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More details needed on park 'expansion'

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To the editor:

Thank you for starting a dialogue about the proposed study on the expansion of the reach of the National Park Service. We agree that the News should be "all in favor" of the idea of expanding the benefits of having the National Park Service in our midst. This is why we were delighted this week when Congressman John Tierney informed us that he has filed a bill to study expanding the boundary of the NPS Salem Maritime National Historic Site located on Salem's historic waterfront. The emphasis needs to be placed on the word study.

We wholeheartedly agree with the statement that "the National Park Service has done a tremendous job over the past decade" with its regional visitor center in downtown Salem and with taking its tall ship Friendship on ambassadorial sails along the coast of Massachusetts. But in recent years, the National Park Service is providing even more direct benefits to our communities. Through its revitalized education programs in ocean stewardship and maritime history, the after-school programs with the Greater Salem Boys & Girls Club, the Junior Ranger programs, First Jobs and the Youth Intake program, NPS is reaching out and becoming ever more engaged in our communities — especially with our youths. Communities may not always be aware of the impact of the National Park Service because NPS frequently does these outreach programs through its unique partnership with Essex Heritage, and often in association with other organizations such as the North Shore Work Force Investment Board and Northeast Metropolitan Region Vocational School.

The objective of bill HR 1500 filed by Congressman Tierney last week is to study the ways in which the benefits of having the National Park Service in Salem might be expanded. We have been assured that if legislation is passed to implement a study, the National Park Service will include public input throughout the process as we all learn more about the impact of expanding their reach. Alternatives will be developed. Public input will be solicited. Proposals will be revised, and recommendations will be reviewed with residents, as well as our municipal leaders.

We are excited to see this process move forward and know that we have several other examples of areas where the National Park Service expanded its reach in very positive ways. Think of the impact that the National Park Service has had in the revitalization of the once-decaying industrial city of Lowell. Look at the impact that the National Park Service has had on the once-neglected Boston Harbor Islands. We welcome an open dialogue as this process moves forward.

Annie Harris
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