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Johnson Environmental Bill Passes U.S. House

Bill Designates National Heritage Area in Northwest Corner

Reps. Larson and Olver Strongly Support Measure

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The U.S. House of Representatives today approved Congresswoman Nancy Johnson’s bill designating the Upper Housatonic Valley National Heritage Area in Connecticut’s Northwest Corner.

“House passage is good news for the Northwest Corner and our environment,” Johnson said. “Through this locally-led initiative, the region will be able to make real progress in protecting the Upper Housatonic River Valley and its rich history and heritage. The valley is a real treasure for Connecticut and it deserves federal protection.”

“This legislation will preserve a region rich with historical landmarks, while also boosting tourism and stimulating sustainable economic development,” said U.S. Rep. John Olver, the lead Democratic sponsor. “Home to many nationally known writers like Melville and Wharton and the country’s first mill supplying U.S. currency paper, the Upper Housatonic River Valley Heritage Area greatly deserves the recognition and resources this legislation brings.”

“As the National Parks Service rightly recognized in its study of the region, the Upper Housatonic Valley has a rich history and distinctive landscape that deserve to be protected,” said U.S. Rep John Larson (D-CT), a key supporter of the bill. “Federal designation will provide critical funding and technical assistance enabling the guardians of the Upper Housatonic Valley Heritage Area to preserve its natural and historic resources for the benefit of this and future generations.”

Johnson and Olver introduced H.R. 938, *The Upper Housatonic Valley National Heritage Area Act of 2005*, in February. It will create a National Heritage Area covering nine towns in Northwestern Connecticut and 20 others in Southwestern Massachusetts. It would make \$1 million in yearly federal grants available to the region through the National Park Service to preserve its unique heritage, protect its environment, and foster its local economy.

The 29 Connecticut and Massachusetts towns included in the proposed National Heritage Area share a unique historical, natural, and cultural experience. Home to many of the nation’s earliest iron industries, the first blast furnace was built in 1762 by Ethan Allen and supplied iron for the cannons that helped the Americans win the Revolutionary War. Its five National Historic Landmarks include homes of American writers Edith Wharton, Herman

Melville and W.E.B. DuBois. In addition, the area includes four National Natural Landmarks.

The legislation awaits Senate action on the companion bill, S. 429, introduced by U.S. Sens. Joe Lieberman (D-CT) and Chris Dodd (D-CT). On March 15, the Senate Committee on Energy and National Resources Subcommittee on National Parks held a hearing on S. 249.

“With today’s House passage and last month’s Senate hearing, I’m optimistic that we’ll receive the designation,” said Ron Jones, Chairman of Upper Housatonic Valley National Heritage Area, Inc. “In the meantime, we’re moving forward and continuing our heritage programs to be ready to take on the responsibility of federal designation. I appreciate Congresswoman Johnson’s and Congressman Olver’s continuing leadership and support for the Upper Housatonic Valley National Heritage Area.”

Jones said area has already organized heritage activities including an Iron Heritage Trail brochure, a graduate course for local teachers on the area, and a summer art festival.

The nine Connecticut towns proposed for the Heritage Area are Salisbury, North Canaan, Canaan, Norfolk, Cornwall, Sharon, Kent, and Warren in the Fifth Congressional District, and Colebrook in the First Congressional District.

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