

July 11, 2009

Defenders Urge NPS to Use Valley Forge Agreement as a Model for the GU Boathouse Issue

In a news release issued on July 1, 2009, the National Park Service announced an agreement with the American Revolution Center, an organization that had long sought to build a new museum on property within Valley Forge National Historical Park in Pennsylvania.

Under the agreement, the Center would instead establish its museum at Independence National Historical Park in Philadelphia. This outcome provides a highly appropriate setting for the new museum, while protecting the historical landscape of Valley Forge.

In a July 11 letter, the Defenders of Potomac River Parkland sent congratulations on the Valley Forge agreement to Dan Wenk, Acting Director of NPS. The Defenders urged that NPS adopt a similar policy toward the C&O Canal National Historical Park, thereby protecting established parkland from a proposal to build a large private Georgetown University boathouse within the NHP. The letter is reprinted below:

July 11, 2009

Mr. Dan Wenk
Acting Director, National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C St., NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Mr. Wenk:

Re: Elegant solution for Valley Forge National Historical Park, and opportunity for C&O Canal National Historical Park

Congratulations to the National Park Service (NPS) for its leadership role in resolving the controversy over the proposed location of the American Revolution Center. As a result, NPS has protected the historic landscape of a national historical park from development, and chosen an appropriate urban location for a new museum.

We encourage you to apply these same leadership skills to the controversial proposal to build a private Georgetown University boathouse on land within the C&O Canal National Historical Park (NHP). Our alliance of twenty-five organizations does not object to the idea of the University's building a new boathouse, but we do oppose the desire to place the facility within the C&O Canal National Historical Park (NHP).

One of the sites under consideration by NPS for a private Georgetown University boathouse (the "EA preferred" site) is a narrow, wooded section of Potomac River tidal floodplain located within the C&O Canal NHP, at the entrance to the Capital Crescent Trail, a busy non-motorized public trail. We believe the NPS should not approve a massive new private boathouse at such a location. Instead, an alternative site outside of the C&O Canal would have technical, environmental, practical, social and economic advantages for everyone, while protecting the park

from private development. In addition, a more accessible location outside of the NHP might make it possible for a new boathouse to be shared with other boating communities, not just used by one group of athletes from one private university.

We urge you to apply the well-conceived Valley Forge NHP solution to the C&O Canal NHP. Please let us know how we can be of assistance to you in resolving this long-standing -- and unnecessary -- threat to this cherished national historical parkland.

Sincerely,

Sally C. Strain, DC Coordinator, Defenders of Potomac River Parkland, www.savethecanal.org

Member organizations of Defenders of Potomac River Parkland are: American Canoe Association; American Hiking Society; American Whitewater Association; Appalachian Mountain Club; Audubon Naturalist Society; Canoe Cruisers Association; Citizens Committee to Save Laurel Lakes; Clean Water Action; C&O Canal Association; Coalition for the Capital Crescent Trail; Dupont Circle Conservancy; East Coast Greenway Alliance; Friends of the Earth; League of Women Voters; National Parks Conservation Association; Potomac Appalachian Trail Club; Potomac Conservancy; Potomac Heritage Trail Association; Potomac Pedalers Touring Club; Quantico Orienteering Club; Rails to Trails Conservancy; Sierra Club, DC Chapter; Washington