

The Hike That Saved the C&O Canal: 60th Anniversary, March 20, 2014

On March 20, 1954, Justice William O. Douglas began his historic march to protect the C&O Canal from development as a highway. He was accompanied by *Washington Post* journalists who responded to his challenge to walk the entire 184-mile towpath from Cumberland, Md., to Georgetown, D.C. The hike convinced the newspaper to reverse its support for the highway proposal, and created a broad new awareness of the value of the canal's natural and historic environment.

Arrangements for the 1954 hike were made by the Wilderness Society and the Appalachian Trail Club, and participants included the president of the National Parks Association. On the last evening of the hike, Justice Douglas formed a committee (which became the C&O Canal Association) to work with others for the preservation of the canal. These efforts eventually culminated in the creation of the C&O Canal National Historical Park in 1971.

Since then, many individuals and organizations have accepted the challenge of protecting the National Historical Park. Among them are the members of the Defenders of Potomac River Parkland, a coalition focused on preventing inappropriate development within a D.C. section of the canal park that includes a popular stretch of the Capital Crescent Trail. Currently, an Environmental Impact Study that might lead to such development is on hold, but it has not been withdrawn. Preservation of this important area of the park requires continued vigilance.