

December 18, 2008

Ian A. Bowles, Secretary of Energy and Environmental Affairs
Attn: Elizabeth Sorenson, ACEC program
Department of Conservation and Recreation
251 Causeway Street, Suite 700
Boston, Ma. 02114

Dear Secretary Bowles,

I would like to offer the strong support of the Housatonic Valley Association (HVA) for the nomination of the **Upper Housatonic River 'Area of Critical Environmental Concern' (ACEC)**. The HVA is a non-profit watershed organization whose mission is save the natural character and environmental health of our communities by protecting land and water in the Housatonic Watershed.

We feel fortunate that the Commonwealth has a natural resource stewardship program such as the ACEC to preserve, restore, and enhance critical environmental resources. We have been directly involved with this program through the Stewardship of the Hinsdale Flats ACEC in it efforts to protect the headwaters of the Housatonic River. We feel that this nomination to protect a section of land and river is equally important. This particular 13-mile stretch of the river which contains portions of Lee, Lenox, Pittsfield, and Washington contains the quality, uniqueness, and significance of its natural and cultural resources that qualifies itself for ACEC designation.

As stated in the nomination document, these 12,280 acres are a biologically rich and unique region in the Commonwealth that supports an exceptional ecosystem with many species found nowhere else in Massachusetts, from unique riparian habitat lands to unique Fens and bogs. For instance, there are 31 documented state-listed rare species located within the proposed ACEC. Largely due to this prime habitat condition, this area also serves as a significance bird habitat and migratory corridor. To add to its unique natural attributes, this area also offers a wide range of public educational and recreational activities on existing protected lands, and includes important historical and archaeological resources.

Designation of this area as ACEC will greatly help to preserve, restore, and enhance these resources and ecosystem of the Upper Housatonic River, direct state agencies to provide higher standards of review and protection, and will establish a framework for local, regional, and state stewardship.

As stated in the nomination, ‘an ACEC designation will help focus attention on this crucial stretch of the river, both in terms of its extraordinary resources and in terms of the next stage of the proposed PCB remediation, an enterprise that will affect not only this stretch of the river but also miles of downstream communities, both human and environmental. It will also support long-term efforts to provide the wise stewardship that this special stretch of the river deserves.’

We would be more than happy to assist with the future stewardship of this area and will work with the community to help educate our communities and citizens about the environmental significance of the resources of this area and ecosystem, and to encourage citizen and community involvement in the long-term protection and management of the ACEC.

This nomination definitely has more than the minimum threshold of natural resources that qualify for an Area of Critical Concern, We feel that this area fulfills the strict requirement to qualify as and ACEC and we strongly urge its nomination.

Sincerely,

Dennis Regan
Berkshire Director