

*SAMPLE LETTER TO CONGRESS*

Honorable xxxxx  
U.S. Senator or Representative  
Washington, DC

Dear Senator or Representative:

I am deeply concerned about a proposed National Park Service (NPS) action in the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park.

A proposed land exchange between the NPS and Georgetown University threatens wooded land at the gateway to the national park upstream of the Key Bridge, between the Potomac River and the heavily used Capital Crescent Trail. Georgetown University intends to grab this public land to build a private boathouse and exercise facility of massive proportions. The NPS is facilitating the plan without regard to the public interest or the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act.

The boathouse as proposed by Georgetown University would dramatically lessen the serene, scenic character of this section of the national park. In square footage, the new building would be seven times larger than the nearest building, the historic Washington Canoe Club. At 54 feet tall, the new building would tower over the Capital Crescent Trail and block views of the river from the C&O Canal towpath. Construction vehicles and boat trailers would tangle with hikers, bikers, and rollerbladers on the Capital Crescent Trail. Fishermen would be forced to move.

The proposal would destroy vegetation and wildlife habitat and disturb adjacent fish habitat in the Potomac River. The removal of riverbank vegetation could increase the flood risk to the C&O Canal embankment and to structures downstream.

Boaters on the Potomac River, and your constituents in northern Virginia, would lose a view of wooded riverbank frequented by ducks, herons, deer, and small mammals.

Worst of all, the proposal would set an alarming precedent for turning national parkland over to private use. What might be the next section of parkland up for grabs by private interests?

The National Environmental Policy Act calls for an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to be prepared on major federal actions. Please insist that the National Park Service prepare an EIS to evaluate the potential impact on vegetation, wildlife habitat, floodwaters, nearby historic structures, and thousands of users of the Capital Crescent Trail, C&O Canal towpath, Canal Road, and the Potomac River, as well as the precedent that would be set for transferring national parkland to a private entity.

The National Park Service prepared an Environmental Assessment (EA) on the land swap alone in 1995--nine years ago. The EA is outdated and inadequate. Since then, completion of the Capital Crescent Trail has attracted thousands of users, and vegetation on the site has grown.

The letter and the spirit of the National Environmental Policy Act call for the federal agency to consider the entire proposal, including the full size and ultimate disposition of the public land involved; alternatives to the proposal, including a "no action" alternative; and to do so in a timely manner.

Across the river, in your own state of Virginia, the National Park Service proposes construction of a different boathouse on national parkland along the Potomac River. In this case, an Environmental Impact Statement process is under way. Why is this process considered a legal requirement for one national park site but not for another?

I urge you to stop the National Park Service from completing this land swap, and, before any further action is taken, to request an Environmental Impact Statement evaluating all impacts of any land exchange and subsequent construction in this section of the C&O Canal National Historical Park.