

SENATE RESOLUTION opposing certain proposals concerning the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area.

WHEREAS, The Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area (“Delaware Water Gap”) is a unit of the National Park System located in New Jersey and Pennsylvania, that currently encompasses nearly 70,000 acres, of which 21,978 acres are in Sussex County and 9,222 acres are in Warren County; and

WHEREAS, The Delaware Water Gap is enjoyed by the residents of Sussex and Warren counties, as well as residents from throughout the State and visitors from across the country, and is among the top 10 most visited units of the National Park System with approximately five million visitors annually; and

WHEREAS, The Delaware Water Gap offers numerous recreational opportunities, such as bicycling, bird watching, boating, camping, canoeing, cross country skiing, fishing, hiking, horseback riding, hunting, swimming, walking, and special events, and is home to numerous rare, threatened, and endangered species of plants, amphibians, fish, mammals, and reptiles; and

WHEREAS, In 2016, the National Park Service proposed a plan titled “Vision 2030: A Vision For A Sustainable Future” (“Vision 2030”), which proposed to change the designation of the Delaware Water Gap from a National Recreation Area to a National Park and Preserve, and to expand the area of the present Delaware Water Gap; and

WHEREAS, The Vision 2030 plan to establish the “Delaware Valley National Park and Preserve,” which would have included the Delaware Water Gap and the Middle Delaware National Scenic and Recreational River, would have eventually limited or prohibited certain recreational activities in certain areas of the park, such as hunting, that are enjoyed by both residents and visitors; and

WHEREAS, If enacted, such a change was likely to negatively affect the economic prosperity of businesses in Sussex and Warren counties that benefit substantially from tourism to the Delaware Water Gap, and residents would no longer have the opportunity to enjoy hunting and other recreational activities locally; and

WHEREAS, Although the Vision 2030 plan was considered by stakeholders in 2016, and later shelved due to these numerous concerns, a similar project proposed in 2022, titled “Delaware Water Gap: Redesignation Project” (“Redesignation Project”), proposes to change the designation of the Delaware Water Gap from a National Recreation Area to a National Park and Preserve, and to expand the area of the present Delaware Water Gap; and

WHEREAS, The specifics and scope of the Redesignation Project, and the environmental, economic, and agricultural impact of the project remain unknown, including if, and how, fees will be collected, and how the project will be funded; and

WHEREAS, The Redesignation Project raises concerns that the rights of local property owners will be disregarded, and eminent domain will be used by the federal government to acquire private and State

property adjacent to the Delaware Water Gap, including nearby High Point State Park, Stokes State Forest, and Worthington State Forest; and

WHEREAS, The conversion of private property to federal parkland would result in a reduction of tax revenue in affected municipalities, may negatively affect local school districts in the area, and may negatively affect the local economy by preventing farmers who lease land along the Delaware River from producing crops that feed livestock; and

WHEREAS, The Redesignation Project may further affect the local economy in a similar manner to the Vision 2030 plan by potentially prohibiting or restricting recreational activities, including hunting, which will cause local businesses in Sussex and Warren counties to suffer financially, force tourism to other states that offer these activities, and prevent residents from enjoying hunting and other recreational activities locally; and

WHEREAS, It is fitting and proper for this House to express opposition to proposals, such as the Vision 2030 plan and the Redesignation Project, to change the designation of the Delaware Water Gap from a National Recreation Area to a National Park and Preserve and expand the current boundaries of the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area, to ensure that the rights of local property owners are protected, to prevent financial and economic losses in the area, and to protect the freedom of local residents and visitors to enjoy all of the recreational activities the Delaware Water Gap has to offer; and

BE IT RESOLVED *by the Senate of the State of New Jersey:*

1. This House opposes proposals to change the designation of the Delaware Water Gap from a National Recreation Area to a National Park and Preserve and to expand the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area beyond its current boundaries.

2. Copies of this resolution, as filed with the Secretary of State, shall be transmitted by the Secretary of the Senate to the Governor and Lieutenant Governor of the State of New Jersey, the Secretary of the Interior, the Director of the National Park Service, the Regional Director of the Northeast Region of the National Park Service, every member of Congress elected from this State, and the Commissioner of the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection.

STATEMENT

This resolution expresses opposition to proposals that change the designation of the Delaware Water Gap from a National Recreation Area to a National Park and Preserve and expand the current boundaries of the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area.

The Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area (“Delaware Water Gap”) is a unit of the National Park System located in New Jersey and Pennsylvania that encompasses portions of Sussex and Warren Counties. The Delaware Water Gap offers numerous recreational opportunities that are enjoyed by the residents of Sussex and Warren counties, as well as residents from throughout the State and visitors from across the country. The Delaware Water Gap is among the top 10 most visited units of the National Park System with approximately five million visitors annually.

In 2016, the National Park Service proposed a plan titled “Vision 2030: A Vision For A Sustainable Future,” (“Vision 2030”) which proposed to change the designation of the Delaware Water Gap from a National Recreation Area to a National Park and Preserve. The Vision 2030 plan also proposed to expand the area of the present Delaware Water Gap. The Vision 2030 plan would have limited or prohibited certain recreational activities in certain areas of the park, such as hunting, that are enjoyed by both local residents and visitors alike. If enacted, such a change was likely to affect the economic prosperity of businesses in Sussex and Warren counties that benefit substantially from tourism to the Delaware Water Gap. In addition, local residents would no longer have the opportunity to enjoy hunting and other recreational activities locally.

Although the Vision 2030 plan was shelved due to these numerous concerns, a recently proposed project titled “Delaware Water Gap: Redesignation Project” (“Redesignation Project”) also seeks to change the designation of the Delaware Water Gap from a National Recreation Area to a National Park and Preserve, and to expand the area of the present Delaware Water Gap. The specifics and scope of the Redesignation Project and the environmental, economic, and agricultural impacts of the project, remain unknown, including if, and how, fees will be collected, and how the project will be funded.

In addition, the Redesignation Project raises concerns that the rights of local property owners may be disregarded. It is possible the federal government will use eminent domain to acquire private and State property alongside the Delaware Water Gap, including nearby High Point State Park, Stokes State Forest, and Worthington State Forest. The conversion of private property to federal property would result in numerous economic ramifications. It would result in a reduction of tax revenue in affected municipalities, may negatively affect local school districts in the area, and may negatively affect the local economy by preventing farmers who lease land along the Delaware River from producing crops that feed livestock.

The Redesignation Project may further affect the local economy in a similar manner to the Vision 2030 plan by prohibiting or restricting recreational activities, including hunting. As stakeholders determined in 2016, prohibiting these recreational activities will cause local businesses in Sussex and Warren counties to suffer financially, and prevent local residents from enjoying hunting and other recreational activities locally.

Opposes changing designation of Delaware Water Gap from National Recreation Area to National Park and Preserve and opposes certain parts of National Park Service's "Vision 2030" for Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area.