

October 5, 2005

Ms. Fran Mainella, Director
National Park Service
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20240

Re: Georgetown University Boathouse Proposal in C&O Canal National Historical Park

Dear Director Mainella:

I am writing on behalf of American Hiking Society to express our concerns regarding the Georgetown University (GU) boathouse proposal and related Potomac riverfront issues as they affect nationally significant cultural, recreational, and natural resources. We strongly urge the National Park Service to prepare a comprehensive Environmental Impact Statement that includes analyses of impacts for several related proposals regarding the Georgetown Waterfront, including the proposed boathouse. The EIS should evaluate the impact of the land swap and boathouse on natural and cultural resources, hikers and other recreationists, and local communities and consider alternative locations or other types of public/private boathouses outside of the Park.

The current GU proposal to build a large boathouse along the Potomac River within the C&O Canal National Historical Park has the potential to negatively impact important qualities of the riverfront. Development of this tract would adversely affect parkland available to the public, disrupt wetlands and a flood plain along the river, and obstruct scenic views along the Capital Crescent Trail and C&O Canal Towpath—two very popular trails in the Washington, DC metropolitan area.

The Potomac River maintains its relatively clean and wild character because of the lack of development from Key Bridge to Cumberland, MD. The proposed boathouse development could increase pollution and runoff and alter natural systems that keep the river healthy. Furthermore, the C&O Canal Towpath is the backbone of the congressionally-designated Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail, established in 1983 to commemorate the mix of history, culture, and recreation along the Potomac River. The proposal would alter the trail experience for users of this resource representing one of twenty-four national scenic and historic trails.

The Potomac riverfront must be adequately protected so that future generations of hikers and other trail enthusiasts will be able to fully enjoy the riverfront's unique natural and cultural heritage, including abundant flora and fauna, the C&O Canal National Historical Park, and the longest stretch of the 500+ mile-long Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail. Other alternative locations for building public and private boathouses on already developed riverbank exist outside of the C&O Canal National Historical Park.

As the national voice for America's hikers, American Hiking promotes and protects foot trails and the hiking experience. With a strong membership base of individual hikers and

hiking clubs--including many in the Washington, DC area--American Hiking represents more than half a million outdoors people and serves as the voice of the American hiker.

Thank you for your consideration of this urgent matter.

Sincerely,

Celina Montorfano
Vice President for Programs

Cc. Hon. Eleanor Holmes Norton
Hon. Barbara Mikulski
Hon. Christopher Van Hollen, Jr.