

**Testimony of
Elizabeth W. Castagna, Vice President
Friends of Weir Farm National Historic Site
before the
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands
of the House Committee on Natural Resources
on
H.R. 5852, the *Weir Farm National Historical Park Redesignation Act***

**116th Congress, 2nd Session
July 13, 2020**

Good afternoon Chair Haaland, Ranking Member Young, and Members of the Committee, and thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of H.R. 5852. The *Weir Farm National Historical Park Redesignation Act* proposes to change the park's designation from a National Historic Site to a National Historical Park to more accurately reflect the park's acreage, rich history and artistic legacy, numerous natural and cultural resources, and abundant recreational opportunities.

My name is Elizabeth Castagna and I am the Vice President on the board of Friends of Weir Farm National Historic Site, a not-for-profit volunteer organization that works in partnership with the park. The Friends of Weir Farm enhance the visitor experience and continue the park's creative legacy through seasonal programs, such as Jr. Ranger Days, and special projects, including the recent refurbishing and opening of the historic Weir Barn.

Weir Farm National Historic Site was established as a National Park unit in 1990 to preserve and interpret the historically significant properties and landscapes associated with the life and work of Julian Alden Weir, the American Impressionist. For the first 16 years the park's development was constrained by a life tenancy. In 2006, Weir Farm NHS began a comprehensive rehabilitation and restoration of over 80% of its historic resources and landscapes, leading to the park's reopening in 2014. In addition to

preserving Weir's studio and home, the park includes extensive fields, gardens, trails, woods and the Weir Pond.

Weir Farm National Historic Site has grown to approximately 70 acres since the original designation in 1990, covering many related stories over a period of 135 years of artistic relevance, and extensive natural resources that had not been inventoried or known at the time of the designation. It is Connecticut's first national park unit and the only unit in the National Park Service dedicated to an American painter. But the park goes far beyond that, interpreting the work and lives of several artistic generations' stories, as well as a vibrant contemporary art community utilizing the landscape today for painting outdoors. Weir's work was instrumental in defining American Impressionism and the site is integral to his artistic vision and to the growth of a national style of painting. The documentation of over 250 painting sites throughout Weir Farm National Historic Site and the adjoining Weir Preserve has led to innovative natural resource management and proved it to be a model for other parks to manage landscape and scenery.

We believe that the designation "Weir Farm National Historical Park" most accurately states what the park has become. This place, which includes several historic houses and three art studios, two historic barns, multiple outbuildings and a scenic landscape of gardens, fields, woods, along with a pond, stone walls and other features, is much more than a 'historic site', a title that suggests a single building, or a place such as a battlefield. National Historic Sites generally are only a few acres in size, with limited natural resources, discrete boundaries and a single narrative. Typically, a 'historic site' conveys a particular moment in history, not a place with a rich national history of generations of artists and art movements.

The Friends of Weir Farm enthusiastically support this redesignation as a National Historical Park to properly reflect Weir Farm's acreage, number of historic themes and

artists, natural and cultural resources, trails, fishing and other recreation, and national impact. This redesignation will also recognize the increase in public access, trails, collaboration with partners, and public programming since the park was restored and reopened in 2014.

Changing the name of this extraordinary place to a 'National Historical Park' will communicate much more clearly to the public what this property is today, and will better represent the park's complex cultural, natural and recreational resources.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on behalf of the Friends of Weir Farm in support of this legislation.