

York River Wild and Scenic Study

Brief History and Background

Brief History of York River Wild and Scenic Study

Since 2009, the locally-based group Friends of the York River -- which includes residents, town leaders, and others interested in river conservation -- has been leading an exploratory effort to determine whether a National Wild and Scenic Partnership Riverⁱ designation might be an appropriate way to recognize, manage, and protect the York River and its associated resources.

With support from the York and Eliot Boards of Selectmen and Kittery Town Council, Representative Chellie Pingree (ME-1) asked the Northeast Region of the National Park Service to undertake a reconnaissance survey to evaluate the York River as a candidate for a potential Wild and Scenic River designation and as a step toward a full Wild and Scenic River Study. The National Park Service completed a reconnaissance survey in 2013 and concluded that the York River would be a good candidate for a Wild and Scenic Study.ⁱⁱ

In 2014, subsequent to a bill submitted by Senator Angus King (I-2), the US Congress approved an amendment of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act “to designate segments of the York River and associated tributaries for study for potential inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System.”ⁱⁱⁱ At this point in time, only the study of the York River is being conducted.

Purpose of the Study

The congressionally authorized Wild and Scenic Study is intended to determine whether the York River is eligible and suitable for designation as a Partnership National Wild and Scenic River, and to determine if such a designation is appropriate for the communities of Eliot, Kittery, and York.

The Study provides an opportunity for the towns to work together across their boundaries on a watershed scale to gather important information and identify issues and goals for this shared resource. The end result will be the publication of a York River Management and Stewardship Plan.

Purpose of the Study Committee

The Study Committee will be composed of local appointees and partner organizations to oversee the study of the York River, to share information among the communities and partners, and to ultimately publish and publicize the Management and Stewardship Plan. With input from the residents of the three communities, the Study Committee, together with the National Park Service, will ultimately determine whether or not a designation of the York River as a Partnership Wild and Scenic River should be pursued. Both the study development process and the plan will be of great value, whether designation is or is not pursued.

Study Committee Membership

Members will be appointed by the Board of Selectmen/Town Council in each of the three towns. Ideally, each member of the Study Committee will be a recognized community leader and will share an excitement about the knowledge to be gained from the studies of the York River and in identifying

issues and goals for the York River and its resources. Each Board of Selectmen and Town Council will be asked to nominate one member of the Study Committee to serve as liaison with its Board/Council. The liaison members will be asked to have regular, periodic meetings with its Board/Council to answer questions and keep each community apprised of the progress of the study. Non-voting members will include partner organizations such as the National Park Service, a Maine State Agency or Agencies, and possibly other interested entities (e.g., Chamber of Commerce).

Recommended Study Committee Size

Between 11 and 15 voting members will be appointed by the Boards of Selectmen/Town Council. With an 11-member committee, one possible scenario could be 7 members from York and 2 from Kittery and 2 from Eliot. Perhaps more important than individual town residency, and the exact representation from each town, is the level of engagement, interest, and skills of the persons serving on the Committee.

Option for Committee's Decision-Making Process

Decisions will be made by "substantial consensus" with provisions for a majority 2/3rds vote if needed.

Time Commitment

Members will be appointed for three years. Members likely should expect to prepare for and attend monthly meetings and to do some outside work toward completion of the management plan, for example, outreach to the community. Subcommittees may form around key issues and interests, may be very active and important, and will choose their own meeting times and methods of work. Staff support will be provided to the overall committee and subcommittees, but much will also be expected from the members themselves if the full potential of the studies is to be realized. We must realize, however, that some people may be unable to serve the full three years and should be aware that vacancies will occur throughout the Study period. If a vacancy occurs, the Study Committee will assess the skills lost with the member's resignation from the Committee and make a recommendation(s) to the three Boards of Selectmen/Town Council, who will appoint a replacement member.

Date to have Study Committee in place

August 2015

ⁱ The Wild & Scenic Rivers Act was enacted by Congress in 1968 as a means to protect and recognize natural rivers and their immediate environments that possess outstanding remarkable scenic, recreational, geological, fish and wildlife, historic, cultural or other similar values that should be preserved in free flowing conditions.

ⁱⁱ Wild and Scenic River Reconnaissance Survey of the York River. National Park Service Northeast Region. December 2013.

ⁱⁱⁱ H.R.2197 in the 113th Congress, 2D Session, IIB forward.