

American Rivers – Environment America – National Parks Conservation  
Association – Sierra Club – The Wilderness Society

July 13, 2011

The Honorable Doc Hastings  
Chairman  
Committee on Natural Resources  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Edward Markey  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Natural Resources  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressmen Hastings and Markey:

The organizations signing this letter represent millions of Americans committed to protecting our nation's lands, wildlife, and water as places that Congress set aside for the enjoyment and recreation of all. We are writing to express our strong opposition to H.R. 850, a bill that facilitates a mammoth and costly freeway-style bridge over and through the St. Croix National Scenic Riverway.

If enacted, H.R. 850 will not only result in the construction of a bridge that will harm a unit of the National Park System, the St. Croix River, it will set a dangerous precedent for all Wild and Scenic Rivers under pressure from harmful development. In its more than 40-year history, the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act has never been waived for a transportation project or for any project of this magnitude.

The St. Croix River begins in northwest Wisconsin and flows south, forming the border of Minnesota and Wisconsin and joining the Mississippi River southeast of the Twin Cities. The St. Croix National Scenic Riverway was established in 1968 as one of the eight original Wild and Scenic Rivers and the lower section was designated four years later. The only Wild and Scenic river in Minnesota, the St. Croix provides a unique wilderness-like experience for outdoor recreation opportunities near a growing metropolitan area.

In late 2010, the National Park Service, the official steward of the St. Croix River, determined that the bridge that will be built if H.R. 850 is passed would create a "direct and adverse effect on the values for which the riverway was established."

In addition to the terrible precedent of allowing enormous construction projects over a Wild and Scenic River, the bridge being proposed will cost Minnesota, Wisconsin, and the American taxpayer close to \$700 million to build. This \$700 million bridge would serve only 18,000 cars a day between Stillwater, Minnesota and Houlton, Wisconsin, which has a population of 400. In contrast, the collapsed I-35W bridge in Minneapolis was rebuilt and completed in 2008 at a cost of only \$234 million, and it is handling 145,000 vehicles a day. This proposed bridge would be the most costly bridge ever built in the history of the state of Minnesota.

We recognize the need for a new crossing at the St. Croix National Scenic Riverway as the bridge currently serving the community of Stillwater is outdated and in need of repair, and we support a more sensible, smaller and less-costly solution. However, as the Committee heard in testimony during the legislative hearing on H.R. 850 this bridge is too big and too expensive,

especially during the current tough budgetary time at the federal and state level. We ask the Committee to not move forward with marking up this bill, and if it is brought up for a markup, to amend it to ensure that a bridge consistent with the scenic values of the St. Croix River will be built at the right size and cost to taxpayers.

Sincerely,

Bill Lee  
Chief Operating Officer  
American Rivers

Anna Aurilio  
Director, Washington Office  
Environment America

Tom Kiernan  
President  
National Parks Conservation Association

Debbie Sease  
National Campaign Director  
Sierra Club

Bill Meadows  
President  
The Wilderness Society

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July 13, 2011

The Honorable Jeff Bingaman  
Chairman  
Committee on Energy and Natural Resources  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Energy and Natural Resources  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Bingaman and Murkowski:

The organizations signing this letter represent millions of Americans committed to protecting our nation's lands, wildlife, and water as places that Congress set aside for the enjoyment and recreation of all. We are writing to express our strong opposition to S. 1134, a bill that overrides the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act and authorizes the construction of a costly, freeway-style bridge over and through the St. Croix National Scenic Riverway.

If enacted, S. 1134 will not only result in the construction of a bridge that will harm a unit of the National Park System, the St. Croix River, it will set a dangerous precedent for all Wild and Scenic Rivers under pressure from harmful development. In its more than 40-year history, the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act has never been waived for a transportation project or for any project of this magnitude.

The St. Croix River begins in northwest Wisconsin and flows south, forming the border of Minnesota and Wisconsin and joining the Mississippi River southeast of the Twin Cities. The St. Croix National Scenic Riverway was established in 1968 as one of the eight original Wild and Scenic Rivers and the lower section was designated four years later. The only Wild and Scenic river in Minnesota, the St. Croix provides a unique wilderness-like experience for outdoor recreation near a growing metropolitan area.

In late 2010, the National Park Service, the official steward of the St. Croix River, determined that the bridge that will be built if S. 1134 is passed would create a "direct and adverse effect on the values for which the riverway was established."

In addition to the terrible precedent of allowing enormous construction projects over a Wild and Scenic River, the bridge being proposed will cost Minnesota, Wisconsin, and the American taxpayer close to \$700 million to build. This \$700 million bridge would serve only 18,000 cars a day between Stillwater, Minnesota and Houlton, Wisconsin, with a population of 400. In contrast, the collapsed I-35W bridge in Minneapolis was rebuilt and completed in 2008 at a cost of only \$234 million, and it is handling 145,000 vehicles a day. This proposed bridge would be the most costly bridge ever built in the history of the state of Minnesota.

We recognize the need for a new crossing at the St. Croix National Scenic Riverway as the bridge currently serving the community of Stillwater is outdated and in need of repair, and we support a more sensible, smaller, and less-costly solution.

We understand that the Committee may schedule a legislative hearing on S. 1134 soon. We prefer the Committee not consider this bill, but if the hearing is to be held, then we request to appear as witnesses to provide testimony on how the proposed bridge sets a terrible precedent for undermining the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act and in these tight fiscal times simply does not make sense.

Sincerely,

Bill Lee  
Chief Operating Officer  
American Rivers

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