborative decade-long effort will deliver more federal funding to protect the river, which provides countless environmental and economic benefits to its surrounding communities.”

“The York River Study Committee is excited that after over a decade of citizen effort, and the last five years, intensive study by the Committee, the River is moving closer to designation as a Partnership Wild and Scenic River. The York River Wild and Scenic River Act brings us much closer to designation. Over the years, few local issues have seen the broad and passionate support that York River designation has. The reasons are simple. With the tide, one floats from the headwaters down the River through history, passing remnants of precontact settlement through marshes and forests that nourish a rich biota, ending at the River mouth with its stately colonial homes and 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,” **said Judy Spiller, Kittery Town Councilor and Chair of the York River Study Committee.**

“York River possesses many special qualities such as scenic beauty, a well-preserved history, and diverse natural ecology. The river’s healthy salt marshes capture and store carbon, provide important habitat for many species, and help mitigate coastal flooding. These community benefits provided by the river are increasingly important with climate change impacts. Designation into the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System will provide more opportunities for us to proactively preserve these important qualities,” **said Jennifer Hunter, York River Wild and Scenic Study Coordinator.**

Pingree and Golden originally [introduced legislation](#) to add the York River to the National Park Service's 'Wild and Scenic' List in February 2019; King and Collins [introduced Senate companion legislation](#) in December 2020. These bills followed a [three-year study](#) –funded by legislation that Pingree and King [introduced in 2011](#) and Congress passed in 2014—conducted by local stakeholders which recommended the designation. In 2018, the voters of York and Eliot overwhelmingly passed referendums to move forward with the designation, as did the town councils of Kittery and South Berwick.

A 'Wild and Scenic' river designation would direct more federal funding and technical assistance to the area, while lifting the York River's profile as a national destination. It also would provide a local forum for the four watershed communities to collaboratively address long-term river stewardship needs. Last week, the U.S. House of Representatives passed legislation which included an [amendment](#) from Congresswoman Pingree to designate the York River as Wild and Scenic.

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