

## National Park Service Falls Short on GU Boathouse Assessment

I wish to offer the following observations about the 11/17/04 article “Park Start Nears As Boathouse Issues Remain,” by Julia O’Donoghue.

It is the C&O Canal Association (COCA), and not the Coalition for the Capital Crescent Trail (as reported in the article), that is suing the National Park Service (NPS) because of issues related to the Georgetown University boathouse proposal. For almost two years, COCA had hoped to persuade the National Park Service to conduct an environmental review on the project, as required by law, to protect:

- a national historical park dedicated to the memory of Justice William O. Douglas
- the conservation of the Potomac River
- the important historical role that the Canal played in the western expansion and the Civil War.

Why should an organization dedicated to the C&O Canal find it necessary to sue the NPS to make the Park Service comply with the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA)? And why has the NPS consistently claimed that neither an Environmental Impact Study (EIS) nor even an Environmental Assessment (EA) – a less rigorous study – would be required prior to the construction in the Park of a 51 foot tall, 280 foot long and 33,000 sq ft private boathouse? Why was it necessary for COCA and its allies to raise balloons on July 19, in front of witnesses, to show that, despite denials by NPS, the proposed boathouse would rise 23 feet above the towpath, eliminating river views for the general public? Is it in the public interest to even contemplate such a structure within a national park, without an EA or an EIS, to determine the effects?

These are some of the questions that COCA and others have been asking for almost two years. Finally, one week after filing the lawsuit, NPS agreed to perform an EA – a study that should have been performed years ago. COCA is simply forcing NPS to do their job.

The primary duty of the NPS is to serve as the “guardians” of the parks. Construction in a national park – especially private development in the C&O Canal NHP with its two million visitors annually – is a sensitive matter. In Virginia, the NPS is performing an EIS for a proposed Arlington County Boathouse on the Potomac River. A number of locations are being considered, with public input, as part of the extensive study. The C&O Canal Association believes that just as NPS is requiring a full EIS for the Virginia side of the Potomac River, it should also require a full EIS for the DC side of the Potomac River, where three boathouses are being planned! The public deserves nothing less from NPS.

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C&O Canal Association