

**A Draft Proposal to Create the Delaware River National Park and Lenape Preserve**



“The Delaware Water Gap National Recreation bill authorizes the creation of a 72,000-acre national park..... A full 15 percent of this Nation’s entire population will live within 100 miles of this reservation..... these people of ours yearn for beauty and hunger for the opportunity to find refreshment in nature..... Here they will come, ..... and their lives will be infinitely richer because they came this way.” **President Lyndon Banes Johnson, September 1, 1965**

**on the signing of Delaware Water Gap legislation.**

**The purpose** of designating the Delaware River National Park and Lenape Preserve is to place this gem of our national heritage into the jeweled crown of the national park system where it has always belonged. Delaware River National Park and Lenape Preserve appropriately recognizes the singularly spectacular natural & cultural resources contained within this park. It recognizes the extraordinary complex of resources found in this one place: the Appalachian Trail, the longest undammed river in the Eastern United States, the Kittatinny Ridge, and 12,000 years of demonstrated human occupation; all within the homeland of the Lenape people. All these unique elements of our national heritage are found within the heart of hundreds of thousands of acres of connected public lands in one grand cultural landscape. Creating the park and preserve with the correct designations and maintaining the traditional activities, including hunting within the preserve, will fulfill the original intention of Congress to create equity in nature based recreational opportunity for the now 60 million people living nearby and create the 12<sup>th</sup> national park in the East. The vision in President Johnson’s words and echoed in legislative history will culminate in the Delaware River National Park and Lenape Preserve.

By this action traditional uses are enshrined more securely in perpetuity, within the Lenape National Preserve, a designation that was created specifically to protect activities such as recreational hunting. The national park portion serves in perpetuity as a wildlife nursery & migration corridor enhancing the benefits to the hunting and non-hunting public by being adjacent to and surrounding the Delaware River National Park. The National Park will enhance protection and prestige of the park resources and the surrounding area and add to the economy with every new visitor who comes and as President Johnson predicted here, they will come.

**Proposal:**

The existing federal public lands within the existing National Recreation Area will be re-designated in part as the Delaware River National Park and in part as the Lenape National Preserve. No lands or other donations from the nearby states of New Jersey, New York, or Pennsylvania are required, although the states are encouraged to cooperate and collaborate in the way they determine best for their citizens and for all Americans. The National Park and Preserve is authorized to accept or acquire additional lands from willing sellers and donors to enhance large landscape scale connectivity, to address climate adaptation, to create wildlife corridors, and watershed protection, and to provide recreational equity for the millions of Americans living in urban and suburban areas within a day’s travel. The Lenape Preserve will receive priority for the addition of new lands until the amount of acreage used in the creation

of the Delaware River National Park has been replaced by those new lands acquired from willing sellers or donors.

The Lenape Preserve will continue to maintain all the authorities for ecological management invested in the original National Recreation Area. The Delaware River National Park will be managed according to the best available science and the management policies of the National Park Service. Both the Delaware River National Park and the Lenape National Preserve will be managed in the highest tradition of the National Park Service to achieve a resilient landscape, aid in climate change adaptation, to provide the infrastructure and facilities needed to manage the visitation and to provide for the nature based and history-based recreation and to create recreational equity for the many millions living nearby and for all Americans and visitors from abroad.

### **Discussion:**

This action is based on the rationale that the proper designations for the lands are required to recognize the reality that Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area (DEWA) has never been a recreation area by the definition at the time it was created. National Recreation Areas at the time were defined as a small strip of land surrounding a reservoir created by damming a river. We recognize that the Tocks Island Dam was never built, and the manmade lake was never created. The local people started a movement to stop the flooding of their beloved Delaware River Valley, a direct nexus to the 20th century environmental movement giving it momentum. Without recourse to reverse the thousands of condemnations for the purpose of creating the dam, Congress moved ahead with the recreation area designation and the National Park Service subsequently changed the definition of national recreation area to fit the hybrid situation created by this crucible of controversy from known as the Tocks Island Dam. This proposal is the opportunity to intentionally designate these lands properly and to memorialize the loss suffered by the many evicted for the Tocks Island Dam debacle. Ensuring the best possible conservation and preservation of this area for future generations will honor the sacrifices of the many who went before us in the last century and in these last twelve thousand years. The Delaware River National Park and Lenape Preserve will honor the "First People" who occupied the area for millennia and a Lenape Cultural and Education Center will welcome the hundreds of millions of visitors who will follow in the coming century yearning for beauty and inspiration and hungering for refreshment in nature.

### **Designations**

- **National parks.** Often referred to as the "crown jewels" of the park system, the 59 national parks contain some of the country's best-known natural attractions. They are generally large, diverse areas with outstanding natural features and ecological resources. They tend to be among the most strictly protected units in the park system, in that Congress has historically been reluctant to authorize consumptive activities such as mining or hunting in the national parks.

- **National recreation areas.** NPS manages 18 national recreation areas.<sup>8</sup> This designation was originally given to lands that surround Bureau of Reclamation reservoirs and feature water-based recreation. It has since also been used for other outdoor areas, especially those in or near urban centers. Recreational activities, such as boating, fishing, or hunting, are often explicitly authorized in the legislation designating national recreation area
- **National preserves.** The 19 national preserves are similar to national parks in their size and natural features, including geological attractions, flora, and wildlife. However, the national preserves explicitly allow certain activities not generally permitted in national parks. Many preserves adjoin national parks and were not incorporated within those parks specifically because Congress wanted to allow uses (such as hunting or oil and gas exploration) that were not considered compatible with national park designation. Half of the national preserves are in Alaska.<sup>6</sup>

Cited From Congressional Research Service Report from November 19, 2015

### **Potential Benefits**

This action will create the environment to allow advocates to illuminate the great need and already overwhelming responsibilities already burdening the park and its visitors and managers. While no one can predict the future or bind any future Congress to any action, legislative language directing the improvement of the infrastructure and facilities in a manner consistent with the decades of planning and public review conducted by the NPS will allow the necessary budget increases to accrue. Direction from Congress on inclusion of the Tribes in shaping the future preserve and on management policies resulting in intentional ecological management to increase resilience, adapt to climate change, and to preserve traditional uses and to enhance the local economy through tourism will benefit all.

It will transform a section of the existing park into what will be a Lenape National Preserve, a more appropriate designation to preserve traditional uses like hunting than a national recreation area can or will be.

It will also create a section that will be a Delaware River National Park. That Delaware River National Park will enhance the prestige of the park and the surrounding area. It will create a broader awareness of the national and international significance of the natural & cultural resources found here.

It will add and more opportunity for more people to be inspired by those resources and more economic opportunity for the surrounding population

It will highlight the great complex of connected lands in Pennsylvania and New Jersey along the longest undammed river In the Eastern United States and create the first national park in New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania.

It will allow the park to compete more successfully for appropriated funds for what will be only the third National Park in the Northeast Region and the 12<sup>th</sup> in the Eastern United States.

It will attract more money to enhance the infrastructure that accommodates the existing four million visitors and the many more that will be able to visit their national park. Legislative language identifying the issues allow advocates to successfully work to enhance funding in the future

The local economy will be positively impacted by both new visitors and by the investment in roads, bridges and visitor facilities expected to follow over the following decade.

It will preserve the traditional uses like hunting enshrining them in a more accurate designation of the Lenape Preserve. The National Park will enhance wildlife available in the surrounding area and provide opportunity for individual wildlife to mature to into significant specimens.

It will focus protection on the migratory highways in the park like the Appalachian Trail and the Kittatinny Ridge.

It will specifically and further protect the biodiversity, the carbon sequestration, and other climate adaptations needed for the future generations to thrive.

And it can return recognition of the sacred homeland of the Lenape people to all who visit the Delaware River National Park and Lenape Preserve in perpetuity. A Lenape Cultural & Education Center within the new national park can provide millions of Americans with the knowledge and recognition of the First People in the area.

It can authorize the first NPS built Visitor Center for the millions of people who visit and have never been provided the appropriate facilities for visitation

Lands can be added, in the future, from willing sellers and donations that enhance the national park and the preserve and eliminate any sacrifice of acreage used to create the national park by prioritizing the Preserve additions first

Cooperation between federal and state agencies on recreational and ecological management issues can be directed by Congress.

#### How can this happen

Legislation such as this effect can pass in a variety of ways. The New River Gorge designation change as attached to the first Covid Relief Bill. DEWA has is already a shining example of all

criteria for a national park and has been an NPS unit for over 56 years. Congress need only add the new designation Delaware River National Park and Lenape Preserve and define the boundary as part of any legislative exercise and the President's signature will make it law. It could be as simple as a rider on an appropriations bill.

### **Unimpacted Uses**

No impact on fishing

No impact on Boating

No impact on camping

No impact on hiking

National Park and Preserve designation will essentially allow all previously will continue in some portion of the new complex.

### **Conclusion**

All constituencies that now enjoy this NPS unit will be better served by the National Park and Preserve rather than a National Recreation Area. It will be an opportunity to enhance the infrastructure and to add the new facilities for camping and boating and hiking that are clearly needed and Congress can provide direction on the many issues it remained silent on in 1965. This proposal is a victory for all Americans.