

Donald V. Church
Owner, Seaboats Inc.
October 30, 2007 Act to Designate the Taunton Wild and Scenic River
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands of the House Natural
Resources Committee

I have reviewed the most recent studies of the “Taunton Wild and Scenic River Study” as compiled by the Park Service. In my opinion, their report is totally out of context with the lower part of the river as I know it.

The upper reaches of this river are as described “wild and scenic”, however, the lower segment 4 could not under any stretch of the imagination be classified this way. The lower segment has power plants, old oil refineries, vessel repair docks, shipyards, bridges that should be removed, Battleship Cove Museum, yacht clubs, night spots and a designated port area.

Fall River is the second deepest harbor in Massachusetts, as such it should have been on a regular dredge maintenance schedule. Dredging has not even been discussed since the 1950’s.

A few years ago, a rumor from the Newport, RI pilot office indicated that the Brightman Street Bridge would be removed. If this were to happen, I believe that the river from there north, would be open to economic development. The rumor, however, was unfounded. As a result of not dredging and the hardship of the restrictions of the bridge, Shell Oil was closed and the only gasoline terminal left in South Eastern Massachusetts is in Braintree, a loss for the area east of Fall River and South of Boston. Instead of economic development, it created an economic hardship.

Our company began in 1977 in Rhode Island as a very small organization. However, in Rhode Island we did not own our facility but were on leased land. Our company became concerned about the future as the mayor of Providence was repeatedly suggesting a complete revitalization of the harbor with the usual hotels, restaurants, aquariums, etc. with no room for commercial marine ventures.

With an uncertain future, we started looking for a more business-friendly city and were able to purchase our land and dock in Fall River, MA. The company relocated in 1991 and from a small start-up company, we have grown steadily and now have contributed over 24 million dollars to the economy each year, with a payroll over 5 million.

Seaboats is continuing to grow. We are obligated to an expenditure of another \$25,000,000 this year with a payroll of over \$5,000,000 and the possibility of an additional \$30,000,000 in equipment investment.

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As with any business, if you do not continue to grow, eventually you fade away. If the lower Taunton River is designated as a “wild and scenic river”, it will give the NPS the authority to review certain construction activities that require a federal permit or other federal assistance. Specifically, Section 7(a) of the WSR act stipulates that “No department or agency of the US shall assist by loan, grant, license, or otherwise in the construction of any water resource project that would have a direct and adverse effect on the values of which such river was established or determined by the Secretary charged with its administration”.

What this would mean in the case of the entire Taunton River is that any “water resources project” that requires a federal permit (such as a US Army Corps dredging permit), and that involves construction activity that would affect the flow of the river, could be subject to review by, and require approval from, the NPS. The NPS has very broad discretion to consider whether a project will have an impact on the values for which the river has been designated as a Wild and Scenic River – for example, impacts on water quality or fisheries resources. If it is determined by the NPS that the project will have a “direct and adverse effect,” the federal permit or other assistance to the project cannot be issued.

In conclusion, I cannot see any benefit to the economy by designating the lower portion of the Taunton River “Wild and Scenic” nor can I see any benefit to the environment. The only possible effect would be to stop economic development.