

CONGRESSMAN

News
From _____

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RAHALL BILL TO ESTABLISH NATIONAL PARK UNITS ON WEST VIRGINIA RIVERS

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Stating that West Virginia is blessed with some of the country's most outstanding rivers in terms of their natural, scenic, cultural and recreational values, U.S. Rep. Nick J. Rahall (D-WV) today introduced legislation which seeks to establish in the state, as units of the national park system, the largest network of federally protected rivers in the eastern United States.

"This will be a historic legislative initiative for West Virginia," Rahall said on the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives in introducing the measure, titled the "West Virginia National Interest River Conservation Act of 1987." The bill seeks to expand on the success of the New River Gorge National River, designated as a national park unit in 1978, by establishing additional federal river park units on several of its tributaries. Under the legislation, the 24.5 mile whitewater segment of the Gauley River below Summersville Dam would be designated as a national recreation area and the state's first national wild and scenic rivers would be established on the lower Meadow and lower Bluestone Rivers.

"Enactment of this legislation will complete a system of protected river units in southern West Virginia which will compliment the region's existing state parks as well as the New River Gorge National River," Rahall said. "We will, in fact, have created a network of natural, cultural, scenic and recreational wonders unsurpassed in their raw beauty anywhere in the East."

According to the Congressman, the bill represents an initiative in economic development through conservation. "A budding tourism industry has shown great promise as fast becoming a major contributor to the rejuvenation of southern West Virginia and rivers such as the New, Gauley and Bluestone are magnets for visitors, sportsmen and whitewater enthusiasts and should be preserved for these purposes. Additional federal river park units will enhance these activities and further promote the type of economic development associated with travel and tourism we have seen stemming from the establishment of the New River Gorge National River," Rahall said. "In West Virginia we not only recognize the development potential of natural resources such as coal, oil, natural gas and timber, but the need to conserve certain natural resources such as these rivers. With a well-balanced policy governing these resources and with sound management and planning, both development and conservation can coexist for the benefit of the people. Both contribute to our economy and are essential to sound public policy."

Rahall noted that whitewater recreation activities on the Gauley River last fall pumped \$16 million in economic benefits into the region and his legislation would promote the growth of this vital new industry. Aside from establishing the Gauley River National Recreation Area, the bill would also designate 4.5 miles of its Meadow River tributary as a national wild river and designate a 13 mile segment of the lower Bluestone River as a national scenic river. "The lower Bluestone River is perhaps the best kept recreational river secret in the East," Rahall stated. "With National Park Service management, this river's recreational and tourism potential is sure to be enhanced providing great benefits to the local economy."

Joining Rahall in introducing the bill are Representatives Harley Staggers, Jr., Bob Wise and Alan Mollohan of West Virginia as well as Rep. Morris Udall, Chairman of the House Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs which will have jurisdiction over the bill. Rahall is a ranking member of the committee.