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MID-ATLANTIC REGIONAL OFFICE
 143 SOUTH THIRD STREET
 PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA 19106

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APPROPRIATE RIVER RECREATION USE STUDY
MAR-19
New River Gorge National River
A Narrative History of Its Designation
as Part of the National Park System

Steven Simpson
and
Leo McAvoy

Division of Recreation, Park and Leisure Studies
University of Minnesota Minneapolis,
MN 55455

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Foreward

In 1982, National Park Service Chief Historian Edwin C. Bearss strongly encouraged all units of the National Park System to update their park histories. (Mackintosh, 1982, p. ix) This report is, in part, an attempt to meet that challenge.

This report is not a complete administrative history, for it describes only events leading up to and including designation of the New River Gorge as a National River. It also is not a legislative history. A legislative history is the collection of bills, hearings, and reports that comprise the documentation leading up to the passage of an act. Appendix A lists the major components of a legislative history for the New River Gorge National River.

This report is a summary in narrative form. It summarizes the legislative history, personal interviews, newspaper clippings, and the assorted memoranda that explained the events that led to the passage of Title XI of the National Park and Recreation Act of 1978. The New River Gorge National River is the result of concerted efforts by local West Virginia citizens. It is hoped that the following pages recognize that cooperative effort.

In the four years that followed (1959-1962), documents lauding the economic benefits of recreational development for the area were prepared by a variety of agencies and organizations. An economic development program for Fayette County (the 16 miles of river that is actually the "Gorge" is in Fayette County) stated that the greatest recreational opportunity in southern West Virginia was development of the New River Gorge as a first class national park. (The Provisional Overall Economic Development, 1961, pp. 18-19.)

A U.S. Department of Commerce report entitled Tourism as a Job Creator stated, "The Gorge has been a point around which the four counties (Fayette, Raleigh, Summers, Mercer) could unite in starting a multi-county development program, and we see the Gorge as a symbol that could be used with great effectiveness in promoting tourism in the four counties." (1962, pp. 9-12, 82)

If these documents were written to stimulate action, they failed. In late 1962, the Department of the Interior and the Department of Commerce agreed that \$20,000 from the Area Redevelopment Administration should be made available to the National Park Service in order to determine the feasibility of a National Parkway along the New River Gorge. Although the bulk of the resulting report stressed protecting the Gorge for future generations, it concluded that a parkway should not be built. The report's primary recommendation read;

Due principally to the rough topography and the presence of highways, railroads, and coal mines, the New River Gorge does not offer an opportunity to develop a parkway of national caliber. Construction of a parkway road would produce an added intrusion on a scene that the parkway concept is intended to preserve and display. It is recommended, therefore, that the New River Gorge parkway not be developed. (United States Department of the Interior, 1963, p.1)

The only designation considered in the report was a parkway. Based on the recommendation not to develop such a facility, efforts to bring the National Park Service to the New River Gorge were temporarily halted.

INTRODUCTION

In November, 1978, President Jimmy Carter signed into law PL 95-625, The National Parks & Recreation Act of 1978. Over 100 units of the National Park Service were affected by the legislation. Some, like the Edgar Allen Poe National Historic Site and the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area, became newly designated entities. Others, like the Cape Cod National Seashore and Wind Cave National Park, had only minor boundary changes. Tacked on near the end of the act was legislation designating the New River Gorge of West Virginia as a National River.

The Gorge's title, a "National River," is unusual. Its placement, toward the end of the Act and as one of only three units listed under its own chapter heading (Chapter XI), is unique. These oddities in the legislation are hints to the unusual events leading up to the designation of the New River Gorge National River.

EARLY INTEREST

Suggestions to make the New River Gorge part of the National Park System began nearly twenty years before the actual designation. From the very start, the impetus was of local origin, southern West Virginians and occasionally state government officials actively inviting the National Park Service into the Gorge area.

At a hearing before the U.S. Senate Special Committee on Unemployment in 1959, Duvall Schultz, a resident of Oak Hill, West Virginia, proposed that the State of West Virginia, with federal aid, acquire the lands about the New River Gorge in order to present the holdings to the federal government for a national park. It was felt that a national park would create a tourism industry to aid a local economy which had been solely dependent upon coal mining. (Hearings before the Special Committee, 1960, pp. 2552-2553).

RENEWED INTEREST - A CALL FOR A NATIONAL PARK

Plans for two major government construction projects, neither having anything to do with the other and both only indirectly affecting the New River Gorge, sparked new efforts to interest the National Park Service in the Gorge. The first project was Appalachian Corridor "L", a section of superhighway that would connect Interstates 77 and 79 running the length of West Virginia. A key element of this effort was the proposed construction directly over the Gorge of the world's longest steel span bridge. The second project was the proposed Blue Ridge Project, a hydroelectric and pump storage facility to be built over a hundred miles upstream of the Gorge on the Virginia - North Carolina border.

The plan for Appalachian Corridor "L" not only provided a major access to the Gorge, but created the spectacular bridge which in itself would become an attraction. In 1972, a joint resolution of the West Virginia House and Senate called for the West Virginia Department of Natural Resources to investigate the recreational potential of the New River Gorge. This was followed a year later by a concurrent resolution urging federal and state participation in developing the area into a national park. (WV Sen. Conc. Res. No. 3, 1973)

The most active proponents for the development of a tourist industry came from the local level, and in particular, from the Fayette Plateau Chamber of Commerce of Oak Hill, West Virginia. J.B. Hess, Executive Director of the Chamber, ensured that the national park idea remained a local topic of discussion by pushing for weekly coverage in the Fayette Tribune, the newspaper of Fayette County. He also maintained correspondence with Senator Jennings Randolph, assuring the Senator that national park status was the desire of the citizenry living in the New River Gorge area.

Randolph was enthused about a national park for his home state and served

as liaison between the government of West Virginia and the appropriate federal entities in Washington. In April, 1973, he presented the state resolutions on the floor of the U.S. Senate. He requested that the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation assist the West Virginia Department of Natural Resources to develop a study of the New River Gorge. (119 Cong. Rec., 1973, p. 2195) Later, when it became apparent that the state would not provide funds to conduct the planned study, he asked Secretary of the Interior Rogers Morton to allow the Department of Interior to carry out the study itself. On September 9, 1974, Senator Randolph introduced S.3975, a bill to designate the New River Gorge a national park. (1974)

Also, in 1974, Hess brought together the business community of Fayette County and formed the New River Gorge National Park Committee. Hess became the committee's secretary. James E. Rust, a local banker, and J. Duvall Schultz, who had advocated national park status at the 1959 Special Committee on Unemployment, were named co-chairmen. The Committee called for a 34,000 acre park in Fayette and Raleigh counties. By December the committee, through the Fayette Plateau Chamber of Commerce, compiled a document entitled A Comprehensive Plan for Development of New River Gorge National Park. The bulk of the document centered on eleven points that the Committee felt would both protect the Gorge and create a Park Service unit of sufficient prestige to encourage a major tourism industry. The eleven points were as follows:

- preserve and augment the natural beauty of the Gorge.
- establish a two lane scenic highway along the north run of the Gorge.
- develop adequate camping, picnic, and rest areas.
- construct hiking and bridle trails along the rim and leading into the Gorge.

- establish an arboretum of native plants, emphasizing large masses of flowering rhododendron and azalea.
- construct a 2,000 seat natural outdoor amphitheater.
- encourage Whitewater activities.
- put a scenic railroad on the abandoned track between Thurmond and Minden.
- develop an exhibition coal mine along the Sewell coal seam.
- construct an operating grist mill.
- restore the town of Thurmond as an example of the bustling early days of coal mining along the New River. (1974)

Speaking for the Committee, Duvall Schultz said, "...it has been a dream of mine for years, to leave something for posterity. I probably won't live to realize it in my lifetime. It is no compromise for me. It's the National Park or nothing." (National Park Favored ..., 1975, p. 1)

WILD AND SCENIC RIVER DESIGNATION

At the same time as the National Park Committee was putting into motion its drive for a national park, one of the biggest environmental controversies of the decade was occurring upstream at the site of the Blue Ridge project. In 1974 the Appalachian Power Company, a subsidiary of the American Electric Power Company, was granted a license from the Federal Power Commission to build a two-dam hydroelectric and pumped-storage facility. The plan of a two-dam system allowed power to be generated by releasing water from the upper reservoir to a powerhouse. The lower dam held this water in a second reservoir and during off-peak hours, energy that otherwise would be wasted could be used to pump the water back above the first dam. Virginia was to be the major benefactor of the power produced. North Carolina was to have 42,000 acres of its New River Valley flooded. Those in favor of the project included the Federal Power Commission,

the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the AFL-CIO, which realized the many jobs the project would create. Opponents ranged from most environmental groups of the three-state area (NC, VA, & WV) to conservative Senator Jesse Helms.

(Schoenbaum, 1979)

In West Virginia, sentiment was divided. J. B. Hess favored the Blue Ridge project because he felt it would augment river flow below the Bluestone Dam and enhance both fishing and recreation. (Hess Urges ..., 1974, p. 1) Bluestone Dam is directly above the New River Gorge and determines water flow through the Gorge. Ironically, West Virginia Attorney General Chauncy H. Browning, Jr. opposed the project for exactly the same reason, claiming releases of large volumes of cold water would have an adverse impact on West Virginia's warm-water fishery. (Schoenbaum, 1979, p. 54) West Virginia Governor Arch Moore sided with Hess and felt that the project upstream would improve recreation potential in the Gorge area. (State in Puzzle ..., 1975)

Most importantly in regards to the New River Gorge, the Blue Ridge project was opposed by West Virginia Representative Ken Hechler and a West Virginia group called the Coalition to Save the New River. Hechler called for wild and scenic designation for the New River along the Virginia - North Carolina border and pushed for the same designation for the Gorge in his own state. (Schoenbaum, 1979, pp. 75, 77-78)

NATIONAL PARK VS. WILD AND SCENIC RIVER

1975 opened with four public meetings held at Hinton, Charleston, Fayetteville, and Beckley, West Virginia. Senator Robert C. Byrd had included \$150,000 in the Department of Interior Appropriations Bill for 1975 to assess the recreation potential of the New River from Bluestone Dam to Gauley Bridge. The Bureau of Outdoor Recreation (BOR) was to do the assessment, and they

sponsored the local meetings to get public input and to present to the local citizens the BOR's preliminary recommendations. (U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1975)

The meetings were also the first official opportunity for the national park proponents and the wild and scenic river proponents to simultaneously voice their opinions. The result of the meetings was a boost for wild and scenic river status. Bureau of Outdoor Recreation Assistant Regional Director Jack Hauptman said that the level of development within the Gorge kept it from meeting the criteria for national park status. (New River Gorge ..., 1975, p. 1, 10) Written statements by both Senator Jennings Randolph and Senator Robert Byrd voiced support for the Gorge's inclusion in the National Park System, but were not specific as to the exact designation. (Randolph, 1975, Byrd, 1975) A lengthier written statement by Representative Ken Hechler regretted that the area could not be a national park, but voiced strong support for wild and scenic designation. (Hechler, 1975) The Three River Chapter of the Izaak Walton League supported wild and scenic river designation because it set standards for water flow, while national park designation did not. (Recreation Bureau Plan ..., 1975)

At the meetings, the general public's main concern was protection of the Gorge from the effects of the Blue Ridge Project. Their support leaned toward wild and scenic designation. Although the BOR pointed out that designation would not halt the Blue Ridge Project, most people felt that wild and scenic designation offered the best chance for preserving the existing water quality and flow. (BOR, 1975) In the end, only a written statement from Rod Clay, Deputy Director of the West Virginia Department of Natural Resources and verbal comments from representatives of the New River Gorge National Park Committee

disagreed with the BOR preliminary recommendation of wild and scenic river designation. (Clay, 1975)

If the meetings were a setback to those wanting a national park, the events of the first half of 1975 showed that the idea of a national park was not dead. Members of the New River Gorge National Park Committee made frequent public statements for their cause.

Duvall Schultz questioned the validity of the BOR meetings because discussion of Blue Ridge skirted the real issue of national park versus wild and scenic river status. (National Park Favored ..., 1975) J. B. Hess made pleas for national park status, claiming wild and scenic rivers appeal to just a select group, whereas national parks appeal to everyone, far and near. (Hess Believes ..., 1975, p. 1)

The Committee did get a commitment from Senator Byrd promising support for national park designation so long as he was assured it was what the people of Fayette County wanted. (New River Gorge ..., 1975, pp. 1,10) This was significant, for on February 4, 1975 Byrd was named chairman of the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior and Related Agencies, putting him in a position of power concerning funding for National Park Service functions. (National Park Given ..., 1975)

THE 1975 NEW RIVER GORGE HEARINGS

On May 1, 1975, the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation officially completed their final report. As expected, the BOR recommended that the area be protected by a designation of Wild and Scenic River. They found no feature or aggregation of features unique enough to qualify the area as a national park. As to a national recreation area, the report claimed that the rugged terrain prevented the high recreational carrying capacity associated with such a designation.

A summary of the BOR recommendations follows:

IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT THE NEW RIVER GORGE BE DESIGNATED A NATIONAL WILD AND SCENIC RIVER MANAGED JOINTLY BY THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE AND THE STATE OF WEST VIRGINIA.

The National Park Service will manage the river way. The State of West Virginia will be responsible for existing and proposed State parks adjacent to the Gorge. Emphasis should be placed on the use of local zoning authority to maintain the area's natural setting so that large scale land acquisition and relocation of residents will not be needed. Significant alteration of current land use patterns is also unnecessary.

Strip mining within the Gorge should not be permitted and a moratorium should be placed on deep mining until its impacts can be identified and controls established to minimize or prevent conflicts with the scenic value and recreational use.

This recommendation would protect one of West Virginia's and the Nation's valuable scenic rivers and enhance the State and local economies through the protection of a major tourist attraction. (U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1975)

Two weeks after the report, Senator Byrd chaired hearings in Washington, DC on the BOR recommendations. The New River Gorge National Park Committee, in the persons of Duvall Schultz, James Rust, J. B. Hess, and Fayette Tribune editor Robert K. Holliday again presented their case for a national park. Each criticized the local January BOR hearings for skirting the park issue by focusing only on Blue Ridge. Their success in conveying this point caused Byrd to reply, "I would have to say that from what I have heard, those meetings weren't worth the expenditure of time, money and effort to have been conducted." (Dept. of the Interior Related Agencies, 1975, p. 2374)

The members of the Committee also expressed disbelief that the New River Gorge, the "Grand Canyon of the East," the home of the oldest river in North America, lacked the unique characteristics for national park status. They wanted the Subcommittee on Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations to realize that, contrary to the mood of the local January hearings, a national park was the wishes of the citizens of the three-county Gorge area.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the hearings were the many hints

that the Gorge might end up being designated neither national park nor wild and scenic river.

James Rust said that he would "... like to see a combination of all three (national park, national recreation area, wild and scenic river) in order to provide exactly what we are trying to accomplish, and what we are trying to accomplish is the preservation of the area and still allow people to utilize it." (1975, p. 2343)

T. Destry Jarvis, Administrative Assistant of the National Parks and Conservation Association suggested at the hearings that the argument not be limited to national park and wild and scenic river designation. According to Jarvis, the designation of national recreation area had been overlooked. He claimed that the only reason the BOR report rejected this designation was that the NRA proposal was limited to too small of an area. Had the National recreation area proposal been the same size as the national park proposal (83,000 acres), it would have included lands back on the plateau. This additional property could offer the high intensity recreation the BOR said was not possible. Both protection and diverse recreation could be accommodated. (1975, p. 2360)

Nathaniel P. Reed, Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Fish and Wildlife and Parks responded by saying that a national recreation area could be supported by the National Park Service, but suggested they "look at the models of the Ozark National Scenic Riverway, the Buffalo National River, for a national river approach. Those are two approaches I would recommend." (1975, p. 2375)

Jon Dragan, President and founder of Wild Water Inc., the first of the Gorge's commercial raft companies, accepted a proposed wild and scenic river

designation, but claimed it fell short of adequately protecting the New River. Dragan, a long time proponent for protection, was a resident of Thurmond and the only person directly involved in the hearings who actually lived in the Gorge itself. As a river runner, he had introduced officials in Washington to the Gorge by guiding them on Whitewater raft trips. Dragan claimed that wild and scenic river designation failed to adequately address the problem of waterflow. The designation also depended on local land use zoning, which Dragan said was not the real answer for providing permanent protection. He said, "I think there has to be sort of a--for lack of a better term...--a combination of something between a national park and wild and scenic river." (1975, pp. 2358-2359)

Dragan's hesitancy to rely on land use zoning was borne out by an event that occurred back in West Virginia the same week as the Washington hearings. Raleigh County Commissioners unanimously voted to not effect zoning ordinances along the New River. Summers County had already done the same thing, leaving Fayette County the only county of the Gorge area willing to use zoning as a means of protecting the natural integrity of the Gorge. Eric Finstick, a member of the original BOR study team, was quoted as saying that "Until zoning is in effect, the area cannot become wild and scenic under our recommendations." (Commission Vote ..., 1975)

The range of opinions during the hearings meant that the BOR recommendations were not necessarily the last word on the proposed designation. Advocates for national park status followed the hearings with a new push for their cause. West Virginia Governor Arch Moore compared national park status to a cathedral, national recreation area to a nice church, and wild and scenic status to a revival tent. (Chambers Says ..., 1975, p. 1) The New River Gorge National Park Committee compiled a summary of their key points and put together

a polished publication entitled The Famous New River Gorge National Park.

Within it, the Committee stressed the need for preservation, but included the recreation and historical development needed to make the Gorge an attraction of national appeal. (1975)

Those advocating wild and scenic river designation generally had no qualms with the development encouraged by the Committee, but saw countering the BOR recommendations as jeopardizing any kind of designation for the near future. As Jim Watkins of the Coalition to Save the New River said, "... we can protect the Gorge with wild and scenic designation while we're trying to get the national park." (Chamber Says ... 1975, p. 1)

BLUE RIDGE IS DEFEATED

In late 1975, disjointed efforts concerning the Gorge were being made, but little progress was realized. On October 28 and October 30, bills were introduced into the House of Representatives (H.R. 10448) and the Senate (S.2577) authorizing the Secretary of the Interior to designate the New River Gorge as part of the Wild and Scenic Rivers System. (1975) Senator Randolph continued his support for a national park designation. The Department of Commerce asked that no action be taken until a mineral survey of the area be completed and evaluated. The final environmental statement prepared by the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation was completed and found no adverse effects to authorizing a New River Gorge National Wild and Scenic River. (Northeast Regional Office, 1976)

By September, 1976, no action had been taken on the New River Gorge. However, on September 11 of that year, President Gerald Ford signed into law a bill making a stretch of the New River in North Carolina a part of the Wild and Scenic River System. For environmentalists in the eastern United States, this

was major legislation, for it killed any chance of the Blue Ridge Power Project ever being built. For the environmentalist community in southern West Virginia, it was a victory for the Gorge, and it inspired them to push forward for the Gorge's national designation. Jim Watkins and Jerry Kirk of the Coalition to Save the New River attended President Ford's signing of the North Carolina New River legislation. While standing in the Rose Garden of the White House, they decided to keep going for wild and scenic river designation of the Gorge.

(Interview with Jim Watkins, 1985) Congressman Ken Hechler also wasted no time, and only four days after Ford's signing, Hechler reintroduced a bill (H.R. 15569, 1976) to designate the New River Gorge as a component of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System.

Sides were drawn. At the end of 1976, several possible designations were being discussed, but at the local level it was still wild and scenic rivers versus national park. In general terms, the proponents of the two different designations were as follows:

WILD AND SCENIC

-Coalition to Save the New River

-Izaak Walton League

(3 River Chapter)

-Jon Dragan (raft outfitter)

--with support of--

Rep. Ken Hechler

Bureau of Outdoor Recreation

NATIONAL PARK

-New River Gorge

National Park Committee

-Fayette Plateau

Chamber of Commerce

--with support of--

Senator Jennings Randolph

W. Virginia Dept. of Nat. Resources

NATIONAL RIVER

The concern that National Park Service protection of the Gorge would tie up coal reserves led to a 1-year mineral appraisal by the Bureau of Mines and the

Geological Survey. Again, Senator Byrd's position as chairman of the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior and Related Agencies was a factor, for it was the Department of the Interior Appropriations Act of FY 1976 that funded the mineral appraisal.

The report entitled Coal Reserves Study: New River Gorge, West Virginia (U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1977) was completed by mid-year in 1977, and on June 1, 1977, a meeting was held in Senator Randolph's Washington office. Doug Maddy, of the Fayette Plateau Chamber of Commerce, Duvall Schultz, Jon Dragan, Jim Watkins and representatives of the Bureau of Mines and Bureau of Outdoor Recreation were among those in attendance. The report indicated that the Gorge did contain coalbeds that would be economically feasible to mine, but could be reached from entries outside the boundaries of a National Park System unit.

A surprise, at least to the members of the National Park Committee, was the suggestion by the BOR that the unit be designated not a national park nor a wild and scenic river, but a national river, a term that was completely new to them. After heated discussion, the BOR was asked to reconsider the idea of a national river designation. (Schultz, 1978)

To complicate matters further, on October 28, 1977, Congressman Harley O. Staggers introduced a bill (H.R. 9821, 1977) to establish the New River National Scenic Riverway. Scenic Riverway was the designation listed on the cover of the 1975 BOR Report suggesting wild and scenic status. The Stagger's bill basically tried to protect the Gorge while protecting the rights of local citizens to live, fish, and hunt in the area.

By the end of the 1977, every involved party favored federal designation of one type or another. The possible designations included national park, national wild and scenic river, national river, and national scenic riverway. A problem

was that no one had explained to the local citizens the exact distinctions between the various choices. In an attempt to rectify this lack of local understanding regarding possible designation, T. Destry Jarvis of the National Parks and Conservation Association met with Jon Dragan and Doug Maddy in Thurmond. Maddy had become Executive Vice President of the Fayette Plateau Chamber of Commerce in 1976. Although not in on the initial Gorge protection efforts, Maddy had become one of the key members of the business community advocating national park status.

Jarvis now supported the national river idea and was, in fact, writing proposed legislation for such a designation. He convinced Maddy that unless major National Park Service policies were changed, a town and an active railroad in the Gorge precluded any chance of national park designation. Jarvis also presented to Maddy and Dragan the benefits of the designation of national river. Although not as prestigious as a national park, national river designation could encourage economic development while still protecting the resource. (Interview with Doug Maddy, 1985) The appeal of the national river designation was its flexibility. Although two national rivers already existed in the National Park System, (Ozark River and Buffalo River) the title had no specific guidelines accompanying it. The legislation could be written to include or exclude any provisions that the interested parties wanted.

THE CONSENSUS

On April 6, 1978, Secretary of the Interior Cecil Andrus wrote a letter to Speaker of the House Tip O'Neill recommending a draft bill "to provide for the establishment of the New River Gorge National River." (Andrus, 1978) Within the week Senators Randolph and Byrd introduced the bill (S.2866, 1978) into the Senate, and Congressmen Nick Rahall and Harley Staggers did the same in the

House (HR. 12001, 1978)

The bills did include the flexibility promised by Jarvis. As author, Jarvis used the laws of several other designations to draw up the many sections of the bill. The basic model was similar to legislation for the Buffalo National River and Ozark Scenic Riverway. The prohibition on dam construction included language from the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. The National Park Service's traditional park policy was the source of wording on resource protection, and the unique set of land acquisition provisions were modeled after Sleeping Bear Dunes and Cape Cod National Seashore. (Interview with T. Destry Jarvis, 1985)

This flexibility was important, for that summer Doug Maddy invited Destry Jarvis to reiterate to the New River Gorge National Park Committee what he had explained to Maddy at their Thurmond meeting.

Realistically, the Committee, in holding out for national park status, was the last obstacle to achieving national river designation. Those originally advocating wild and scenic river were in favor of any designation they felt would protect the Gorge. The word from the offices of both Senator Randolph and Senator Byrd was that the Gorge had the momentum for federal designation, but until the local community reached a consensus, they would not get anything. The senators were hard pressed to support a designation that would anger half of their constituents.

In the words of Doug Maddy, "Destry did a splendid job of explaining the alternatives. ... We (the Committee) were enlightened." Convinced that there was, at least for the present, no chance for a national park, the Committee was ready to return to their Congressional delegation with a consensus opinion in favor of national river designation. (Interview with Doug Maddy, 1985)

DESIGNATION

In October, 1978, the Senate Subcommittee on Parks and Recreation and the House of Representatives Subcommittee on National Parks and Insular Affairs held a joint hearing on S.2866 and H.R. 12001, the bills calling for the New River Gorge National River. (1978) Oral and written statements were made by Doug Maddy, Jim Watkins, Jon Dragan, Wanda Hauser of the West Virginia Izaak Walton League, Willis Hertig of the West Virginia Department of Natural Resources, Senator Randolph, Senator Byrd, Congressmen Staggers and Rahall, and Department of the Interior representatives including National Park Service Director William Whalen. J. B. Hess represented the New River Gorge National Park Committee, which had changed its name to New River Gorge National River Committee.

Each had suggestions for changes in the bills, such as extension of boundaries, protection of private landholders, and guaranteed waterflow, but every person appearing before the two subcommittees supported the national river designation.

The hearings were held on October 3, 1978. On October 4, 1978, Congressman Phillip Burton of California presented on the floor of the House amendments to S.791. This bill was an all-encompassing park and recreation bill including so many national park units in forty-six different states that it was referred to as the "park barrel" bill. S.791 was the Senate version of H.R. 12356, a bill passed by the House in July, 1978. (Congress, Rec, 1978, P.33571)

The House's July bill had consisted of ten titles. Burton's amended bill had twelve. Title XI was the language of S.2866, Senator Byrd's and Senator Randolph's bill establishing the New River Gorge National River. After twenty years of effort to designate the Gorge as part of the National Park System, Burton had attached the Gorge to an omnibus bill that was to be passed by the

House of Representatives later the very same day. After passage, it was sent to the Senate, where it took one week for the Senate to amend the bill and pass it. On October 13, 1978 the House concurred with the Senate amendments, and on November 10, 1978, President Carter signed into law The National Parks and Recreation Act of 1978, which included designation of the New River Gorge National River. (Congress Rec. 1978, Weekly Compilation ..., 1978)

The New River Gorge National River became reality, a 62,000 acre river corridor from the Bluestone Dam in Hinton, West Virginia to a designated boundary near the town of Fayetteville, West Virginia. In the words of the Act itself, its establishment was "... for the purpose of conserving and interpreting outstanding natural, scenic, and historic values and objects in and around the New River Gorge and preserving as a free-flowing stream an important segment of the New River in West Virginia for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations ...". (National Park and Recreation of 1978)

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