

*Kingston, NY* - In a move that could bring elevated national prestige and levels of federal funding to the region, Congressman Maurice Hinchey (D-NY) today unveiled new legislation he's authored that would initiate the process for the Hudson River Valley special resources study by the National Park Service (NPS). Hinchey's bill would authorize the NPS to conduct a study of the Hudson River Valley to determine if the area could benefit from NPS programs and to make recommendations to Congress on what further action should be taken.

"The Hudson River Valley Greenway and the Hudson River Valley National Heritage Area have drawn a lot of positive attention to one of the most beautiful places in the country. Designating the Hudson River Valley as part of the National Park System would take the region to the highest, most prestigious level possible while making the region eligible for an increase in federal resources and support," Hinchey said. "These additional resources could be used toward conservation efforts, historic preservation, tourism promotion and a wide array of economic development activities. With the recognition of the National Park Service, the Hudson River Valley would forever have its place as one of America's great natural and historic treasures."

In order for the Hudson River Valley to become part of the National Park System, a congressionally-authorized NPS study must be conducted. Hinchey's legislation would authorize such a study from Fort Edward in Washington County down through Westchester County. The study would entail significant outreach to local communities and extensive research and cataloging of the region's resources. If the NPS's study finds that the Hudson River Valley would be a good fit as part of the National Park System then subsequent legislation would be needed to make that designation. Hinchey said he would immediately introduce the necessary legislation should the NPS's study deem the Hudson River Valley to be an appropriate addition to the National Park System.

While the NPS would have a lot of discretion during the study process, Hinchey's bill outlines specific guidelines to ensure that the study recognizes the realities of the Hudson River Valley. These guidelines require the NPS to closely examine park unit models, in particular national river and recreation areas, as well as other landscape protection models, that: encompass large areas of non-federal lands within their designated boundaries; foster public and private collaborative arrangements for achieving NPS objectives, and protect and respect the rights of private land owners.

Designating the Hudson River Valley as a unit of the NPS, would dramatically increase the level

of funding and attention that the NPS could invest in the region. Historic sites would be eligible for new aid, local communities would be able to work more effectively with the NPS to protect natural resources, and recreational resources, such as trails, would be enhanced. Hinchey's bill explicitly states that any future NPS designation must respect the rights of private land owners. There would be no forced land acquisition activities permitted.

Hinchey has long sought greater recognition, protection, and resources for the Hudson River Valley. As a member of the New York State Assembly, Hinchey authored the legislation that led to the creation of the Hudson River Valley Greenway, creating a process for voluntary regional cooperation among 264 communities within 13 counties that border the Hudson River. The Greenway is an innovative state-sponsored program created to facilitate the development of a regional strategy for preserving scenic, natural, historic, cultural and recreational resources while encouraging compatible economic development and maintaining the tradition of home rule for land use decision-making. When Hinchey arrived in Congress, he authored legislation that led to the designation of the Hudson River Valley National Heritage Area, which provides technical assistance to local communities or local managers to assist them in managing natural and historic sites of national importance. As a unit of the National Park System, the Hudson River Valley would be in line for significantly more resources and assistance from the NPS.

"The Hudson River Valley is home to some of the most unique cultural, historic, natural, recreation and scenic resources in the entire country. As a unit of the National Park Service, we would be able to more prominently feature and protect these precious resources for this and future generations of New Yorkers and all Americans," Hinchey said. "Additionally, living within a nationally recognized park service unit would likely enhance the attractiveness of that region and properties located within it because of the significant attention and resources that accompany this designation."

Hinchey first suggested that the Hudson River Valley should be made a unit of the National Park Service at the 2009 Hudson River Summit held at West Point in June 2009. Following that speech, Hinchey received very positive feedback on that suggestion and has pursued the idea ever since.

There are existing NPS units that serve as excellent models for a Hudson River Valley designation, including the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area. These units encompass river corridors and cover mostly non-federal land, yet they are permanent units of the NPS, funded and supported through the NPS's annual operating plans.

