

Press Release
October 7, 2004

Today, the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal Association and the Washington Canoe Club filed suit in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia seeking Declaratory and Injunctive relief against the Department of Interior and the National Park Service to halt the proposed land swap with Georgetown University to allow the University to build a private boathouse on what is now federal park land.

The suit is based on violations of the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) in by failing to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement in connection with the land exchange, in light of the boathouse's significant negative impacts on the C&O Canal National Historical Park, the Washington Canoe club and the Capital Crescent Trail, and by failing to evaluate alternatives to the land exchange. The lawsuit also alleges that the National Park Service violated a binding memorandum of agreement executed under the National Historic Preservation Act which prohibits the Park Service from approving a boathouse design with a footprint in excess of 15,000 square feet and a height of 40 feet. They also are in violation of the Land, Water, and Conservation Fund Act ("LWCF"), by approving the exchange of valuable federal parkland for land owned by Georgetown University that has a significantly lower value.

The suit follows over a year of hearings and meetings, following the revelation of the design for the boathouse having a total square footage of approximately 35,000 square feet (with a first floor footprint of 18,682 square feet), standing 54 feet at its highest point, whose roofline will be more than nine feet above the C & O Canal Tow path and clearly visible from both the C & O Canal National Historical Park and the Capital Crescent Trail. The boathouse will extend 1,200 feet upstream from Key Bridge, encroaching on the area designated in the 1987 Georgetown Waterfront Plan for preservation of the natural appearance of the Palisades, with a dock that will extend 75 feet out into the Potomac River. Finally, the proposed boathouse is in conflict with the Georgetown Waterfront plan, which envisaged a structure much less than half the size.

Note that for a proposed boathouse by Arlington County, across the river, in contrast to this action, NPS has required an EIS, even though it is 1/2 to 1/3 the size of the Georgetown building.

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