



Testimony of

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Committee on Public Works and the Environment
Council of the District of Columbia

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Chairperson Schwartz and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on the important issue of preserving our parkland. I am here today as Chair of the Sierra Club's Washington, D.C., Chapter, to testify in opposition to the National Park Service's plan to give away our public parkland in the C&O Canal National Historical Park for development of a private boathouse by Georgetown University.

The Sierra Club is America's oldest, largest and most influential grassroots environmental organization. Nationally, we have 800,000 members, including more than 3,000 members here in the District of Columbia on whose behalf I testify today. The Sierra Club has a long and distinguished history of fighting to create and protect our national parks and other precious natural areas for future generations to explore and enjoy.

As Washingtonians, we are blessed with hundreds of acres of national parkland, including gems like Rock Creek Park, the National Mall, Anacostia Park, Glover Archbold Park, Potomac Park and the C&O Canal National Historical Park. Unfortunately, we find these parks under siege: in Rock Creek Park, heavy automobile traffic on Beach Drive crowds out recreational users five days a week; the National Mall's green space is being gobbled up by development like the World War II Memorial, and other monuments and memorials are being proposed; and now we find the C&O Canal National Historical Park threatened by inappropriate development.

Congress charged the National Park Service with preserving our national parks in order to “conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wildlife therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.”¹ In some cases we find the agency upholding this mission. However, in this case we are very troubled to find the Park Service on the wrong side of the issue – making a back room deal with the Georgetown administration to trade away our prized public parkland for private development.

We in the Sierra Club believe that public parkland must remain in the public domain, and we have a long history of fighting inappropriate development in our parks. Locally, we fought and defeated construction of a freeway through Glover Archbold Park and an amusement park on Kingman Island, and more recently we worked with neighborhood groups to defeat the Park Service’s plan to give away four acres of Whitehaven Park to the Casey Foundation for development of a mayoral mansion. We intend to continue to fight this proposed boathouse development just as vigorously as we have fought these previous battles.

I would like to be clear that we support non-motorized recreation on the Potomac, and we do not oppose the construction of a boathouse at an appropriate site down river and outside of the C&O Canal National Historical Park. But we vehemently oppose the construction of a massive new boathouse on what is public parkland. Such development would destroy many trees and fragment wildlife habitat along a beautiful stretch of the river. And its proposed location near the entrance to the Capital Crescent Trail presents major safety concerns for the thousands of walkers, runners and cyclists who use that trail.

I can only hope that Georgetown and the Park Service will come to their senses, abandon their ill-conceived plans and begin searching for an alternative boathouse site down river. However, if they continue to dig in their heels and proceed with the current proposal, the Sierra Club and many other organizations will fight it tooth and nail, and as more people learn that their public parkland is at stake we can be certain that the opposition will continue to grow. Chairperson Schwartz and members of the committee, I hope you will join us in opposing this inappropriate development on our national parkland and encourage Georgetown to explore feasible and more environmentally friendly alternatives.

¹ The National Park System Organic Act, 1916.

