

York River Wild and Scenic River Program – A Timeline

Summer/Fall 2008: Jamie Fosburgh of the National Park Service (NPS) Wild and Scenic Rivers Program takes a boat trip on the York River with Carol and Joey Donnelly. The goal is to introduce Jamie to the river and to find out more about the Wild and Scenic Rivers program.

April 2009: The Mount Agamenticus to the Sea (MtA2C) Communications and Policy Committee (CPC) meets specifically on the topic of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Program to determine if it might be a good fit for the York River and its communities. CPC members determine that the program deserves exploration.

Fall 2009: After several months of fact-finding and meetings (including discussions/meetings with NPS officials and those involved in the Wild and Scenic-designated rivers in New England), the CPC met and recommended an NPS Study should be pursued but that public and town support will have to be built to secure it. CPC reports to the MtA2C Oversight Committee at its next fall meeting. All agreed that another organization separate and distinct from MtA2C should be created to garner public support for a Study Bill in the US Congress.

Early in 2010: The Friends of the York River is formed to educate and advocate for a US Congressional Study Bill, which would pay for an NPS-led Study and a locally-driven Stewardship Plan – the first step in the designation process. Steering Committee members included: Caroline Donnelly (Chair), York; Karen Arsenault, York; Chuck Ott, York; Jennifer Fox, Eliot; Helen Winebaum, York; Paul Dest, Wells Reserve; Stewart Dawson, York; Bernadine Speers, York; David Gittins, York.

2010 to 2014: Friends of the York River held many public gatherings and one-on-one meetings; they presented the Wild and Scenic Rivers Program to Town Councils and Select Boards in the towns. Discussions and meetings also occurred with members of Maine's Congressional Delegation and their staffs. Informational meetings and presentations occurred with individual businesses, the Chamber, and civic organizations. By the end of 2010, York, Kittery, and Eliot leaders voted to support federal legislation to fund an NPS Study.

Throughout 2011: Meetings held in Augusta with leaders at the Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry, Maine Department of Transportation, the Maine Turnpike Authority, and the Maine Coastal Program. Discussions and meetings continued with members of Maine's Congressional Delegation and their staffs to get support for a Study Bill in Congress.

May 20, 2011: Congresswoman Chellie Pingree visits the York River – over 50 people gather for the event. Rep. Pingree expressed her strong support for the Study Bill. Subsequently, on May 23, Rep. Pingree submitted a bill (HR 2336) in the US House of Representatives to direct NPS to fund a Study.

June 15, 2012: Congresswoman Pingree's bill passed in the US House; however, there was no companion bill in the US Senate for the Study Bill.

Sometime in 2012: In recognition that the work on York River Wild and Scenic initiative is more than what an all-volunteer committee can handle, the Steering Committee secures private funds to hire a (very) part-time coordinator, Karen Young of York. Karen helps support the Committee for 3 years, through the formation of the Study Committee in mid-2015. The Maine Coastal Program designates staff person, Theresa Torrent, to serve as its point person on the York River effort.

November 15, 2012: Congresswoman Pingree submits a letter to the NPS requesting that they conduct a Reconnaissance Survey to evaluate the York River as a candidate for NPS designation as a Wild and Scenic River. This survey is designed to answer questions about the river's candidacy for Wild and Scenic designation and to provide some momentum if the answers are positive.

Mid-2013: Congresswoman Pingree resubmits her Study Bill in the US House (HR 2197) in May; Senator Angus King submits a companion Study Bill in the US Senate (S.1520) in September.

December 2013: NPS completes its 26-page *Wild and Scenic River Reconnaissance Survey of the York River* and publishes and distributes the document, which indicates that the York River would make a good candidate for further study for Wild and Scenic River designation.

Early 2014: The Town of South Berwick is approached about their support for the Study Bill, as a small section of the town is within the watershed. Town Council approves and joins the other 3 towns in their support for a Study of the watershed.

December 2014: The York River Wild and Scenic Study Bill passes (along with other NPS-related legislation) in the House and Senate as part of a large, 600+ page Defense Authorization Bill (HR 3979).

Early 2015: Friends of the York River Steering Committee began to develop a process to form and recruit members for the York River Study Committee, which will eventually hire a coordinator and oversee the development of a river Stewardship Plan and expenditures of NPS and other funds. The Steering Committee received support from York Town Manager Steve Burns, which allowed the Town of York Interim Planning Director (Beth Della Valle) to provide support for this multi-month effort. Wells Reserve and NPS entered into a 5-year cooperative agreement (2015-2020) to fund the Study and Stewardship Plan.

Fall 2015: York River Study Committee formed and first monthly meeting held in November. Committee members included from York -- Chuck Ott (Chair), Karen Arsenaault, Cindy Donnell, Thom Kearns, Joan LeBlanc, and Michael Masi; from Eliot -- Stefan Claesson and John Murphy; from Kittery -- Judy Spiller; from South Berwick -- Jean Demetracopoulos; from the Wells Reserve -- Paul Dest (Treasurer and Vice Chair); from NPS -- Jim MacCartney and Jamie Fosburgh. In early 2016, State Agency representatives join the Study Committee: Claire Enterline, Maine Coastal Program/DMR; David Gardner and Judy Gates, Department of Transportation.

January 2016: Interviews for York River Study Committee Coordinator position occur. Jennifer Hunter of York selected, whose work begins in February.

2016 through 2018: Jenn Hunter coordinates, in tandem with the Study Committee, all aspects of the Study and development of what will become the *York River Watershed Stewardship Plan*. Study Committee meets monthly. Outreach Subcommittee and ORV Subcommittee are formed and meet regularly. Website and other outreach materials are developed, research is completed, three major studies conducted, numerous (60+) public meetings were held, and dozens of presentations made. Stewardship Plan chapters written and edited, and graphically designed.

November 2017: Study Committee unanimously endorsed pursuing a Partnership Wild and Scenic River designation for the York River and its major tributaries, subject to community approvals.

August 2018: *York River Watershed Stewardship Plan* completed, printed, and distributed. The 142-page plan (plus appendices) represents over 30 months of work on the part of the Coordinator and the Study Committee.

Meetings with community groups and town councils and boards of selectmen continue, including public hearings for upcoming warrant items and resolutions.

Fall 2018: The Friends of the York River engages to advocate and build support in the four towns for acceptance of the Stewardship Plan and for federal legislation that would designate the river as Wild and Scenic.

November and December 2018: All four towns (in York and Eliot by citizen votes on warrant items on the November 6 ballot; in Kittery and South Berwick by Town Council votes on November 26 and December 11, respectively) approved the Stewardship Plan and endorsed pursuing a bill in the US Congress to designate the York River as a Partnership Wild and Scenic River.

February 14, 2019: York River designation bill HR 1248 introduced by Congresswoman Pingree and Congressman Jared Golden.

Spring 2019: Senator King requested that the Congressional Research Service analyze the impact designation of the York River will have on local land decisions use and economies. Research Service completes its report on August 28, 2019, that was favorable to designation (no adverse impacts).

May 22, 2019: A hearing on HR 1248 was held by the House Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands, with testimony in support from Congresswoman Pingree, Study Committee chair Chuck Ott, and NPS acting director Dan Smith. Eighteen months later in November 2020, the bill was favorably reported to the House of Representatives by the House Natural Resources Committee.

January 10, 2020: NPS releases its *York River Wild and Scenic River Study Report* that confirms the suitability and eligibility for river designation. The report was posted on the National Park Service's Planning, Environment, and Public Comment (PEPC) website for review and comment through April 10, 2020. NPS finalizes a summary report of public comments in June 2020.

February 2020: The Maine House and Senate unanimously approved a Joint Resolution supporting designation of the York River into the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. York River Study Committee members are invited guests at the State House for the reading of the resolution.

June 2020: 5-year NPS Cooperative Agreement with Wells Reserve ends. \$204,000 NPS funds awarded for a variety of costs to conduct the Study and develop the Stewardship Plan. The Study Committee raised additional funds from private (individuals and foundations) and state sources, bringing the total spent on the 5-year effort to \$243,379.

July 2020: Judy Spiller elected as Chair of Study Committee.

Summer 2020: Plans to address issues related to road/bridge construction and maintenance are worked out between Maine DOT, Maine Turnpike Authority and NPS, allowing a legislative effort in the US Senate to proceed.

December 1, 2020: Senator King and Senator Susan Collins introduced Senate Bill S.4938 to designate York River into the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System.

February 2021: Congresswoman Pingree introduced an amendment to the Wilderness Protection Act (HR 803) that included York River designation. HR 803 passed in the House on February 26, 2021.

March 1, 2021: Stand-alone bills to designate the York River into the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System were reintroduced in the US House (HR 1469) and US Senate (S.491), co-sponsored by the full Maine Congressional delegation.

June 23, 2021: The Senate Subcommittee on National Parks convened a hearing on S.491. Bill co-sponsor and Subcommittee Chairman Senator King introduced the bill at the hearing, and Jennifer Hunter testified.

July 2021: Department of Interior transmits the January 2020 NPS York River Study Report to Congress.

November 2021: The House Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands held a hearing on HR 1469, with Congresswoman Pingree and Jennifer Hunter providing testimony. On the Senate side, the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources passed S.491, with one committee member voting against it. The Senate Committee's favorable report is filed and the bill sent to the full Senate in December.

December 2021: Governor Mills sends letter of support for York River designation to leadership of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee.

February 2022: Congressional Budget Office completes its Cost Estimate Report for S.491, a procedural step in the process.

End of December 2022: The US House and US Senate pass HR 2617: Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2023 (the "Omnibus Bill") and President Biden signs into law this legislation that designates the York River into the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System (Public Law No. 117-328).

Jenn Hunter and Paul Dest: January 2023