

Eightmile River Wild and Scenic Coordinating Committee Report March 2007

On February 8, 2007, Rep. Joe Courtney held a press conference to announce the introduction of his first bill as a recently elected Federal Congressman – the designation of the Eightmile as a federally recognized Wild and Scenic River. He chose a very appropriate site: the Red Mill property on the banks of the Eightmile River in Lyme. The setting was gorgeous, with crisp cool weather, a bright sunlit sky, and the sounds of icy, clear water tumbling through the riverbed. It was the perfect place to pronounce his commitment to protect and preserve the Eightmile River Watershed and we thank Sue Hessel and Karen Dahle for their generous offer to host the event. .

H.R. Bill #986 is intended to designate segments of the Eightmile River as part of the federal Wild & Scenic Rivers system and in addition to Congressman Courtney, Senator Dodd and Representative Shays have pledged their support. The federal designation process is lengthy and by no means automatic. Once designation is attained (hopefully within this current fiscal year), the watershed area will be eligible for federal funding and grant opportunities for future preservation efforts.

Congressman Courtney's efforts to introduce the Wild & Scenic legislation follow a busy year for the Eightmile River Wild & Scenic project. In the first weeks of October '06, the National Park Service released the Draft Study Report and Environmental Assessment. Public comment was received (all positive) and the major work of the Study Committee came to a successful close. That Eightmile Wild and Scenic Study Committee has now evolved into the Eightmile W & S Coordinating Committee, taken on new members from each town (and kept some of the seasoned veterans), and is now working on a successful outcome of the legislative effort in Washington DC as well as looking ahead to implement the Watershed Management Plan.

East Haddam has passed a riparian corridor protection ordinance and Salem and Lyme are close behind. This quick action on one of the Committee's highest priorities is seen as a major success.

The Committee recently heard a report from Dr. Piotr Parasiewicz, a UMASS professor, presenting his findings from a large study of Eightmile River hydrology and fish habitat availability (in laymen's terms "what the fish think of what we are doing to their river"). He described the existing fish population, their instream habitats, the impact of water flow rates, water temperatures, and similar criteria necessary to assess the viability of a given stream. One interesting trivia point: the committee learned that a single fresh water mussel (which are very abundant in the river) filters 5 gallons of water daily. From his research, Dr. Parasiewicz was able to offer many suggestions about how to protect and improve the current ecological health of the river system.

Official bound copies of the Watershed Management Plan and Study Report were also released during 2006 and are available from our office at the UCONN Extension Center in Haddam or from our website: www.eightmileriver.org. The committee is currently on the verge of releasing a newly designed website that will offer many great resources to the watershed. Please pay us a virtual visit this summer and check out the fruits of our important work.

Submitted by the Eightmile River Wild & Scenic Coordinating Committee