Tsongas Announces Legislation to Help Designate Nashua River as Wild & Scenic

GROTON, MA – May 2, 2012 - This morning, by the banks of the Nashua River in Groton, Congresswoman Niki Tsongas unveiled new legislation that she is introducing to help designate the Nashua River as a Wild & Scenic River. This classification would help preserve and protect this historic waterway while making it eligible to receive federal funding for further conservation efforts.

“The Rivers of the Fifth District have helped to shape our history, culture, and economy for generations,” said Congresswoman Niki Tsongas. “The legislation that I am introducing recognizes the great role that the Nashua has played in contributing to our region and would help to keep the River clean, vibrant and easily accessible. Thanks to the work of the Nashua River Watershed Association, the Nashua has undergone a tremendous recovery and its designation as a Wild & Scenic River would enable additional preservation efforts while allowing this natural treasure to be enjoyed for many years to come.”

Tsongas’ legislation would authorize the National Park Service (NPS) to conduct a study on the Nashua River and two of its tributaries, the Squannacook and Nissitissit Rivers, to determine their eligibility for designation as Wild & Scenic Rivers. During the study process the NPS would work with state and local governments, conservation groups, and concerned residents to develop a conservation plan for the river in order to protect water quality and conserve open spaces. Should the study favorably determine the Nashua River’s eligibility as a Wild & Scenic River, legislation to officially designate the river and implement the conservation plan would then be introduced in order to clean up polluted waters around the river, keep drinking water supplies clean, and protect the river for a variety of uses.

“The Nashua River Watershed Association is absolutely delighted that Congresswoman Tsongas is introducing the Nashua River Wild and Scenic River Study Act,” said Elizabeth Ainsley Campbell, Executive Director Nashua River Watershed Association. “The Study provides a very significant opportunity for stakeholders to come together to develop a River Management Plan for these beautiful stretches of river that mean so much to our communities. Undertaking the Study as part of the Partnership Wild and Scenic Rivers Program enables stakeholders to take advantage of expertise and funding that would otherwise be unavailable.”

The bill, H.R. 5319, entitled the Nashua River Wild and Scenic River Study Act, has been endorsed by all eight towns through which the Nashua runs in Massachusetts: Lancaster, Harvard, Shirley, Ayer, Groton, Dunstable, Townsend and Pepperell. If approved, the Nashua would join the Concord, Sudbury, and Assabet as rivers in the Fifth District that have been designated as Wild & Scenic. The Nashua is considered a strong candidate for this designation because the river previously ranked among the nation’s most polluted, and while significant progress has been made in cleaning up the river, threats to water quality from polluted runoff and biological diversity are still present. A 4.8 mile segment in Pepperell would be excluded from the study because of an existing hydro project that FERC is in the midst of permitting.

Tsongas is a member of the Natural Resources Committee in the House of Representatives and has worked to preserve and protect the rivers and waterways in the Fifth Congressional District. She hosts an annual ‘River Day’ to highlight the importance of the Rivers in the communities she represents and to recognize the organizations, volunteers and different levels of government working together to sustain and preserve the integrity of these resources.