

News
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CONGRESSMAN

Nick Rahall

WEST VIRGINIA-4th DISTRICT

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RAHALL CALLS FOR "LEGISLATIVE GUERILLA WARFARE"

TO PROTECT WEST VIRGINIA RIVERS

KNOXVILLE, TENNESSEE -- Citing a growing threat to West Virginia's rivers by an ever-expanding hydroelectric power industry and a lenient Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, U.S. Rep. Nick Rahall (D-WV) today declared war in the protection of West Virginia's rivers.

In a speech today to the Eastern Professional River Outfitters Association in Knoxville, Rep. Rahall told the outfitters, "There is a common thread interwoven in the threat faced by the whitewater rafting industry. Almost all whitewater rivers are tempting prey for hydroelectric developers. They are at your doorstep."

Rahall believes that the whitewater rafting industry is invaluable to the economic recovery of southern West Virginia. "Whitewater rafting is on the cutting edge of the budding tourism industry in West Virginia," Rahall pointed out. "The industry shows great promise of becoming a major contributor to the economic rejuvenation of the region."

Rahall has been involved in several temporary measures to protect whitewater rivers, notably last year when he included a provision into an omnibus water bill to regulate water releases on the Gauley River in the fall.

However, he envisions a more permanent solution to the problem of the threat posed by the ever-expanding hydroelectric power industry, many of whom covet a project at the Summersville Dam and the Bluestone Dam in West Virginia. There are applications pending before the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission for these projects.

"These are among the reasons I introduced my bill, the West Virginia National Interest River Conservation Act of 1987, to insure the protection and advancement of whitewater flows from the Summersville and Bluestone Dams," Rahall said. "This will enhance whitewater activities in the area. Moreover, through the establishment of a Gauley River National Recreation Area, we would provide permanent protection of the gorge and preserve its use for recreation activities."

"Without suitable protections, the future viability of the industry is on shaky grounds," Rahall added.

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