

News
From _____

CONGRESSMAN

Nick Rahall

WEST VIRGINIA-4th DISTRICT

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CONTACT: Jerry Burkot
202-225-3452

RAHALL ANNOUNCES MAJOR WEST VIRGINIA RIVER CONSERVATION PROPOSAL

Elkins, W.Va. -- U.S. Rep. Nick Rahall (D-WV) today announced he will begin work on an omnibus West Virginia river conservation bill which would create the state's first national wild and scenic river and a new unit of the national park system.

Rahall said he envisions the legislation will have three elements: national wild and scenic river designation for a portion of the Bluestone River, national recreation area designation for a portion of the Gauley River gorge and certain boundary changes at the New River Gorge National River. The Fourth District congressman made the announcement at the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy's "Annual Highlands Spring Review Weekend" held near Elkins, where he was the keynote speaker.

"In our state, there is much emphasis placed on the development of our natural resources -- coal, oil, natural gas, and timber," Rahall said, "and I am a promoter of these industries."

"We are also a state blessed with natural resources containing outstanding cultural, wildlife, scenic and recreational value," Rahall added. "We must recognize both the development potential and the conservation need of our rich natural resource heritage in West Virginia and I believe they can coexist with proper management. Both contribute to our economy and are essential to sound public policy. They are also important to the stature of our great state and are part of the legacy we will leave to our children."

Citing his previous work to create the New River Gorge National River in 1978, and his river conservation agenda aimed at enhancing whitewater rafting opportunities on the Gauley River, Rahall said that new federal river designations not only protect outstanding natural resources but also promote tourism in the region and bring in badly needed revenues into the local economy.

According to Rahall, he will consider national wild and scenic river designation for the segment of the Bluestone River from Eads Mill in Mercer County to the river's confluence with Bluestone Lake and national recreation area designation for the segment of the Gauley River from the Summersville Dam to the vicinity of either Peter's Creek or Swiss.

Rahall stressed that unless there is agreement among the majority of private landowners in the affected areas, legislative activity on the proposal would not be forthcoming. In this regard, Rahall said that there would be no need for federal land acquisitions along the Bluestone River although some federal land ownership would be required along the Gauley River. "Keep in mind that this proposal is still in its infancy and could be modified to a great extent prior to introduction based on the public comment I receive," Rahall added.

The congressman said that he will begin to work with the West Virginia congressional delegation, local officials, affected landowners, the white water rafting industry and other interested parties on the legislation, which he said would be titled the "West Virginia National Interest River Conservation Act." The West Virginia Highlands Conservancy has already endorsed the concept of a national recreation area designation for the Gauley River and the Citizens for Gauley River has requested some type of permanent protection for the river.

At present, West Virginia has only one national recreation area, the Spruce Knob/Seneca Rocks National Recreation Area and two units of the national park system: The New River Gorge National River and the Harpers Ferry National Historic Park.