

# Nashua, Squannacook, and Nissitissit Rivers Stewardship Plan

February 15, 2018

Nashua River Wild and Scenic River Study Committee  
c/o Nashua River Watershed Association  
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978-448-0299  
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# Nashua River Wild and Scenic River Study Committee

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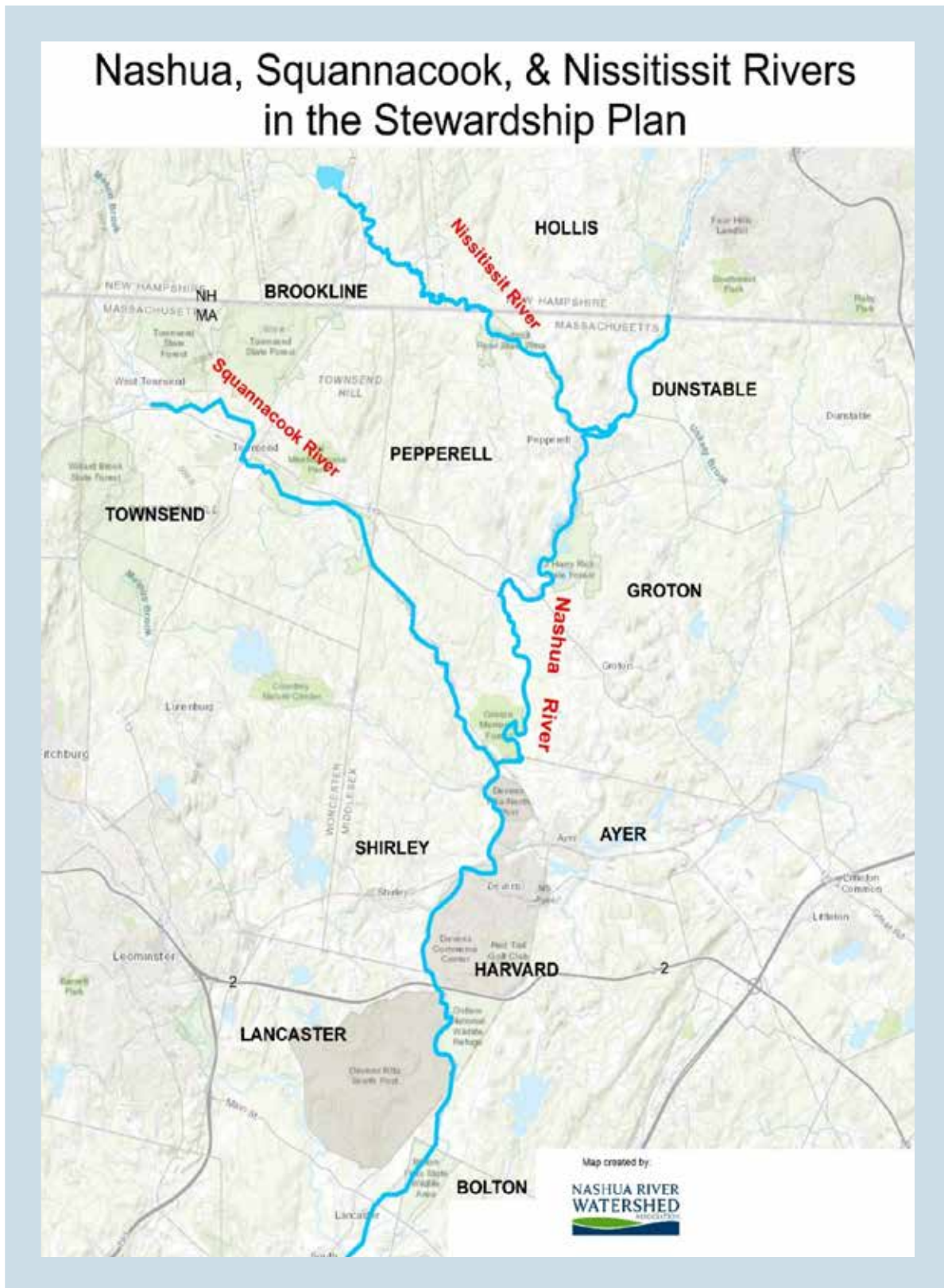
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This Plan is also available on our website [www.WildandScenicNashuaRivers.org](http://www.WildandScenicNashuaRivers.org) (and once a final draft is produced, hard copies will be made available in the Town Clerks’ offices and town libraries). Additional information and electronic copies of this plan are available on our website [www.WildandScenicNashuaRivers.org](http://www.WildandScenicNashuaRivers.org) or by sending a request to [Alf@NashuaRiverWatershed.org](mailto:Alf@NashuaRiverWatershed.org).



*Nashua, Squannacook, & Nissitissit Rivers in the Stewardship Plan.*



February 15, 2018

Greetings—

We are pleased to present the “Nashua, Squannacook, and Nissitissit Rivers Stewardship Plan” for your consideration. Three years in the making, the Stewardship Plan is intended as a guide for local communities as they work in partnership to take voluntary actions to protect and enhance the outstandingly remarkable resource values of these rivers in the years to come.

The Congressionally-authorized Nashua River Wild and Scenic River Study Committee identified the resources and developed the voluntary Stewardship Plan with much public input. Representatives appointed to the Committee by the eleven participating riverfront towns—Ayer, Bolton, Brookline, Dunstable, Groton, Harvard, Hollis, Lancaster, Pepperell, Shirley, and Townsend—worked together with the Nashua River Watershed Association and National Park Service to explore whether sections of the rivers were eligible and suitable for federal designation as Partnership Wild and Scenic Rivers. Many experts from state agencies and conservation organizations assisted with this effort, and the conclusion is a resounding affirmation that our rivers merit designation.

It is up to the townspeople in the eleven participating communities to vote at their 2018 spring Town Meetings to accept the Stewardship Plan and its recommendation that the rivers be designated Partnership Wild and Scenic Rivers. If the votes are affirmative, as the Study Committee anticipates, legislation will be submitted to Congress. After designation, a local Stewardship Council will be formed—much like our current Study Committee—to implement the Stewardship Plan. Designation will not stop development, rezone private land, or change property rights. Land use controls on private lands continue to be solely a matter of state and local jurisdiction.

**Acknowledgements:** We have many people and organizations to thank for their assistance over the past three years, first and foremost the boards and committees of the participating towns and all those who served at one point or another on the Study Committee. As can be seen from the list of Experts Consulted, we have been very fortunate throughout our work to have the benefit of their expertise. We also appreciated being able to consult with leaders of the Stewardship Councils of the New England rivers that have already been designated Wild and Scenic: Eight Mile; Farmington; Lamprey; Sudbury, Assabet, and Concord; Upper



Missisquoi and Trout; and Westfield. We appreciated being able to utilize template sections of the plans developed by their Stewardship Councils as appropriate.

Many friends from throughout the watershed have contributed a wide variety of photographs. Several individuals have contributed extraordinary pro bono services, including Cindy Knox, who designed our website and provided an initial set of stunning photographs, Diane Carson of Nashoba Paddler, LCC who provided canoes and kayaks for our on-river outreach tours, and Joan Wotkowicz, who helped edit and format the Stewardship Plan.

We greatly appreciate the financial and technical support provided by the National Park Service, including attention from both Liz Lacy, who joined the team more recently, and from Jamie Fosburgh, who has been a tremendous and steady presence since the inception of the project. The Nashua River Watershed Association staff's leadership and diligent work in coordinating the study activities and development of the Stewardship Plan have enabled us to bring this project to fruition, and we especially thank Elizabeth Ainsley Campbell, Al Futterman, Martha Morgan, and Wynne Treanor-Kenvold.

In conclusion, we look forward to hearing from the townspeople at their 2018 spring Town Meetings when they accept the Stewardship Plan and its recommendation to seek designation for sections of the Nashua, Squannacook, and Nissitissit Rivers as Partnership Wild and Scenic Rivers. Furthermore, we look forward to using this locally-driven Stewardship Plan as a guide to voluntary actions that can be taken to protect and enhance our magnificent rivers.

Lucy B. Wallace  
Chair, Nashua River Wild and Scenic River Study Committee

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*Nashua River from Ice House Dam at Harvard-Shirley town line with contrails in the sky. Photo: Rich Soar.*



*Nashua River. Photo: Cindy Knox Photography.*

## Executive Summary

**T**he Nashua, Squannacook, and Nissitissit Rivers are valued by local communities and merit national recognition. This Stewardship Plan (Plan) was created by the locally-appointed Nashua River Wild and Scenic River Study Committee during a three-year study that explored the possible designation of the rivers under the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System.

The Plan is intended to guide stewardship of the rivers in the event that they are designated by Congress as Partnership Wild and Scenic Rivers. Through this partnership, many entities representing local, state, and federal interests all voluntarily agree to participate in the Plan's implementation and the realization of its goals. Its implementation through Wild and Scenic designation potentially offers a net financial gain for municipalities and local partners, as costs associated with implementing the Plan can be funded through federal monies (subject to Congressional approval) allotted for that purpose. Regardless of designation, the Plan is intended to be

a valuable resource and important tool for citizens, local organizations, and state and local officials concerned with managing, protecting, and enhancing the Nashua, Squannacook, and Nissitissit Rivers and the special resources associated with them.

### National Wild and Scenic Rivers System

Congress established the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System in 1968 following a decade of widespread dam building and hydroelectric development.





*Squannacook River. Photo: Cindy Knox Photography.*

The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act (Public Law 90-542; 16 U.S.C. 1271) was enacted to balance this dam building with the preservation of the free-flowing character and outstanding features of some of the nation's most beloved rivers. As of 2018, there are 208 rivers in the National System encompassing 12,700 miles (this is less than one-quarter of 1% of our nation's rivers). This includes nine designated rivers in New England.

With the exception of the Allagash River in Maine and the Wildcat Brook in New Hampshire, all of the designated Wild and Scenic Rivers in New England are called Partnership Wild and Scenic Rivers. Partnership Rivers are a subset of the National System that flow through land predominantly held in private ownership or by state and local government (rather than through federal lands), and are characterized by strong partnerships among the adjacent communities and the National Park Service. Partnership Wild and Scenic Rivers have a stewardship approach that sets them apart from the other rivers comprising the National System.

Common principles of Partnership Rivers include:

- Administration is through post-designation Stewardship Councils comprised of local representatives (much like the Study Committee).
- Land use is governed by existing local municipalities and state laws and regulations.
- The National Park Service will not own or manage lands associated with the designation (other federal agencies such as US Fish and Wildlife Service—Oxbow National Wildlife Refuge—are unaffected).
- The National Park Service is responsible for implementing Section 7 of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act to ensure federal consistency in preserving identified Outstandingly Remarkable Resource Values (ORRV) and the free-flowing character of the river. This responsibility is coordinated with each river's Stewardship Council.
- River stewardship plans are locally developed and approved prior to federal designation.
- River stewardship plans form the basis of the designation and guide subsequent voluntary actions.

- Stewardship responsibilities are shared among local, state, federal, and non-profit partners.
- Voluntary participation is essential to the partnership and viewed as the key to success.
- Partnership Wild and Scenic Rivers are not considered units of the National Park System, and are not subject to regulations that govern Park units.

## Nashua River Wild and Scenic River Study covering the Nashua, Squannacook, and Nissitissit Rivers

The Nashua River Wild and Scenic River Study was initiated following passage of a bill introduced by US Representative Niki Tsongas, at the request of local advocates with the support of municipalities. The bill was signed into law by President Barack Obama on December 19, 2014 (Public Law 113–291); it authorized a Study of the Nashua River, Squannacook River, and Nissitissit River.

The locally-appointed Study Committee was convened in 2015 to investigate the eligibility and suitability of the inclusion of the Nashua, Squannacook, and Nissitissit Rivers into the National Wild and Scenic River System. The Study Committee was comprised of voting representatives appointed by each of the participating riverfront municipalities—Ayer, Bolton, Dunstable, Groton, Harvard, Lancaster, Pepperell, Shirley, and Townsend in Massachusetts and Brookline and Hollis in New Hampshire—as well as the Nashua River Watershed Association and the National Park Service. Representatives from US Fish and Wildlife Service, US Geological Survey, Massachusetts Department of Fish and Wildlife, Massachusetts Division of Ecological Restoration, and Devens Enterprise Commission also participated in the Study Committee.

The role of the Study Committee was to determine whether the Nashua, Squannacook, and Nissitissit Rivers are eligible for federal designation, to assess the level of local support for such designation, and to summarize the Committee’s findings and recommendations in this voluntary Stewardship Plan. The Study Committee received financial and technical support from the National Park Service for the Study process.

The segments being recommended for designation include:

- The Nashua River at the confluence of the North and South Nashua Rivers in Lancaster, Massachusetts up to the New Hampshire state line.
- The Squannacook River at its confluence with the Nashua River in Groton, Massachusetts up to its headwaters in Townsend, Massachusetts.
- The Nissitissit River at its confluence with the Nashua River in Pepperell, Massachusetts up to its headwaters in Brookline, New Hampshire.

Three working dams in the Massachusetts portions of the Nashua and Squannacook Rivers—the Ice House Dam in Harvard, the Hollingsworth & Vose Dam in Groton, and the Pepperell Dam in Pepperell, —will be “grandfathered” as existing facilities compatible with the designation. Designation will not impact their existing operations.

## Outstandingly Remarkable Resource Values

To be eligible for Wild and Scenic designation, a river must be free flowing (without dams) and possess at least one “outstandingly remarkable” natural, cultural or recreational resource value (deemed ORRVs in this Plan). An ORRV is a unique, rare, or exemplary river-related feature that is significant at a comparative regional or national scale. The Study Committee gathered information about the Nashua,





*Nissitissit River. Photo: Ken Hartlage.*

Squannacook, and Nissitissit Rivers and their associated natural, cultural, and recreational resources with assistance from knowledgeable community members as well as from local, state, and federal officials.

The Study Committee determined through its investigation that the Nashua, Squannacook, and Nissitissit Rivers possess numerous ORRVs in three main categories: Biological Diversity; Recreational and Scenic; and Historical and Cultural. Just a few highlights are listed below:

- The Study area has exceptional biological diversity, three state-designated Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, six “Priority Natural Communities” along the Nashua River, and significant areas designated as “core habitat” by Massachusetts. Our findings include more than two dozen threatened, endangered, or species of special concern, including dragonflies in the Squannacook River; freshwater mussels in the Nissitissit River; and, additionally, a notably large population of Blanding’s turtles, which are state-listed in Massachusetts and New Hampshire.
- The cool waters of the Squannacook and Nissitissit Rivers provide some of the best fly-fishing within reach of Boston, Nashua, and Worcester. Some 30 bass fishing clubs hold tournaments on the Nashua River, more than 8,000 visitors annually use canoes or kayaks to recreate on the rivers, the 11-mile Nashua River Rail Trail runs alongside the river, and there are many miles of connected trails. Peaceful and scenic views are afforded from the river due to the extent of forested shoreline.
- The Study area has given rise to many influential conservationists, including Benton MacKaye and William Wharton. The area experienced a breathtaking resurgence of conservation activities in the 1960s that had lasting impact on the cultural fabric of the region. The “Marion Stoddart Story” and the clean-up of the Nashua River has merited international acclaim and has been a model for watershed groups across the country. Noteworthy historic sites, including those associated with Native Americans, Shakers, and transcendentalists abound in our area.

## Existing Protections

For each ORRV identified, the Study Committee considered the protections existing for these resources and evaluated whether the protections are sufficient. The Committee then made suggestions for voluntary stewardship recommendations, which are included in this Plan. Existing laws, regulations, and ordinances at the federal, state, and local levels afford a high degree of protection for many of the ORRVs found along the Nashua, Squannacook, and Nissitissit Rivers.

An extraordinary proportion of the land along the Nashua, Squannacook, and Nissitissit Rivers is permanently protected by a mosaic of federal, state, and local entities. The result is increased biodiversity, increased scenic value, and increased recreational pleasure associated with our rivers.

## Stewardship Recommendations

This Stewardship Plan presents a series of recommendations that can be voluntarily implemented by local landowners, municipalities, and state and federal agencies working together to help protect river-related resources and maintain and enhance the quality and way of life valued by so many people (see Chapter 4). The recommendations in this locally-developed Stewardship Plan can be implemented by a post-designation, locally-appointed Stewardship Council working with communities and partners on a voluntary basis.

## Next Steps

The Study Committee is engaging with the river-front communities in a dialogue about the Plan, its recommendations, and potential Wild and Scenic designation. This dialogue will culminate in the spring of 2018 with Town Meeting votes in eleven participating towns on the Stewardship Plan and the Wild and Scenic River designation. The Study Committee and the National Park Service will only recommend designation if the Plan and designation are supported by favorable community votes in the participating towns.

## Effects of Designation and Implementing the Plan

Designation will result in establishment of a Stewardship Council comprised of representatives appointed by the eleven participating municipalities plus the Nashua River Watershed Association and the National Park Service. The Stewardship Council will guide the administration of the designation and implementation of the locally-developed Stewardship Plan. Designation will also likely result in an appropriation of federal funds (subject to Congressional approval) to support implementation of the Stewardship Plan.

Existing state and local laws will continue to govern—private lands and activities will not be subject to increased federal control. Land use decisions will continue to be made by local planning and zoning boards, not federal agencies. The federal government will not acquire lands to implement the designation. Licensed, pre-existing hydroelectric facilities can continue to operate; other existing dams can be retrofitted for non-hydroelectric power purposes. Hunting and fishing laws and regulations will be unaffected, and rules governing agricultural practices will not change. If the rivers are designated, the designation would also give the local municipalities a voice, through the Stewardship Council and the National Park Service, in protecting ORRVs from any harmful effects of *new* federally funded or permitted construction or development of water resource projects affecting the designated portions of the rivers.

## In Conclusion

Working together, participating local, state, and federal partners can steward the outstandingly remarkable resources of the Nashua, Squannacook, and Nissitissit Rivers through voluntary actions.







*Bertozzi Rapids on the Squannacook River at Groton-Shirley town line. This is also the site of a USGS stream gage.  
Photo: Cindy Knox Photography.*

## Chapter 1: Wild And Scenic Rivers

### The National Wild and Scenic Rivers System

#### When was this Established and Why?

The National Wild and Scenic Rivers System was established by the US Congress on October 2, 1968 with the passage of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act (Public Law 90-542; 16 U.S.C. 1271) to protect free-flowing, outstanding rivers from the harmful effects of **new** federally assisted projects such as dams and hydroelectric facilities. The Act states:

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It is hereby declared to be the policy of the United States that certain selected rivers of the Nation which, with their immediate environments, possess outstandingly remarkable scenic, recreational, geologic, fish and wildlife, historic, cultural, or other similar values, shall be preserved in free-flowing condition, and that they and their immediate environments shall be protected for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations. The Congress declares that

the established national policy of dam and other construction at appropriate sections of the rivers of the United States needs to be complemented by a policy that would preserve other selected rivers or sections thereof in their free-flowing condition to protect the water quality of such rivers and to fulfill other vital national conservation purposes.<sup>1</sup>

**What Rivers are Eligible?** To be eligible for designation as “Wild and Scenic,” a river or river segment must have at least one Outstandingly Remarkable Resource Value (ORRV). The ORRVs are river-related scenic, recreational, geologic, fish and wildlife, historic, cultural, or other similar values. The locally identified ORRVs must have unique, rare, or exemplary qualities at a comparative regional or national scale. The ORRVs identified during this Study process are extensively discussed in Chapter 4.

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<sup>1</sup> Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1968, Public Law 90-542, 16 U.S.C. 1271 (1968).

To be eligible for designation, a river or river segment must also be free flowing. The term “free-flowing” refers to flow within the designated river segment and is not the same as naturally flowing. The free-flowing status of our rivers was evaluated during this Study process and is extensively discussed in Appendix A.

**Are There Special Protections?** Designation provides communities with special federal protection of the river. Section 7(a) of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act describes the specific protections provided to designated rivers resource-rich:

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The Federal Power Commission [Federal Regulatory Commission] shall not license the construction of any dam, water conduit, reservoir, powerhouse, transmission line, or other project works under the Federal Power Act . . . on or directly affecting any river which is designated . . . and no department or agency of the United States shall assist by any loan, grant, license, or otherwise in the construction of any water resources project that would have a direct and adverse effect on the values for which such river was established . . . No department or agency of the United States shall recommend authorization of any water resources project that would have a direct or adverse effect on the values for which such river was established . . .<sup>2</sup>

The intention of Section 7 of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act is to protect the designated rivers from **new** federal projects that would adversely affect the free-flowing character or Outstandingly Remarkable Resource Values for which the rivers are designated. Section 7 requires the evaluation of partially or fully federally funded or permitted construction and development water resources projects within the designated area. This Section prevents licensing or exemption by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) of new dams or hydropower facilities on or directly affecting the designated area; prevents federal projects which have a direct or

adverse effect on the free-flowing character, Outstandingly Remarkable Resource Values, or water quality of the designated area; and limits federal projects that would invade the designated area or unreasonably diminish the free-flowing character, Outstandingly Remarkable Resource Values, or water quality of the designated area.



Although this section is the regulatory arm of the Act, it applies only to specific federal projects and does not impact local zoning or the land use of private landowners, as this remains governed by local and state laws regardless of designation.

### How Many Rivers Have Been Designated?

As of 2018, fifty years after the passage of the Act, there are 208 rivers in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System encompassing 12,700 miles. While this at first may seem like many miles, it is less than one-quarter of 1% of our nation's rivers. In Massachusetts, there are 8,229 miles of rivers, of which only 147.1 are designated as Wild and Scenic. Of New Hampshire's 10,874 miles of rivers, only 38 miles are currently designated Wild and Scenic.

There are nine designated rivers in New England: Allagash (Maine); Lamprey (New Hampshire); Wildcat Brook (New Hampshire); Concord, Sudbury, and Assabet Rivers (Massachusetts); Taunton (Massachusetts); Upper Missisquoi and Trout Rivers (Vermont); Westfield (Massachusetts); Eightmile (Connecticut); and Farmington (Connecticut).

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.





Nissitissit River. Photo: Ken Hartlage.

## Partnership Wild and Scenic Rivers

### What Are Partnership Wild and Scenic Rivers?

Partnership Rivers are a subset of the National System that flow through land predominantly held in private ownership or by state and local government. Seven of the nine designated Wild and Scenic Rivers in New England are Partnership Wild and Scenic Rivers. They are managed through partnerships among the adjacent communities and the National Park Service.

Partnership Wild and Scenic Rivers have a management approach that sets them apart from the other rivers comprising the National System. The common principles of the Partnership Wild and Scenic Rivers include:

- No federal ownership or management of lands (federal ownership is excluded by Congress).
- Administration is through post-designation Stewardship Councils comprised of local representatives (much like the Study Committee).

- Adjacent land use continues to be governed by existing local municipalities and state laws and regulations.
- The National Park Service is responsible for implementing Section 7 of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act to ensure federal consistency in preserving identified ORRVs and the free-flowing character of the river. This responsibility is coordinated with each river's Stewardship Council.
- River stewardship plans are locally-developed and approved prior to federal designation.
- River stewardship plans form the basis of the designation and guide subsequent stewardship actions.
- Stewardship responsibilities are shared among local, state, federal, and nonprofit partners.
- Voluntary participation is essential to the partnership and viewed as the key to success.

The Nashua, Squannacook, and Nissitissit Rivers are being considered for possible designation as **Partnership** Wild and Scenic Rivers, a subset of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers system.



*Nashua River. Photo: Cindy Knox Photography.*

## Benefits of a Wild and Scenic River Designation

There are many benefits to a Wild and Scenic River Designation. Below are just a few:

- Preserves a clean and plentiful water supply.
- Supports robust and diverse plant and animal populations that reflect a healthy ecosystem.
- Improves passage for safe boating on the rivers and other recreational enhancements.
- Preserves scenic views that define our local communities.
- Fosters the next generation of conservationists.
- Recognizes important historical and cultural sites.
- Possible federal funding support to help towns achieve priority projects to help steward the outstandingly remarkable resource values.
- Small grants to help local schools, towns, civic groups, private landowners and others on projects that support the purposes and goals the Stewardship Plan.





*Nashua River and greenway corridor. Photo: Cindy Knox Photography.*

## Chapter 2:

# “Nashua River Wild and Scenic River Study” Covering The Nashua, Squannacook, and Nissitissit Rivers

## Wild and Scenic Study Authorization

**First Steps.** To determine if a particular river or river segment is eligible for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers system, a Wild and Scenic River Study is conducted. In 2009, the Nashua River Watershed Association (NRWA) began assessing whether any of the rivers in the Nashua River watershed might merit such a formal Wild and Scenic River Study process. The NRWA found that much of the Nashua River was already included in the 1982 Nationwide Rivers Inventory of candidates for Wild and Scenic designation.

The NRWA looked at the Nashua River’s main tributaries in light of the Wild and Scenic criteria and assessed that the Squannacook and Nissitissit Rivers could almost assuredly also merit designation. On the other hand, the North Nashua River did not seem to be a strong candidate for inclusion at that time, as its 20 miles had 11 dams and its water quality

was still compromised by unresolved Combined Sewer Overflow situations in the cities of Leominster and Fitchburg. The NRWA, in consultation with the National Park Service, concluded that for a first time venture in the Nashua River watershed regarding seeking Wild and Scenic designation, it would be appropriate to seek authorization for a Study to be conducted on only sections of the Nashua, Squannacook, and Nissitissit Rivers.

It was noted at the time that there was precedent for the future Stewardship Councils of designated rivers to undertake successive ventures to seek designation for additional meritorious rivers in their watersheds.

**Initial Support.** In 2009, the NRWA began outreach to the Boards of Selectmen of the Nashua, Squannacook, and Nissitissit’s riverfront towns, seeking their support for asking Congress to

authorize a formal Study of sections of the rivers for potential inclusion as Partnership Rivers in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. Assured of broad local support for the study, US Representative Niki Tsongas first introduced legislation to Congress in 2011, and, as is typical, the legislative process took several years.

### NPS Reconnaissance Survey.

In 2013, at the request of Representative Tsongas, the Northeast Region of the National Park Service (NPS) conducted a reconnaissance survey<sup>3</sup> of the Nashua, Squannacook, and Nissitissit Rivers



NPS “Wild and Scenic River Reconnaissance Survey of the Nashua River” Report Cover

to evaluate them as candidates for potential Wild and Scenic River designation and as a step toward a full Wild and Scenic River Study. The preliminary findings were that eligibility and suitability criteria were likely to be met, and that a Wild and Scenic River Study would be appropriate and productive.

**Legislation Authorizing the Study.** On December 19, 2014, a bill re-introduced to Congress by Representative Tsongas was signed into law<sup>4</sup> by President Barack Obama, authorizing the “Nashua River Wild and Scenic River Study” encompassing the Nashua, Squannacook, and Nissitissit Rivers. A public announcement and celebration was held on January 12, 2015 at the Nashua River Watershed Association’s River Resource Center in Groton, Massachusetts.



Press event at the Nashua River Watershed Association on January 12, 2015 announcing passage of Nashua River Wild & Scenic River legislation. From left to right: Elizabeth Ainsley Campbell, NRWA Executive Director; Lucy Wallace, NRWA President; US Congresswoman Niki Tsongas; Jamie Fosburgh, National Park Service Manager of New England Rivers; and MA State Representative Eileen Donahue. Photo: Pam Gilfillan.

The resultant Study was conducted according to the principles associated with the Partnership River Study approach, as described previously.

## The Study Committee

**Committee Membership.** After the Study was authorized, the National Park Service entered into a Cooperative Agreement with the Nashua River Watershed Association and provided financial<sup>5</sup> and technical support. The NRWA convened a Study Committee, which held its first meeting in October of 2015 after funding was in place and representatives were appointed. The backbone of the Study Committee consists of formally appointed representatives from each of the eleven towns ultimately participating in the Study: Ayer, Bolton, Dunstable, Groton, Harvard, Lancaster, Pepperell, Shirley, and Townsend in Massachusetts; Brookline and Hollis in New Hampshire. Each municipality

3 National Park Service Northeast Region, *Wild and Scenic River Reconnaissance Survey of the Nashua River* (Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Northeast Region, Boston, Massachusetts, 2013).

4 Carl Levin and Howard P. “Buck” McKeon National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2015, Public Law 113-291, H.R. 3979 (2014).

5 While the National Park Service has provided the vast majority of funding, additional support was provided through a grant from the Bruce J. Anderson Foundation to the NRWA and a small portion of a grant from Bristol-Myers Squibb Company. Additional *pro bono* services contributed substantially to the work of the Study Committee.



has a vote on the Committee, as does the Nashua River Watershed Association and the National Park Service. Representatives from US Fish and Wildlife Service, US Geological Survey, Massachusetts Department of Fish and Wildlife, Massachusetts Division of Ecological Restoration, and Devens Enterprise Commission also participate in the Study Committee. Additional stakeholders with resource expertise regularly participate in the Committee as well, providing invaluable assistance.

The full Study Committee has been meeting regularly on the third Thursday of each month, with all meetings open to the public. Notes of the meetings are posted on the Committee’s website: [www.WildandScenicNashuaRivers.org](http://www.WildandScenicNashuaRivers.org) along with a wealth of related information. Two subcommittees were formed: the Outstandingly Remarkable Resource Value Subcommittee and the Outreach Subcommittee. Throughout the process, the knowledge of numerous federal, state, and local experts was drawn on and extensive public input was sought.



### Responsibilities of the Study Committee.

Consistent with the approach taken in exploring all Partnership rivers, over the course of the approximate three-year study process, the Study Committee’s main responsibilities have been to:

- Determine whether the Nashua, Squannacook, and Nissitissit Rivers are eligible for inclusion in the Wild and Scenic Rivers System; assess the rivers’ free-flowing characters, document ORRVs; and determine the specific sections for which to seek designation.
- Serve as the focal point for local community, citizen, and stakeholder involvement throughout the study process; determine whether there is suitable local support and commitment for designation.
- Review local, state, and federal protections

that are already in place for the ORRVs; assess current threats to the ORRVs; and identify opportunities for stewardship.

- Develop a locally-driven Stewardship Plan to serve as a blueprint for improved stewardship of the identified natural, recreational and scenic, and historical and cultural values, with technical assistance from the National Park Service. The recommended actions can be undertaken voluntarily in the future, regardless of whether designation occurs.

**NPS Study Report to Congress.** Upon fulfillment of the main Study Committee responsibilities outlined above, the National Park Service summarizes the research and findings in a NPS Study Report to Congress. The finalized Study Report is a separate document from this Stewardship Plan and is presented to Congress. The presentation of the NPS Study Report to Congress, anticipated to be in June or July of 2018, is followed by a public comment period. Designation requires that a bill be passed by Congress and signed by the President.



*Lucy Wallace, chair of Study Committee and Outstandingly Remarkable Resource Values Subcommittee, and Al Futterman, NRWA staff and Study Committee Coordinator, at NRWA River Resource Center. Photo: Wynne Treanor-Kvenvold.*

## Summary of Findings

**Sections and Boundaries.** The sections being recommended by the Study Committee for designation include:

- The Nashua River at the confluence of the North and South Nashua Rivers in Lancaster, Massachusetts up to the New Hampshire state line.
- The Squannacook River at its confluence with the Nashua River in Groton, Massachusetts up to its headwaters in Townsend, Massachusetts.
- The Nissitissit River at its confluence with the Nashua River in Pepperell, Massachusetts up to its headwaters in Brookline, New Hampshire.



*Robert Pontbriand, chair of the Outreach Subcommittee.  
Photo: Elizabeth Ainsley Campbell.*

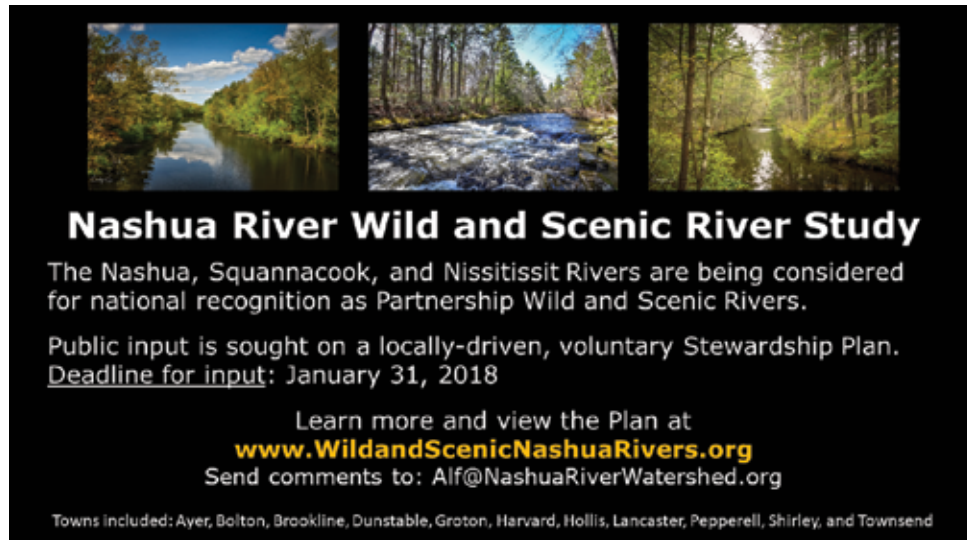
The National Park Service is recommending that small sections be excluded from the designation upstream and downstream from the three working dams in Massachusetts—the Ice House Dam in Harvard, the Hollingsworth and Vose Dam in Townsend, and the Pepperell Dam in Pepperell.

The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act does not contain specific requirements regarding lateral boundaries or the minimum width of the river corridor after designation. Consistent with the established Partnership Wild and Scenic River model, which involves no federal land acquisition or management, there are no distinct lateral boundaries or corridors established within this Stewardship Plan or for the Partnership Wild and Scenic designation of sections of the Nashua, Squannacook, and Nissitissit Rivers.

The Stewardship Plan focuses its stewardship efforts on the rivers themselves, their tributaries and headwaters, and their immediate riparian corridors. Lands within the floodplain, immediately adjacent to the rivers’ banks, or which are noteworthy in their scenic character receive the greatest attention. For uplands outside of this area—indeed throughout the entire watershed—the Plan identifies beneficial actions relating to water quality maintenance and improvement and other issues best addressed by taking a watershed approach.



*Nashua River Wild and Scenic River Study Committee at a monthly meeting. Photo: Martha Morgan.*



*Public Service Announcement from the Nashua River Wild and Scenic River Study Committee seeking input on the Stewardship Plan.*

### **Requirement of Free-Flowing Character.**

As noted above, the National Park Service is recommending that small sections be excluded from the designation upstream and downstream from the three working dams in Massachusetts. For a full discussion of dams, see Appendix A. Note that our dams are also associated with Outstandingly Remarkable Resource Values involving river-related historical and cultural sites.

**Demonstration of Outstandingly Remarkable Resource Values (ORRVs).** The Study Committee—with assistance from many federal, local, regional, and state resource professionals—successfully identified and documented three categories of ORRVs: Biological Diversity; Recreational and Scenic; and Historical and Cultural. Understanding the “Rivers as Corridors” is discussed in Chapter 3. In Chapter 4, descriptions of each ORRV Category directly precede the recommended actions.

**Local Support and Commitment.** From start to finish, the active representation of the municipalities on the Study Committee served as one form of testament to local concurrence regarding the ORRVs and local support for the action plan to protect them. Throughout the process, presentations were given to Boards of Selectmen, Conservation Commissions, and Planning Boards in each of the towns, and outreach to Water Departments and

Departments of Public Works was done if separate departments existed. Local Historical Commissions and Societies were contacted, as were fishing clubs, sportsmen clubs, local and regional land trusts, greenway committees, regional and local trails groups, Regional Planning Authorities, conservation organizations, and dam owners.

Broad public input was solicited at multiple Public Forums, through public service announcements (PSAs), and numerous e-news and Facebook postings. Leading up to the Annual Town Meetings, extensive additional outreach is being done, including production and circulation of a short educational video. The endorsements from the town boards and the entities listed above will be printed in an Addendum to this Stewardship Plan and will appear in the National Park Service Report to Congress. Ultimately, affirmative votes at the spring 2018 Town Meetings will be the strongest expression of local support. See Chapter 5 regarding the upcoming Town Votes, and see Appendix L for highlights of outreach events, forums, and activities through February 15, 2018 as well as to see sample materials.

**Existing protections.** A Regulatory Review was conducted by the Study Committee and reviewed extensively by local, regional, and state regulatory professionals. The Regulatory Review is presented in Appendix B.





*Nissitissit River. Photo: Ken Hartlage.*

### **Stewardship Plan Recommended Actions.**

The Study Committee has no regulatory authority. Similarly, the future Stewardship Council that will evolve from the Study Committee after designation will have no regulatory authority. The locally-driven Stewardship Plan offers recommendations for voluntary actions that could be taken to protect and enhance the ORRVs, whether or not designation occurs. These suggested actions can be found in detail in Chapter 4.

## **In Conclusion: The Study Committee Recommends Wild and Scenic River Designation**

The Nashua River Wild and Scenic River Study Committee believes that designation of segments of the Nashua, Squannacook, and Nissitissit Rivers as components of the national Wild and Scenic Rivers system is a critical step in the fulfillment of the goals and resource objectives that have been defined for the rivers in this Plan. The designation would:

1. Officially recognize segments of the Nashua, Squannacook, and Nissitissit Rivers as a resource of national significance.
2. Establish the National Park Service as a partner in the implementation of this Plan.
3. Provide opportunity for federal funding to implement the action strategies of the Plan and support the operations of the proposed Nashua, Squannacook, and Nissitissit Rivers Stewardship Council.
4. Protect the designated river segments from potentially harmful federal water resource development projects, which could threaten the outstanding resource values of these rivers.

If sections of the Nashua, Squannacook, and Nissitissit Rivers are designated as part of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System by the United States Congress, this Stewardship Plan would serve as the “Comprehensive Management Plan” required for all National Wild and Scenic Rivers.

**The Nashua River Wild and Scenic River Study Committee voted to endorse this Stewardship Plan and to recommend designation at its February 15, 2018 meeting.**



*Nashua River. Photo: Bill Nickerson.*

## Chapter 3:

# The Rivers As Corridors

## Early Stewards and Champions

**Native Americans.** The region covered by our Stewardship Plan has a long and remarkable history of conservationists, beginning with Native Americans, who utilized the area as prime hunting grounds because of its extraordinary wildlife habitat and density of wildlife.<sup>6</sup> As stewards of this landscape, they kept the area virtually free of all permanent settlements in order not to despoil this special, productive area.

**Benton MacKaye.** More recently, the area has produced a long list of notable conservationists and conservation entities. Benton MacKaye (1879–1975)

is one of several luminaries whose views were shaped by our study area; he, in turn, “significantly influenced the evolving American conservation and



**Benton MacKaye (1879–1975),** environmental pioneer with deep ties to Shirley, advocated for land preservation and linear greenbelts, including one along the Squannacook River. He was the originator of the Appalachian Trail and co-founded the Wilderness Society.

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<sup>6</sup> “Native Americans and later settlers would have been attracted to this area for not only the well-drained soils and fresh water supply, but also the wildlife that would have inhabited the many local wetlands. Wetlands in particular offered an often overlooked variety of relatively predictable, abundant, and nutritional resources for humans and their hunted prey. Wetland plants include emergent wetland species such as cattail, water plantain, and arrowhead, deep water species such as water lily, and wet meadow plants such as nutsedge. Ground nut also grew abundantly along riverbanks in the region before the introduction of domesticated pigs by Europeans.” Mitchell T. Mulholland, “Community-Wide Archaeological Reconnaissance Survey of Groton, Massachusetts. Public Version” (Archaeological Services, Department of Anthropology, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Massachusetts, March 2011, page 30, [www.townofgroton.org/DesktopModules/Bring2mind/DMX/Download.aspx?PortalId=0&EntryId=14113](http://www.townofgroton.org/DesktopModules/Bring2mind/DMX/Download.aspx?PortalId=0&EntryId=14113)).



environmental movements.” MacKaye is well known as the visionary<sup>7</sup> inspiration behind and proponent of the Appalachian Trail and a co-founder of the Wilderness Society. His home terrain in Shirley Center provided the model and the muse for many of his ideas about forestry, recreational trails, regional planning, conservation, transportation, wilderness preservation, and habitable and sustainable communities.<sup>8</sup> MacKaye helped pioneer the idea of land preservation for recreation and conservation purposes, and was a strong advocate of balancing human needs and those of nature.

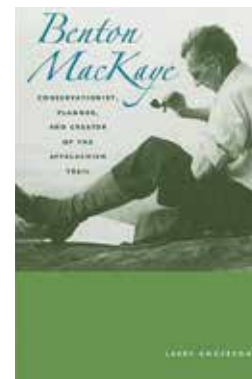


*Benton MacKaye (1879-1975).  
Photo: Appalachian Trail Conservancy.*

Nearly one hundred years ago, MacKaye urged Massachusetts’s state officials and conservationists to develop a linear park along the full length of the Squannacook River<sup>9</sup> and Willard Brook, one of the Squannacook’s main tributaries. He proposed a south-north recreational greenbelt that he called a “Wachusett/Watatic Wilderness Way.” As a consul-

tant for the 1929 Governor's Committee on the Needs and Uses of Open Spaces, he promoted a statewide network of such wilderness ways that would serve “to control the flow of metropolitan civilization.”

A most important element of MacKaye’s ideas and visions that are well worth heeding today, is the notion of using corridors following natural features, such as linear mountain ranges and rivers, ... for controlling and limiting growth, while providing recreational opportunities and protecting natural resources. Greenways, the conversion of abandoned railroad beds to trails, urban growth boundaries, the activities of local land trusts, and, of course, the creation of heritage areas exemplify today’s approach to “linking up” separate corridor projects into larger regional networks. In combination, these river corridors form not just a key habitat network but more importantly provide for landscape-level ecosystem requirements.<sup>10</sup>



*Book cover for Larry Anderson’s book on  
Benton MacKaye.*

7 Larry Anderson, *Benton MacKaye: Conservationist, Planner, and Creator of the Appalachian Trail* (Johns Hopkins University Press, November 12, 2002), page 1.

8 Benton MacKaye was also the first graduate of Harvard College’s School of Forestry, as well as an incorporator of the Nashua River Watershed Association, along with Marion Stoddart, in 1969.

9 The 1952 Conservation Land Use Plan for the Town of Groton Massachusetts recommends “...acquiring land for a Squannacook River Park,” pages 9-10.

10 Larry Anderson, “Benton MacKaye and Freedom’s Way: The ‘New Exploration’ of a Regional Environment” (PowerPoint presentation at Annual Meeting of Freedom’s Way Heritage Association, Lunenburg, Massachusetts, March 17, 2003).



*Squannacook River. Photo: Joan Wotkowicz.*



*Hand-drawn map of a proposed “Nashua–Squannacook River Reservation” by Benton MacKaye, 1945. Nearly 100 years ago, Benton MacKaye recognized the value of linear wilderness preserves as a natural control of expanding development, similar to mountain ranges.<sup>11</sup>*

## Ecological and Biological Corridors with Extensive Protected Lands

### Extensive Protected Lands: Including Oxbow National Wildlife Refuge and Bolton Flats Wildlife Management Area.

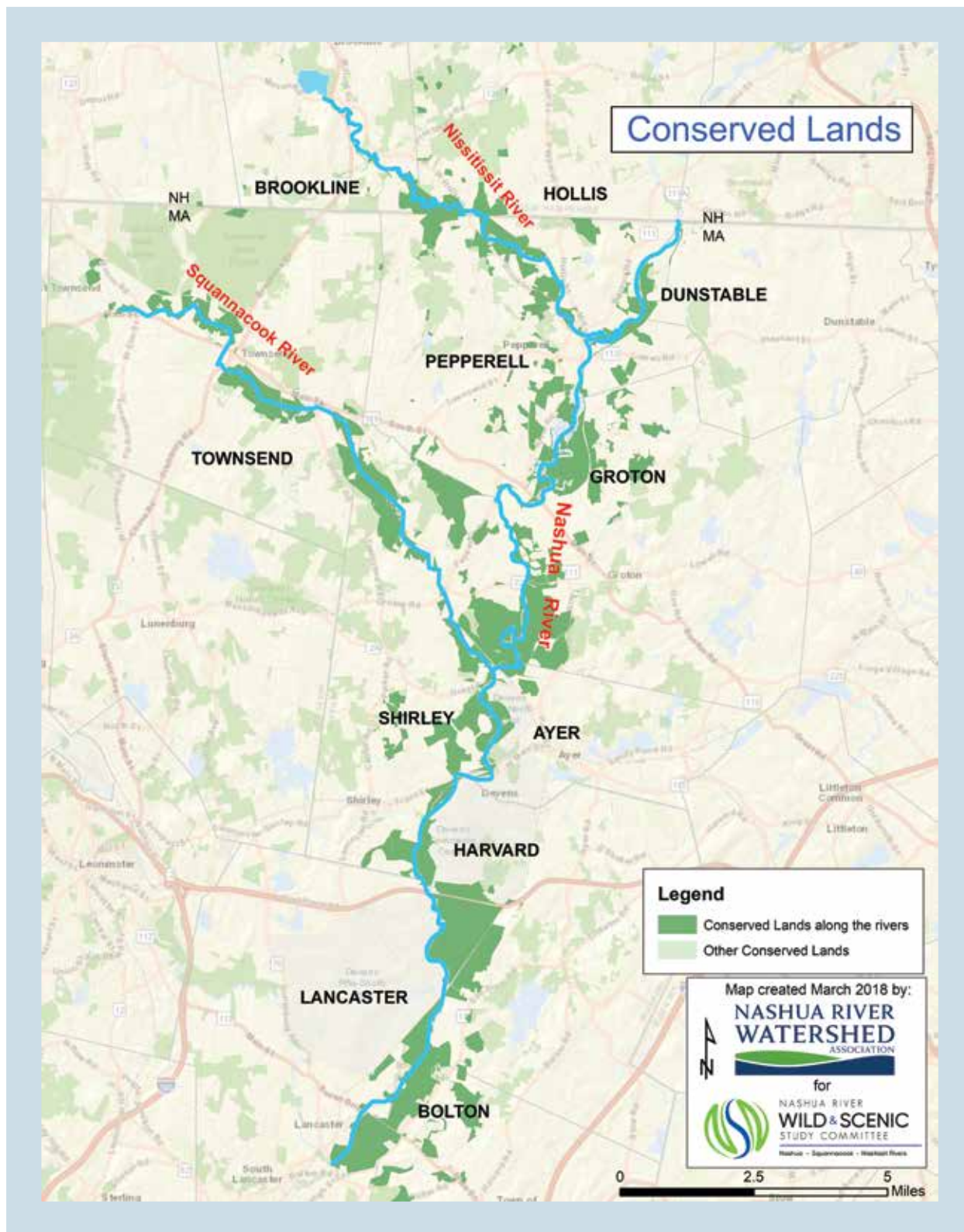
The Nashua, Squannacook, and Nissitissit Rivers are ecological and biological corridors; animals use them as habitat and for passage. The Massachusetts Audubon Society, in a report entitled “Focus Areas for Wildlife Habitat Protection in the Nashua River Watershed,” points out that the river valleys serve as both wildlife habitat corridors and natural south-north migration routes for terrestrial and aquatic fauna and flora set within a context of contiguous undeveloped and, in many cases, permanently protected land.<sup>12</sup>

Efforts to protect major tracts of riparian land have already met with significant success in the region covered by our Stewardship Plan. The various

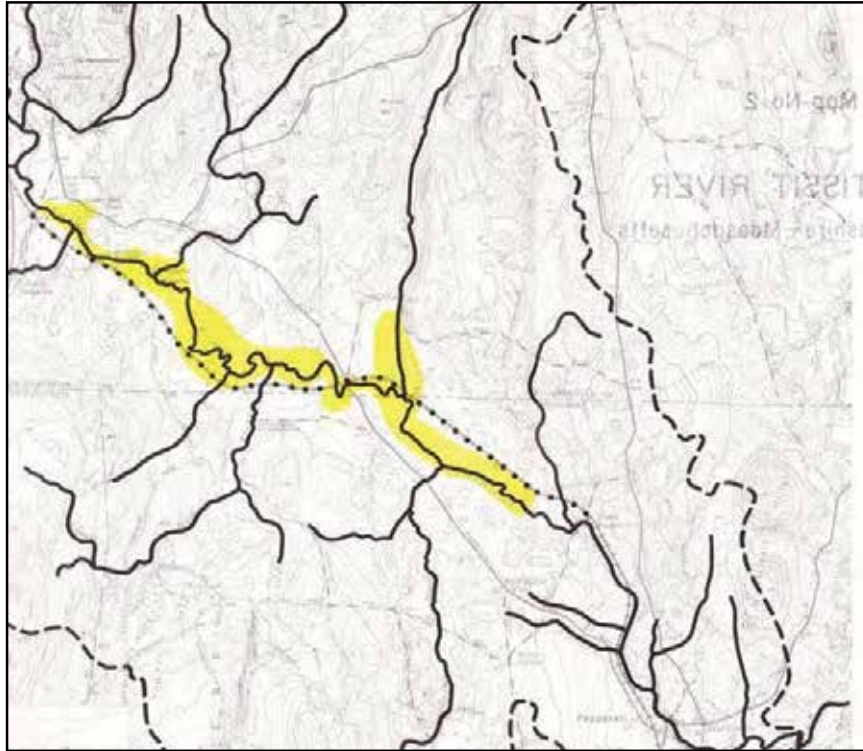
<sup>11</sup> “Possible Layout for a Nashua-Squannacook Reservation,” hand-drawn map by Benton MacKaye (1945), from Larry Anderson archives.

<sup>12</sup> Massachusetts Audubon Society, Focus Areas for Wildlife Habitat Protection in the Nashua River Watershed (Ecological Extension Service of the Massachusetts Audubon Society, September 2000).





*Permanently protected conservation lands with emphasis on those abutting the Nashua, Squannacook, & Nissitissit Rivers.*



*Map of “Proposed Preserve Area” for the Nissitissit River in Brookline and Hollis, NH and in Pepperell, MA by NH Division of Economic Development, 1967. At the time of this proposal, it was suggested that protecting “this river in a joint project with Massachusetts....would be comparable to some of the ‘Wild River’ projects of the national government.”*

conservation lands in our study area are crucial stepping-stones for wildlife movement north from the anchor that is the Oxbow National Wildlife Refuge (ONWR).<sup>13</sup>

The “Oxbow/Intervale/Bolton Flats” area is also cited in a report, *Focus Areas for Wildlife Habitat Protection in the Nashua River Watershed*, as a large wildlife habitat focus area of ~8,500 acres. These areas with large amounts of little-disturbed interior are “cornerstones of a habitat reserve design for the Nashua River Watershed....Tracks of bobcat, black bear and moose have been recorded within this focus area. Bobcats are particularly sensitive to human disturbance and their presence in an area is a very strong indicator of high quality habitat.”<sup>14</sup>



**Eight miles of the Nashua River run through the Oxbow National Wildlife Refuge. The Refuge serves as an anchor in a series of substantial conservation lands in our area that are crucial stepping-stones for wildlife movement northward.**

**Additional Protected Lands.** In addition to the Oxbow National Wildlife Refuge—which alone protects eight miles along the Nashua River—the Nashua, Squannacook, and Nissitissit River corridors provide linear linkages among several other sizeable public conservation lands in the region covered by our Stewardship Plan. Noteworthy examples are

<sup>13</sup> For example, the ONWR beneath the Route 2 Bridge over the Nashua River is one of the few locations for wildlife to cross the barrier created by that heavily trafficked highway.

<sup>14</sup> Harvard Open Space and Recreation Plan, 2016, page 35.





*Nissitissit River and greenway corridor. Photo: Cindy Knox Photography.*

the Ayer State Game Area, Bolton Flats Wildlife Management Area (WMA), Groton Town Forest, J. Harry Rich State Forest, Sabine Woods, Squannacook and Nissitissit River WMAs, Surrenden Farm, and Townsend State Forest.

Much of the remaining unprotected riparian land enjoys partial protection under the 1996 Massachusetts Rivers Protection Act and under local floodplain zoning bylaws.

A draft GIS analysis of the one quarter mile corridor of the three rivers (in Massachusetts only) shows a total of approximately 16,825 acres of floodplains, of which approximately 15,715 acres is permanently protected; that is, more than 93% of all floodplains are protected and only less than 7% (~1,100 acres) is unprotected to date.<sup>15</sup>

The focus of the very first Nashua River Watershed Association “Greenway Committees” (circa 1969) was to encourage each town to have a greenway committee and “floodplain protection” zoning bylaws. Lancaster was the first town to have such a



The Boards of Selectmen from Ayer, Harvard, Lancaster and Shirley said it best in their 1991 mission statement relating

to the closure of Fort Devens:

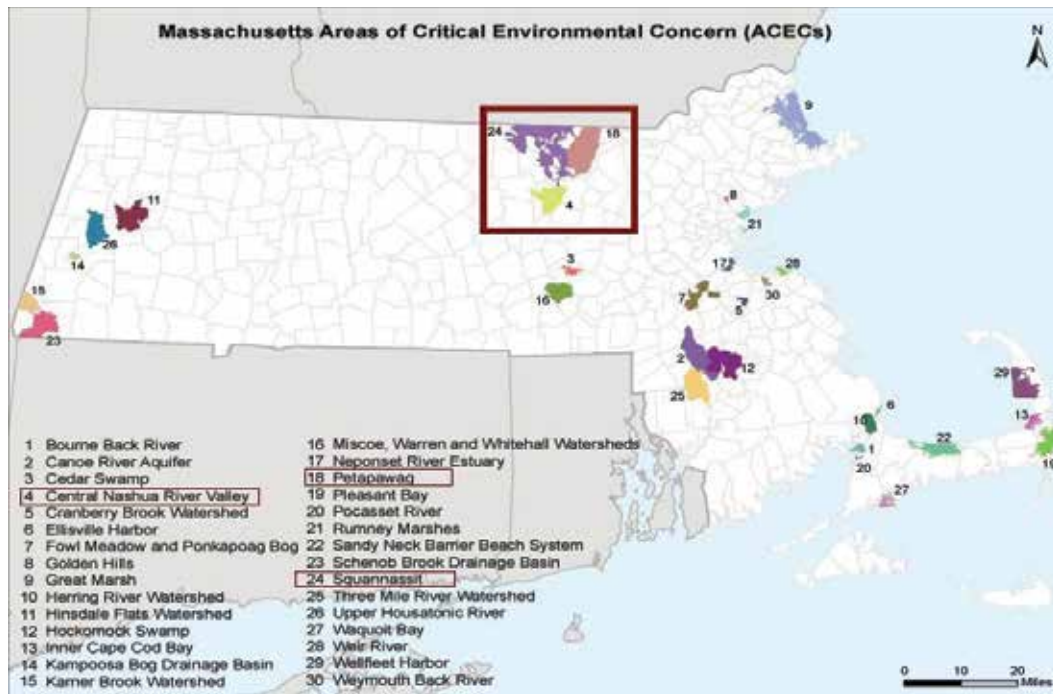
“We recognize the unique and valuable natural resources within the region. Future open space for scenic, natural resources, or recreational purposes is an integral part of our overall objectives. Natural resources, including wetlands, rivers, aquifers, soils and wildlife, are interconnected systems knowing no town borders. Development activities in one town can have dramatic impact on a neighboring town. Therefore, effective natural resource protection within reuse planning can only be achieved through multi-town cooperation.”

greenway committee. The largely protected corridors of the Nashua, Squannacook, and Nissitissit Rivers continue into New Hampshire through holdings of

<sup>15</sup> Nissitissit River (in Massachusetts only): ~3,200 acres floodplain total in corridor with ~3,135 acres protected and ~65 acres unprotected (98% protected or 2% unprotected).

Squannacook River: ~4,800 acres floodplain corridor total in corridor with ~4,570 acres protected and ~230 acres unprotected (95% protected or 4.75% unprotected).

Nashua River (mainstem in Massachusetts only): ~ 8,825 acres floodplain corridor total in corridor with ~8,010 acres protected and ~815 acres unprotected (91% protected or 9% unprotected).



*Map of all Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs) in MA by MA Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs as of 2017. The added box highlights the Central Nashua River Valley, Petapawag, and Squannassit ACECs.*

the Brookline Conservation Commission, Nissitissit River Land Trust, and Beaver Brook Association (~2,200 acres) in Hollis<sup>16</sup> and Brookline. As far back as 1963, the New Hampshire Natural Preserves Forum wrote, “An attempt should be made to protect this [Nissitissit] River in a joint project with Massachusetts. On a small scale, this would be comparable to some of the ‘Wild River’ projects of the national government.”<sup>17</sup>



Hollis contains a large concentration of conservation land in the south central New Hampshire region.

A greenway system has been established that includes a protective corridor along the Nissitissit River in Hollis and Brookline. Brookline’s recent purchase of 75 acres with a half mile of river frontage does much to complete the Nissitissit River greenway.

Hollis, New Hampshire is fortunate to contain what is probably the largest concentration of conservation land in the south central New Hampshire region. Extensive conservation holdings are located throughout the town. This category includes private conservation lands held by Beaver Brook Association, the Nissitissit River Land Trust, homeowners associations, and other groups as well as the town. Beaver Brook Association owns the largest concentration of land in Hollis with 1,643 acres (out of a total of ~2,200 acres). The Nissitissit River Land Trust owns 65 acres, forming a protective corridor along the Nissitissit River. The town owns most of the remaining conservation land. The acquisition of most of the conservation and recreation land in Hollis has resulted in the formation of a greenway system that connects natural areas.

A semi-circular pattern has emerged that stretches from the Nissitissit River in the town’s southwestern

<sup>16</sup> Beaver Brook, a significant tributary to the Nissitissit River, flows through Beaver Brook Association’s lands and has its confluence with the Nissitissit River at the Hollis, New Hampshire and Pepperell, Massachusetts state line.

<sup>17</sup> New Hampshire Natural Preserves Forum, 1963.

extreme, northerly through the vast holdings of the Beaver Brook Association toward Silver Lake State Park and Spalding Park Town Forest north of Town Center. In recent years, the pattern has been recognized and efforts have been made to fill in the remaining gaps.

**Importance of Connectivity.** Throughout our area, extensive open spaces connected by riparian corridors create a synergistically larger, unified entity from what would otherwise be fragmented areas.<sup>18</sup> In other words, maintaining the connectivity of ecologically and biologically diverse open spaces and habitats is important at the regional scale because connectivity gives the components of our shared landscape the resilience needed to survive challenges, such as warming weather patterns, better than isolated areas can. Importantly, the extensive riparian corridors of the Nashua, Squannacook, and Nissitissit Rivers are further extended by greenways along each of their tributaries.

In a 1992 survey, the US Fish and Wildlife Service stated "...the value of large, contiguous undeveloped areas for species longterm protection outweighs exponentially that of an equal area of *disjunct refugia* spread among suburban environs."<sup>19</sup> The quantity of rare species found in our area confirms this.

The science of landscape ecology tells us that where lands are still interconnected, ecological processes are more likely to persist in a continuous system to provide dispersal corridors, which protect local pop-

ulations from chance extinction events, and provide opportunities for regional recolonization and genetic flow to outside populations. Here in New England, that is primarily from the south to the north.<sup>20</sup> The region covered by our Stewardship Plan has high ecological integrity and is a resource-rich unit that has been recognized by the State of Massachusetts as three unique Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC): the Central Nashua River Valley, the Squannassit, and the Petapawag ACECs. These three contiguous ACECs together comprise 76,000 acres or 118 square miles—a full 28% of the total existing ACECs throughout Massachusetts.<sup>21</sup>

The connectivity of the three ACECs via the Nashua River provides significant linkages between important wildlife areas. Indeed, when one includes MassWildlife's Bolton Flats Wildlife Management Area, the amount of open space along the Nashua River creates what could be the largest, least human-impacted habitat in the entire 530+ square mile Nashua River watershed.

Efforts to protect our key resources go back many decades. Prepared by the Nashua River Watershed Association, the first *Regional Plan for the Nashua River Greenway* called for "protecting the watershed; providing habitat for wildlife; conserving the ecology; preventing future river pollution; providing open space and outdoor recreation opportunities; maintaining high water quality; increasing property values; enhancing the general economy; and providing a population buffer zone."<sup>22</sup>

18 R.J. Naiman, "The Role of Riparian Corridors in Maintaining Regional Biodiversity," (Ecological Applications Vol. 3, No. 2, May 1993).

19 US Fish and Wildlife Service, "Survey and Evaluation of Wetlands and Wildlife Habitat," (Fort Devens Massachusetts, 1992, page 71).

20 South to north corridors in New England are particularly important in a time of warming weather patterns as species must evolve their ranges northward; see <https://climateactiontool.org>.

21 ACECs are a formal designation made by the Massachusetts Secretary of Energy and Environmental Affairs to protect and preserve areas of environmental significance. [There is no comparable New Hampshire program.] The designation notifies regulatory agencies and the public that most development activities under State jurisdiction within ACECs must meet high environmental quality standards. The fundamental reason for these designations is the need to protect both open spaces and the interconnections that are essential to maintaining the biological diversity of the entire region.

22 Nashua River Watershed Association, "Regional Plan for the Nashua River Greenway," (1970).



## Some Additional Influential Conservationists

### William P. Wharton.

Benton MacKaye was not the only influential conservationist with roots in our area who recognized the importance of river corridors. William P. Wharton (1880–1976) of Groton, Massachusetts, a contemporary and friend of Benton MacKaye, was an incorporator of both the Nashua River Watershed Association and the New England Forestry Foundation, as well as a President of the National Parks Association. Wharton was an advocate of numerous local as well as national conservation projects. He, along with his friend Harris Reynolds, is also credited with introducing the idea of the Town Forest into the United States.<sup>23</sup>



William P. Wharton (1880–1976).  
Photo: [www.williampwhartontrust.org](http://www.williampwhartontrust.org).

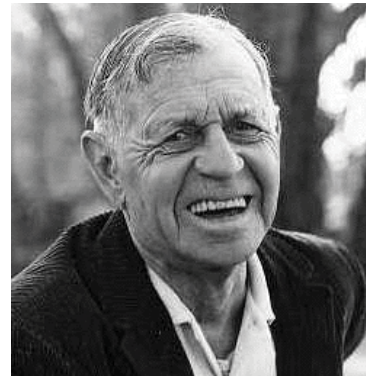
**Ellen Swallow Richards.** Ellen Swallow Richards of Dunstable is another important conservationist; she is credited with establishing the field of ecology in the 1890s. The area was also the home of the Lowthorpe School, the second school of Landscape Architecture in the United States, where numerous leading landscape architects studied. Noted landscape architect and Harvard professor Charles Eliot II was a patron of the school. In 1963, Eliot also wrote Groton's first Master Plan as well as Harvard's in 1969, both of which introduced advanced concepts of environmental protection and planning.



Ellen Swallow Richards (1842–1911).  
Photo: *The Life of Ellen H. Richards* by Caroline L. Hunt.

### Jeffrey P. Smith.

In 1923, Jeffrey P. Smith (1902–1987) inherited the neglected “Buttonwood Farm” in Hollis, New Hampshire and devoted the next 40 years to dairy farming. After retiring, he began championing limited growth and conservation, having become troubled about rapid population growth in Hollis and surrounding communities. Smith's cousin, Hollis Nichols, joined with him in acting on their shared interest: acquiring land for conservation. Beginning with Hollis's own estate, in 1964 Smith and Nichols organized Beaver Brook Association to protect local land from development.<sup>24</sup> During the next decade and a half, with help from gifts of money, they were able to negotiate 86 different purchases totaling 1,500 acres, including Smith's own 200 acres gifted to Beaver Brook Association. Today, Beaver Brook Association has more than 2,200 acres.



Jeffrey P. Smith (1902–1987).  
Photo: [www.beaverbrook.org](http://www.beaverbrook.org).

<sup>23</sup> Massachusetts Forest and Park (Association) News, (August 1970, page 98).

<sup>24</sup> 1964 was also the year that the Town of Hollis was the first in New Hampshire to form a municipal Conservation Commission.

Jeffrey P. Smith also influenced the formation of other land trusts. He helped organize the Nissitissit River Land Trust founded in 1968,<sup>25</sup> which is dedicated to protecting all of the land along the Nissitissit River, much of which has now been protected. Smith additionally joined with three Pepperell residents to form the Nashoba Conservation Trust in 1969 and is the Smith of the eponymous Nichols-Smith Land Trust. The “Jeff Smith Trail”—eight miles over parcels of land in Hollis and Pepperell that are owned by organizations helped by Smith—was created to permanently honor Smith’s life-long efforts. Smith also helped establish the Hollis Conservation Commission, which in 1966 petitioned New Hampshire’s Governor Peterson to stop the pollution of the Nashua River. The Commission then contacted Massachusetts conservation commissions along the Nashua River to describe what Hollis had done and to ask them to do the same.

### Marion Stoddart.

Marion Stoddart is recognized by many to be our area’s most influential champion of the rivers and the river corridors. Moving to Groton in 1962, Stoddart was appalled by the befouled condition of the Nashua River. In 1965, she formed the Nashua River Clean-Up Committee and galvanized a grassroots movement to address the situation. The Clean-Up Committee evolved to become the Nashua River Watershed Association (NRWA), formalized in 1969 with Benton MacKaye, Lee P. “Bill” Farnsworth, Jeffrey P. Smith, Marion Stoddart, and William Wharton, among others, as incorporators.



*Marion Stoddart (born 1928) with her three children, circa early 1960s. Photo: NRWA Archives.*



Marion Stoddart, together with others, has worked for over five decades to fulfill the vision of permanently protected greenway along the river and its major tributaries. Today, more than 50% of the greenway along the Nashua, Squannacook, and Nissitissit Rivers is permanently protected.

From its outset, the NRWA took a collaborative watershed approach to protecting natural resources and highlighted the inextricable link between water quality and land use in all its initiatives. The NRWA’s earliest plans called for the establishment of permanently protected greenway along the river and its major tributaries.

## Our Rivers Today

Today, the Nashua, Squannacook, and Nissitissit river corridors support outstandingly remarkable biological and ecological diversity. They also support outstandingly remarkable opportunities for recreation, for enjoyment of scenic views, and for appreciation of historical events that shaped our region. This Stewardship Plan for the Nashua, Squannacook, and Nissitissit Rivers, developed through a locally-driven process, outlines voluntary actions that can be taken to maintain and enhance our outstandingly remarkable resource values.

<sup>25</sup> “It so happened that in 1962 a group called the New England Wildflower Preservation Society conducted a field trip along those 9 miles [of the Nissitissit River]. The field trip led the New Hampshire Natural Preserves Forum to list the river as ‘worthy of preservation.’ That in turn led to the formation of the Nissitissit River Land Trust, incorporated in 1968.” [www.brookline.nh.us/conservation-commission/pages/nissitissit](http://www.brookline.nh.us/conservation-commission/pages/nissitissit)





*Nissitissit River in Brookline, NH. The properties on either side of the river were purchased in 2017 by the Town of Brookline with the help of several local and regional land trusts, thereby adding 75 acres of permanently protected land to the Nissitissit River greenway.  
Photo: Birch Three Photography.*

## Chapter 4:

# Outstandingly Remarkable Resource Values and Action Plans

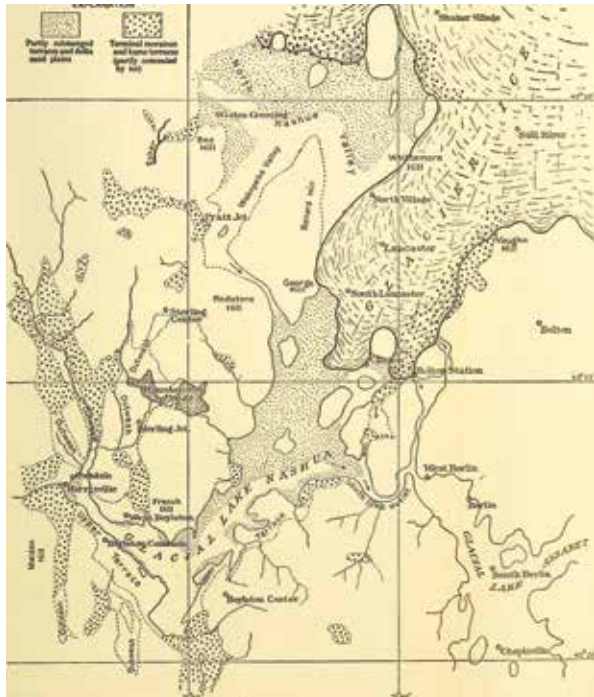
**T**o be included in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System, a river must meet certain eligibility criteria, including possessing at least one “outstandingly remarkable resource value” (ORRV in this Plan). An ORRV must be natural, historical, cultural, recreational or scenic in character, be river-dependent, and have unique, rare, or exemplary qualities on a regional or national scale. The Nashua, Squannacook, and Nissitissit Rivers possess a great many such resources that meet these criteria. This chapter describes these resources, which include aspects of biological and ecological diversity, recreational and scenic values, and historical and cultural resources.

## The Shaping Forces: Geology, Aquifers, and Ecoregions

**Geography.** The Nashua River watershed includes parts of 32 communities in Massachusetts and New Hampshire, with a total drainage area of approximately 538 square miles. The mainstem Nashua River flows for a total of 37 miles before joining with the Merrimack River at Nashua, New Hampshire. The Nashua River and its tributaries have some highly unusual characteristics. The majority of the tributaries that feed the mainstem of

the Nashua River flow in a southerly direction, while the mainstem flows in a northerly direction. The North Nashua River begins in the former industrial centers of Fitchburg and Leominster before flowing southeastwardly into Lancaster. The South Nashua River flows from the Wachusett Reservoir, which serves as part of the water supply for Boston. The two main branches of the river join in Lancaster to form the mainstem, which then flows to its terminus in New Hampshire.

**Geology.** The bedrock underpinning our study area is made up of two types of rock: granite and other igneous types; and metamorphic, primarily schist and gneiss. Over ten thousand years ago, the Nashua River valley was carved by moving glacial ice that was over one mile thick. The Nashua River itself was once Glacial Lake Nashua, an enormous lake that extended from Boylston, Massachusetts north to Nashua, New Hampshire. At that time, the mainstem river flowed southward through the Worcester area.



*Map of Glacial Lake Nashua, an enormous lake that extended from Boylston, MA north to Nashua, NH, that flowed southward through the Worcester area. The Nashua River's course to the South was reversed as the edge of the last ice age glacier melted away, leaving what remained of Glacial Lake Nashua to drain to the north. Image: Campbell, Marius R. (Marius Robinson), 1858-1940; Geological Survey (U.S.).*

Bedrock and a thin layer of glacial till “hardpan” dominate the higher elevations of the watershed, especially to the west and northwest, where the main tributaries to the mainstem Nashua River rise: the Squannacook and Nissitissit as well the North Nashua, Quinapoxet, and Stillwater Rivers. These relatively cooler (with the exception of the North



*This map, taken from Abijah Marvins's 1879 History of Lancaster, shows some of that town's early roads and bridges – at Five Corners and at Lane's Crossing -- on the Nashua River. It also shows a former course of the river meandering in a sinuous manner, which is produced by the river's swinging from side to side as it flows across its floodplain or shifts its channel within the valley. Also note the “Ancient River Road to Groton,” which may imply that the road followed pre-historic foot paths. Image: Digital Commonwealth, [www.digitalcommonwealth.org/search/commonwealth:02871f57x](http://www.digitalcommonwealth.org/search/commonwealth:02871f57x).*

Nashua River), higher-gradient rivers all flow from the northwest to the southeast and meet the Nashua River at sharp angles, turning to join the mainstem which flows in a northeasterly direction. The flow of the tributaries is additional evidence that the Nashua River used to flow south.<sup>26</sup> The river's course was reversed as the edge of the last ice age glacier melted away, leaving Glacial Lake Nashua to drain to the north. There are many sand and gravel deposits



The Nashua River's course was reversed as the last ice age glacier melted away: it is unusual in flowing in a northerly direction, while its tributaries flow in a southerly direction.

<sup>26</sup> Reference in the History of Lancaster, regarding the shape of Pine Hill: Rev. Abijah P. Marvin, *History of the Town of Lancaster: From the First Settlement to the Present Time, 1643–1879*, (Lancaster: Published by the town, 1879).



## Nashua Basin Water Withdrawals (2017)

Name	Registration* Volume (mgd)	Current Permit Volume (mgd)	Total Authorized Volume (mgd)
Ayer DPW Water Division	0.82	0.5	1.32
Groton Water Department	NA	0.3	0.3
Devens	1.35	3.45	4.8
MCI Shirley	0	0.54	0.54
Pepperell Water Department	0.74	0.56	1.3
Shirley Water District	NA	0.31	0.31
Townsend Water Department	0.76	0	0.76
West Groton Water District	0.27	0	0.27
Epic Enterprises, Inc. (Ayer)	0	0.15	0.15
Hollingsworth & Vose (Groton)	2.42	0	2.42
International, Inc. (Bolton)	0.2	0.15	0.35

*\* Registration Volume is the volume of water registered with the MA Department of Environmental Protection. Since 1988, persons planning to withdraw water from ground or surface sources for purposes in excess of an annual average of 100,000 gallons per day or 9 million gallons in any three-month period must apply for a Water Management Act Permit. Withdrawers with a Water Management Registration do not need a permit if they do not increase withdrawals over their registered volumes or add any new withdrawal points to their system.*

dating from the glacial period in the central part of the valley. These porous deposits often have accessible groundwater used as municipal water supplies.

There is considerable landscape-level geomorphologic variation within our focus area, which is characterized by topography dominated by glacially-shaped geological forms and river valleys underlain by aquifers. Not surprisingly, it has many glacial artifacts: kettlehole ponds with fluctuating water levels; spruce bogs, kame terraces, and eskers; and sandy outwash soils. Such soil acts as a recharge area in large floodplains, which support many types of rare flora. Not only is the area especially rich in diverse wetland habitats because of the meandering Nashua River, but there is also an unusual amount of field, floodplain grassland, and wet meadow habitat due to the river's oxbows and wide floodplains.

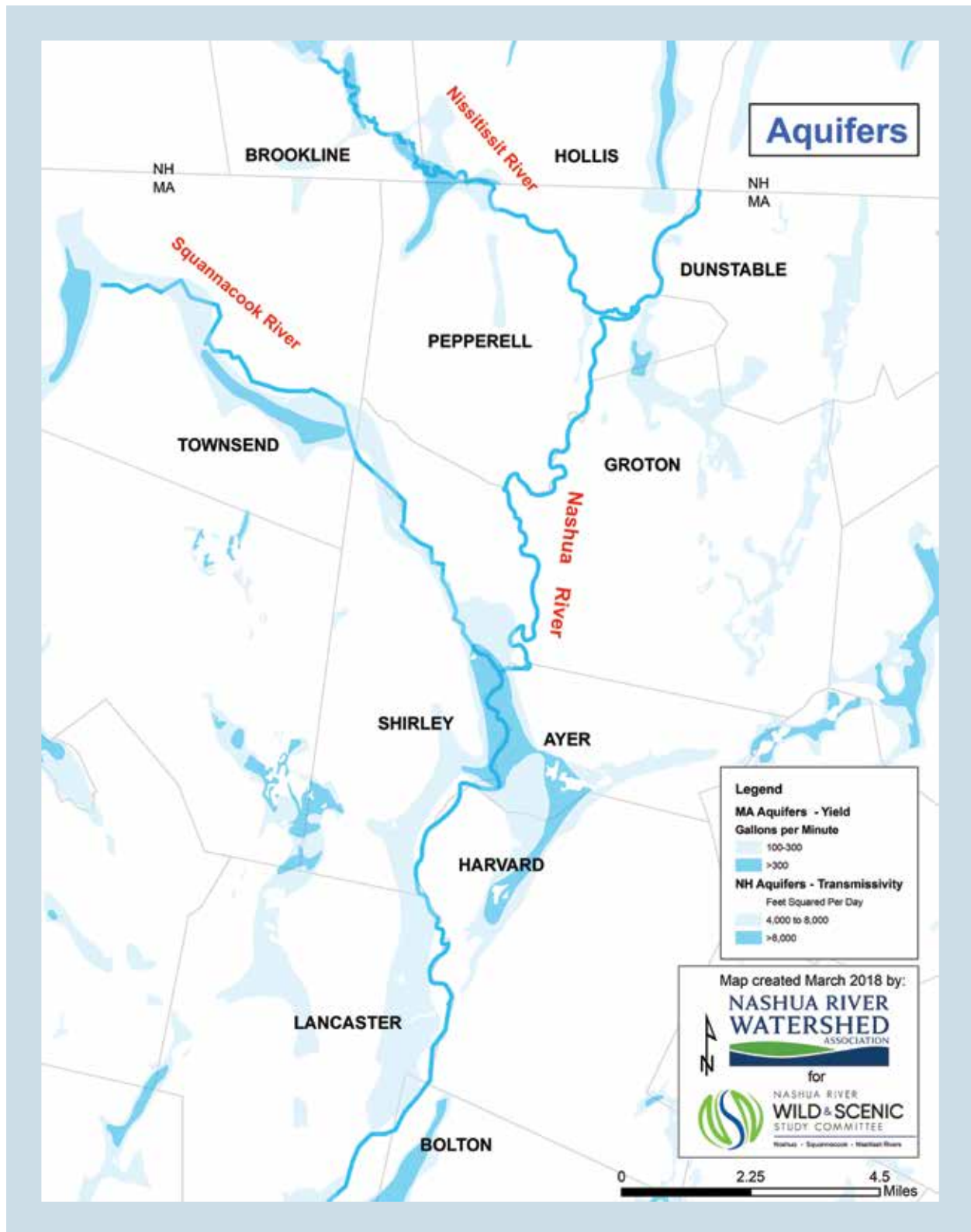


Glacially shaped river valleys underlain by aquifers characterize our landscape, which has many glacial artifacts such as kettle ponds and drumlin swarms.



*Red Maple - Birch Wood Swamp along Squannacook River.  
Photo: Kim King.*





*Aquifers in MA (gallons/minute yield) & in NH (feet/day transmissivity).  
Note how the river valleys correspond to underlying aquifers.*

Note: There are other considerable “ecosystem service” benefits associated with wetlands and floodplain grasslands: because of their high rates of production they are second only to rainforests in removing carbon from the atmosphere, thereby moderating warming temperatures; removing surplus nutrients from overland runoff; and preventing these and other pollutants from entering our rivers.

**Aquifers.** High-yield, high-productivity aquifers, defined as more than 300 gallons per minute, are found under several of our communities and are tapped as municipal sources of public drinking water supplies. For example, Pepperell depends on groundwater for both public and private wells, with 80% of the households dependent on its three municipal public wells. The Devens Regional Enterprise Zone (former Fort Devens military base) has three gravel-packed wells that provide nearly five million gallons per day of potable drinking water to the more than 90 businesses and 100 families that call Devens home. The West Groton Water Supply District operates wells on the bank of the Squannacook River. The Shirley Water District is Massachusetts’s first ever Water District; it manages four gravel packed wells, supplying over 4,500 customers in Shirley and surrounding communities.

In Townsend, recognition of the importance of its high-yield aquifer came with the passage of the 1986 Aquifer Protection Overlay District Bylaw, which protects the aquifer from new structures and uses considered hazardous. The Wekepeke aquifer under portions of Lancaster is another high-yield aquifer, which provides a municipal backup well and could be a potential public water source for a larger region.

In Hollis, two districts provide direct protection to groundwater resources. The first district, the Water Supply Conservation Zone, includes the entire stratified drift aquifer between Federal Hill Road and Proctor Hill Road (Route 130). The intent of the



Two overlapping forest types in our region create a transition zone that supports especially rich biodiversity.

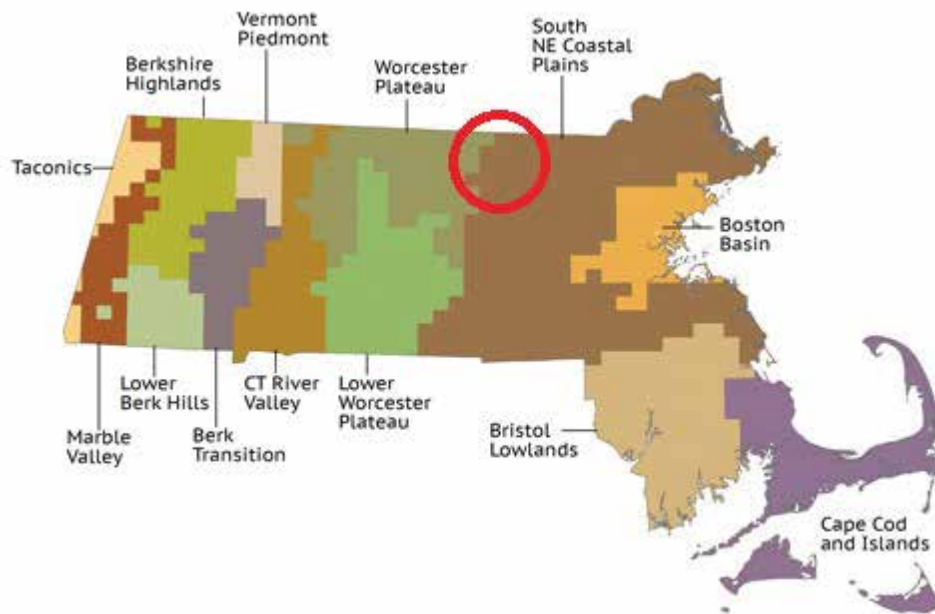
zone is to protect the drinking water supply for the school system and the town center area. The second district is the Aquifer Protection Overlay Zone. This district encompasses those areas designated as *stratified drift* by the United States Geological Survey in its 1986 study of the region. The district prohibits uses that would have a potential negative impact on groundwater quality. The Nissitissit River Valley aquifer, in the southwestern corner of Hollis, has a saturated thickness of only 20 feet; however, this aquifer has a transmissivity greater than 8,000 square feet per day and potential for induced infiltration from the Nissitissit River.<sup>27</sup>

Groundwater and surface water is closely linked in the glaciated terrain of New England. Groundwater provides vital recharge to streams and other water-dependent areas, such as wetlands. Dianne Timmins, Coldwater Fisheries Biologist, New Hampshire Fish and Game Department: “[groundwater is] critical to brook trout spawning success. We are studying this more in depth as we speak but preliminary data from the Dead Diamond watershed indicates increased success in areas with groundwater influence. The documented spawning sites all have groundwater plumes where the brook trout are building their redds (nests).”<sup>28</sup>

As a major aquifer recharge area, the Nashua River valley stores floodwaters and precipitation in its numerous wetlands and sandy glacial soils. Maintaining flood storage capacity within the Nashua River valley is critical to preventing flooding downstream. Where the valley broadens, the river and stream beds have a flatter slope than areas upstream; where the floodplains and associated wetlands widen, the permeable

27 Hollis, New Hampshire, “1998 Master Plan Update,” (Adopted by Hollis Planning Board on March 16, 1999).

28 Dianne Timmins, personal communication on February 11, 2018.



Map of Massachusetts ecoregions by MassAudubon. The red circle highlights the location of our region.

sand and gravel floodplains percolate the floodwaters and act as a giant holding tank, minimizing flood damage downstream.<sup>29</sup>

**Ecoregions.** Our focus area occurs in an area of overlap of two major forest types: the Northern Hardwoods (a mixed group of sugar maple, ash, beech, and birch) and Central Hardwoods (a group dominated by oaks with some hickories). Thus, the forest vegetation of the study area is a mix of northern and central hardwoods interspersed with hemlock and white pine. These two forest types now mingle in the Nashua River watershed in what is called the transition zone, giving us a wonderfully diverse array of forest types to enjoy today. Additionally, the varied topography ranges from the “Worcester Monadnock Plateau” sub-ecoregion<sup>30</sup> in the steeper headwater sections, to more gently rolling terrain, to generally flat lowland river valleys in the east in the large “Gulf of Maine (Southern New England) Coastal Plain” sub-ecoregion. Because of this elevation and topographical difference, the change in habitat over a small distance

can be dramatic.

Grassland habitats decreased in New England with farm abandonment in the late 1800s and have become increasingly less common with suburban sprawl and the regeneration of our forests. Yet within portions of our area, especially along the Nashua and Squannacook River floodplains, open fields are relatively widespread because farming is still active. Some areas are deliberately maintained as early successional habitats in order to preserve wildlife diversity. Examples of this can be found in several conservation parcels in our focus area that are mowed annually to maintain an herbaceous community, such as the Watt Farm, which is part of the Oxbow National Wildlife Refuge.

It is interesting to note that historically untilled patches of forest are more likely to have higher native biodiversity than areas that were tilled and supported row crops. Dense patches of wintergreen (*Gaultheria procumbens*) have been shown to be more abundant in unplowed than plowed lands.<sup>31</sup> Wintergreen

29 ACEC Nomination Report, “Central Nashua River Valley,” pages 5-6.

30 In southcentral New Hampshire this same ecoregion is described as “Hillsboro Inland Hills and Plains” (see [www.wildlife.state.nh.us/wildlife/images/wap11x17-habitat2015.jpg](http://www.wildlife.state.nh.us/wildlife/images/wap11x17-habitat2015.jpg)).

31 G. Motzkin et al., “Controlling site to evaluate history: vegetation patterns of a New England sand plain,” *Ecological Monographs*, 66: 345-365 (1996).





*Wintergreen (Gaultheria procumbens) can be an indicator that the soils where this plant grows in dense patches have never been plowed under. Photo: Dryas Wikimedia Commons.*

patches in large areas, for example as can readily be found along the Squannacook River, suggest that these lands have been continuously forested and likely support a greater biodiversity of microflora and fauna, as well as vascular plants, than nearby areas that were tilled.

The geology, aquifers, and ecoregions are shaping forces that give rise to many aspects of our three categories of Outstandingly Remarkable Resource Values: Biological Diversity, Recreational and Scenic, and Historical and Cultural.

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Also, K. Donohue et al., “Effects of the past and the present on species distributions: land-use history and demography of wintergreen,” *Journal of Ecology* 88: 303-316 (2000).

Thanks to Pat Swain Rice, recently retired natural community ecologist for the Massachusetts Natural Heritage Endangered Species Program (NHESP) and author of *Classification of Natural Communities of Massachusetts*, for bringing this to our attention.

## Potential Threats to Our Three ORRVs

The Study Committee also identified some existing and future threats that could degrade the quality of each of the three ORRVs of the Nashua, Squannacook, and Nissitissit Rivers.

**Potential threats to Biological Diversity ORRVs** include, but are not limited to:

- Habitat loss and fragmentation
- Significant riparian corridor land use alterations
- Non-point source pollution
- Terrestrial and aquatic non-native invasive species
- Changes in local weather patterns such as increased intensity of drought and severe rain events

**Potential threats to Recreational and Scenic ORRVs** include, but are not limited to:

- Insufficient maintenance of access points on the rivers
- Increase of invasive aquatics such as the water chestnut infestation at Pepperell Pond
- Loss of opportunities to connect trails and expand the trail network
- Insufficient public signage in some communities regarding the existing trail network
- Increased inappropriate siting of alternative energy installations

**Potential threats to Historical and Cultural ORRVs** include, but are not limited to:

- Lack of on-going education regarding early conservationists
- Under-utilization of the “Marion Stoddart Story” as inspiration and as a model
- Potential lack of continuity on collection of water quality monitoring data to document river renewal
- Inadequate attention to some river-related historical and cultural sites
- Need for additional education of both adults and youth regarding watershed health

## Why Some Recommended Actions Appear in the Suggested Strategies for Multiple ORRVs

The three categories of Outstandingly Remarkable Resource Values that have been identified for the Nashua, Squannacook, and Nissitissit Rivers are inextricably linked with each other. Thus it is not surprising that a recommended action item that might protect a biological diversity value could be the same, or very similar, to a recommended action item suggested to protect a recreational and scenic value, and indeed also a historical and cultural value. Suggested actions to maintain or expand a naturally vegetated buffer along the rivers is an example of a recommended action fitting in all categories. The Nashua River Wild and Scenic River Study Committee decided to support this seeming duplication, especially as there might be instances where a user of the Plan would, for their own interests, focus on only one category. We would want the set of recommended actions considered by such a user to be “complete.”

## ORRV Category: BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY



*Bobcat along Nashua River in Pepperell, MA -- the only wild cat still found in MA and NH. Photo: Andrew Padla and Deb Taylor.*



*Cardinal flower (Lobelia cardinalis), a common wetland plant often seen along our rivers. Photo: Elizabeth Ainsley Campbell.*



*Bald eagle. Once extirpated from our region and declared a federally-protected Endangered Species, this bird has made a remarkable recovery to the point where it has been relisted from "Endangered" to "Threatened" status. Photo: Christine Guertin.*

A consequence of the confluence of distinct ecoregions and transitions between them, as described in the preceding “Shaping Forces” section of this Chapter, is that our area supports outstanding overall biodiversity. While area residents delight in sightings of a vast array of flora and fauna—including cardinal flowers along the shores, a bobcat refreshing itself with a drink of river water, and bald eagles soaring above the waterways—it is the turtles, fish, mussels, and dragonflies, in part, that help define our rivers as having rare, unique, or exemplary features meriting Wild and Scenic designation.

**Biodiversity.** Biological and ecological diversity in the area can be measured by the sheer number of species and by the number of species assemblages (natural communities of plant and animal species that share a common environment and occur together repeatedly on the landscape). Abundant wetlands, grasslands, and uplands shelter many rare species, most of which need more than one habitat to survive, or depend upon increasingly rare habitats.

Another benefit of the protected areas around our area’s several aquifers is that many Massachusetts Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program (NHESP) Priority and Estimated Habitats are found overlying them.

Having a high number of state-listed rare species in the focus area is largely a function of the existence of intact special habitats and/or natural communities and the large extent of contiguous open space. The





*“Pitch Pine – Scrub Oak Community” in the Bolton Flats State Wildlife Management Area in Lancaster, MA: a MA state-designated “Priority Natural Community,” which is state-ranked as “S2: imperiled.” This is a globally rare, fire-dependent shrub-dominated community with scattered trees and occasional openings, occurring on dry, poor, usually sandy, soils, which provides habitat for many rare species. Photo: Chris Buelow.*

Nashua, Squannacook, and Nissitissit Rivers—as well as the Unkety Brook tributary to the Nashua River—are described by NHESP in its 2012 “BioMap2: Conserving the Biodiversity of Massachusetts in a Changing World” report as:

...the watery framework for a complex landscape that supports an exceptionally high number of rare and uncommon species. Forty-one such turtles, dragonflies, freshwater mussels, salamanders, plants and other species inhabit these rivers, brooks, and vernal pools. Good populations of the globally rare Brook Floater mussel inhabit the Nissitissit River, while the equally rare Ringed Boghaunter dragonfly can be found in four boggy sites across this large Core Habitat.<sup>32</sup>

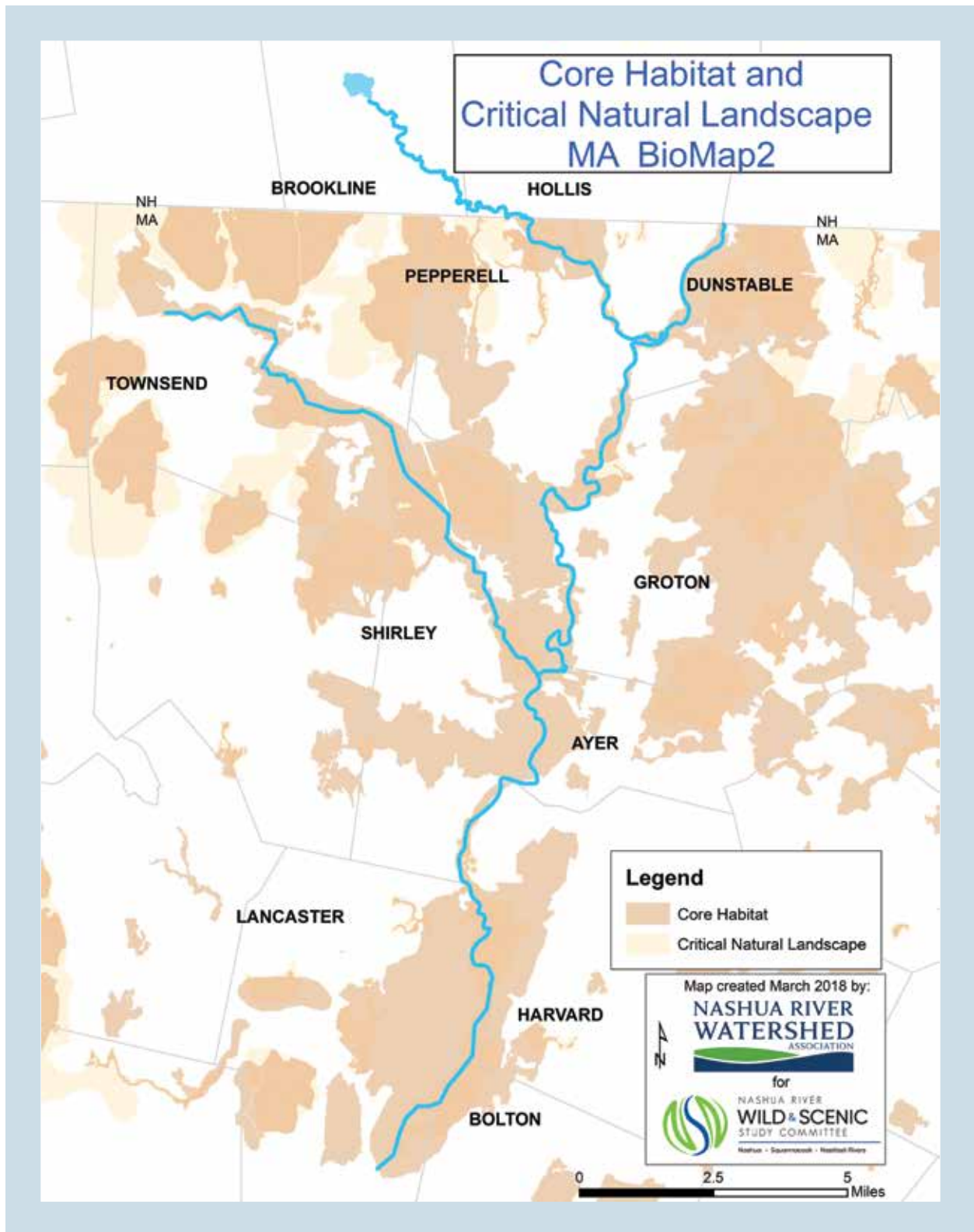
**Priority Natural Communities.** The Nashua River corridor consists of significant portions of terrestrial habitat designated by the Commonwealth’s BioMap2 project as “core habitat,” representing the highest priority for biodiversity conservation and protection. ([www.mass.gov/eea/agencies/dfg/dfw/natural-heritage/land-protection-and-management/biomap2/](http://www.mass.gov/eea/agencies/dfg/dfw/natural-heritage/land-protection-and-management/biomap2/))

Additionally, six Massachusetts NHESP exemplary or “Priority Natural Communities”<sup>33</sup> occur along the Nashua River:

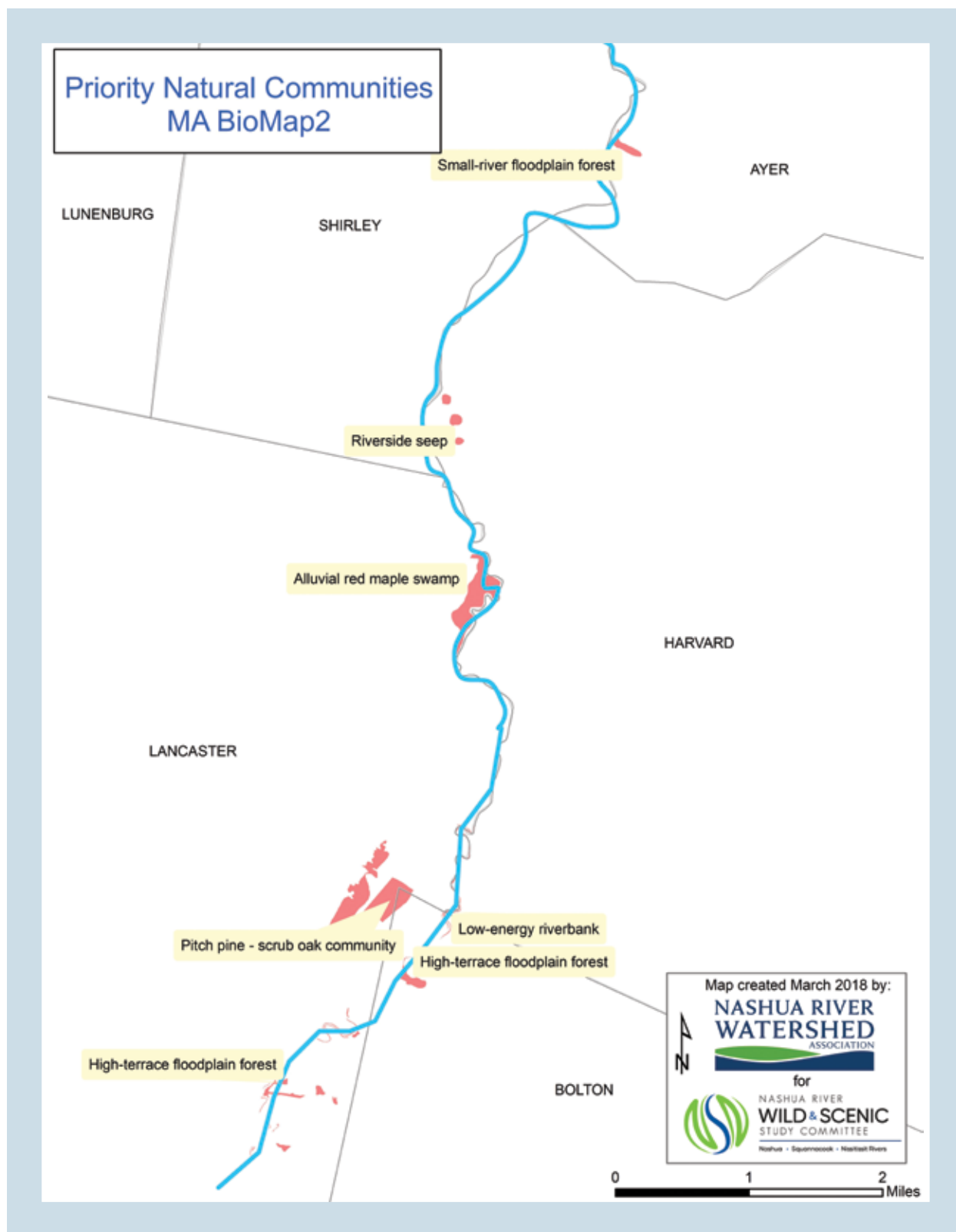
- Kettlehole Level Bog (Groton)
- Pitch Pine–Scrub Oak Community (Lancaster)
- Red Maple–Black Ash Swamp (Ayer)
- Alluvial Red Maple Swamp (Harvard)
- Small-River Floodplain Forest (Ayer)
- High-Terrace Floodplain Forest (Bolton and Lancaster)

<sup>32</sup> Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program, BioMap2: Conserving the Biodiversity of Massachusetts in a Changing World (2012).

<sup>33</sup> NHESP Priority Types of Natural Communities at [www.mass.gov/eea/docs/dfg/nhosp/natural-communities-facts/priority-natural-commun.pdf](http://www.mass.gov/eea/docs/dfg/nhosp/natural-communities-facts/priority-natural-commun.pdf) and Natural Community Fact Sheets at [www.mass.gov/eea/agencies/dfg/dfw/natural-heritage/natural-communities/natural-community-fact-sheets.html](http://www.mass.gov/eea/agencies/dfg/dfw/natural-heritage/natural-communities/natural-community-fact-sheets.html). Note that there are no corresponding state designations of either Priority Natural Communities or BioMap in New Hampshire.



*MA BioMap2 Core Habitat & Critical Natural Landscape. Note: there is no equivalent datalayer in NH.*



*MA BioMap2 Priority Natural Communities along the Nashua River. Note: there is no equivalent datalayer in NH.*



Since few intact floodplain forests remain in New England, these are considered to be among the rarest forest type in the region.<sup>34</sup> Also, MassWildlife has made the Pine Hill area, adjacent to the Nashua River in Lancaster, a priority to preserve and to protect because it has some of Central Massachusetts's last remaining Pitch Pine–Scrub Oak (PP/SO) patches. PP/SOs are a unique habitat—threatened by forest fragmentation—that occur on outwash sandplains, which are themselves much reduced in the focus area (and statewide) because of their ease of development and attractive for sand and gravel mining.

**ACECs.** There are three Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs) in our focus area: the Central Nashua River Valley ACEC (12,900 acres, 1996); the Squannassit ACEC (37,450 acres, 2002); and Petapawag ACEC — “swamps on a hill” — (25,630 acres, 2002). Massachusetts's ACECs “... receive special recognition because of the quality, uniqueness and significance of their natural and cultural resource.”<sup>35</sup> For example, Petapawag ACEC is most important for the diversity of wildlife and rare species: the NHESP database indicates that there are sixteen state-listed<sup>36</sup> rare species and one federally-listed threatened species in this one ACEC.

More specifically, within the Squannassit ACEC, the Nissitissit River sub-watershed includes sightings of American bittern (bird, MA state-listed endangered), brook snaketail (dragonfly, MA state-listed Special Concern), spotted turtle (formerly of MA



The Nashua River corridor has significant terrestrial habitat designated as “core habitat” by the Commonwealth’s BioMap 2 project, and there are six “Priority Natural Communities” along the Nashua River.

state-listed Special Concern and NH state-listed threatened), and wood turtle (MA and NH state-listed Special Concern). The Squannacook River corridor has several records of rare species including the marble salamander (threatened), Blanding’s turtle (threatened in Massachusetts and petitioned for federal listing; see <https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp0/profile/speciesProfile?spcode=C05M>), creeper (mussel, MA state-listed Special Concern), bridle shiner (fish, MA state-listed Special Concern), and wood turtles (MA state-listed Special Concern).

Note: According to Mike Jones, Massachusetts State Herpetologist:<sup>37</sup>

...the Nashua [River] is also the site of some of the earliest scientific observations on wood turtles, which need restoration efforts.... Beginning in 1854, Sanborn Tenney and Louis Agassiz studied a population in Lancaster, described in Agassiz’ *Contributions to the Natural History of the United States*.<sup>38</sup>

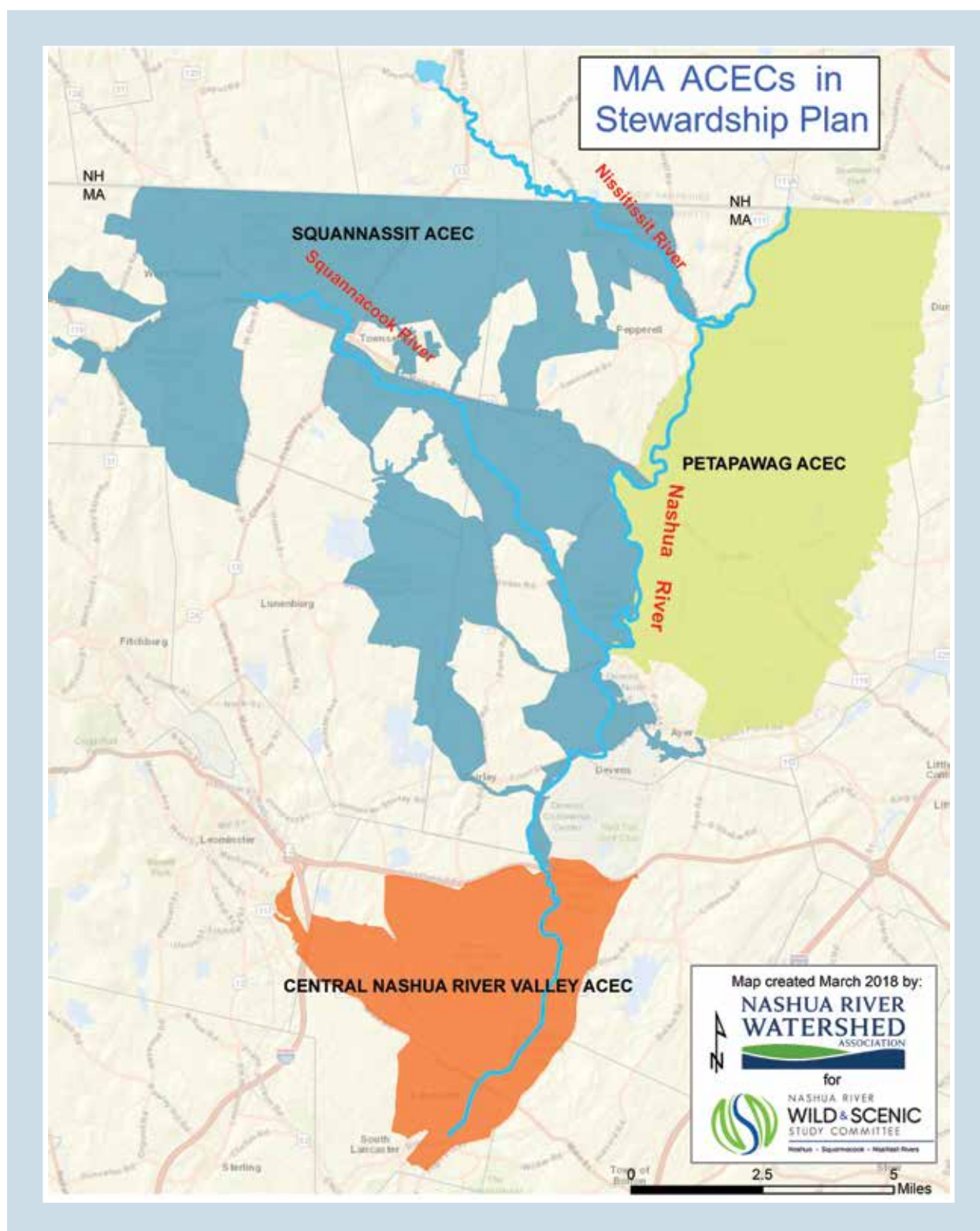
34 See The Nature Conservancy, New Hampshire: A Question of Flow at [www.nature.org/ourinitiatives/regions/northamerica/unitedstates/newhampshire/freshwater/a-question-of-flow-for-floodplain-forests.xml](http://www.nature.org/ourinitiatives/regions/northamerica/unitedstates/newhampshire/freshwater/a-question-of-flow-for-floodplain-forests.xml). For more see University of New Hampshire’s Habitat Stewardship Series: Floodplain Forests at [https://extension.unh.edu/resources/files/Resource000414\\_Rep436.pdf](https://extension.unh.edu/resources/files/Resource000414_Rep436.pdf).

35 For an overview of the ACEC program, see [www.mass.gov/service-details/acec-program-overview](http://www.mass.gov/service-details/acec-program-overview).

36 As listed in 321 CMR 10.90, March 10, 2017 “There are 169 species of animals and 258 species of plants that are protected under the Massachusetts Endangered Species Act. These 427 native species are state-listed as Endangered, Threatened, or of Special Concern and are tracked in a database. These species are either at risk, or may become at risk, of extinction. Rarity in the state, population trend, and overall threat are the main criteria used to determine extinction risk.” ([www.mass.gov/service-details/list-of-endangered-threatened-and-special-concern-species](http://www.mass.gov/service-details/list-of-endangered-threatened-and-special-concern-species)).

37 Mike Jones, personal communication on December 19, 2016.

38 In speaking of occurrence of wood turtles in Lancaster, Massachusetts, Agassiz says it “is so common in the neighborhood. ... that I have at times collected over one hundred specimens in an afternoon ...” Louis Agassiz, *Contributions to the Natural History of the United States*, (Little Brown and Company, vol. 1, 1857) page 294.



*MA Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs) in our area.  
 Note: there is no equivalent program and designation in NH.*

The Nashua River corridor provides breeding and migration habitat for listed bird species such as king rail, pied-billed grebes, and common moorhens, and provides potential habitat for American and least bittern as well as the blue spotted salamander and the water shrew, both of which are dependent on the interspersed wetland and terrestrial habitats.

**Turtles.** Our focus area is also the home of the largest known population of state-listed Blanding’s turtle: according to herpetologist Brian Butler, ours is the only core Blanding’s habitat in Massachusetts. Mike Jones, Massachusetts State Herpetologist, writes, “the Nashua River watershed supports the largest contiguous and unfragmented population of Blanding’s in Massachusetts.”<sup>39</sup> NHESP calls it “...a very significant population, possibly the largest



*Wood turtle (Glyptemys insculpta), which has “Special Concern” status in both MA and NH. Their preferred habitat is riparian areas; they favor slower moving mid-sized streams with sandy bottoms and densely vegetated stream banks. The stream bottom and muddy banks provide hibernating sites for overwintering, and open areas with sandy soils near the stream’s edge are used for nesting. Photo: William G. Wilkinson.*

in New England.”<sup>40</sup>

According to the Commonwealth’s BioMap2, Blanding’s turtles use many parts of this landscape throughout their decades-long lives, from feeding and over-wintering in deep vernal pools and buttonbush shrub swamps to nesting in open, sunny, well-drained fields and abandoned gravel pits. Because of their extensive movements over the course of the year, Blanding’s turtles require larger landscapes than many other turtle species.<sup>41</sup>

Loss of only a few adults annually can cause populations to decline as they do not reproduce until late in life (14–20 years), and they have low replacement rates due to low nest and juvenile survivorship. Roads are the primary cause of adult mortality. Despite concerns about the ongoing decline attributable to the lack of suitable nesting sites and continued road mortality, this local population appears to be healthy and growing—it is a regional stronghold—and will continue to do so as long as their travel corridors and habitats are protected. Indeed, in 2002, the region was being considered as having two of only nine “state herpetofauna reserves” due to the “presence of multiple rare herptile species, relative lack of habitat fragmentation, and diversity of wetland types.”<sup>42</sup>



Despite concerns about the decline of the state-listed Blanding’s turtle, our population appears to be healthy and growing. It will continue to do so as long as travel corridors are protected.

<sup>39</sup> Mike Jones, personal communication on December 19, 2016.

<sup>40</sup> See Area of Critical Environmental Concern: Designation of the Central Nashua Valley ACEC.

<sup>41</sup> [www.fws.gov/northeast/ecologicalservices/turtle/species/blandingsturtle.html](http://www.fws.gov/northeast/ecologicalservices/turtle/species/blandingsturtle.html).

<sup>42</sup> From 1998 through 2000, the Massachusetts NHESP surveyed sites across the state for state-listed rare reptiles and amphibians, eventually choosing nine areas as potential “herp reserves” because of the presence of multiple rare herptile species, relative lack of habitat fragmentation, and diversity of wetland types interspersed with undeveloped uplands. The reserve areas were delineated around known rare species sites based on dispersal distances and habitat use for each rare herptile species represented at a site, so that the population of each species could have a high likelihood of long-term persistence. The proposed 6,700-acre Squannacook Herp Reserve would have been almost completely incorporated into the eastern portion of the Squannacook ACEC,





*Nissitissit River. Photo: Ken Hartlage.*



*Blanding's turtle (Emydoidea blandingii), which has "Threatened" status in MA; conservation status of "State Endangered" in NH.  
Image: Arthur C. Wikimedia Commons.*

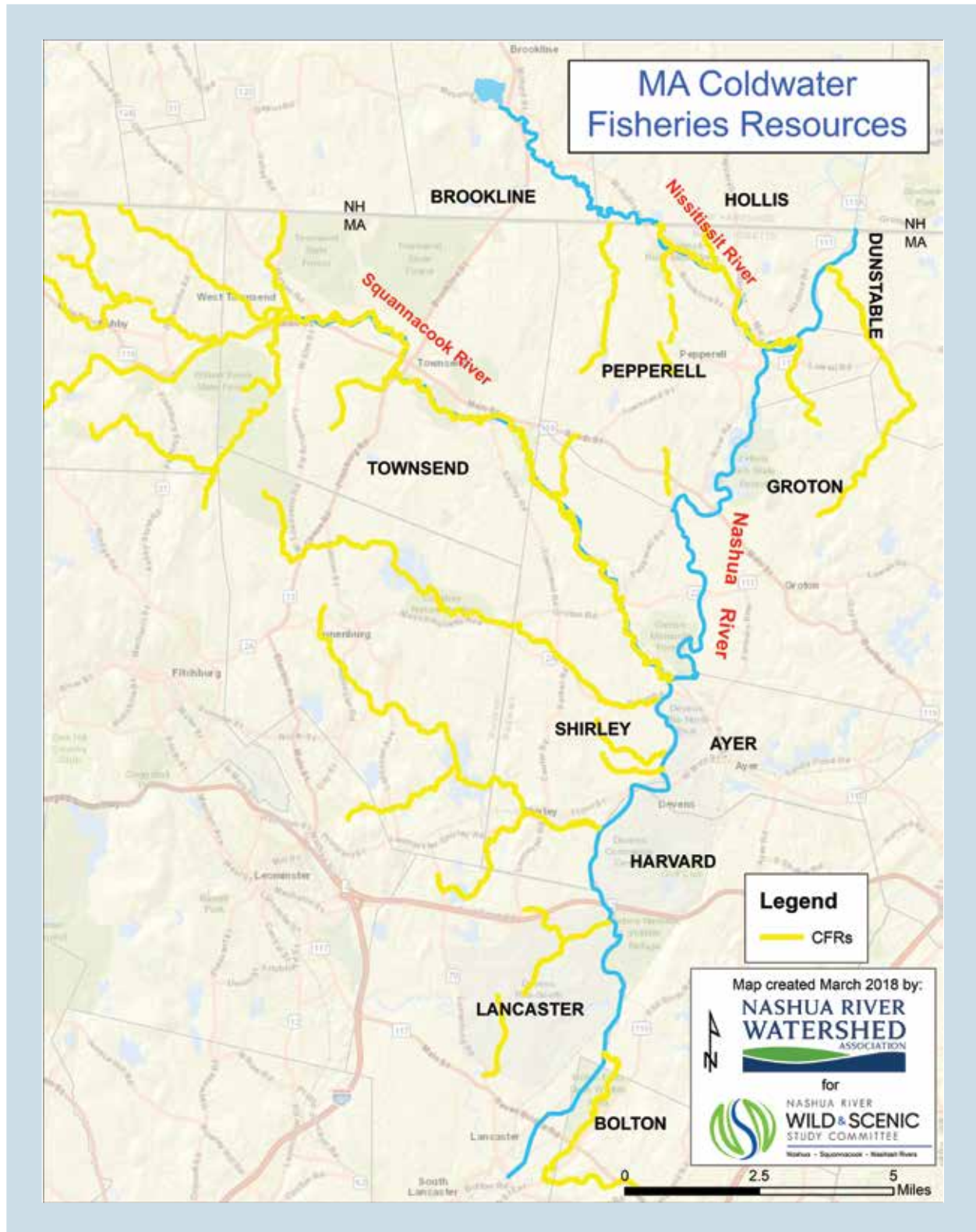
The proposed 18,000-acre Unkety Brook Herp Reserve was to include the northern half of the proposed Petapawag ACEC, plus additional areas. This herp reserve was delineated to protect populations of Blanding's turtles, spotted turtles (at that time on Massachusetts's rare species list), and blue-spotted salamanders. Only three of the nine proposed herp reserves were known to harbor more than two of the targeted rare reptiles and amphibians; the proposed Unkety Brook Herp Reserve was one of those three. This herp reserve would have been the largest of the herp reserves delineated across the Commonwealth, if that project had gone forward.

As the Natural Heritage report – unpublished -- on the project stated, "...the Unkety site may be key to the persistence of Blanding's turtles in Massachusetts and may be essential to maintaining connectivity with populations of target species in New Hampshire and Maine."

Additionally, two dozen other state-listed threatened, endangered, or species of special concern exist in the focus area. The majority of fauna on the Massachusetts List of Endangered, Threatened, or Special

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with a small part in the Petapawag ACEC. This reserve was delineated to protect populations of Blanding's and spotted turtles and appears to contain the highest density of vernal pools of all nine contemplated herp reserves in Massachusetts. [www.mass.gov/eea/docs/dcr/stewardship/acec/acecs/petwag.pdf](http://www.mass.gov/eea/docs/dcr/stewardship/acec/acecs/petwag.pdf).



*MA Coldwater Fisheries Resources (CFR) in our area highlighted in yellow.  
Note: there is no equivalent datalayer in NH.*



**Chap. 130. AN ACT ESTABLISHING A SQUANNACOOK AND NISSITISSIT RIVERS SANCTUARY.**

*Be it enacted, etc., as follows:*

Chapter 132A of the General Laws is hereby amended by adding after section 16 the following section: —

**Section 17.** There is hereby established in the towns of Ashby, Groton, Pepperell, Shirley, Townsend and Lunenburg a protected area to be known as the Squannacook and Nissitissit Rivers Sanctuary. Said Squannacook and Nissitissit Rivers Sanctuary shall be comprised of the waters of the Squannacook river and its tributaries, to wit: Ash swamp, Ashby reservoir, Bayberry Hill brook, Bixby brook, Flat pond, Flat Pond brook, Fitchburg reservoir, Locke brook, Mason brook, Pearl Hill brook, Pumpkin brook, Trap Fall brook, Trout brook, Walker brook, Willard brook, Witch brook with the exclusion of that section of the Squannacook river from the Hollingsworth and Vose dam at West Groton located approximately North 42° 36' 45", West 71° 38' 7", on the U.S. Geological survey map Shirley quadrangle to the confluence of the Nashua river; and the waters of the Nis-

sitissit river and its tributaries to wit: Coon Tree pond, Gulf brook, Heald pond, Mine brook, Port Barrel pond, Park Barrel Pond brook, Stewart brook, Sucker brook, Wolf brook. After the effective date of this act, no new discharge of treated or untreated sewage or other wastewater will be permitted to be discharged to the Squannacook and Nissitissit Rivers Sanctuary. For the purpose of this section, sewage shall mean the water-carried waste products or discharges from human beings, sink wastes, wash water, laundry wastes and similar so-called domestic waters; wastewater shall mean sewage, liquid or water-carried waste products or discharges from human beings, sink wastes, wash water, laundry wastes and similar so-called domestic wastes, and also sewage, liquid or water-carried waste from industrial, commercial, municipal, private or other sources; and person shall mean any individual, association, partnership, corporation, company, business, organization, trust, estate, the commonwealth or any political subdivision thereof, any administrative agency, public or quasi-public corporation or body or any other legal entity or the legal representatives, agents, or assignees thereof.

No person shall install or construct, or cause to be installed or constructed, any new outfall, drainage pipe, ditch, channel or other conveyance to carry storm water runoff, either directly or indirectly from any structure, parking lot, or storage yard, other than from a one or two-family residence and appurtenant parking and storage facilities, into the Squannacook and Nissitissit Rivers Sanctuary or any tributaries thereof until plans have been approved by the planning board and conservation commission of the affected town in which the pipe, ditch, channel or other conveyance is located. Said town may require the construction of any structure or structures or treatment works which it deems necessary to prevent the pollution of the Squannacook and Nissitissit Rivers Sanctuary by matter carried by such storm water runoff.

The attorney general shall take such action as may be necessary from time to time to enforce the provisions of this section. The superior court shall have jurisdiction in equity to enforce the provisions of this section.

*Approved April 14, 1975.*

*The 1975 Squannacook and Nissitissit River Sanctuary Act, Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 132A, Section 17.*



Concern Species are so designated because of loss of habitat to development. Without places to breed, nest, and find food, they have little chance of longterm survival. Part of the goal of this Stewardship Plan is to help educate the public about the value of identifying and protecting large contiguous areas of undeveloped land as wildlife habitat.

**Fish and Mussels.** In 1974, a stream survey of the Nashua River system found only aquatic species most tolerant of pollution. Today, the Nashua River, which is heavily used by recreational anglers, supports a substantial warmwater game fishery including large-mouth bass, chain pickerel, brown trout, fallfish, carp, blacknose dace, black crappie, common and golden shiner, brown bullhead, tessellated darter, yellow and white perch, white sucker, slimy sculpin, and bluegill.<sup>43</sup> It is also “fished” by mink, otter, mergansers, bald eagles, osprey, and great blue heron. Brook trout spawn in the tributaries and travel to the Nashua River for part of each year. The burgeoning fish population in the mainstem Nashua River is sustained by all the surrounding open water wetlands.



*American eel (Anguilla rostrata) was once an abundant species in rivers, and was an important fishery for Native Americans.*

*Image: Duane Raver- USFWS.*



Native brook trout are found in the Nissitissit and Squannacook Rivers and their tributaries. Twenty tributaries to the Nashua, Squannacook, and Nissitissit Rivers are state-defined coldwater fisheries resources.

American eel exist in the Nashua and Squannacook Rivers, and upstream eel (elvers) passage has been installed at Ice House Dam on the Nashua River, though there is no fish passage.

The Nissitissit River and its tributaries—particularly, Gulf, Mine, and Sucker Brooks—are coldwater fisheries resources<sup>44</sup> (“CFR”; Massachusetts Department of Fish and Game 2015) containing native brook trout. There are over twenty tributaries to the Nashua, Squannacook, and Nissitissit Rivers that are state-defined coldwater fisheries resources—as are the Squannacook and Nissitissit Rivers themselves. The Squannacook River<sup>45</sup> supports a native trout population in its upper end, and its main tributaries, Willard, Trapfalls, and Locke Brook, support native brook trout. It is likely that some of these trout find their way into the mainstem Nashua River.<sup>46</sup>

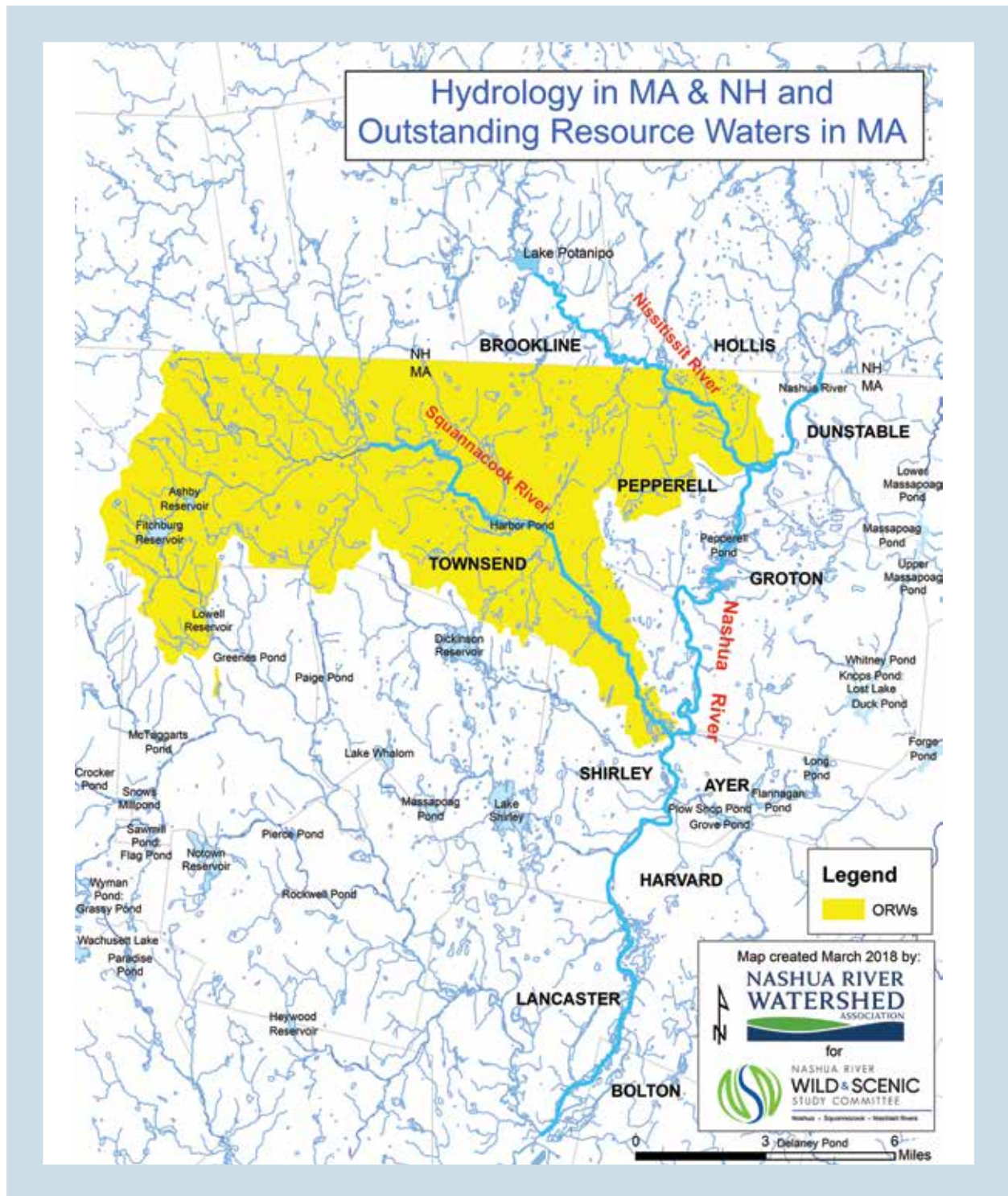
The Squannacook-Nissitissit Rivers Sanctuary Act (MGL 132A:17, 1975) was passed to protect the Outstanding Resource Waters (ORWs) of these two rivers and associated named tributaries from degradation by new discharges of pollution. Therese Beaudoin, Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) Watershed Coordinator, stated in a personal communication:

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, [www.mass.gov/eea/docs/dcr/stewardship/acec/acecs/petwag.pdf](http://www.mass.gov/eea/docs/dcr/stewardship/acec/acecs/petwag.pdf).

<sup>44</sup> A Coldwater Fisheries Resource (CFR) is a waterbody where reproducing coldwater fish use such waters to meet one or more of their life history requirements. CFRs are particularly sensitive habitats. Changes in land and water use can reduce the ability of these waters to support trout and other kinds of coldwater fish. Identification of CFRs is based on fish samples collected annually by staff biologists and technicians. See: [www.mass.gov/service-details/what-is-a-cfr](http://www.mass.gov/service-details/what-is-a-cfr).

<sup>45</sup> One may hear that the Native American (Nipmuc) name *Squannacook* means “place for taking salmon.”

<sup>46</sup> USFWS Oxbow National Wildlife Refuge, *Final Comprehensive Conservation Plan*, February 2005. [www.fws.gov/refuge/Oxbow/what\\_we\\_do/conservation.html](http://www.fws.gov/refuge/Oxbow/what_we_do/conservation.html).



*Hydrology (brooks, streams, and rivers) in both MA & NH; and state-designated Outstanding Resource Waters (ORW) in the Squannacook River and Nissitissit River subwatersheds in MA. Note: there is no equivalent datalayer in NH.*





*Native brook trout from Gulf Brook in Pepperell, MA. The Squann-a-Tissit Chapter of Trout Unlimited was instrumental in replacing old pipe culverts which helped provide trout passage between Heald Pond and the Nashua River. Photo: Russ Schott.*

The Massachusetts DEP has studied water quality in the Nashua Watershed since the late 1960s. The Squannacook River has provided an ideal location for establishing least impacted conditions for both water quality and flow, and has **served as a reference river for decades**. A **long term monitoring station** was established here in 1998, with sampling conducted every two months; available data show that water quality and aesthetics in the Squannacook River have been consistently among the cleanest in Central Massachusetts.

<sup>47</sup> “University of New Hampshire zoologist Don Chandler and his students have found that riffle beetles, a species that lives in fresh water, are especially sensitive to water quality. When the water is clean, they thrive. In the Nissitissit River Chandler’s team found 13 out of the 17 species of the insect known to exist in the state, a sign that the river is unusually clean.” <http://unhmagazine.unh.edu/f99/finickybugs.html>.

<sup>48</sup> Pat Swain Rice, personal communication in 2016.



*Brook floater (*Alasmodonta varicose*) and northern lance (*Elliptio fisheriana*). The globally rare brook floater freshwater mussel on the left is a state-listed Endangered Species in both MA and NH that can be found in the Nissitissit River (and otherwise occurs in only four rivers in MA). It is interesting to compare its size and shape to that of the northern lance on the right hand side, which is not from New England. Photo: Erianna Wikimedia Commons.*



Mussels have benefitted from the 2015 removal of the Turner Dam on the Nissitissit River in Pepperell and include rare species requiring especially clean water.

The Nissitissit River is home to five species of freshwater mussel—one of the most highly endangered animal groups in North America—which require clean water.<sup>47</sup> In Massachusetts, freshwater mussels are a Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) by MassWildlife and good sites need to be protected.<sup>48</sup> Two listed under the Massachusetts Endangered Species Act (MESA) are: the creeper (Special Concern) and the brook floater (endangered and also listed as endangered under New Hampshire’s Endangered Species Conservation Act), notable as one of just four populations in the Commonwealth. In fact, “the Nissitissit River was ranked as a conservation priority stream based on its rela-



tively healthy *A. varicosa* population [brook floater]” [and additionally] “...named as a conservation priority because of immediate threats to *A. varicosa* populations.” (*Confirmed Occurrences and Population Assessment of the Brook Floater in Massachusetts*, draft report, unpublished, February 2016).

The recent 2015 removal of the Millie Turner Dam on the Nissitissit River in Pepperell is believed to have a beneficial impact on the mussels in the river, as it will both cool the water and reconnect populations up and downstream of the former dam. In 1750, Turner Dam was constructed and associated with grist and sawmills. In 1838, Blake and Ballard machine shop was established on site. In 1864, Blake Brothers produced “Improved Turbine Water Wheel,” a “belt fastener” that they invented and patented; the turbine is sold nationally and internationally. In 1942, Robert and Millie Turner purchased property and razed the industrial buildings on site (ca. 1947). Dam failure occurred in 1954 caused by upstream dam breach (Potanipo Pond) and heavy ice flows. In 1956, the dam was reconstructed by Paugus Rod and Gun Club and a group of local volunteers. The property was conveyed to David Babin by Millie Turner in 2008. And in 2010, Massachusetts Department of Fish and Game purchased 17 acres from Mr. Babin for conservation purposes; the dam and underlying land (0.47 acre) was excluded. Massachusetts Division of Ecological Restoration accepted dam removal as a state Priority Project for river restoration in 2013.



Seventy-one species of dragonflies have been collected on a single day on the Squannacook River or its adjacent wetlands, and likewise 57 species on the Nissitissit River, including state-listed species.



The ringed boghaunter (*Williamsonia lintner*), designated as Massachusetts state-threatened, is found along the Nashua River in the vicinity of the Oxbow National Wildlife Refuge. Photo: [mass.gov](http://mass.gov).

The dam was removed with mussel relocation, and completion of 0.47-acre property transfer to the Commonwealth in 2015.

The dwarf wedge mussel is a federally-listed species<sup>49</sup> found in the Nissitissit River. Eastern pearlshell, also in the Nissitissit River, and the creeper mussel, present in the Squannacook River in Townsend, are listed as Species of Conservation Need in the *Massachusetts State Wildlife Action Plan*. In addition, the creeper (mussel, MA state-listed Special Concern) and triangle floater (mussel, MA and NH state-listed Species of Greatest Conservation Need) are present in the Nashua River.<sup>50</sup>

As part of Trout Unlimited’s “Brook Trout Initiative”, the Squan-a-Tissit Chapter of Trout Unlimited assessed the Nissitissit River and its tributaries to identify areas where restoration or protection efforts would most help protect the native brook trout populations.

**Dragonflies.** The ringed boghaunter, designated as Massachusetts state-threatened, is found along the Nashua River in the vicinity of the Oxbow National Wildlife Refuge. Five species of state-listed dragonfly species—brook snaketail, forcipate emerald, Kennedy’s emerald, spine-crowned clubtail, and umber

49 See US Fish and Wildlife Service Environmental Conservation Online System at <https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp0/profile/speciesProfile?Id=784>.

50 Biodrawiversity, LLC, “Freshwater Mussel Survey in the Nashua River in the Bypass Reach, Tailrace, and Impoundment of the East Pepperell Dam Pepperell, Massachusetts,” (May 2013) page 1.

shadowdragon—occur in the Squannacook River corridor. The spine-crowned clubtail is found in the Nissitissit River corridor as well. Such a multiplicity of dragonflies and freshwater mussel species present in the Squannacook emphasize the high water quality of that river and its importance in providing habitat for a variety of other species, common and rare.<sup>51</sup>

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*Ophiuchus aspersus*, the Brook Snaketail, is an indicator of high quality small/medium sized rivers/streams. I have collected this species in both the Nissitissit and Squannacook Rivers. This species is characteristic of clean, sandy-bottomed rivers and streams that flow through forests and they thrive in medium gradient rivers/streams with abundant riffles and sandy substrate.... The Bertozzi Wildlife Management Area has been well known among Odonatists in Massachusetts for its odonate diversity: there are records going back decades. It's hard to find a single location in MA where one can find as many species of odonates in one day during late spring/early summer when the adult odonates are at their peak abundance. I have personally collected 71 species of odonates either on the Squannacook River proper or in adjacent wetlands, and likewise 57 species on the Nissitissit.<sup>52</sup>

**Birds.** During the spring and fall bird migrations, the Nashua River is the second most commonly followed Atlantic flyway in Massachusetts, after the coast. This migratory bird mecca has over 230 bird species, half of them nesting.<sup>53</sup> In particular, the open field grassland habitat—found at the Bolton Flats Wildlife Management Area and in Devens at the Moore Airfield and Shepley Landfill—provides nesting sites for the MA state-listed Endangered upland sandpiper and the Threatened grasshopper sparrow.<sup>54</sup> Additionally, the Pine Hill area in Lancaster, mentioned above with regard to its exemplary



*Grasshopper sparrow, a MA state-listed Threatened Species.  
Photo: Dominic Sherony.*

Pitch Pine–Scrub Oak natural community, has documented vesper and grasshopper sparrow territories on it according to Chris Buelow, NHESP Restoration Ecologist.<sup>55</sup> See Audubon Society's "Nashua River Watershed Important Bird Area (IBA) Site for further discussion of this site."<sup>56</sup> Continuing along

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51 Townsend Open Space and Recreation Plan, 2013, page 29.

52 Michael Veit, personal communication on Dec. 19, 2016.

53 Harold Herrill, "Fall and Winter Birds of the Lancaster Area," *The Bird Observer of Eastern Massachusetts* (Vol. 5, No. 61977).

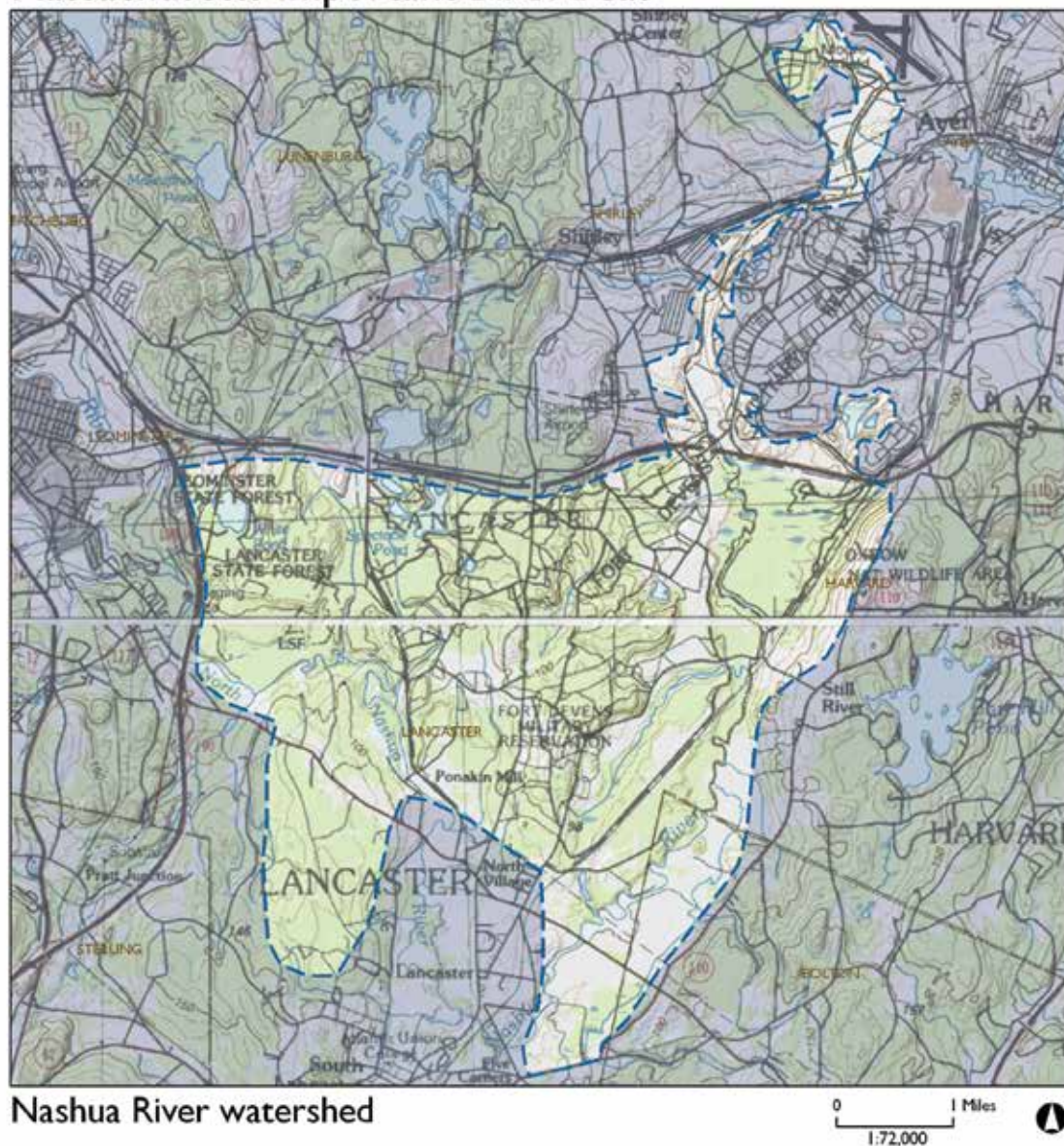
54 NHESP, "An Action Plan for the Conservation of State-listed Obligate Grassland Birds in Massachusetts," 2013.

55 Chris Buelow, email communication on June 19, 2014.

56 Mass Audubon Society Important Bird Area (IBA) at [www.massaudubon.org/our-conservation-work/wildlife-research-conservation/statewide-bird-monitoring/massachusetts-important-bird-areas-iba/important-bird-area-sites/nashua-river-watershed](http://www.massaudubon.org/our-conservation-work/wildlife-research-conservation/statewide-bird-monitoring/massachusetts-important-bird-areas-iba/important-bird-area-sites/nashua-river-watershed).



## Massachusetts Important Bird Areas

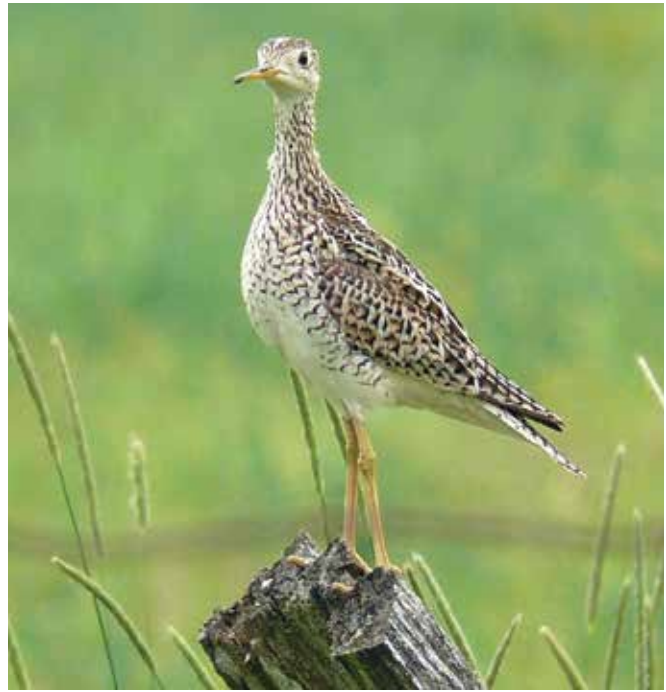


*Map of MassAudubon's "Nashua River Watershed" Important Bird Area (IBA). IBAs provide essential habitat to one or more species of breeding, wintering, and/or migrating birds.*



the Atlantic flyway into New Hampshire, migratory birds would follow the Nashua River north to the Merrimack River to or from their breeding areas. Some birds, like the common redpoll, stop in New Hampshire, as this is their northern breeding ground.<sup>57</sup> This Nashua River Watershed IBA is composed of the Oxbow National Wildlife Refuge, Devens Reserve Forces Training Area (Devens RFTA), Bolton Flats Wildlife Management Area, the Nashua Greenway, Lancaster State Forest, and private lands along the Nashua River that are contiguous with the publicly owned areas. Much of this land was part of the former Fort Devens. A large portion of the former Fort Devens was transferred to the US Fish and Wildlife Service and is now the Oxbow National Wildlife Refuge. The area between the wildlife refuge, Devens RFTA, and Bolton Flats is known as the Intervale Region and is primarily privately owned, except for a small parcel of Lancaster conservation land. The public portion is composed of Lancaster conservation land called the Nashua Greenway and the Lancaster State Forest.

The diverse habitats are reflected in a rich avifauna. The habitats include a large grassland, extensive wetlands, forested uplands, and a riverine corridor. The forest communities are Appalachian oak-pine forest, hemlock-northern hardwood forest, red maple hardwood swamps, and pitch pine-scrub oak barrens. The wetland communities present are equally diverse and include New England floodplain forest, dwarf shrub bogs, a black spruce-tamarack bog, oxbow ponds, and sandy bottom kettlehole ponds. The grassland is particularly important as



*Upland Sandpiper, a MA state-listed Endangered Species.  
Photo: Dawn Scranton.*



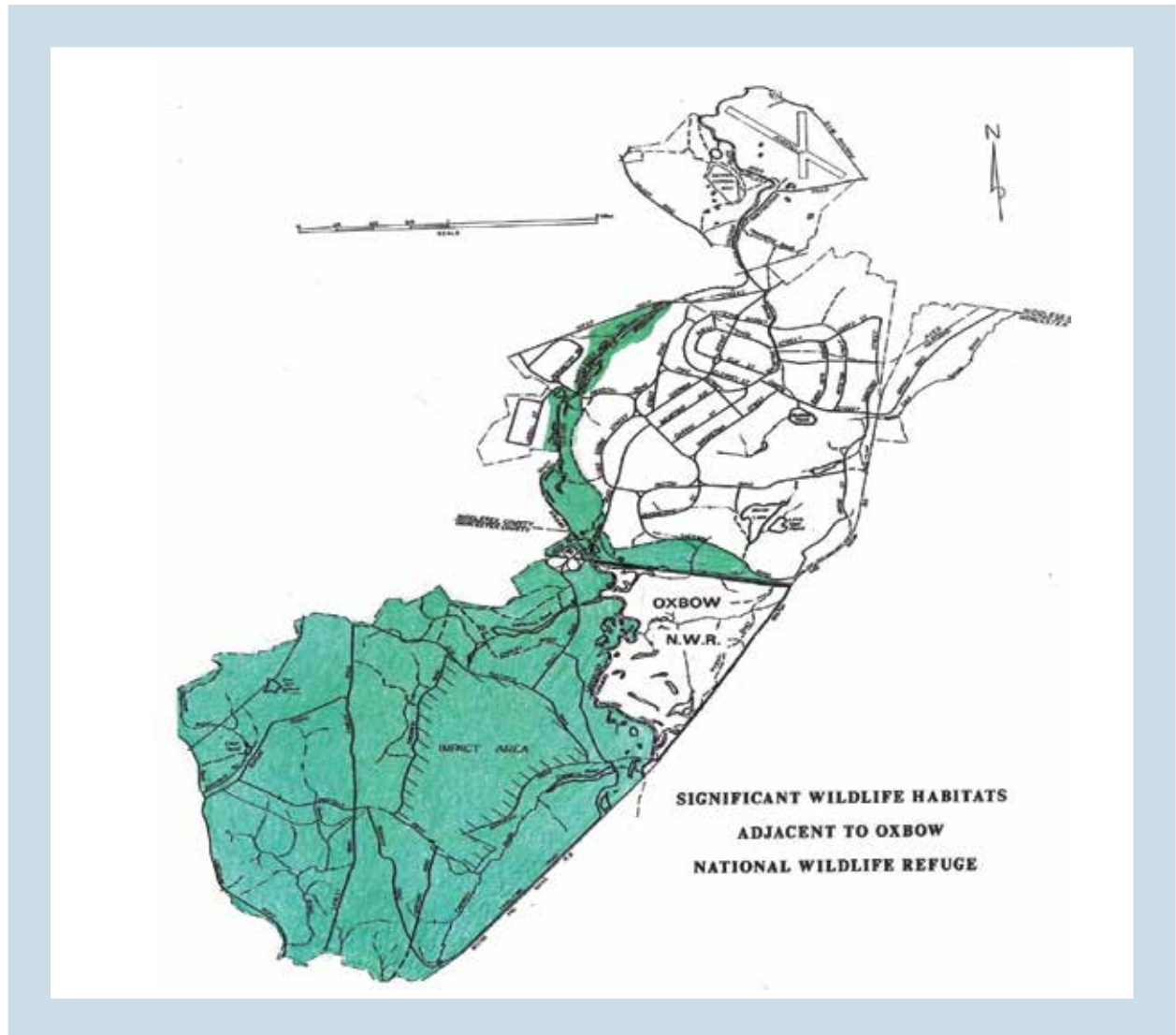
Over 230 bird species, half of them nesting, can be found in the migratory bird mecca of the Nashua River, which is the second most commonly followed Atlantic flyway in Massachusetts.

the site hosting the Commonwealth's third largest breeding population of grasshopper sparrows as well as supporting vesper sparrows, upland sandpipers, and bobolinks.

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This IBA includes large areas of upland and wetland habitats including grassland, wetlands, forest, and the riparian corridor. Much of the land in the IBA is owned by the federal government. It provides important habitat for upland species including declining grassland birds and a wide diversity of migratory songbirds, as well as wetland dependent species like waterfowl, rails, and bitterns. Raptors of concern known to utilize the area include the bald eagle, peregrine falcon, northern harrier, and sharp-shinned hawk. The IBA has no specific regulatory significance or authority; the program identifies areas of particularly significant bird habitat to educate people about the importance of these areas and draw attention to the need to consider the avian resources in land management plans and decisions." (Personal communication with Heidi Ricci, Mass Audubon, Oct. 25, 2017)

57 Pamela D. Hunt et al., "The State of New Hampshire's Birds—A Conservation Guide," (New Hampshire Audubon, Concord, NH 2010).



*Map of "Significant Wildlife Areas Adjacent to Oxbow National Wildlife Refuge," U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service "Survey and Evaluation of Wetlands and Wildlife Habitat, Fort Devens MA," 1992. All the green-colored areas to the north of Route 2 have been incorporated into the Oxbow National Wildlife Refuge; the South Post of Fort Devens which has not been surplused is still actively used and is strictly off limits.*

**!!SEC. 2831. TRANSFER OF JURISDICTION AND LAND CONVEYANCE, FORT DEVENS MILITARY RESERVATION, MASSACHUSETTS.!!**

(a) **TRANSFER OF LAND FOR WILDLIFE REFUGE.**--Subject to subsection (b), the Secretary of the Army shall transfer, without reimbursement, to the administrative jurisdiction of the Secretary of the Interior that portion of Fort Devens Military Reservation in the State of Massachusetts that is situated south of Massachusetts State Route 7, for inclusion in the Oxbow National Wildlife Refuge. The transfer shall be made as soon as possible after the date on which the property is determined to be excess to the needs of the Department of Defense.

(b) **LAND CONVEYANCE AUTHORIZED.**--The Secretary of the Army shall convey to the Town of Lancaster, Massachusetts (in this section referred to as the "Town"), all right, title, and interest of the United States in and to a parcel of real property consisting of approximately 100 acres of the parcel available for transfer under subsection (a) and located adjacent to Massachusetts State Highway 70.

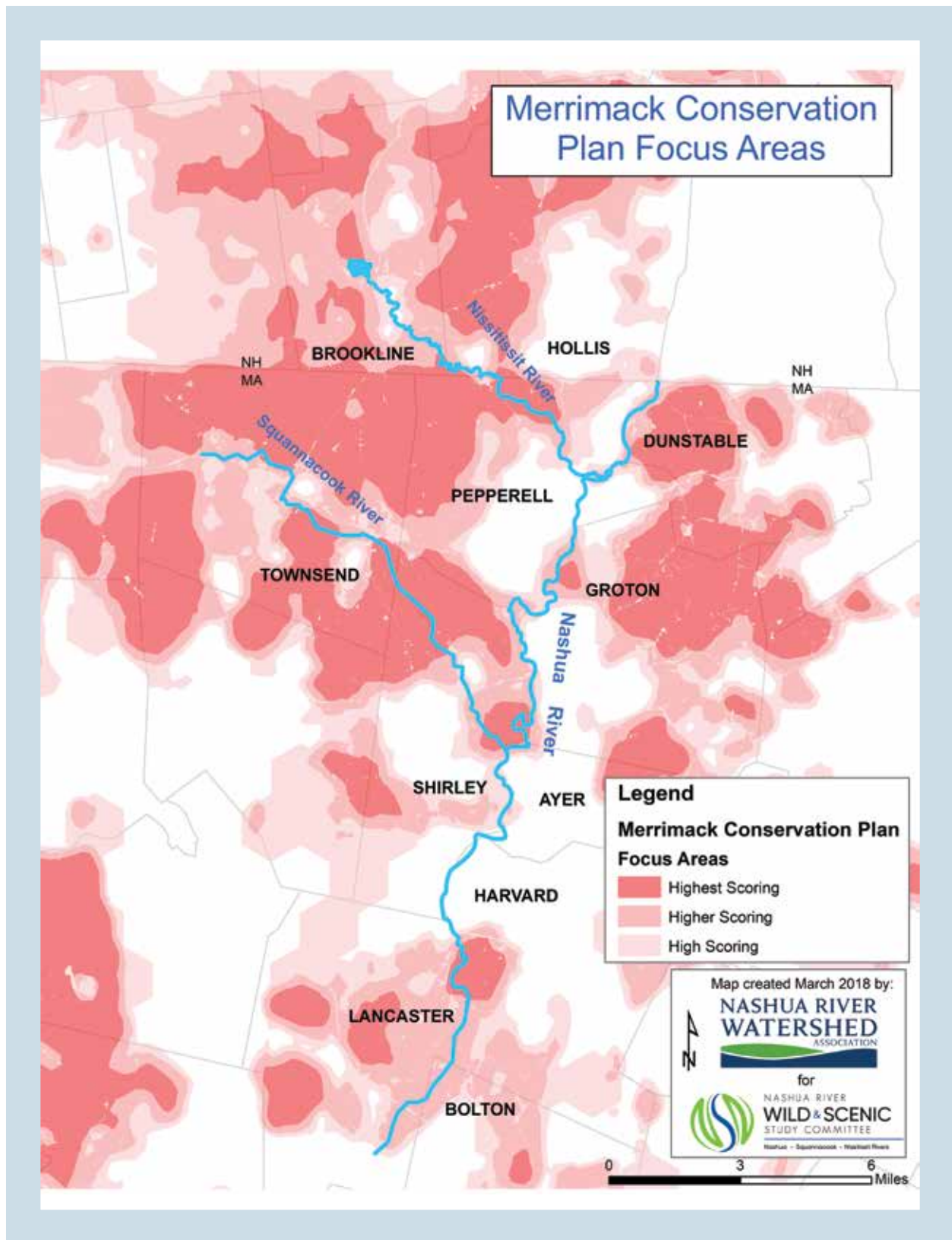
(c) **LEGAL DESCRIPTION.**--(1) The exact acreage and legal description of the real property to be transferred under subsection (a) shall be determined by surveys that are mutually satisfactory to the Secretary of the Army and the Secretary of the Interior. The cost of such surveys shall be borne by the Secretary of the Interior.

(2) The exact acreage and legal description of the real property to be conveyed under subsection (b) shall be determined by surveys that are mutually satisfactory to the Secretary of the Army, the Secretary of the Interior, and the Board of Selectman of the Town. The cost of such surveys shall be borne by the Town.

(d) **ADDITIONAL TERMS AND CONDITIONS.**--The Secretary of the Army may require such additional terms and conditions in connection with the transfer and conveyance under this section as the Secretary of the Army considers appropriate to protect the interests of the United States.

*Excerpt from the 1996 US Defense Authorization Act pertaining to the "Transfer of Jurisdiction and Land Conveyance, Fort Devens Military reservation, Massachusetts" if the property is determined to be excess to the needs of the Department of Defense.*





*Merrimack Conservation Plan Focus Areas (highlighting 3 highest tiers). "Conservation Focus Areas are geographic areas where undeveloped land provides a combination of three core natural values: clean water, wildlife habitat, and good soils for growing food and forests." For more info see <https://merrimackconservationpartnership.org/resources/conservation-plan>.*



## Some Key Findings on the Exemplary Status of Biodiversity Features

- **The Oxbow National Wildlife Refuge, which has 1,667 acres and approximately eight miles of Nashua River frontage**, is the crown jewel of permanently protected land in our area.
- The Nashua River corridor consists of significant portions of terrestrial habitat designated by the **Massachusetts BioMap2 project** as “**core habitat**,” representing the highest priority for biodiversity conservation and protection. There are **six “Priority Natural Communities”** along the Nashua River, according to Massachusetts Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program (NHESP).
- **Three state-designated ACECs are in our area covering a total of approximately 76,000 acres:** the Central Nashua River Valley, Squannassit, and Petapawag ACECs. Together these three contiguous ACECs comprise approximately 28% of total existing ACECs throughout the Commonwealth. ACECs are “areas where unique clusters of natural and human resource values exist and which are worthy of a high level of concern and protection.”
- The **1975 Squannacook-Nissitissit Rivers Sanctuary Act** was passed to protect the **Outstanding Resource Waters** of these two rivers and associated named tributaries from degradation by new discharges of pollution.
- The **Squannacook River has served for decades as a Massachusetts state reference (or “baseline”) river for least-altered flow patterns<sup>58</sup> and was used to develop the state’s water withdrawal policy.** A longterm monitoring station was established there in 1998, with sampling conducted every two months; available data show that water quality and aesthetics in the Squannacook River have been consistently among the cleanest in Central Massachusetts.
- “Many of the tributaries connected to the lower Nashua River (i.e., downstream from Wachusett Reservoir), together with the Nissitissit River, Squannacook River, and associated tributaries, represent **the most substantial concentration of coldwater fisheries resources in the eastern third of Massachusetts**. The location of these resources also makes this complex of coldwater streams the closest significant recreational stream trout fishery to the Boston metropolitan area.”<sup>59</sup>
- **The Nissitissit River is unique in eastern Massachusetts for having both a “Fly Fishing Only” and “Catch and Release” section.** The recent removal of the Millie Turner Dam in Pepperell is expected to improve flows and benefit the river’s wild brook trout population. Further, due to conservation efforts, nearly 50% of the entire length of the Nissitissit River has a 300-foot vegetated buffer strip.<sup>60</sup>

58 US Geological Survey, “Characteristics and classification of least altered streamflows in Massachusetts,” (Scientific Investigations Report 2007-5291, 2008).

59 Adam Kautza, Coldwater Fisheries Project Leader at MassWildlife, personal communication on June 1, 2017.

60 Note: Harvard has a Nashua River Watershed Greenspace Buffer District. See the Zoning Bylaw, 125-42. B(9). This is 300-foot-wide from the Nashua River in Harvard.

### Some Key Findings on the Exemplary Status of Biodiversity Features, *continued*

- **Twenty-five tributaries** to the Nashua, Squannacook, and Nissitissit Rivers are Massachusetts **coldwater fisheries resources** (CFR), as are the Squannacook and Nissitissit Rivers.
- The **US Fish and Wildlife Service has stocked alewife and American shad** in an impounded pond on the Nissitissit River in New Hampshire and is pursuing a goal to reintroduce same species to the Nashua River in the next ten years.
- The **Nashua River is the second most commonly followed Atlantic flyway in Massachusetts**, after the coast<sup>61</sup> The Oxbow National Wildlife Refuge is listed as a priority for protection under the North American Waterfowl Management Plan and the Emergency Wetlands Resources Act of 1986.
- As a **major aquifer recharge area**, the Nashua River valley stores floodwaters and precipitation in its numerous wetlands and sandy glacial soils. Another benefit of our focus area's several aquifers is that many Massachusetts NHESP Priority and Estimated Habitats are found overlying them.
- **Some two dozen state-listed Massachusetts NHESP threatened, endangered, or species of special concern exist in this region.** Five species of state-listed **dragonfly** species occur in the Squannacook River corridor. The Nissitissit River is home to six species of **freshwater mussel**—one of the most highly endangered animal groups in North America—which require clean water. The river was ranked as a conservation priority stream because of such. The entire length of the Nissitissit in Massachusetts is identified as Natural Heritage Priority Habitat for five listed species. Such a multiplicity of dragonflies and freshwater mussel species present in the Squannacook and Nissitissit emphasizes the high water quality of those rivers.
- Our focus area is also the home of the **largest known population of Massachusetts-listed and New Hampshire-listed Blanding's turtle**: Massachusetts NHESP calls it "...a very significant population, possibly the largest in New England."<sup>62</sup>
- Nearly the entire Nashua River watershed has been included as the "**Nashua River Greenway Forest Legacy Area**" under the US Forest Service administered Forestry Legacy Program in partnership with Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation's Bureau of Forestry. Two outstanding tracts protected by Forest Legacy in our study area are the Belmont Springs tract (255 acres in Pepperell) and the Pumpkin Brook Link tract (174 acres in Shirley).

<sup>61</sup> Dunstable Open Space and Recreation Plan 2010-2017.

<sup>62</sup> Mike Jones, personal communication on December 19, 2016.



## BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY ACTION PLAN



*Blanding's turtle (Emydoidea blandingii) has Threatened status in MA; Conservation status of "State Endangered" in NH.  
Photo: Arthur Wikimedia Commons.*

### A: BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

**GOAL A.1:** Sustain and enhance existing biological diversity along and within the rivers and their tributaries.

**OBJECTIVE:** Ensure that the outstanding existing biological richness of the rivers' aquatic and bordering terrestrial communities will be sustained and enhanced into the future, that common species will remain common, and that populations of rare and threatened species are not extirpated.

- **Engage the public** - Use a variety of media to help audiences from youth to senior citizens learn about the rich biological legacy along the region's rivers and streams; the relationships between human activities, wildlife, and plant habitat needs; and conservation actions and outcomes. Provide rich field experiences and programs to help residents and visitors to the region develop and increase their connections with the natural world of the rivers and their shores.
- **Address nonpoint source pollution** - Work with communities and landowners to address issues of nonpoint source pollution, especially stormwater runoff and flows from disturbed areas, septic system discharges, and other sources of water quality impairment. Develop strategies to help mitigate effects of climate disturbance.
- **Protect riparian zones** - Work with communities and landowners to protect riparian zones

from unnecessary clearing and land alteration.

- **Conserve contiguous habitat** - Help communities identify conservation strategies that will provide contiguous habitat, corridors, and linkages among habitat types to address the needs of diverse plant and wildlife populations.
- **Conserve critical habitat** - Work with local land trusts; local, state, and federal officials; and landowners to conserve critical habitats along the rivers and nearby uplands.
- **Conserve targeted species** - Carry out targeted activities focused on species and communities of particular conservation interest, as detailed below.



*Top: Public walk on Keyes Trail beside Nissitissit River in Brookline and Hollis, NH during outreach phase of our study, spring 2018. Photo: Jordan Bailey. Bottom: Public walk on the Squannacook River Rail Trail in Townsend, MA during outreach phase of study, fall 2017. Photo: Bill Rideout.*

## **GOAL A.2: Protect Priority Natural Communities & rare species habitats.**

**OBJECTIVE:** Protect habitats and corridors identified as high priority by Massachusetts Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program (NHESP) and by New Hampshire Natural Heritage Bureau (NHB), and by doing so, sustain and enhance important biological communities and species.

- **Inform the public** - Provide a variety of information through many media and programs to inform residents and visitors about unique/special communities and rare species, and their needs.
- **Encourage best practices for habitat management** - Encourage habitat management, such as according to MassWildlife recommendations, for early successional/young forest.<sup>63</sup>
- **Protect endangered species** - Help municipalities and land trusts permanently protect all occurrences of state-recognized NHESP Priority Natural Communities along the Nashua River, according to Massachusetts NHESP Program.
- **Protect land corridors** - Focus on creating “south to north” land protection corridors—dispersal and migratory wildlife routes through which terrestrial and aquatic flora and fauna will be able to move and adapt, as climate disturbance increasingly impacts biological processes and drives species north.<sup>64</sup>
- **Report rare species sightings** - Report rare species to Massachusetts NHESP and

<sup>63</sup> MassWildlife is encouraging landowners to create young forest on their land to benefit wildlife. MassWildlife Habitat Specialists can provide technical advice and guidance to qualified landowners. <https://www.mass.gov/news/masswildlife-can-help-landowners-create-young-forests>.

<sup>64</sup> Britta Timpane-Padgham et al., “A systematic review of ecological attributes that confer resilience to climate change in

New Hampshire NHB to ensure the habitat of rare species is identified and protected.

- **Follow a comprehensive approach to large woody material** - Develop a comprehensive approach to large woody material (LWM) management in rivers and streams by working with stakeholders, including the Squan-a-Tissit Chapter of Trout Unlimited, local Conservation Commissions, recreational paddlers, the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife, and others. A comprehensive approach allows for safe paddling, but also recognizes that LWM provides important ecological benefits, and should be left in place whenever possible.<sup>65</sup> The goal should be the judicious pruning of downed trees in rivers to provide for both recreational use and aquatic ecological habitat.<sup>66</sup>
- **Prepare for future land protection** - Ensure that if the South Post of Fort Devens is ever surplused that the land is permanently protected and/or becomes incorporated into the Oxbow National Wildlife Refuge (less the one hundred acres to Lancaster). Inform all current Boards of Selectman and Conservation Commissions in Lancaster and Harvard of this legislation.



*"Trees, Paddlers, and Wildlife: Safeguarding Ecological and Recreational Values on the River" brochure jointly produced by Appalachian Mountain Club and MA Division of Ecological Restoration (former Riverways Program). See video at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=UTTewIOS304](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UTTewIOS304).*

### GOAL A.3: Protect state-listed Blanding's turtles (Threatened in Massachusetts and Endangered in New Hampshire).

#### OBJECTIVE: Protect existing turtle populations and help expand populations for the future.<sup>67</sup>

- **Reduce turtle mortality in roads** - Determine road mortality "hot spots" and reduce such through public educational signage located at "turtle crossings." Report Massachusetts road mortality at Linking Landscapes: [www.linking-landscapes.info/turtle-roadkill-surveys.html](http://www.linking-landscapes.info/turtle-roadkill-surveys.html) See [www.blandingsturtle.org/uploads/3/10/4/3/30433006/nebtwg\\_recreation.pdf](http://www.blandingsturtle.org/uploads/3/10/4/3/30433006/nebtwg_recreation.pdf).
- **Provide habitat** - Create turtle nesting habitat—a limiting factor—to encourage turtles to nest in areas that will not require them to cross roads. Work with MassWildlife and Massachusetts NHESP to evaluate prime habitat.
- **Protect vernal pools** - Defend integrity of specific vernal pools, which are vital Blanding's turtle habitat, by prohibiting vernal pool (VP) modification. Protecting VPs by certifying them is key, but buffers around and connections between all wetlands and upland aestivating (dormancy) and nesting areas used by blanding turtles are critical. Encourage certification of potential vernal pools (PVPs) as appropriate.

environmental restoration," (PLOS, March 16, 2017), <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0173812>.

<sup>65</sup> Large woody material (LWM) provides habitat, improves water quality, supports invertebrate life cycles, creates physical complexity and stabilizes banks and bed so there have been concerns about clearing such from the rivers. An excellent approach to LWM management can be found in "Recreation Enhancement of the Lamprey River: Final Report to the Lamprey River Wild and Scenic 2015 Small Grants Program," [www.lampreyriver.org/UploadedFiles/Files/woody\\_obstacles\\_report.pdf](http://www.lampreyriver.org/UploadedFiles/Files/woody_obstacles_report.pdf).

<sup>66</sup> The "Trees, Paddlers, and Wildlife" guide produced by the Massachusetts Division of Ecological Restoration (DER) and the companion video "Trees, Paddlers and Wildlife" produced by the Appalachian Mountain Club and Massachusetts DER should be starting references for such efforts.

<sup>67</sup> Protecting Blanding's turtle habitat will protect a wide variety of other species in the process.



Note: Certified Vernal Pools (CVP) are Outstanding Resource Waters. Submitting rare species reports to Massachusetts NHESP and New Hampshire NHB is key to protect habitat.

- **Follow forestry best practices** - Given that maintaining forested land in forest use is vital to conserving viable populations of Blanding's turtles, follow "Massachusetts Forestry Conservation Management Practices for Blanding's turtles."<sup>68</sup>
- **Engage public in turtle protection** - Encourage continued public support and participation in the annual "Big Night" (first mass amphibian movement in early spring) activities as well as local turtle protection happenings.<sup>69</sup>
- **Work to expand habitat** - Work with landowners, Conservation Commissions, land trusts, and others to expand protected forest land and other appropriate habitat for Blanding's turtles adjacent to areas with existing populations so that there will be areas for expanding populations to move into.
- **Spread a message to leave turtles alone** - Educating everyone about the importance of leaving wildlife wild and not taking turtles home is important. Turtles live a long time, if they aren't run over, and it is best for them to remain in the wild. Consider starting or expanding head-starting school-based or other turtle-rearing project with proper authorization

- **Raise awareness about turtles** - Conduct public education and raise awareness through signage and educational information to residents, businesses, developers, and contractors. Publish newspaper articles and press releases during migration; provide information for websites, mailings, and local cable access. Partner with groups like Devens Eco-Efficiency Center to help raise awareness (e.g., support Earth Day turtle crossing sign-making project and/or other initiatives).



*Turtles will often cross the same section of road from year to year to seek preferred habitat. Road mortality accounts for a large percentage of turtle population declines. Photo: NRW Archives.*

<sup>68</sup> See Massachusetts Forestry Conservation Management Practices for Blanding's Turtles at [www.mass.gov/eea/docs/dfg/nhosp/regulatory-review/blandings-turtle-cmp.pdf](http://www.mass.gov/eea/docs/dfg/nhosp/regulatory-review/blandings-turtle-cmp.pdf).

<sup>69</sup> Amphibian Alert: Each spring in Pepperell, volunteers provide safe passage for salamanders on their nocturnal breeding migration at [http://archive.boston.com/news/local/articles/2011/05/08/in\\_pepperell\\_volunteers\\_make\\_sure\\_salamanders\\_get\\_safe\\_passage/](http://archive.boston.com/news/local/articles/2011/05/08/in_pepperell_volunteers_make_sure_salamanders_get_safe_passage/).

## **GOAL A.4: Protect and enhance coldwater fisheries resources.**

**OBJECTIVE:** Maintain existing populations of coldwater fish through actions that help mitigate thermal effects of a warming climate; maintain riparian forests; ensure baseflows provided by cold, clean groundwater discharges; sustain diverse aquatic invertebrate populations; and prevent nonpoint source pollution, especially sedimentation into coldwater streams.

- **Raise awareness about streams** - Collaborate with anglers' organizations, aquatic biologists, naturalists, local school systems, and others to increase public awareness and appreciation of how headwater streams "work." Focus on baseflows and storm flows, the life of coldwater streams, the recreational value of coldwater fisheries, and the ways that individuals can both enjoy and contribute to sustaining these remarkable resources. Conduct outreach focused on engineers who develop stormwater systems for projects, municipal members of planning and conservation boards, and others whose decisions affect stormwater management and land use change.
- **Protect brooks** - Protect small, cold, headwater brooks, which are necessary for reproduction, rearing of juveniles, thermal refuge during periods of high temperatures, and as year-round habitat for some CFR species.<sup>70</sup>
- **Improve culverts and crossings** - Improve stream habitat by replacing and/or up-grading poorly designed culverts and other stream crossings.<sup>71</sup>
- **Preserve canopies** - Preserve forest canopies over coldwater fisheries resources to ensure streams remain shaded. Pay special attention to, and provide comments on, any proposed utility or natural gas pipeline construction that cross CFRs as well as adjacent solar farms with an eye toward potential negative impacts resulting therefrom.
- **Protect water flow** - Maintain, protect, and enhance water flow regimes that support the needs of native river flora and fauna, while accommodating demands for water supply, waste assimilation, commercial, and industrial and agricultural uses.
- **Maintain riverbanks** - Conduct stream assessments to identify and repair man-made bank disturbance and/or erosion impacting natural structure and reducing riparian vegetative cover.

70 "It is imperative to maintain appropriate flow regimes and water levels (e.g., [streams are] reliant on groundwater inputs during much of the year; groundwater withdrawal or limited infiltration hampers this, impervious surfaces and drainage systems create higher than normal flows during rain events), access (e.g., dams, perched culverts, etc. cut off many kilometers of important habitat), and maintain suitable water temperatures (e.g., riparian vegetation provides shade among other important benefits to small brooks, runoff into streams from dark impervious surfaces is very warm): while accommodating demands for water supply, waste assimilation, commercial, industrial and agricultural uses. Small, coldwater brooks also buffer the temperature of the larger streams and rivers they flow into as well as some distance downstream from their confluence. The larger streams and rivers in the Nashua-Nissitissit-Squannacook complex could likely serve as overwintering habitat for trout and other coldwater species in their deeper pools." (Adam Kautza, Coldwater Fisheries Project Leader at MassWildlife, personal communication on June 1, 2017).

71 See "Restore or Maintain Watershed Connectivity to Provide Areas for Fish and Wildlife Passage and the Ability to Compensate for Increased Storm Events," pages 5-32 in *New Hampshire State Wildlife Action Plan*. New or replacement bridges and culverts should ideally have openings which pass the bankfull width without constriction. Bridges and culverts should be designed to cross the river without creating channel approaches at an angle to structures. Such sharp angles can lead to undermining of fill materials and structural components. The historic channel migration pattern of the river should be considered when installing new or replacement crossing structures, and when constructing new roads, driveways, and buildings. Planned build-out for watershed communities and resultant channel enlargement (from increased percent imperviousness) should be considered when designing new or replacement bridges and crossing structures.

- **Study geology** - Conduct Geographical Information Systems (GIS) analysis of area's geology to help determine which headwaters might be prioritized for protection (given geological influences), in collaboration with state fisheries officials.
- **Address Data Gaps** - Support the New Hampshire Wildlife Action Plan (2015) and the New Hampshire Fish and Game Department's Coldwater Fishery Program, Inland Fisheries Operational Plan (2017) to address data gaps in brook trout population and status.



*Nissitissit River. Photo: Jane Metzger.*

## **GOAL A.5:** : Protect and enhance anadromous fisheries.

### **OBJECTIVE:** Ensure ongoing and sustained populations of anadromous fishes by restoring and maintaining fish passage, spawning areas, and nursery habitat throughout the river system.

- **Provide fish ladders** - Ensure adequate fish ladders are installed at hydropower facilities, and existing ladders are maintained for both up and downstream effective and efficient passage of river herring, American shad,<sup>72</sup> and American eel.<sup>73</sup>
- **Provide stream crossings** - Work with local and state highway officials to ensure that poorly designed culverts and other stream crossings are adequate for passage of migratory fishes year-round. Evaluate road and railroad crossings and prioritize poorly designed culverts for replacements using Best Management Practices (BMP) for Fish Passage as summarized described in the "Massachusetts Stream Crossing Handbook."<sup>74</sup>
- **Reintroduce anadromous species** - Encourage state and federal agencies such as US Fish and Wildlife Service to reintroduce alewife and American shad to the Nashua River in the next few years, similar to the program ongoing since 2014 to reintroduce alewife in Lake Potanipo at the headwaters of the Nissitissit River in New Hampshire.<sup>75</sup> (See link: [www.wildlife.state.nh.us/fishing/anadromous-why-restore.html](http://www.wildlife.state.nh.us/fishing/anadromous-why-restore.html).)

72 "American shad are in severe decline. In Massachusetts, shad have been extirpated or reduced to unsustainable populations in all rivers where they occurred, due to structures blocking spawning migrations, pollution of spawning grounds, changes in land and water use that reduce habitat, nonpoint source pollution, increased water withdrawals from spawning rivers, and overfishing. Climate change, predation, and bycatch in other fisheries also have led to population declines." (from Massachusetts Bays Program Official Website).

73 US Fish and Wildlife Service, *Comprehensive Conservation Plan for Oxbow National Wildlife Refuge*, (January 2005) page 33.

74 Department of Fish and Game, "Massachusetts Stream Crossing Handbook" (2<sup>nd</sup> edition, June 2012), [www.mass.gov/eea/docs/dfg/der/pdf/stream-crossings-handbook.pdf](http://www.mass.gov/eea/docs/dfg/der/pdf/stream-crossings-handbook.pdf).

75 "Alewife stocking has occurred for several years as part of a restoration project where the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and New Hampshire Fish & Game work to re-establish this native fish to our area's waters. Downstream dam removal, and improved fishways at existing dams, will make it possible for the offspring of these stocked fish to return in future years to Lake Potanipo. These stocked adults will spawn in Lake Potanipo, and leave in a few weeks. Their young will grow in the lake all summer, and leave for the ocean during a fall high water event. It will then take 3-5 years for them to mature and return to reproduce themselves." (Michael Bailey, USFWS, 2017, personal communication).





*Since 2014 the American alewife has been restored to the Nissitissit River headwaters by US Fish and Wildlife Service by annual releases into Lake Potanipo. Photo: Jordan Bailey.*

## **GOAL A.6: Sustain and improve populations of freshwater mussels.**

### **OBJECTIVE: Protect existing populations of freshwater mussels, and work toward restoration of extirpated populations, per Massachusetts NHESP recommendations.**

- **Improve habitat for endangered mussels** - Improve habitat condition for the recovery of extirpated and declining mussel populations. Freshwater mussels in Massachusetts and in New Hampshire are of special conservation interest as one of the most highly endangered animal groups in North America and are well represented at good sites such as in Nissitissit River, which need to be protected.
- **Avoid threat from sediment** - Protect freshwater mussels from construction projects, which have the potential for sediment release that could suffocate the mussels by insuring erosion control BMPs are in place for all work sites.<sup>76</sup>
- **Improve stream connectivity** - Work to improve stream connectivity throughout the watershed to allow passage of host fish species

on which mussel populations depend. Ensure that construction involving road and railroad crossings includes installation of adequate culverts to allow year-round fish passage. Survey small dams to ensure that they do not impair the upstream passage of a wide array of potential host fish species (not just anadromous fishes).

- **Preserve habitat** - As with coldwater fisheries, work with communities, landowners, Conservation Commissions, fisheries managers, and state regulators to minimize non-point source pollution, including sedimentation and temperature changes. Maintain as much forested cover as possible in riparian and upland contributing areas to minimize thermal impacts. Manage stormwater to minimize surface flows of warmwater, to maintain year-round baseflows of cool groundwater, and to minimize changes in forested cover.
- **Monitor for invasive mollusks** - Monitor streams to ensure that invasive mollusks do not become established, potentially competing with native species for food and altering the benthic substrate needed by mussels. In the event of invasive mollusks being documented, establish a targeted removal program promptly to attempt to prevent adverse effects on native species.



*Removal of the Millie Turner Dam in Pepperell, MA by the Mass-Wildlife, MA Division of Ecological Restoration, and several other partners has helped the river return to a healthier and more natural state. In this photo, ecologists relocate stranded mussels after the dam has been taken out and the former impoundment drained.*

<sup>76</sup> While not all of the BMPs will be appropriate for or accepted by every municipality, they are meant to be a guideline of some of the technologies currently available. Also, see "New Hampshire Best Management Practices for Erosion Control on Timber Harvesting Operations" at [https://extension.unh.edu/resources/representation/Resource000247\\_Rep266.pdf](https://extension.unh.edu/resources/representation/Resource000247_Rep266.pdf).



## Disturbances Over the Law Relative to the Killing of Salmon and Other Fishes, 1784

In 1781 the Great and General Court passed an act prohibiting “The Killing or destroying any salmon shad or alewives in the Merrimack River or any waters falling thereinto in this state, except on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays, under a penalty of 2 lbs [pounds]”; and further- “That no person shall erect or build annually within the months of May, June, September and October, any dams or other obstructions across said steams, nor continue said mill-dams or other obstructions under a penalty of 20 pounds.”

This act, according to tradition, because of its provisions for keeping the dams open during certain months of the year, was the cause of no little commotion in Raby [Brookline], where the project of damming the Nissitissit River at or below its outlet from the pond [Lake Potanipo] was already being seriously considered. It divided the people into two factions. It was a question of “To dam or not to dam.” One faction was opposed to the act, claiming that to build a dam across the river with the obligation of keeping it open during four months of the year, two of which, at least, were spring months when mill business was most active, was prohibitive to that extent that it reduced to a minimum the chances of making even a living profit in the mill business and therefore cut out all inducements for capital to invest in building mill-dams. The men who argued as above were, of course, the town’s capitalists; many of them passing rich with a mortgaged farm and an income of five pounds a year. Thus it happened that they opposed the damming of the river and instead d---d the General Court for passing the law.

The other faction favored the act because, as they claimed, if the dams were not kept open during the spring months, the pond itself, as well as all the streams which flowed into it, would no longer furnish the inhabitants with their annual spring supply of brain food in the form of lamprey eels and alewives; a species of nutrition of which they openly hinted the brains of their opponents were sadly in need. This latter faction, therefore, was in favor of damming the river and obeying the law.

A few years later and while the foregoing act was still operative, a dam was built across the river at its outlet from the pond; and for many years after the seafish continued to make their annual migrations up and down the Nissitissit and its tributary streams. Indeed, that ancient “chestnut” of alewives crowding into brooks so thickly as to enable one to cross upon their backs from shore to shore, continued to be told of Douglass Brook in the village well into the nineteenth century.”

Edward Parker, *History of Brookline, New Hampshire* (1914), pages 100-101.

## GOAL A.7: Minimize the effect of non-native invasive species.

### OBJECTIVE: Control or diminish the prevalence of aquatic and terrestrial and/or riparian invasive plants and animals.

- **Monitor invasive species** - Monitor the presence of species that have the ability to thrive and spread aggressively outside their native range, both aquatic and land-based. Learn about methods for control and eradication. Communicate with and educate the public for prevention and control.
- **Follow stewardship practices** - Follow the recommendations in the *Aquatic Invasive Plant Management Plan for the Nashua River*,<sup>77</sup> notably water chestnut (*Trapa natans*) infestation in the Groton and Pepperell sections of the Nashua River, which has the potential to spread downstream. Continue with hand-pulling events from canoe and kayaks to control the spread of water chestnuts.
- **Raise awareness about invasives** - Post signs warning of non-native invasive aquatics at launch sites, reminding boaters to check their boats for hitchhiking plants. Provide educational materials for lake and pond associations on invasive terrestrial and aquatic flora and fauna, including the proper cleaning boats and

of motors to prevent transport and spread of invasives. Present programs and prepare articles for local media to educate the broader public about aquatic invasives, how to identify them, and things individuals can do to prevent the establishment and spread of invasives.

- **Monitor invasive aquatic weeds** - Where feasible as time and funding permit, conduct baseline mapping of aquatic invasive weeds along the rivers (other than in those sections already done in the Oxbow NWR); additionally, those areas previously mapped should be periodically revisited to determine if any invasive plant growth has occurred.
- **Follow through on local plan** - Ensure the completion of the Invasive Species Monitoring and Control Plan by Pepperell Hydro for the Pepperell Pond Impoundment.<sup>78</sup>
- **Incorporate controls in municipal processes** - Work with municipalities to incorporate invasive species control as part of the approval and permitting process for land development. Invasive species identification and management during permitting, construction, and operations can help reduce the spread of invasives and support greater biodiversity along the river corridors.<sup>79</sup>
- **Evaluate control methods** - Attempt to control non-native, exotic invasives—such as purple loosestrife, for example—by releasing host-specific beetles: insects that feed only on this invasive plant and pose no threat to the wetland ecosystem. Evaluate results of such past efforts, and if established that this is effective, expand beetle release program.<sup>80</sup>

<sup>77</sup> Nashua River Watershed Association for the Nashua River Regional Aquatic Invasives Alliance, “Aquatic Invasive Plant Management Plan for the Nashua River,” (2017).

<sup>78</sup> Per Pepperell Hydro’s FERC license (P 12721-006), an Invasive Species Monitoring and Control Plan (ISMCP) is to be implemented by the Licensee. The objectives of the ISMCP will be: (1) to document the species composition of invasive plants from the upstream end of the Pepperell impoundment downstream to the tailrace (i.e., the project area); (2) to implement an early detection/rapid response program to identify and control new invasive species infestations within the Pepperell project area; (3) to conduct surveys and associated reporting of the project area’s infestation status on a five-year cycle; and (4) to identify potential means (regional programs) to maintain or reduce the existing infestations.

<sup>79</sup> See an example Devens: 974 CMR 3.04(8)(n)(g).

<sup>80</sup> “Invasive or Overabundant Species: Common reed has invaded a portion of wetlands of Oxbow NWR. Planning to determine its rate of spread and the most effective means of control has been initiated. Purple loosestrife is another extremely invasive plant



- **Encourage native plantings** - Encourage native landscaping, at home and at businesses, to support wildlife ecology and to reduce escapes of potential new invasive species into the wild.
- **Enlist volunteers** - Sponsor hand-pulls of invasive species such as purple loosestrife, especially in areas where the populations of the plant are small. Annual pulling has been shown to be effective in controlling this species when started early after initial appearance of the plants.
- **Consider smothering methods** - Control of some riparian and wetland invasives such as Japanese bamboo (aka knotweed), purple loosestrife, and non-native common phragmites by smothering with black plastic or burlap has been found to be effective over the long term if the treatment is carried out consistently over time. Once established, Japanese knotweed becomes a major problem, and floodplains are highly susceptible; thus, attack it before it becomes well established anywhere along the river corridors. Initiate experimental efforts to document effectiveness of this approach in the Nashua River basin and, if promising, promote such controls by watershed groups and river users.
- **Organize clean-up efforts** - Support biodiversity in riparian habitat by organizing river clean-up days with local volunteers to hand pull target common terrestrial non-native invasive species such as Japanese knotweed, Japanese barberry, Asian bittersweet, and glossy buckthorn. Consider the use of herbicides, if necessary, to control the spread of terrestrial invasives. Herbicides are only to be used where safe and appropriate, after obtaining the required approvals from state and local boards and committees.



*Volunteers pull out aquatic invasive water chestnut (*Trapa natan*) plants by hand for disposal. This “hand-pull” method of eradication works best in small alcoves and other confined zones but cannot make any significant mark where the infestation has spread to dozens if not hundreds of acres as it has upstream of the Pepperell Dam. Photo: Martha Morgan.*

## B: WATER QUALITY AND QUANTITY

**GOAL B.1:** Maintain and improve our rivers’ water quality so that it supports the needs of native wildlife, aquatic resources, and water supplies.

**OBJECTIVE:** Collect data, make plans, and take actions that support improved water quality.

- **Study water quality** - Ensure NRWA’s volunteer, citizen-based water monitoring program

species which threatens portions of the wetland habitats of the refuge. No formal surveys to determine the rate of spread have been conducted. The refuge has released *Galerucella* sp. beetles and *Hylobius transversovittatus* weevils as biological control agents. The *Galerucella* beetles are leaf-eating beetles which feed on the leaves and the new shoot growth of purple loosestrife, weakening the plant until it eventually is removed or reduced. *Hylobius transversovittatus* is a root-boring weevil that deposits its eggs in the lower stem of purple loosestrife plants. The hatched larvae feed on the root tissue, destroying the plant’s nutrient source for leaf development, which in turn leads to the destruction of the mature plant. Additional plant species that are considered to be invasive, and that require monitoring on the refuge include: spotted knapweed, glossy buckthorn, Asian bittersweet, and autumn olive.” From “Oxbow National Wildlife Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plan” (2013).

continues and captures data from geographically representative sites. Collect streamflow and water quality data as needed to support the protection of these resources.

- **Address impaired waters** - Consider developing an approved plan for impaired sections of rivers in the designated reaches. Apply for federal Section 319 Clean Water Act grants to improve water quality.
- **Conserve land** - Conserve undeveloped and sensitive land within the area to limit impervious cover and mitigate the effects of urbanization.<sup>81</sup> Corridor protection strategies that prevent or limit placement of infrastructure within the corridor will protect structures from future erosion and flood losses.<sup>82</sup>
- **Increase green canopy** - Increase street tree and urban/suburban forest canopy cover within developed areas of the watersheds to aid in stormwater quantity and quality management, while decreasing runoff temperatures. Also, promote the use of other green infrastructure techniques, such as vegetated roofs and walls in the built environment, to better manage runoff in the watersheds.
- **Protect drainage** - Protect and restore natural drainage patterns where feasible through stream daylighting and tributary restoration projects (for example, consider appropriate sections of

Varnum Brook in Pepperell). Improve water quality by using low-impact development techniques to pre-treat runoff prior to discharging to any tributaries.

- **Practice bioretention – Publicize the benefits of bioretention<sup>83</sup> areas and promote the use of these and other green infrastructure and/or low-impact development (LID) techniques** for managing runoff from nearby farms and developed areas. Consider identifying a candidate site in the proposed designated area for installing a bioretention area to demonstrate its benefits and functions.
- **Review NPDES** - Review National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System<sup>84</sup> (NPDES) permits for municipal, industrial and private entities to ensure water quality standards can be maintained or achieved.
- **CSO notification** - Ensure stakeholders in designated downstream reaches from municipalities with Combined Sewer Overflows (CSOs) are notified of CSO incidents in a timely manner.
- **Participate in collaborations** - Participate in networking collaborations with upstream and downstream communities, as appropriate, to improve water quality, including regional stormwater collaboratives and wastewater utilities.
- **Promote the Rivers Sanctuary Act** - Review whether the 1975 Squannacook-Nissitissit

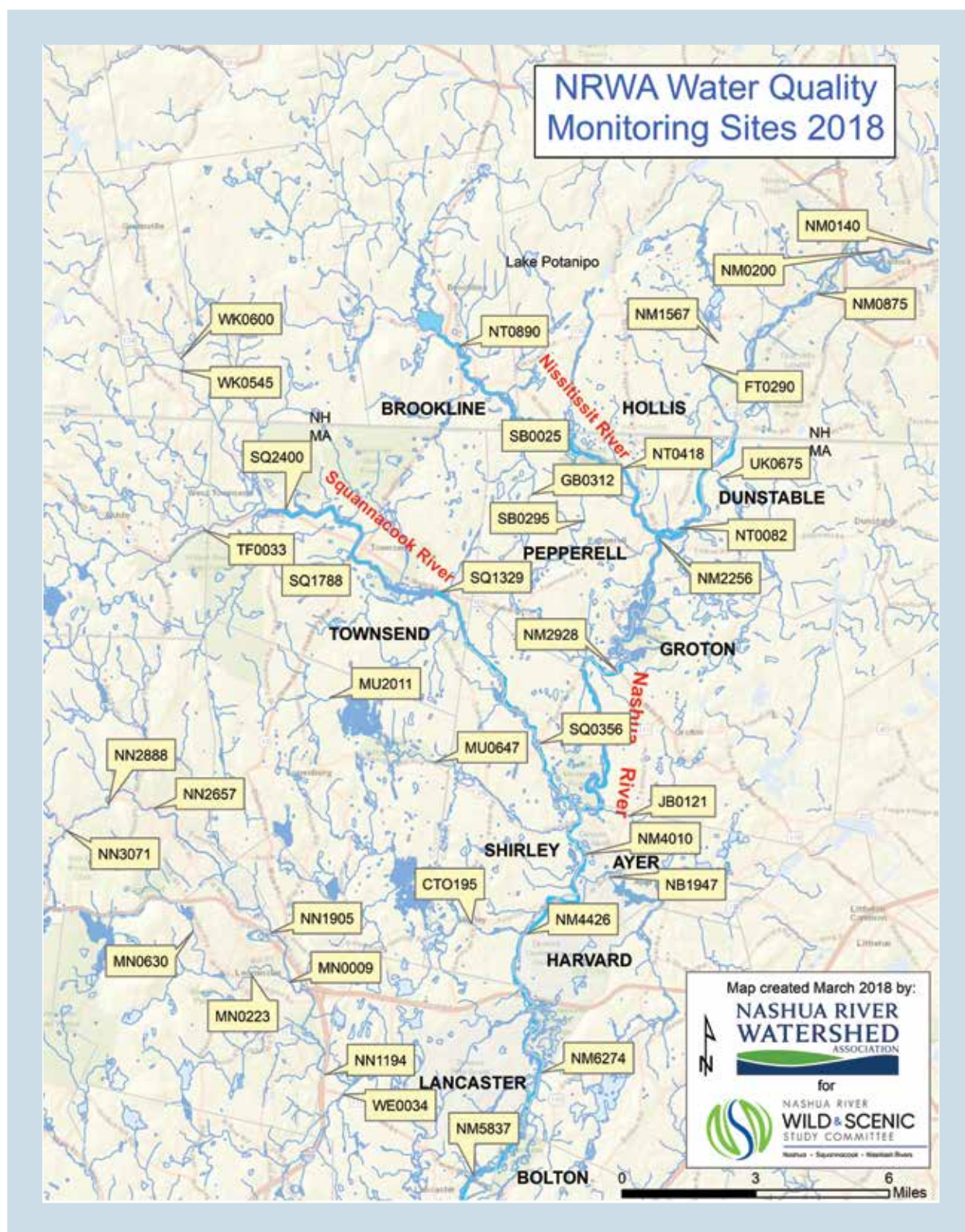
81 Several key management challenges affect the ecological integrity of the river corridor. These include increasing development, invasive species, habitat fragmentation, water withdrawals, and stormwater, sediment, and nutrient runoff into the river. “The CFRs in this region suffer from the effects of excessive development and its associated issues (e.g., loss of riparian forest, dams/impoundments, perched culverts and other road crossings, impervious surfaces, water withdrawal, etc.)” Adam Kautza, Coldwater Fisheries Project Leader at MassWildlife, personal communication on June 26, 2016.

82 According to Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation: One of the primary objectives of river corridor planning is to identify the key flood and sediment attenuation areas, where human land uses may be in constant conflict with the channel evolution of particularly dynamic and sensitive stream reaches. Key attenuation reaches are prime candidates for the acquisition of river corridor conservation easements because they are critical to the capture and storage of water, sediment, nutrients, and organic material. Functioning attenuation reaches serve to reduce excess erosion, reduce the fine sediment and nutrient loading that otherwise impairs water quality, and retain the coarser sediment and organic material important as cover habitats to aquatic organisms. [http://dec.vermont.gov/sites/dec/files/wsm/rivers/docs/rv\\_RiverCorridorEasementGuide.pdf](http://dec.vermont.gov/sites/dec/files/wsm/rivers/docs/rv_RiverCorridorEasementGuide.pdf).

83 Bioretention is the process in which contaminants and sedimentation are removed from stormwater runoff. Stormwater is collected into the treatment area, which consists of a grass buffer strip, sand bed, ponding area, organic layer or mulch layer, planting soil, and plants. Bioretention cells are depressed areas, generally about six inches, with specific soils and plants to help naturally attenuate and filter stormwater runoff used as infiltration filter. Plants used in the cells should tolerate wet and dry conditions

84 NPDES is a permit program that controls water pollution by regulating point sources that discharge pollutants into waters of the United States as authorized by the federal Clean Water Act.





*Nashua River Watershed Association Water Quality Monitoring Sites for 2018 sampling season. For more info see <http://nashuariverwatershed.org/what-we-do/protect-water-and-land/river-water-quality-overview/wqm.html>.*



## Discharges at Wastewater Facilities

Name of Wastewater Facility	Point of Discharge	Permitted Volume (mgd) <sup>1</sup> Average per month
Facilities Within Proposed Designated Reaches		
Ayer	Nashua	1.79
Groton School	Nashua	0.07
Devens	Groundwater <sup>2</sup>	4.69
Pepperell	Nashua	1.13
Hollingsworth & Vose	Squannacook	2.4
Facilities Upriver from Proposed Designated Reaches		
East Fitchburg	North Nashua	12.4
Leominster	North Nashua	9.3
Clinton (MWRA) <sup>3</sup>	South Nashua	3.01

1. Million gallons per day

2. Devens facility discharges to surface filter beds that drain into groundwater

3. MWRA: Massachusetts Water Resource Authority operates the Clinton facility

Rivers Sanctuary Act, which was intended to protect the state-designated Massachusetts Outstanding Resource Waters of these two rivers (and associated named tributaries in Shirley, Pepperell, Ashby and Townsend) from degradation by new discharges of pollution, is still being honored today. Work with towns to ensure compliance with the Act.

- **Review stormwater permits** - Review NPDES Permit renewals and work with towns and regional stormwater collaboratives to help meet NPDES permit requirements.<sup>85</sup>
- **Promote best practices for wastewater treatment** - Consider advocating for Best Management Practices at wastewater treatment facilities to remove endocrine disrupting chemicals, pharmaceutical contaminants, and harmful household products as yet untreated in the waste stream. The community is en-

couraged to properly dispose of medications at “drop boxes” available at most police stations. Prescription medications, vitamins, and similar products should not be disposed of in toilets or sinks. Wastewater treatment plants and septic systems are not designed to remove these products from waste streams, so they can contaminate water resources.

- **Practice continuous improvement for wastewater treatment** - Keep current on the performance of existing wastewater treatment facilities to assure the continued protection of water quality. As funding becomes available or is sought, promote upgrades to the maximum extent practicable of our water pollution control facilities whose effluent makes up a majority of the river’s baseflow at certain low-flow times of the year.
- **Monitor for contaminant discharges** - Con-

<sup>85</sup> The Municipal Separate Stormwater Sewer Systems (MS4) permit, which will regulate stormwater in more than 250 municipalities in Massachusetts, was scheduled to take effect on July 1, 2017, with the first action item for municipalities to comply due in September. The stay delays permit implementation until July 1, 2018 and it postpones the due date for communities to file their Notice of Intent as well. Under the MS4 permit, municipalities must develop, implement and enforce a stormwater management program that controls pollutants to the maximum extent practicable, protects water quality, and satisfies appropriate requirements of the federal Clean Water Act. The MS4 permit requires implementation of six minimum control measures. Updated permit requirements include the need to address identified water quality problems, including stormwater discharges to water bodies with approved total maximum daily loads for bacteria, phosphorus and nitrogen.

duct additional Illicit Discharge Detection and Elimination (IDDE) monitoring in most impacted segments of the Nashua River basin to identify potential sources of pathogens and other contaminants. Note: While the towns in this Wild and Scenic River stewardship area themselves do not have any CSOs, upstream communities on the North Nashua River do have such, which impact our mainstem Nashua River towns. This is one of the Municipal Separate Stormwater Sewer Systems (MS4) elements that each municipality will be responsible to comply with under the new NPDES permit.



*Two NRWA water quality monitors at the site they monitor once a month during the April to October testing season.  
Photo: Martha Morgan.*

**OBJECTIVE:** Pursue opportunities for preventing or reducing the impact of non-point source pollution from various land use activities using Best Management Practices.<sup>86</sup>

- **Plan for erosion and sediment control** - Work with municipalities to ensure erosion and sediment control plans are being prepared, implemented, monitored, enforced, and removed

appropriately as part of all development projects within the watersheds.

- **Plan for pollutant spills** - Ensure towns (public works, fire, or police departments) have emergency plans for accidental pollutant spills and have equipment for such emergencies on hand.
- **Follow best practices for road salt and sand** - Work with local municipal Departments of Public Works (DPW), highway departments, and the Massachusetts and New Hampshire Departments of Transportation to promote Best Management Practices that minimize road salt and sand runoff to wetlands, streams, and rivers. Research alternatives to road salt, as towns are willing.
- **Encourage best practices for property owners** - Reduce pollution from landscaping chemicals and reduce water consumption. Provide advice to citizens on proper use of lawn chemicals to prevent over-treatment. Encourage riparian landowners through an education campaign to reduce runoff on their property, minimize impervious surfaces and minimize pesticide and fertilizer use. Many property owners have lawns right up to the edge of the rivers or wetlands. Encouraging adequately wide vegetated riparian buffers is key.<sup>87</sup>
- **Review potentially damaging land uses** - Review any potentially polluting land uses within one-quarter mile of rivers and their tributaries. Agricultural uses where plowed fields with no vegetated riparian buffers are left bare throughout the winter and spring can be especially damaging.
- **Control improper dumping** - Reinforce or create pet waste bylaws/ordinances—pooper-scooper laws—and restrictions on illegal dumping and eroded areas, such as at Groton

<sup>86</sup> While not all of the BMPs will be appropriate for or accepted by every municipality, they are meant to be a guideline of some of the technologies available today.

<sup>87</sup> See “Living in Harmony with Streams: A Citizen’s Handbook to How Streams Work” (Friends of the Winooski River, 2012) at <https://winooskiriver.org/images/userfiles/files/Stream%20Guide%201-25-2012%20FINAL.pdf>.

Place “dog park” along the Nashua River.<sup>88</sup>

[www.nashobavalleyvoice.com/groton\\_news/ci\\_18007525?source=rss](http://www.nashobavalleyvoice.com/groton_news/ci_18007525?source=rss).

- **Create green landscapes** - Encourage the creation of green infrastructure networks—systems of connected natural, constructed or restored landscape features—that help preserve ecosystem services.<sup>89</sup>
- **Share stormwater resources** - Encourage towns to join regional stormwater collaboratives to share the resources necessary to meet stormwater management goals.
- **Consider water in land use planning** - Ensure that land use planning includes adequate water supply resources, stormwater drainage systems, and wastewater treatment systems (both onsite and centralized wastewater treatment systems) as well as permanent and temporary soil stabilization techniques and groundcover for all disturbed areas.
- **Identify threats from septic systems** - Partner with towns to identify the degree of threat from potential faulty and/or illicitly discharging septic systems, which may result in bacterial and nutrient contamination of nearby streams and groundwater.



*“Begin No Salt Area” road signs instruct state and local road crews to not apply salt in areas where road run-off would likely drain into nearby freshwater streams resulting in degraded water quality.*

### **OBJECTIVE:** Preserve and protect important high- and medium-yield aquifers.

- **Promote aquifer protection** - Promote extended aquifer protection through land use regulations and acquisition. As a major aquifer recharge area, the Nashua, Squannacook, and Nissitissit River valleys store floodwaters and precipitation in their numerous wetlands and sandy glacial soils.
- **Conserve water** - Actively promote water conservation. Encourage communities to consider mandatory conservation measures to augment volunteer efforts during droughts. Develop homeowner incentives to conserve water.
- **Encourage rainwater reuse** - Actively promote rainwater harvesting and reuse. Encourage communities to consider requirements for

<sup>88</sup> “Animal sources of pathogens are both urban and rural in nature: pet droppings on municipal streets delivered by stormwater runoff, livestock wandering into waterways, and wildlife such as beaver and moose. Some communities are installing pet waste gathering stations in public parks. While contamination by native wildlife is impossible to control, contamination by livestock is not. A single cow produces approximately 5.4 billion fecal coliforms a day, and two cows allowed unrestricted access to a stream for 24 hours can contaminate as much water as the city of Keene, N.H., uses in one day. Currently, the state of New Hampshire do not require farmers to keep livestock from entering streams, although a number of federal programs provide grants for fencing and alternative water sources.” [http://crjc.org/pdffiles/Connecticut\\_River\\_Rec\\_Management\\_Plan-Web.pdf](http://crjc.org/pdffiles/Connecticut_River_Rec_Management_Plan-Web.pdf).

<sup>89</sup> See: [www.devensec.com/development/Green\\_Infrastructure\\_Guidelines\\_Final\\_8-12-14.pdf](http://www.devensec.com/development/Green_Infrastructure_Guidelines_Final_8-12-14.pdf) for an example education and awareness tool.



capture and storage of rainfall for non-potable water uses on development projects to help better manage stormwater runoff and reduce the use of potable water. Encourage all landowners in methods of returning water to the ground instead of running off the property, including the use of rain barrels and rain garden installation. (See Massachusetts Drought Management Plan<sup>90</sup> and New Hampshire 2016 Drought Management Plan.<sup>91</sup>)

- **Follow best practices for water withdrawal**

- Encourage towns with registered<sup>92</sup> (not permitted) water withdrawals to also follow best practices and conservation measures: e.g., 65 residential gallons per capita day (RGPCD), 10% unaccounted for water,<sup>93</sup> and Best Management Practices, such as leak detection, pricing, public education, etc.

- **Adhere to regulations for water withdrawal** - Ensure Massachusetts's Water Management Act regulations (310 CMR 36.00) are followed in the evaluation of new water withdrawals, and for requests for increased water withdrawals.<sup>94</sup>

- **Preserve hydrology** - Work with Planning Boards, Town Engineers, Conservation Com-

missions and developers, and landowners to consider maintaining or restoring predevelopment hydrology in order to protect groundwater recharge capability. Appropriate techniques include limiting impervious surfaces, rainwater harvesting, the use of swales and other LID measures, and Best Management Practices that assist infiltration. Runoff from pre-development cannot increase post-development, which is why each town needs staff that is capable of interpreting stormwater calculations.

- **Protect floodplains and wetlands** - Maintain the ability of floodplains and wetlands to efficiently absorb water and protect the river from runoff related pollution. Assess floodplain and wetland mapping for the corridors and determine ways to improve it, coordinating with state and federal agencies. Consider conducting *fluvial* geomorphic assessments<sup>95</sup> of the three rivers beginning with locations that have historical flooding and bank erosion issues. Work with town boards to inform them of the importance of floodplains<sup>96</sup> for floodwater storage and to encourage protection of floodplains and wetlands when considering development proposals.

90 Massachusetts Drought Management Plan, <http://www.mass.gov/eea/docs/eea/wrc/droughtplan.pdf>.

91 See [www.des.nh.gov/organization/divisions/water/dam/drought/documents/drought-management-plan-for-web.pdf](http://www.des.nh.gov/organization/divisions/water/dam/drought/documents/drought-management-plan-for-web.pdf) and New Hampshire Drought Program link [www.des.nh.gov/organization/divisions/water/dam/drought/categories/overview.htm](http://www.des.nh.gov/organization/divisions/water/dam/drought/categories/overview.htm).

92 Registration Volume is the volume of water registered with the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection. Since 1988, persons planning to withdraw water from ground or surface sources for purposes in excess of an annual average of 100,000 gallons per day or 9 million gallons in any three-month period must apply for a Water Management Act Permit. Withdrawers with a Water Management Registration do not need a permit if they do not increase withdrawals over their registered volumes or add any new withdrawal points to their system.

93 Unaccounted-for water (UFW) represents the difference between “net production” (the volume of water delivered into a network) and “consumption” (the volume of water that can be accounted for by legitimate consumption, whether metered or not).

94 “[...] [P]roduction (water supply) wells can cause streamflow depletion by intercepting groundwater that would have discharged to nearby rivers, or inducing direct infiltration of river water to the well, causing low-flow issues.” Jeffrey Barbaro, USGS, personal communication on October 5, 2017.

95 Fluvial geomorphic assessments are studies of the physical condition of river systems. The assessments evaluate how, to what extent, and why river channels have become unstable. Causes ranging from major flood events to human activity are assessed. Data show that given the time and space, rivers eventually “evolve” to a channel form that is in equilibrium, or at balance, with the water and sediment inputs of their watersheds.

96 It is important to recognize that rivers and floodplains need to operate as a connected system. Flooding is necessary to maintain the floodplain biological community and to relieve the erosive force of flood discharges by reducing the velocity of the water. Flooding and bankfull flows—the water level stage that just begins to spill out of the channel into the floodplain -- are also essential for maintaining the instream physical structure. These events scour out pools, clean coarser substrates (gravel, cobbles, and boulders) of fine sediment, and redistribute or introduce woody material. (NWCC Technical Note 99–1, Stream Visual Assessment Protocol, 1998 [www.nrcs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE\\_DOCUMENTS/stelprdb1044776.pdf](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/stelprdb1044776.pdf)).

- **Assess watershed geomorphology** - Consider conducting watershed geomorphic assessments that would enable knowledgeable decisions to guide the management of stable river corridors. Assessments will be useful in guiding land use, development, and infrastructure planning and design as well as flood hazard prevention. They can play an important role in the protection or restoration of the economic, aesthetic, and ecological values of river corridors. Through understanding of the relationships between watershed processes and human investments, we are able to make wise decisions about river corridor management.<sup>97</sup>



*The flood of 2010 on the Nashua River inundated Route 119 in Pepperell, MA. Photo: Wynne Treanor-Kvenvold.*

## **OBJECTIVE:** Educate public about the river ecology and ways to keep rivers healthy.

- **Engage town and state agencies** - Work with town DPW road crews and appropriate state Department of Transportation agencies who could help alert the public to the significance of Wild and Scenic Rivers. For example, signs could be posted at bridge crossings or other appropriate locations.
- **Raise awareness through events** - Sponsor local events to raise public understanding about native wildlife and the impacts of development patterns on habitat and ecosystem integrity. For example, provide Wild and Scenic River outreach information at community events, fairs, festivals, canoe races, fishing events, and other public gatherings.
- **Engage utility companies** - Work with private and public utility companies on creating and updating utility corridor management plans that recognize the importance of maintaining healthy wetlands, stream and river riparian buffers, and reducing the use of chemical pesticides in or near these sensitive areas.
- **Engage the public** - Engage with residents and others in the watershed on ecological issues, particularly with regard to recognizing that the streams, streambanks, and riparian areas, including riparian buffers and corridors, are sensitive places that might be conserved, restored, and protected.<sup>98</sup>
- **Pursue education opportunities** - Pursue opportunities to educate landowners, developers, and local land use boards about the causes of non-point source pollution, its potential impacts on water quality and instream resources, and methods—such as Best Man-

<sup>97</sup> See [http://dec.vermont.gov/sites/dec/files/wsm/rivers/docs/rv\\_rcprotectmanagefactsheet.pdf](http://dec.vermont.gov/sites/dec/files/wsm/rivers/docs/rv_rcprotectmanagefactsheet.pdf), page 5

<sup>98</sup> The single most important natural system critical to maintaining the integrity of the entire Nashua River watershed is a forested riparian buffer.

agement Practices—for reducing or eliminating it. Pursue opportunities to demonstrate the use of Best Management Practices in controlling non-point source pollution such as expanding riparian native vegetation buffers (to an ideal of 300 feet).<sup>99</sup>



*NRWA's environmental education programs in classrooms frequently utilize an EnviroScape®, a portable, interactive model that demonstrates point and non-point source water pollution concepts and their prevention. Photo: Gaynor Bigelbach*

## C: HABITAT

### GOAL C.1: Maintain and enhance high-quality riparian habitat.

**OBJECTIVE:** **Protect intact and functional riparian buffers.** Protect vegetative buffers - Work to maintain or expand riparian native vegetated buffers to maintain lower water temperatures. Note that clear, coldwater

supplied by the Squannacook and Nissitissit Rivers to the Nashua River provides a refuge for temperature-sensitive fish in all three rivers.

- **Restore streambeds** - Restore streambeds impacted by road sand deposition and seek solutions to reduce future road sand and other sedimentation. Involve town DPWs and state Departments of Transportation as appropriate.
- **Consider riparian buffers in town plans** - Give high priority protection to riparian buffers. This can be reflected in each town's *Open Space and Recreation Plan* "Inventory of Lands of Conservation and Recreation Interest," as well as their land use and subdivision bylaws and regulations.



*As part of a NRWA/Merrimack River Watershed Council project funded by the US Forest Service, "Expanding Riparian Buffers," and with the help of a local Eagle Scout, the eroding banks at Bertozzi Conservation Area in Groton, MA were restored with plantings of native shrubs and grasses. Photo: Al Futterman.*

<sup>99</sup> Buffer Width: "There is not one generic buffer size which will keep the water clean, stabilize the bank, protect fish and wildlife, and satisfy human demands on the land. The minimum acceptable width is one that provides acceptable levels of all needed benefits at an acceptable cost for a particular site. The basic bare-bones buffer is generally 50 feet from the top of the bank. To filter dissolved nutrients and pesticides from runoff a width of up to 100 feet or more may be necessary on steeper slopes and less permeable soils to allow runoff to soak in sufficiently.... on coldwater fisheries, the stream channel should be shaded completely. Studies show that that at least up to 100 feet, the wider the buffer, the healthier the aquatic food web. To protect against flood damage a smaller stream may require only a narrow width of trees or shrubs; a larger stream or river may require a buffer that covers a substantial portion of its flood plain. A 100-foot buffer will generally remove 60% or more of pollutants, depending on local conditions. It will also provide food, cover and breeding habitat for many kinds of wildlife but only fulfill few needs for others, such as travel cover." (Connecticut River Joint Council Report, 1998).

Also see Eightmile River Wild and Scenic Study Committee, "Riparian Buffer Zones: Functions and Recommended Widths," (April 2005).





*Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) floodways in MA (2017) & NH (2007).  
For more info see [www.fema.gov/floodway](http://www.fema.gov/floodway).*

**OBJECTIVE:** **Support protection of important wildlife habitat areas and migration corridors as identified and prioritized through habitat studies and assessments such as “Universal Stream Assessment.”<sup>100</sup>**

Encourage land conservation easements and restrictions - Educate and encourage landowners to consider Conservation Easements (CE) in New Hampshire—aka Conservation Restrictions (CR) in Massachusetts<sup>101</sup>—and the importance of maintenance and enforcement of these restrictions. Consider providing funding to budget-strapped local land trusts whose lack of capacity makes it difficult to do required annual monitoring of all CEs. Also, consider training volunteers to conduct annual monitoring of CRs/CEs, such as is done by Sudbury Valley Trustees (see [www.svtweb.org/properties/stewardship#Coordinate](http://www.svtweb.org/properties/stewardship#Coordinate)).

- **Encourage current use programs** - Encourage conservation and the preservation of existing forest, farm, and recreational land. Increase the likelihood of permanent forestland protection by increasing the number of landowners enrolled in current use programs (Chapter 61, 61A and 61B in Massachusetts). These programs can be used by landowners who want to keep their land in open space but are not able or willing to execute a permanent conservation restriction/easement agreement.
- **Support deer population control** - Encourage state agencies to include hunting<sup>102</sup>

as a technique to reduce overpopulations of deer, which can be ecologically destructive. For example, MassWildlife Management Areas, which are a draw for birders and other nature watchers, have a mission of prioritizing wildlife habitat.<sup>103</sup>

For more see Massachusetts Audubon Society’s “Nashua River Watershed Important Bird Area Site” at [www.massaudubon.org/our-conservation-work/wildlife-research-conservation/statewide-bird-monitoring/massachusetts-important-bird-areas-iba/important-bird-area-sites/nashua-river-watershed](http://www.massaudubon.org/our-conservation-work/wildlife-research-conservation/statewide-bird-monitoring/massachusetts-important-bird-areas-iba/important-bird-area-sites/nashua-river-watershed).



*Interior forest adjacent to a river. Photo: Kim King.*

100 A Universal Stream Assessment is a survey of rivers and streams based on physical, chemical and biological data collected and analyzed using standardized field and laboratory methods. The goals are to determine the extent to which rivers and streams support a healthy biological condition and the extent of major stressors that affect them. The assessment supports a longer-term goal: to determine whether our rivers and streams are getting cleaner and how we might best invest in protecting and restoring them. [www.epa.gov/national-aquatic-resource-surveys/what-national-rivers-and-streams-assessment](http://www.epa.gov/national-aquatic-resource-surveys/what-national-rivers-and-streams-assessment).

101 Massachusetts Land Trust Coalition, Conserving Land in Your Community, [www.massland.org/conserving-land-your-community](http://www.massland.org/conserving-land-your-community).

102 Nearly all Massachusetts Department of Fish and Game (DFG) properties are required to allow hunting, as the vast majority of their land purchases are made possible because of funds collected for hunting and fishing licenses.

103 Additionally, Massachusetts DFG has a policy of minimizing trails (see [www.mass.gov/eea/agencies/dfg/dfw/wildlife-habitat-conservation/wildlife-lands-trail-policy.html](http://www.mass.gov/eea/agencies/dfg/dfw/wildlife-habitat-conservation/wildlife-lands-trail-policy.html)).

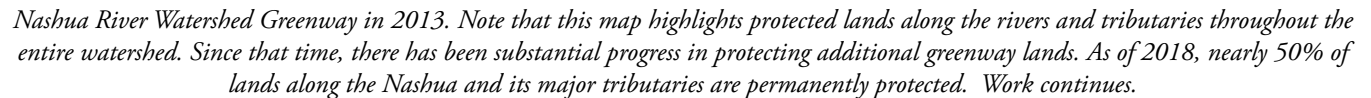
**OBJECTIVE:** Protect and expand “Green Infrastructure” networks and linkages; protect and enhance connectivity through attention to dams, culverts, streambank modifications, and bottom alterations.

- **Connect greenways** - Increase land protection efforts to focus on connecting existing protected greenways (for example, between Bolton Flats WMA and Oxbow National Wildlife Refuge as well as a connector between Sucker Brook and Gulf Brook, and elsewhere).
- **Support linear greenways** - Restore and sustain lands along all water bodies, including wetlands and their surrounding lands, as linear greenways for their natural resource values, as well as along all headwaters throughout the stewardship area, as opportunities arise.
- **Encourage voluntary land conservation** - Continue to assist and support private landowners and local land trusts in their voluntary land conservation measures that protect important riverfront—and watershed—lands. Encourage all land protection agencies to pursue the purchase (in fee or conservation easements) of important river-related lands from willing sellers if parcels come on the market and if funding is available. Give high protection priority to headwaters and tributaries of the rivers.
- **Explore multi-use opportunities** - Continue to look for connections to points of regional recreation and open space interest, such as the Oxbow National Wildlife Refuge, the Shirley Shaker Village, Fruitlands Museum, Ayer State Game Farm, and the Squannacook State Wildlife Management Area in Shirley, as well as connections to the Nashua River corridor, as stated in the *2008 Devens Open Space and Recreation Plan* in reference to its Multi-Use Trail Network Plan.

**OBJECTIVE:** Minimize loss of valued habitat.

- **Protect stream habitat** - Assist with protection of small, prioritized headwater streams that supply coldwater downstream.
- **Protect priority land habitat** - Assist local land trusts and Conservation Commissions to plan for priority land protection, especially of our three rivers and their tributaries.
- **Prevent erosion** - Minimize loss of habitat values coincident with land use practices that cause erosion.
- **Preserve the greenway buffer** - Work with involved parties to ensure that the Squannacook River greenway buffer—and its important turtle habitat—is not degraded by inadvertent misuse.
- **Encourage land management for wildlife habitat** - Work with and educate landowners to encourage continued and longterm management of the already protected open spaces in ways that are conducive to maintaining wildlife habitat.
- **Plan for future habitat protection** - Ensure that if the South Post of Fort Devens is ever surplused, the land is permanently protected and/or becomes incorporated into the Oxbow National Wildlife Refuge (less the one hundred acres to Lancaster). Inform current Boards of Selectmen and Conservation Commissions in Lancaster and Harvard of this legislation.
- **Provide technical resources** - Provide technical assistance to municipalities, landowners, and private organizations seeking to protect and conserve floodplains, wetlands, forests, meadows, riparian vegetated buffers, and other fish and wildlife habitats.
- **Avoid in-stream crossings** - Avoid all utility (gas and electric) in-stream crossings unless the project proposal can show that there is no other feasible alternative.
- **Design culverts and road crossings to allow wildlife passage** - Replacement of poorly





designed culverts<sup>104</sup> and other road-crossing structures should follow the most up-to-date guidelines for stream crossing design, in order to reduce the incidence of destructive erosion, washouts, and scouring at stream crossings, and to allow for unimpeded wildlife passage under roads. Where possible, work in partnership with Massachusetts Division of Ecological Restoration and the New Hampshire agencies involved in the New Hampshire Stream Crossing Initiative.<sup>105</sup>

- **Design bridges and culverts to prevent channel disruption** - New or replacement bridges and culverts should ideally have openings that pass the bankfull width without constriction. Bridges and culverts should be designed to cross the river without creating channel approaches at an angle to structures. Such sharp angles can lead to undermining of fill materials and structural components. The historic channel migration pattern of the river and changing weather and precipitation patterns should be considered when installing new or replacement crossing structures, and when constructing new roads, driveways, and buildings. Planned build-out for watershed communities and resultant channel enlargement (from increased

percent imperviousness) should be considered when designing new or replacement bridges and crossing structures.

- **Properly size stream crossings** - Work with and help town DPWs properly size stream crossings at bridges and culverts, and prioritize worst ones. “These and beaver deceivers<sup>106</sup> are often undersized for the size of the stream and result in impounding of water and sediments upstream of the crossing, and which may limit habitat connectivity and passage of fish and other aquatic fauna.”<sup>107</sup>
- **Enhance in-stream habitat** - Reestablish and protect riparian zones and enhance in-stream habitat conditions. For example, locate beaver deceivers at poorly designed culverts that do not have fish passage. Consider fish passage at dams - Consider the effect of the two mainstem Nashua River dams, Pepperell and Ice House<sup>108</sup>, on fish passage. Establish and maintain adequate upstream and downstream fish passage facilities. Upstream fish and eel passage is required under the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) license for the Pepperell Dam.<sup>109</sup> Ice

104 “The biggest challenge with replacing culverts with a culvert that is bottomless, is cost. It is far less expensive to use a piece of high density polyethylene pipe (HDPE), which is why most DPW’s use this material.” (Paula Terrasi, personal communication on May 30, 2017)

Information on costs associated with maintaining/replacing culverts and potential funding sources should be distributed to towns, DPWs, and select boards. Incentives should be provided for removal or modification of infrastructure identified as barriers to ecosystem services integrity. (See New Hampshire State Wildlife Action Plan, pages 5-32.)

105 New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services Stream Crossing Initiative, [www.des.nh.gov/organization/divisions/water/wetlands/streams\\_crossings.htm](http://www.des.nh.gov/organization/divisions/water/wetlands/streams_crossings.htm).

106 Flow devices are man-made solutions to beaver-related flooding problems. Traditional solutions have involved the trapping and removal of all the beavers in an area. While this is sometimes necessary, it is typically a short-lived solution, as beaver populations have made a remarkable comeback in New England. Flow devices are relatively cost-effective, low-maintenance solutions that regulate the water level of beaver dams and keep culverts open.

107 Massachusetts State Wildlife Action Plan, (2015) page 121; New Hampshire Wildlife Action Plan (2015) page 5-12

108 “No anadromous fish are currently found in the Ice House Dam project area, and upstream and downstream passage facilities are not yet in place at the next downstream dam, the Pepperell Dam in Pepperell. Ice House Partners will be responsible for constructing, operating, maintaining, and evaluating upstream and downstream anadromous fish passage facilities when requested by the Massachusetts Division of Fish and Wildlife or the US Fish & Wildlife Service.” (Federal Energy Regulatory Commission FERC Order Granting Exemption from Licensing (5 Mw or less) Ice House Partners, Inc. Project No. 12769-000, March 31, 2008.

109 From Pepperell Hydro Settlement Agreement: Federal Energy Regulatory Commission Order Issuing Original License to Pepperell Hydro Company, LLC; Project number P-12721, Appendix B, September 8, 2015.

All upstream eel passage facilities shall be operational within three (3) years of license issuance.

Downstream Adult Eel Passage. To protect adult silver eels during outmigration, the Licensee shall either: (1) cease operating the Project from dusk to dawn from August 15 through November 30, annually. Or (2) operate a passage and protection system that meets the following criteria:

House Dam has eel passage for elvers going upstream.<sup>110</sup>

- **Evaluate obsolete dams** - Consider removal of obsolete dams on a case-by-case basis if

determined to be appropriate, supported by local community, and consistent with state dam removal guidelines.



*Poorly or undersized culverts can create high water velocity, turbulence, and/or inadequate water depths within the culvert leading to migration barriers for fish and other aquatic species. They also restrict natural stream flows, particularly during floods.*  
Photo: NRW Archives.



*Replacing old pipe culverts with new bottomless, three-sided culverts helps provide passage for fish and other aquatic species. Such projects often necessitate the efforts of multiple partners to accomplish, such as here with Trout Unlimited's involvement with a Gulf Brook culvert in Pepperell, MA. Photo: NRW Archives.*

Downstream adult eel passage and protection measures or facilities shall be operational eight (8) years after juvenile eels are first documented using the upstream eel passage facilities. This timeframe may be adjusted by the Fisheries Agencies pursuant to the results of monitoring the upstream passage of juvenile Eels. Alternative passage and protection measures may be proposed by the Licensee, and considered by the Fisheries Agencies, if the Fisheries Agencies determine if sufficient data exist documenting their effectiveness.

Notwithstanding the foregoing, Massachusetts DFW has documented eels present in waterways upstream of the Project. Accordingly, in order to protect such eels during their outmigration, and prior to the provision of permanent adult eel passage facilities, the Licensee shall implement interim passage measures at the dam and/or forebay. Such interim passage measures shall be designed in consultation with, and require approval by, the Fisheries Agencies and (1) The licensee must install the interim downstream eel passage facility by August 1, 2018, and (2) shall operate until permanent passage facilities are implemented. Approvable interim passage systems may include either use of the existing forebay drain system or the installation of a siphon system in the same general forebay location.

a. Downstream Fish Passage

The Licensee shall construct, operate, maintain and evaluate the effectiveness of downstream fish bypass passage facilities for Targeted Migrants when the upstream fish passage system begins operation. Said passage facilities shall be operational the first downstream passage season after the beginning of upstream fish passage operation.

b. Upstream Fish Passage

Within three (3) years of license issuance, the Licensee shall develop and submit for Commission approval, functional design plans for upstream fish passage facilities. The upstream fish passage must be installed at the Project after a minimum of 5,000 river herring have successfully and volitionally passed through the Mine Falls' (FERC Project No. 3442) upstream fish passage system for a minimum of two (2) consecutive years (Trigger Level). Installation of the fish passage system shall occur within three (3) years of achieving this Trigger Level, but in no event shall the fish passage system be installed before the year 2026, regardless of the number of migrants passing the downstream Mine Falls Project. Should the Trigger Level occur before the year 2026, the Licensee shall provide interim upstream fish passage through the use of a commercial aquaculture fish pump with a temporary collection chamber installed at a location to be determined in consultation with the Fisheries Agencies. The Licensee shall seasonally operate the upstream fish passage facility in concert with upstream fish passage facilities located at the Mines Falls Project (i.e., same operational dates).

<sup>110</sup> Liisa Grady Marino, Grady Research, Personal communication on August 29, 2017.



**GOAL C.2:** Preserve, protect, and improve wildlife habitat and migration corridors.

**OBJECTIVE:** Promote completion of a permanently protected greenway along the rivers and their tributaries as the rivers and their banks provide key dispersal and migratory routes for wildlife, both aquatic and terrestrial.

- **Conduct greenway inventories** - Coordinate with towns to complete a greenway inventory of protected and unprotected lands. Evaluate if Massachusetts lands thought to be protected are indeed fully “Article 97” protected<sup>111</sup> and are deed recorded.
- **Develop subdivision standards** - Assist town boards and work with municipal officials to develop subdivision standards that require proponents to devote a significant and sizeable portion of land (not including already-undevelopable wet or steep land) for open space conservation, and encourage mixed-use development and cluster zoning by-right bylaws.
- **Remove barriers to wildlife passage** - Consider removal of extraneous and abandoned chain link fencing where feasible on Devens and elsewhere, which creates a barrier for wildlife passage. Examples of such fencing can be seen at and around the Nashua River by West Main Street; and at the Nonacoicus Brook wetland on the North Post south of and adjacent to the Ayer Wastewater Treatment Plant and north of the rail line.



*Bobcat in Groton, MA wetland. Bobcats tend to exhibit crepuscular (dawn and dusk) activity which makes a daytime sighting extremely rare. Photo: JP Gillard.*

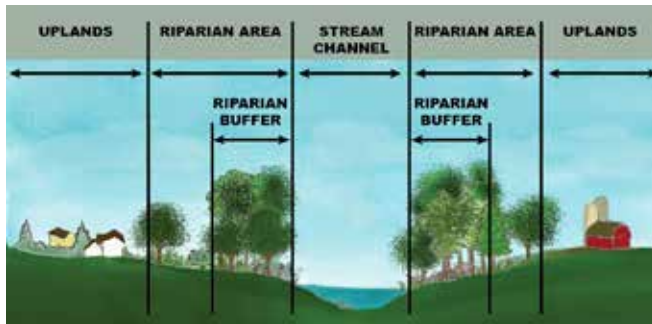
## D: MUNICIPALITIES AND LAND USE PLANNING STRATEGIES

**GOAL D.1:** Promote balanced growth, which preserves property values and protects and enhances the riparian resources for future generations.

**OBJECTIVE:** Engage with landowners on these issues.

- **Promote native vegetative buffers** - Educate and encourage landowners to plant and maintain native vegetative buffers in order to protect aquatic and riparian life by maintaining critical water temperatures, preventing soil erosion and sedimentation, stabilizing stream banks, slowing down runoff, and filtering pollutants from stormwater runoff. Coordinate this effort through the local municipal Open Space and Recreational Plan committees and with Planning, Zoning, Conservation Commissions as well as Public Works, Engineering, and Parks Departments.

<sup>111</sup> See Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs, Article 97 Land Disposition Policy at [www.mass.gov/eea/agencies/mepa/about-mepa/eea-policies/eea-article-97-land-disposition-policy.html](http://www.mass.gov/eea/agencies/mepa/about-mepa/eea-policies/eea-article-97-land-disposition-policy.html).



*This US EPA graphic addresses the issue of sufficient riparian buffers. Although no specific measurements are given herein, a general rule of thumb is that a 200- to 300-foot zone of native vegetation is ideal for the purposes of keeping surface waters clean. The grasses, shrubs, and trees slow down and intercept potentially polluting overland storm run-off.*

## **OBJECTIVE:** Engage with municipalities and developers on these issues.

- **Encourage low impact and green design** - Encourage communities to plan development so that natural and community resources are protected. Encourage local boards to require developers to use low-impact design and other green infrastructure elements/construction methods to minimize runoff.
- **Promote environmental compatibility in development projects** - Encourage towns to focus development in environmentally compatible areas through natural resource inventory assessment and mapping overlays<sup>112</sup> (geology, soils, wetlands and watercourses, habitat mapping, topography, microclimate, Massachusetts NHESP and New Hampshire Fish and Game). Encourage multi-town cooperation where appropriate. Review and comment on proposed state and private development projects to assure water quality will not be degraded. Maintain or restore predevelopment hydrology in order to protect groundwater recharge capability.
- **Pro-actively plan for redevelopment** - Be alert for opportunities to work with towns

pro-actively to redevelop priority sites in an environmentally compatible and creative way. For example, there may be opportunities to include river parks in plans for the reuse of former mill sites.

- **Promote wetland preservation** - Encourage no net loss of wetlands and where possible, re-establish, restore, and enhance wetlands as part of new development or renovation projects. Assess where this has already been done and is effective.
- **Share information on river protection** - Establish a clearinghouse of information on river protection techniques that have been used successfully in other areas.
- **Consider integrating a watershed plan** - Each town could consider integrating the recommendations of the last NRWA Five-year Watershed Plan and/or similar plans into its land use regulations and design standards.
- **Consider adopting this Stewardship Plan** - Request the Planning Boards and Conservation Commissions of each participating Study Committee town to incorporate the Nashua, Squannacook, and Nissitissit Rivers Stewardship Plan into each of their master plans by reference or formal incorporation.
- **Foster watershed stewardship** - Develop a mechanism to monitor this Stewardship Plan, implement such a mechanism, and foster watershed stewardship.



*Example of rain garden used to filter road runoff. Photo: Aaron Volkening via Flickr Creative Commons License.*

<sup>112</sup> See Ian McHarg's Design with Nature: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ian\\_McHarg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ian_McHarg).





*Paddling on the Nissitissit River. Having a shaded canopy over the river is key to keeping water temperatures cool throughout the summer.  
Photo: Ken Hartlage.*

**GOAL D.2:** To restore, protect, and enhance water quality and associated aquatic resources and water supplies.

**OBJECTIVE:** Take actions to protect and improve streambank and related conditions that negatively impact water quality.

- **Prevent stream enrichment and contamination** - Prevent the accelerated enrichment of streams and contamination of waterways from runoff containing nutrients, pathogens, organics, heavy metals, and toxic substances.
- **Preserve natural vegetative canopy** - Educate and encourage landowners to maintain or restore a natural vegetative canopy along streams to ensure that mid-summer stream temperatures do not exceed tolerance limits of desirable aquatic organisms.
- **Minimize trash** - Maintain the stream or waterway free of litter, trash, and other debris by supporting the organization of river clean-up days sponsored by local businesses, groups and/or organizations that share an interest and/or stake in the river. Also, support education and awareness campaigns on the impacts of trash by partnering with local schools to develop and disseminate information throughout the communities.
- **Minimize erosion and stream disturbance** - Minimize the disturbance of the streambed and prevent streambank erosion and, where practical, restore eroding streambanks to a natural or stable condition; for example, at the canoe launch parking lot at West Hollis Road/Brookline Street crossing of Nissitissit River.
- **Consider forming Stream Teams** - Consider putting together Stream Teams for the subject rivers and their tributaries to focus on river restoration and streambank stabilization and provide a venue for communication among stakeholders.



## ORRV Category: RECREATIONAL AND SCENIC VALUES



*Kayaker on the Nashua River. Photo: Christine Guertin.*

**R**iver-related recreational pursuits are greatly valued in our area. This was not always so; in the 1960s, excessive water pollution and foul smells kept recreationalists far from the Nashua River corridor. The story of the remarkable recovery of the river is also detailed as one of our Historical and Cultural values. Today, high quality water supports water-based recreation as well as the enjoyment of numerous greenway trails by the banks of our rivers. The extraordinary amount of protected greenway—beautiful forests along vast stretches of the Nashua, Squannacook, and Nissitissit Rivers—give many paddlers and hikers a “sense of being in the wilderness” and assure them of rewarding scenic views in all directions.

### Hiking Adjacent Conserved Lands.

Among the many major riparian conservation lands (“open spaces”) are: Oxbow National Wildlife Refuge (1,667-acres with almost eight miles of Nashua River frontage),<sup>113</sup> Bolton Flats State Wildlife Management Area (~1,000 acres), Squannacook River State Wildlife Management Area (1,934 acres), Nissitissit River State Wildlife Management Area (625 acres), Townsend State Forest (3,082 acres), Nashua River Rail Trail (11 linear miles one-way), and J. Harry Rich State Forest (~500 acres). The J.

Harry Rich State Forest was the first state-owned tree farm in the nation and the most intensively managed forest acreage in New England according to Hugh Putnam, former chief forester for the New England Forestry Foundation.

Significantly, there are more than one thousand additional acres of locally owned land trust and municipal conservation properties, such as Groton Town Forest (~500 acres) along the river, which had originally been the site of the town’s “Poor Farm”. Furthermore, there are extensive conservation

<sup>113</sup> There are over 13 miles of trails connecting Devens trails and the Oxbow National Wildlife Refuge trails: these trails run along the Nashua River but also many tributaries.



*Public walk along the Squannacook River. Photo: Ward Baxter.*

properties along important tributaries to our rivers. The Montachusett Regional Planning Commission (MRPC) has put considerable effort into creating an interactive web mapping application “MR Mapper” which has more than a dozen data layers including all existing formal trails (and trailhead parking) in six of our focus area towns. This valuable information is available on mobile devices for locational use in the field: see <https://mrmapper.mrpc.org>.

A fact contributing to the success of so much protected land in the focus area is the large number of varied organizations with different focuses working here to protect land, and often working together. These organizations range from federal US Fish and Wildlife Service (Oxbow NWR) to state (Massachusetts Department of Fish and Game/Division of Fisheries and Wildlife – Wildlife Management Areas), (Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation – state forests and rail trails), (Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources – agricultural preservation restrictions), (New Hamp-



Dozens of land trusts and conservation organizations work together with municipal, state, and federal entities to protect riparian lands and provide extensive trails for hiking, biking, and horseback riding.

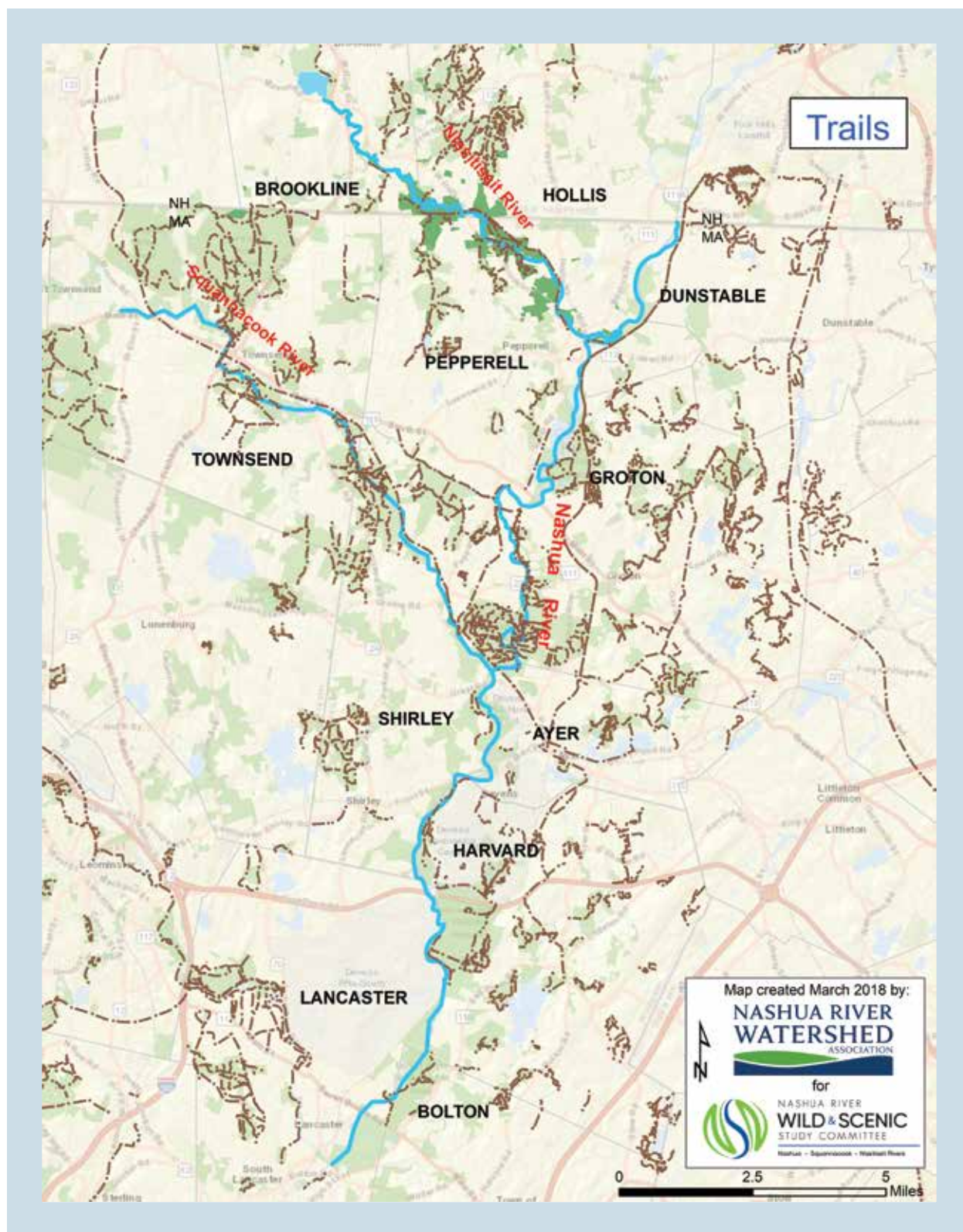
shire Fish and Game Department) to municipal (Conservation Commissions, Town Forest Committees, Open Space Committees, etc.) and regional and local land trusts and conservation organizations (Beaver Brook Association, Bolton Land Trust, Dunstable Rural Land Trust, Groton Conservation Trust, Harvard Conservation Trust, Lancaster Land Trust, Mass Audubon, Nashoba Conservation Trust, Nashua River Watershed Association (coordinating US Forest Legacy Grants and facilitating protection by others), New England Forestry Foundation, Nichols-Smith Land Trust, Nissitissit River Land Trust, North County Land Trust, Piscataquog Land Conservancy, Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests, the Trustees of Reservations, the Trust for Public Land, and Townsend Land Trust) as well as others such as sportsmen’s clubs, religious and educational institutions, MassDevelopment, and the Devens Enterprise Commission.



*The Nissitissit River Wildlife Management Area is a multiple use area that attracts many angler enthusiasts as well as other recreationalists throughout the four seasons. Photo: Max McCormick.*

It is worth noting that Massachusetts currently has the second highest number of land trusts in the country after California. It is also the first state in the nation to have had a land trust, the Trustees of Reservations. The New England Forestry Foundation had its first headquarters in Groton, Massachusetts: it was located there from its founding in 1944 until 2003. And, over fifty years ago in 1967, the Hollis, Conservation Commission – the first town in New Hampshire to have a conservation commission --





*Formal trails in our area in MA & NH: datalayer sources are Montachusets Regional Planning Commission, Nashua Regional Planning Commission, and Northern Middlesex Council of Governments.*



was already noting “the importance of ‘open-space rural character versus development,’ and stressed the importance of acquiring land, ‘preferably along a water course’.”<sup>114</sup>

Beaver Brook Association is a non-profit nature center with over 2,200-acre conservation area in Hollis, Brookline, and Milford, New Hampshire. It takes its name from Beaver Brook, a tributary of the Nissitissit River, which is protected by the Association’s vast undeveloped land holdings.



*Horseback rider in J. Harry Rich State Forest in Groton, MA.  
Photo: Robin Hebert.*



*Nashua River Rail Trail in Groton, MA.  
Photo: Michael W. White.*



The eleven mile, very popular Nashua River Rail Trail parallels the Nashua River for a considerable distance. A Squannacook River Rail Trail is being developed to parallel the Squannacook River for about four miles.

### **Riparian Rail Trials for Biking, Roller-blading and Horseback Riding.**

Many dozens of miles of trails that can be used for biking and horseback riding are located along these three rivers. Most prominently, the singularly popular Nashua River Rail Trail (NRRT), owned by the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation, which runs more than 11 miles from Ayer north to the Massachusetts-New Hampshire state line, travels parallel to the Nashua River for a considerable distance. User counts taken in 2008 indicate that more than one thousand people take advantage of the NRRT on a typical summer weekend and a 2008 estimate by the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation indicates over 382,000 visitations to the NRRT for that year. The number is estimated to have grown substantively over the decade.

Also, in development for more than a decade, a Squannacook River Rail Trail is scheduled to begin construction in 2018. Phase 1 will travel approximately four miles in close proximity to the Squannacook River from Groton to Townsend Center. Additionally, there is an abandoned rail bed turned walking trail along much of the Nissitissit River in Massachusetts in the Nissitissit River State Wildlife Management Area. And, in New Hampshire, the “2017 Brookline Sidewalk and Trail Development Plan” details possible opportunities to pursue, including linking the Potanipo Rail Trail from the Hollis border to Lake Potanipo.”<sup>115</sup>

<sup>114</sup> Hollis, New Hampshire. “2014 Annual Report Hollis NH: 50 Years of Land Conservation: 1965 – 2015,” page 127. See page 5 for prioritization of the sidewalk/trail projects. See page 17 for a map. Projects #1, 5, and 6 all include either the Nissitissit River or rail trail connectivity.

<sup>115</sup> [www.brookline.nh.us/sites/brooklinenh/files/2017\\_sidewalk\\_trail\\_final\\_report.pdf](http://www.brookline.nh.us/sites/brooklinenh/files/2017_sidewalk_trail_final_report.pdf)

**Boating.** The Nashua River for the most part flows relatively slowly, and so is generally appropriate for boaters, including beginners. A local canoe, kayak, and stand-up paddle rental and outfitter, Nashoba Paddler, LLC—an economically successful, family-owned business—on the Nashua River in West Groton rents boats to more than 8,000 different visitors each year: their customers come from near and far. Nashoba Paddler also offers tours and a summer River Camp.

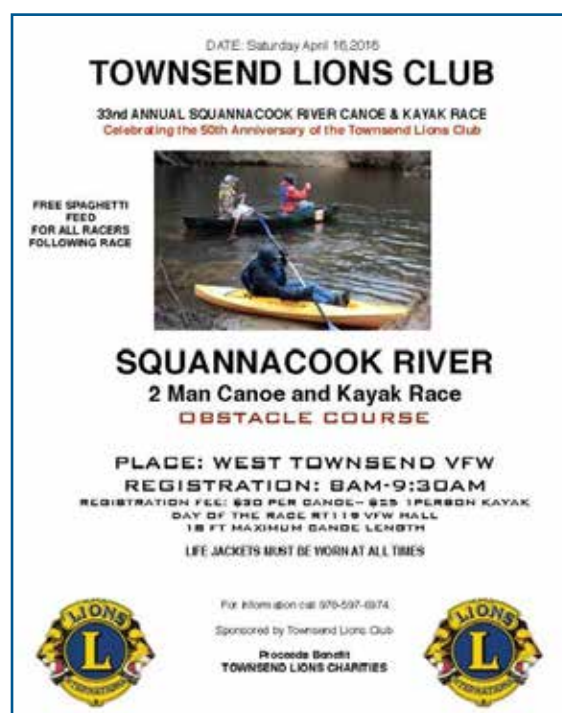
It is also possible to launch one's own car-top boat at over a dozen access points; several of these sites are boat ramps also suitable for trailered boats. (See listing of such in Appendix I.) The NRWA's *Canoe and Kayak Guide* 6<sup>th</sup> Edition,<sup>116</sup> updated and republished in 2017, is a greatly-in-demand, pocket-sized book

that provides maps and descriptions for river outings on 72 miles of the Nashua and its main tributaries, including the Squannacook and Nissitissit Rivers. The guide also details access points and portages.

Additionally, the Townsend Lions Club holds an annual canoe race—the 34<sup>th</sup> such in 2017—on the Squannacook River and canoe races have been held on the Nashua River as well. The Groton School has always used the Nashua River for their crew team (~75 students each year participate in their rowing program)<sup>117</sup> with a 133-year history of rowing as of 2018.



*A canoe/kayak access to the Nashua River at the Oxbow National Wildlife Refuge's Bill Ashe Visitor Facility in Devens, MA.  
Photo: Wynne Treanor-Kvenvold.*



*Historic photo of the Groton School crew team.*

<sup>116</sup> See <http://nashuariverwatershed.org/component/content/article/12-recreation/433-nashua-river-paddling-guide.html>.

<sup>117</sup> Andy Anderson is rowing coach at the Groton School and a well-known American rower. He is a member of the National Rowing Hall of Fame and author of the best-selling rowing book *The Compleat Dr. Rowing*.





Local outfitter Nashoba Paddler, LLC rents canoes and kayaks to 8,000 individuals a year. A cardboard boat race is a featured event at the Annual Greenway Festival in Groton; boating of all varieties is widely enjoyed.

The Groton Greenway Committee puts on an annual spring Greenway Festival at which a featured event is a cardboard boat race and there are often free boat rentals available provided by Nashoba Paddler. The Lancaster Friends of the Nashua River has held several river festivals at which Nashoba Paddler has also offered free boat rentals. Finally, the Boston, Worcester, and New Hampshire Appalachian Mountain Club chapters and other paddling groups (formal and informal such as meet-ups) organize numerous trips on the Nashua River and to some lesser extent on the Nissitissit River every year.



*Paddlers on the Nashua River at the Oxbow National Wildlife Refuge. Photo: Tom and Andrea Laford.*

**Fishing.** The Nissitissit River and two of its tributaries, Sucker and Gulf Brooks, are stocked with brown, brook, and rainbow trout by MassWildlife. Unkety Brook, a tributary to the Nashua River, in Dunstable is also stocked. Some of these stocked trout are known to reproduce and persist in the coldwater sections of our rivers.

The Nissitissit and Squannacook Rivers are widely regarded as providing some of the best fly-fishing within reach of Boston, Nashua, and Worcester area anglers, and have been for a long time. A 1973 Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife (DFW) Creel Census found that almost 20,000 people spent more than 60,000 hours fishing on the Squannacook River. The NRWA's 1984 Squanna-

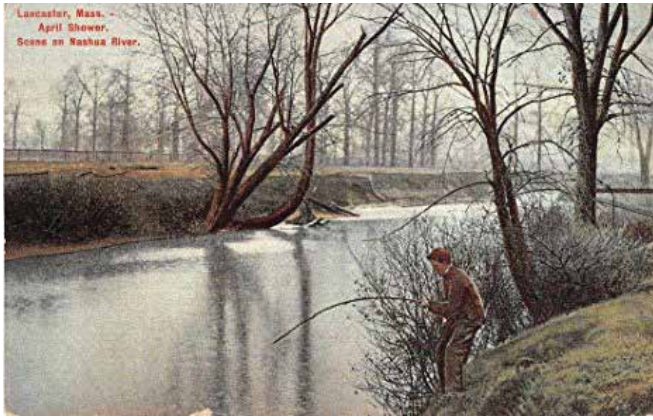


*Fishing along the banks of Nashua River in Bolton, MA.  
Photo: Martha Morgan.*



*Fishing from a bass boat on Nashua River.  
Photo: Cindy Knox Photography.*





*Historic postcard: Nashua River Lancaster, MA.*

cook River Protection Plan, says: “Although readily accessible from major roads and population centers, the Squannacook River is considered by DFW to be ‘one of the three best trout fishing streams in eastern Massachusetts and is heavily stocked’”<sup>118</sup>—the Nissitissit being one of the other three rivers—as it continues to be to this day. As noted earlier, the high water quality is in very large part attributable to high percentage of forest in their respective sub-watersheds.

The Squan-a-Tissit Chapter of Trout Unlimited is active in the watershed, engaging in projects such as constructing a universal access facility on the Squannacook River and assisting MassWildlife staff when they conduct electro-shocking and fish sampling. The Squan-a-Tissit Chapter has also adopted the Nissitissit River under the Massachusetts Adopt-A-Stream program. In the early 1990s, the Chapter was instrumental in the designation of the Henry Colombo area, a nearly two-mile reach of the river that extends from the New Hampshire border to the Prescott Street Bridge in Pepperell, as a Fly-fishing Only–Catch and Release area (Massachusetts’s first so designated).

Chapter members have long been active in the



Opportunities for fishing abound, with high quality fly-fishing on the Squannacook & Nissitissit Rivers and bass fishing on the Nashua River. Thirty angling groups hold bass fishing tournaments on the Nashua River annually.

Nashua River Watershed Association volunteer water quality monitoring program and the University of Massachusetts Acid Rain Monitoring Program. As part of the Trout Unlimited Brook Trout Initiative, the Squan-a-Tissit Chapter is currently conducting an assessment of the Nissitissit River and its tributaries to identify areas where restoration or protection efforts would most help protect the native brook trout populations. This assessment includes a reconnaissance survey of tributaries to identify reaches with native brook trout, a temperature survey of the Nissitissit and its tributaries, and an assessment of the connectivity of the tributaries to the mainstem.<sup>119</sup> (See <http://easternbrooktrout.org/news/newsletters/2008/ebtjv-northeast-april-2008>)

The warmwater sections of our rivers have also become popular for fishing since water quality improved. Over thirty different angling groups, such as Yankee Bassmasters and Freedom Bass, sponsor fishing tournaments in the Pepperell Pond impoundment of the Nashua River. Largemouth bass are found in the Nashua River, with many six pounders caught.

<sup>118</sup> NRWA “Squannacook River Protection Plan,” 1984, reprinted November 4, 1996.

<sup>119</sup> “Small, coldwater brooks also buffer the temperature of the larger streams and rivers they flow into as well as some distance downstream from their confluence. The larger streams and rivers in the Nashua-Nissitissit-Squannacook complex could likely serve as overwintering habitat for trout and other larger-bodied coldwater species in their deeper pools. To the angling community, these larger waters also provide more desirable fishing opportunities with chances to catch larger fish, both wild and stocked. It is imperative to protect the entire network of flowing waters to ensure continued integrity of coldwater fish assemblages and a robust recreational trout fishery.” (Personal communication with Adam Kautza, MassWildlife Coldwater Fisheries Project Leader, June 1, 2017)

**Hunting.** The Pepperell Pond section of the Nashua River is a much-frequented waterfowl hunting location; the Nashua River chapter of Ducks Unlimited is a proponent for hunting on this river segment. Several of our communities sportsmen's clubs are riparian landowners or abutters including: the Shirley Rod and Gun Club (~200 acres) situated on the Squannacook River,<sup>120</sup> and the Townsend Rod and Gun Club (~300 acres) and the South Fitchburg Hunting and Fishing Club (68 acres), which are located on tributaries to the Squannacook River.

**Environmental Education.** Additionally, the numerous open spaces and waterways provide environmental educational venues utilized by Beaver Brook Association, NRWA, and others. NRWA's on-water River Classroom® brings approximately 3,000 students and adults every year to the Nashua and Squannacook Rivers.<sup>121</sup> River Classroom®, conducted in partnership with Nashoba Paddler, has received the Massachusetts Executive Office of Environmental Affairs Secretary's Award for Excellence in Environmental Education.



*Environmental education along a river shoreline, part of the NRWA's River Classroom® Program. Photo: Gaynor Bigelbach.*

Additionally, there are four schools conveniently situated to use the Squannacook River as a nature study site: Spaulding Memorial Elementary School, Hawthorne Brook Middle School, North Middlesex



*Over 180 different schools have participated in NRWA's River Classroom® since 2001; approximately 1,240 classes; and 45,000 participants. Photo: Brett Hall.*



*A student participating in the on-river component of the NRWA's River Classroom® Program. Photo: Nancy Ohringer.*

<sup>120</sup> The beginning of the Squannacook River Wildlife Management Area was created when the Middlesex League of Sportsmen's Clubs purchased and donated 259 acres along the river to the state in 1966. On the lower Squannacook, over 160 acres has been dedicated to conservation by the Shirley Rod and Gun Club.

<sup>121</sup> For example, the school year 2016-2017 participant numbers are: 20 schools; 105 classes, 2,382 students, 1,177 chaperones (thus a total of 3,559 participants); and a total of 14,292 student hours for the school season. Since fall of 2001, a total of 382 different school have participated; 1,243 classes; 30,543 individual students; and 14,522 adult chaperones (thus a total of 45,065 participants). In terms of "student hours", it totals 183,258 student hours.

Regional High School, and the Tarbell Elementary School. Venues such as the Williams Barn in Groton and the Bill Ashe Visitor Facility in the Oxbow

National Wildlife Refuge in Devens offer indoor and outdoor classroom facilities. The Bill Ashe Visitor Center, dedicated in 2016, is sited by the Nashua River and has direct trail and water access for seasonal on-water environmental education opportunities.



**NRWA's River Classroom®** has received the Massachusetts Executive Office of Environmental Affairs Secretary's Award for Excellence in Environmental Education.

**Scenic Views.** The Massachusetts legislature passed the Scenic and Recreational Rivers Act in 1971. “The driving motivation behind this program was to protect, preserve and acknowledge the rivers as significant recreational and scenic resources....[t]o safeguard water quality on and along the watercourses, maintain a healthy and safe environment, and enhance recreational opportunities for people.”<sup>122</sup>

The Massachusetts Department of Environmental Management (now Department of Conservation and Recreation) Scenic Rivers Program prioritized the Nashua and Squannacook Rivers as meriting additional protection. In order to attain this Scenic River status, it was necessary for the governing bodies of the riverfront communities to approve the goals of the 1984 *Nashua River Greenway Management Plan*<sup>123</sup>. Local approval was gained through a series of

public meetings held by the Selectmen of each river town. To this day, these rivers' shorelines are remarkably undeveloped, and their scenery is exquisite.

One of the most famous views in central Massachusetts is of the Nashua River valley from Prospect Hill<sup>124</sup> at Fruitlands Museum – it looks much as it might have a century ago -- and is listed in the 1982 Massachusetts Scenic Landscape Inventory.

This Inventory,<sup>125</sup> which focused on the Commonwealth's very best landscapes, found that high scenic quality often coincides with, and depends on, the



*Historic postcard: “View of Nashua Valley and Mt. Wachusett from Prospect Hill, Harvard Mass.”*

*Image: Elizabeth Ainsley Campbell postcard collection.*



The scenic view of the Nashua River valley from Prospect Hill at Fruitlands Museum in Harvard is one of the most famous views in Central Massachusetts.

<sup>122</sup> From [www.umass.edu/greenway/Ma/Existing/MA-EG-nat.html](http://www.umass.edu/greenway/Ma/Existing/MA-EG-nat.html).

<sup>123</sup> Nashua River Watershed Association, “Nashua River Greenway Management Plan,” 1984.

<sup>124</sup> Also, once called “Makamachekamuck Hill” prior to 1800 (see photo).

<sup>125</sup> The inventory was based on the subjective opinions of professionals guided by a series of objective factors. The entire Commonwealth was subject to the study, which identified the best landscapes greater than one square mile in area. Do note that there is no equivalent survey in New Hampshire.





*Historic postcard: "Makamachekamuck Hill (Old Indian Name) Name changed to Prospect Hill about 1800."*

presence of a healthy natural environment, agriculture, historic features, and a lack of intensive, uncontrolled contemporary development. It advised: "Existing or future efforts in these areas should be linked with a program for regional preservation"<sup>126</sup>. Long stretches of the Squannacook and Nashua Rivers are rated as "distinctive scenic resources" in the Inventory.

Just above the confluence of the Nissitissit and Nashua Rivers is a scenic, historic attraction that many tourists photograph each year: Pepperell's "Chester Waterous Covered Bridge," which stands at the site of Blood's Fordway, where a bridge has spanned the river since 1742.<sup>127</sup> First erected in 1847, it is the only remaining covered bridge in Massachusetts east of the Connecticut River.<sup>128</sup> In Brookline, New Hampshire, the Nissitissit River Covered Bridge is a 110-foot-long pedestrian covered footbridge that is a popular place to view the river near its headwaters at Lake Potanipo.

The Nashua, Squannacook, and Nissitissit Rivers abound with scenic vistas, both from the rivers toward the shores and of the rivers from the land. This is evidenced by the number of people who



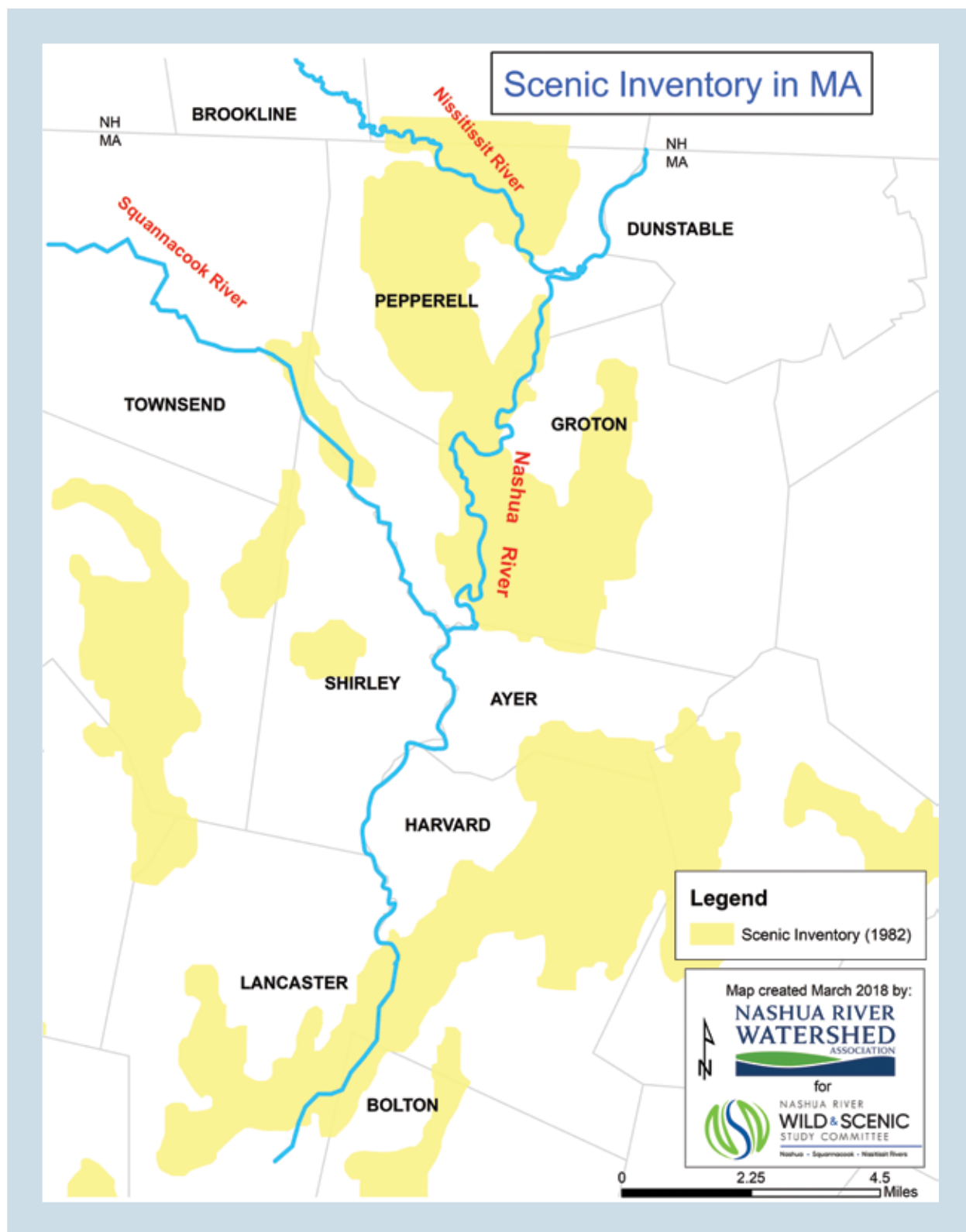
*Chester Waterous Covered Bridge over the Nashua River in Pepperell, MA. Photo: John Phelan.*

recreate on or alongside the rivers, by the anecdotal comments they share with us, and by the comments found within the survey sections of each town's Open Space and Recreation Plans. The majority of residents feel that maintaining their towns' "rural character" is of pre-eminent importance and is

<sup>126</sup> Massachusetts Department of Environmental Management. *The Massachusetts Landscape Inventory: A Survey of the Commonwealth's Scenic Areas*. Boston, MA: Department of Environmental Management, 1982.

<sup>127</sup> Pepperell, Massachusetts, "Pepperell Open Space and Recreation Plan," pages 42-43.

<sup>128</sup> NRWA, "Pepperell Greenway and Conservation Plan" (1982), page 48.



*MA Scenic Inventory in our area as identified in MA Landscape Inventory Project, 1982.  
 Note: there is no equivalent datalayer in NH.*





*Pedestrian covered bridge over the Nissitissit River near Lake Potanipo in Brookline, NH. Photo: Ken Hartlage.*

worthy of their expending tax dollars toward preserving remaining undeveloped parcels of land. Scenic vistas play a strong role in “rural character.” Most all the towns’ Open Space and Recreation Plans also specifically enumerate riparian lands to be of greatest importance.

The Nashua River Wild and Scenic Rivers Study Committee is nonetheless sensitive to the fact that evaluation of “scenic” resources can be a highly subjective and dependent on many aesthetic factors.

Thus, several Committee members accepted, when offered, the opportunity to participate in a National Park Service training in “Visual Resource Assessment and Inventorying.”<sup>129</sup> As a result, a Visual Resource Inventory was conducted on November 17, 2017. Four sites were completed out of the initial two dozen identified by the Study Committee. The Committee believes this will be a valuable exercise to continue.

<sup>129</sup> The National Park Service Visual Resource Inventory (VRI) is a systematic process to identify scenic values for views within and extending beyond NPS units, see [http://blmwyomingvisual.anl.gov/docs/NPS\\_VRI\\_Factsheet-08-2016.pdf](http://blmwyomingvisual.anl.gov/docs/NPS_VRI_Factsheet-08-2016.pdf).





## Some Key Findings on the Exemplary Status of Recreational and Scenic Features

- **Eight thousand unique visitors use canoes and kayaks from Nashoba Paddler, LLC** -- a locally owned outfitter – to explore the Nashua and Squannacook Rivers each year, in addition to the many who bring their own boats to **over 20 access sites**. Nashoba Paddler additionally offers tours and a summer River Camp.
- Award-winning **NRWA River Classroom®**, an on-water environmental education program, brings approximately three thousand students and adults every year to the Nashua and Squannacook Rivers.
- The Nissitissit and Squannacook Rivers are widely regarded as providing some of the **best fly-fishing** within reach of metro-Boston anglers.
- Over **30 bass fishing clubs hold tournaments** on the Nashua River.
- The Groton School has always used the Nashua River for their **crew team**. The Groton Greenway Committee puts on an **annual spring River Festival** at which a featured event is a cardboard boat race. The Lions Club holds an **annual canoe race** on the Squannacook River.
- **The eleven mile Nashua River Rail Trail (NRRT), paralleling the river for several miles, receives more than one thousand users on any given summer weekend day** with people enjoying walking, running, bicycling, roller-blading, and horseback riding. A 2008 estimate by the Massachusetts Dept. of Conservation and Recreation indicates over 382,000 visitations to the NRRT for that year.
- **The ~13,900 acres of permanently conserved lands that abut the rivers provide unparalleled opportunities for hiking and wildlife viewing, and, in many areas, hunting.** The Nashua River is a prime area for hunting waterfowl in season.
- **The Massachusetts Scenic Rivers Program prioritized the Nashua and Squannacook Rivers as scenic rivers in need of protection.** The 1982 Massachusetts Scenic Landscape Inventory included long stretches of the Squannacook and Nashua Rivers as “distinctive scenic resources” including Pepperell's much-photographed “Chester Waterous Covered Bridge”.
- A significant factor in designating **three contiguous Massachusetts ACECs** in the watershed is for the preservation of the scenic and recreational values of the Nashua River corridor.
- The **many miles of permanently protected greenway along the rivers** provide recreationists on shore or water with a serene and breathtakingly beautiful “wilderness” experience within an hour’s drive of three metropolitan cities with a combined population of over 3,000,000.<sup>130</sup>

<sup>130</sup> New Hampshire Department of Resources and Economic Development (DRED), “Nissitissit River NH and MA - A Preliminary Report on Proposals to Preserve” (1967).

## Recreation and Scenic Action Plan



*Angler in the Nissitissit River. Trout are found throughout the Squannacook and Nissitissit Rivers and their tributary streams.  
Photo: Ken Hartlage.*

### A: PROTECTED GREENWAY LANDS

**GOAL A.1:** Promote continued protection of “temporarily protected” greenway lands (Chapter 61, 61A and 61B lands in Massachusetts; “Current Use” lands in New Hampshire).

**OBJECTIVE:** Encourage municipalities to plan ahead.

- **Inventory greenways** - Coordinate with towns to maintain an up-to-date greenway inventory of temporarily protected, permanently protected, and unprotected lands along the three

ivers and their tributaries and headwaters. Encourage community officials to work with private, state, or federal partners and to apply for grants as appropriate to help finance selected land acquisitions as unprotected properties become available and the public supports their acquisition; similarly encourage officials to seek help with funding for stewardship improvements as appropriate.

- **Pursue opportunities** - Encourage Conservation Commissions and Boards of Selectmen to prioritize parcels in Chapter 61 and Current Use properties so that the towns could be ready to act quickly when rights of first refusal (which in Massachusetts afford 120 days to act) are triggered by sale.





*Drone aerial photo of the Nissitissit River in Brookline, NH showing the location of the 2017 municipal purchase of two abutting parcels for conservation purposes.  
Photo: Justin Adam Photography.*

**GOAL A.2:** Promote additional permanently protected greenway lands and continued protection and completion of the “Nashua River Greenway” – the vision of a greenway along both sides of the rivers and their tributaries.

**OBJECTIVE:** Provide proactive encouragement and support of greenway vision.

- **Prepare for the future** - Ensure that if the Fort Devens South Post is ever surplus, the land is incorporated into the Oxbow National Wildlife Refuge as stipulated by 1996 Defense Authorization Act (less the 100 acres to the Town of Lancaster). Inform all current and incoming Boards of Selectmen and Conservation Commissions in Lancaster and Harvard of this legislation.

- **Support landowners and land trusts** - Continue to assist and support private landowners and local land trusts in their voluntary land conservation measures that protect important riverfront and associated watershed lands. Encourage all land buying agencies to pursue the purchase in fee or conservation easements or through gifting of important river-related lands from willing sellers, if parcels come on the market and if funding is available. The New Hampshire Legislature could provide adequate funding for Land and Community Heritage Investment Program (LCHIP) to help protect wildlife habitat and to keep land open for public recreation. Towns could take advantage of opportunities to protect land, especially on the riverfront, for public recreation and open space.
- **Identify connectors** - Identify greenway gaps and pay special attention to land protection efforts that provide “connectors,” especially including between Bolton Flats Wildlife Management Area and Oxbow National Wildlife Refuge, and the connection between Sucker Brook and Gulf Brook.<sup>131</sup>
- **Prioritize headwaters** - Give high protection priority to headwaters and tributaries of the three rivers, especially those of primary concern (as identified in municipal Open Space and Recreation Plans).



*Nissitissit River. As one travels upstream towards a river's origin (or headwaters) the stream channel narrows, the velocity of the current increases, water temperature decreases, dissolved oxygen levels increase, and often aquatic habitat and water quality improves. Photo: Cindy Knox Photography.*

<sup>131</sup> As identified in the Massachusetts Audubon Society, “Focus Areas for Wildlife Habitat Protection in the Nashua River Watershed”, September 2000.



**B: FISHING USE****GOAL A.3:** Support existing greenways.**OBJECTIVE:** Maintain and restore greenways.

- **Support healthy greenways** - Maintain the greenways in a healthy state.<sup>132</sup> Restore natural or man-made “degraded” lands,<sup>133</sup> particularly those visible from the rivers, for example by maintaining and expanding vegetated riparian buffer to an ideal 300 feet from riverbank, where possible.



*Restoring degraded river banks is important to greenway health.  
Photo: Al Futterman.*

**GOAL B.1:** Ensure healthy ecosystems to support recreational fisheries.**OBJECTIVE:** Support both warm and coldwater fisheries.

- **Protect riparian land** - Keep riparian forests intact so that their shade helps keep water temperature cool, which holds more dissolved oxygen than warmwater. Support and promote pavement reduction strategies within watersheds (narrower roads, porous pavements, and surfaces that absorb runoff) to reduce stormwater runoff and water temperatures through education and awareness and changing of local subdivision and development codes. Reduce impervious surfaces when and wherever possible.
- **Protect water flow** - Maintain, protect, and enhance water flow regimes that support needs of native river fauna, while accommodating demands for water supply, waste assimilation, commercial, industrial, and agricultural uses. (In Biodiversity section above see Goal A.4 Protect and enhance coldwater fisheries resources, for more information.)
- **Support native fish** - Work with local, state and federal partners to keep healthy populations of native brook trout and other native sport fish for recreational fishing in the Squannacook and Nissitissit Rivers. One notable example of this is the work of the Squann-a-Tissit chapter of Trout Unlimited<sup>134</sup> to conduct an

<sup>132</sup> Greenways are considered “healthy” when they serve their function as important ecological tools for the protection and enhancement of the natural environment. They improve water quality by establishing buffers along waterways and providing habitat. These buffers serve as natural filters, trapping stormwater pollutants from urban runoff, eroding areas, lawns and agricultural lands.

<sup>133</sup> “Land degradation is a process in which the value of the biophysical environment is affected by a combination of human-induced processes acting upon the land. It is viewed as any change or disturbance to the land perceived to be deleterious or undesirable.” (Wikipedia)

<sup>134</sup> <https://squanatissit.org>.



*Water chestnut (*Trapa natan*), an invasive non-native aquatic plant, has infested well over 100 acres of the Pepperell Pond area of the Nashua River between Groton and Pepperell, MA nearly blocking the navigable channel. Photo: Will Stevenson.*

assessment of these rivers and to identify areas where restoration or protection efforts would be most helpful. Set up a training to learn how to conduct stream crossings (or aquatic connectivity<sup>135</sup>) surveying as needed.

- **Support fish passage at dams** - Consider the effect of the two Nashua River dams (in Massachusetts)—Pepperell and Ice House—on fish passage. Support establishing and/or maintaining adequate upstream and downstream fish passage facilities. Comment on updated fish passage designs as they come up for review.<sup>136</sup>
- **Support recreational uses** - Help facilitate the continued use of the Nashua River in the

“Pepperell Pond” area for bass fishing and bass fishing tournaments, notably by keeping aquatic invasives (primarily, water chestnut) to a threshold below that which may impede boating.

- **Balance multiple uses** - Promote dialogue regarding balancing multi-uses and avoidance of over-use resulting from increased public exposure on all three rivers in order to reduce potential conflicts.<sup>137</sup>
- **Promote responsible angling** - Educate and encourage anglers about proper disposal of lures, weights, and other fishing equipment including monofilament line.

<sup>135</sup> [https://streamcontinuity.org/aquatic\\_connectivity/index.htm](https://streamcontinuity.org/aquatic_connectivity/index.htm).

<sup>136</sup> Note: Fish passage is a requirement of the FERC license and included in the schedule for “required” items to be completed for the Pepperell Hydro Dam. Fish passage will require strict review and approval by Massachusetts NHESP for the species of fish that could potentially pass through the dam area.

<sup>137</sup> Note: The Upper Missisquoi and Trout Rivers, Vermont’s only Wild and Scenic River, answered the Frequently Asked Question: “Will designation result in increased tourism or recreational use of the rivers? Not significantly. Tourism and recreational use on other rivers in the Wild and Scenic System have not seen dramatic increases in either tourism or recreational use attributed to Wild and Scenic designation. The degree to which such traffic increases largely depends on the extent to which the riverfront communities choose to promote Wild and Scenic designation.” [https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/7dcf17\\_83502e6926c84f05803f574a7ebec36b.pdf](https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/7dcf17_83502e6926c84f05803f574a7ebec36b.pdf).

## C: BOATING USE

### GOAL C.1: Preserve and enhance opportunities for boating.

#### OBJECTIVE: Provide and maintain public boating access.

- **Maintain existing access for boaters** - Maintain the current appropriate public access sites for boaters.
- **Facilitate private access** - Secure continued public use through formal agreements with private landowners at informal boat launches regularly used by the public.
- **Support new access points** - Support creation of additional appropriate public access sites for canoe and kayak users, including those planned for the Pepperell Dam.<sup>138</sup>
- **Involve Public Access Board** - Identify appropriate areas for additional car-top public access utilizing the Massachusetts Public Access Board (PAB) staff and criteria<sup>139</sup> for potential car-top sites, if determined that such are needed.
- **Set site standards** - When new river access sites are desired, first develop criteria for siting such riverside public recreation areas.
- **Support handicapped access** - Support development of appropriate handicapped accessible sites.
- **Consider boat access with road projects** - Consider requiring provision for appropriate public access when bridges or culverts (especially on state roads) are upgraded. Support water-based recreation - Encourage the planning of water-based recreational opportunities. Encourage “blue (water) trails”<sup>140</sup> and their canoe access sites, where appropriate (for example, Pellechia launch site).
- **Improve parking and signage** - Encourage adequate parking and signage at existing and new sites, notably at Petapawag launch site.
- **Improve boating passage** - Improve rivers for safe boating passage given large woody material obstructions while maintaining habitat by obtaining input and state approvals from Massachusetts Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program (Massachusetts NHESP) and Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife.<sup>141</sup>
- **Evaluate woody material** - Utilize a recreational and ecological evaluation documentation process to consider alteration of woody material blocking boat passage under summer conditions similar to that used in 2015 by the Lamprey River Watershed Association, see [www.lampreyriver.org/UploadedFiles/Files/woody\\_obstacles\\_report.pdf](http://www.lampreyriver.org/UploadedFiles/Files/woody_obstacles_report.pdf).
- **Maintain stream flows** - Maintain stream flow to enhance recreational and scenic qualities, while accommodating demands for water supply, waste assimilation, commercial, indus-

138 Pepperell Hydro, LLC. “Recreation Plan for Pepperell Hydroelectric Project,” prepared by Kleinschmidt (June 2017).

139 PAB’s criteria are: site must be publically owned; demonstrated recreational need for the project; safe access into and out of the water; potential for adequate parking; a responsive municipal managing authority to maintain the site; and, consistency with the mission of the Massachusetts Division of Fish and Wildlife.

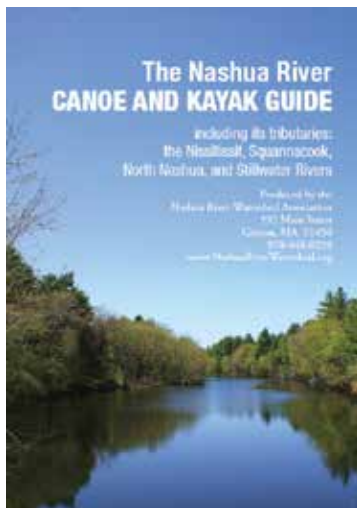
140 A recently created and close-by “blue trail” is on the North Nashua River in Lancaster, Massachusetts.

141 Consult MassWildlife’s “Trees, Paddlers and Wildlife-Safeguarding Ecological and Recreational Values on the River” and/or New Hampshire DES’s Fact sheet “Managing Large Woody Material in Rivers and Streams”. <https://www.des.nh.gov/organization/commissioner/pip/factsheets/rl/documents/rl-21.pdf>. Here a key take-away is: “If the large woody material is not a threat to human health, human safety, or river integrity: Let the Sleeping Log Lie.” Large woody material provides habitat, improves water quality, supports invertebrate life cycles, creates physical complexity and stabilizes banks and bed so there have been concerns about clearing such from the rivers.



trial, and agricultural uses.

- **Regard speed limits** - Re-evaluate appropriate speed limits for the Pepperell Pond area of the Nashua River. Speeding motorboats can conflict with non-motorized uses on the river and can cause bank erosion due to large wakes. Post speed limits as appropriate (see [www.mass.gov/orgs/boat-and-recreation-vehicle-safety-bureau](http://www.mass.gov/orgs/boat-and-recreation-vehicle-safety-bureau)).
- **Encourage clean boating** - Educate boaters to make sure boat hulls are clean before putting in as a way to limit the spread of aquatic invasive “hitchhikers” (see <http://stopaquatic hitchhikers.org/>). Keep aquatic invasives to a threshold below that which may impede boating, for example at Pepperell Pond.
- **Publicize canoe guide** - Publicize NRWA’s 2017 Canoe and Kayak Guide to encourage boaters to select trips compatible with their skill level. Update as appropriate. Consider smart-phone app of this guide.
- **Work with paddling groups** - Interface and coordinate with regional paddling groups such as the Boston, Worcester, and New Hampshire Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC) chapters, which organize numerous trips on the Nashua River and occasionally the Squannacook and Nissitissit Rivers.



Front cover of NRWA's 2017 Canoe and Kayak Guide.

## D: SWIMMING USE

**GOAL D.1:** Provide opportunities for safe swimming in our rivers.

**OBJECTIVE:** Be attentive to both river and riverbank conditions in evaluation of swimming opportunities.

- **Confront bacterial pollution** - Look for opportunities to reduce or eliminate sources of bacterial contamination and pollution so that swimming is safe in the three rivers such as, stormwater controls where appropriate and where sanctioned. Determine such possible non-point pollution sources through monthly water quality sampling/monitoring, or more frequent targeted sampling if funding allows.
- **Provide health warnings** - Educate public about public health threats regarding swimming within several days after intensive rainstorms. Alert the public through social media when bacteria levels at water monitoring sites have been exceeded for safe swimming or boating (primary and secondary contact recreation, respectively).
- **Consider a warning system** - Consider designing an on-line regularly updated “flagging” system to alert swimmers of any immediate water quality threats that would make primary contact with the water unadvisable in those public areas most frequently used for swimming.
- **Monitor and address high use areas** - Monitor most heavily used swimming areas to minimize or repair erosion problems on steep sandy banks (for example, notably at Black Rock in Townsend and Bertozzi Conservation Area in West Groton) where appropriate and where sanctioned. Guide pedestrian access to such sites onto paths that are least destructive.
- **Increase public access** - Increase public access to the rivers where appropriate and where

sanctioned while protecting the riparian integrity and the surrounding river environment.

- **Consider Harbor Pond restoration** - Consider restoring Harbor Pond in Townsend, which is heavily eutrophied and filling in, due to sediment transport,<sup>142</sup> to a level that supports increased recreational use, possibly including swimming where appropriate and where sanctioned.



*Good water quality is important for recreation. Youth enjoying the Nashua River. Photo: Gaynor Bigelbach.*

## E: REGIONAL TRAIL SYSTEM

### GOAL E.1: Maintain and enhance regional trail systems.

#### OBJECTIVE: Provide opportunities for hikers and walkers along the rivers and on inter-connecting trails.

- **Promote trail upkeep and signage** - Encourage maintenance of existing trails and signage; add additional signage as appropriate.
- **Work with volunteer groups** - Increase access

to existing trails and provide information for trail users<sup>143</sup> via coordination with local trail committees, such as those in Groton and Shirley, and reliance on local volunteers and aspiring Eagle Scouts as in Pepperell.

- **Practice trail stewardship** - Increase monitoring and maintenance of rail trails—notably the existing Nashua River Rail Trail, the soon-to-be constructed Squannacook River Rail Trail, and the undeveloped riverside trails along the Nissitissit River in Pepperell, Massachusetts (these trails are owned by DFW, which has strict regulations for trail maintenance) and in Hollis and Brookline, New Hampshire—as well as other pedestrian-only river access areas. Be attentive to minimizing littering, parking problems, all-terrain-vehicle (ATV) abuses, vandalism, and trespassing on adjacent private lands. Encourage “Adopt-a-Trail”-style projects. For example, the Town of Pepperell has a volunteer-based trail monitoring and maintenance program for town-owned trails available on its Conservation Commission website (see: [www.town.pepperell.ma.us/172/Trial-Monitoring-and-Maintenance-Program](http://www.town.pepperell.ma.us/172/Trial-Monitoring-and-Maintenance-Program)).
- **Teach multi-use principles** - Help users of the various trails learn how to safely navigate multiple types of concurrent use, for example horses, pedestrians, and cyclists simultaneously using the rail trails. Help users identify trails appropriate to their form of recreation, e.g., bicyclists on Nashua River Rail trail; fishing access trails along the rivers; and a canoe portage along the Nashua River Rail Trail in Pepperell.
- **Publish trail guides** - Develop riverside trails guide books or maps, both print and on-line, for the public to encourage trail use and assist

<sup>142</sup> Sediment transport is the movement of solid particles (sediment), typically due to a combination of gravity acting on the sediment, and/or the movement of the fluid in which the sediment is entrained. (Wikipedia)

<sup>143</sup> Nashoba Conservation Trust (NCT) and Town of Pepperell, together, created a trail guide with details about 16 properties including land protection history (donation, purchase, etc.), details/GPS location of the parking for the property, flora, and fauna. The free guide can be downloaded from the Pepperell and NCT websites and is available in iBooks.

in exploration of such trails<sup>144</sup>. Support and promote regional community trail mapping<sup>145</sup> such as done by Montachusett Regional Planning Commission.

- **Promote regional trail system** - Promote additional use of trail easements and linkages to further extend existing formal<sup>146</sup> regional trail system for passive recreational use.
- **Look for ways to add to rail trails** - Explore opportunities for extending/connecting rail trails (in all directions) for multi-uses and accessibility, while maintaining wildlife habitat.
- **Support regional trail groups** - Encourage the work of regional trails groups such as Montachusett Regional Trails Coalition (see: [www.facebook.com/MontachusettTrails](https://www.facebook.com/MontachusettTrails)).
- **Stay informed about Thoreau Trail** - Follow development of potential “Thoreau Trail” proposed by Freedom’s Way Heritage Association (FWHA) that would cross the Nashua River on its 50+ mile course connecting Walden Pond and Wachusett Mountain.
- **Encourage universal accessibility** - Encourage Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessible trails and wildlife viewing areas where feasible.
- **Consider trails in town planning** - Update municipal by-laws to include trails and greenways as part of site development process. Encourage inter-municipal planning of trails

and greenways to encourage cross-regional linkages. There are many opportunities to link trails including at river crossing sites on rail trails.



*Participants on public hike along Keyes Trail beside the Nissitissit River in Brookline and Hollis, NH during outreach phase of our study, spring 2018. Photo: LeeAnn Wolff.*



*The Montachusett Regional Trails Coalition, founded in 2012, promotes and supports the development of an interconnected trail system in the Montachusett region.*

<sup>144</sup> For one such example see: [www.americantrails.org/NRTDatabase/trailDocuments/3846\\_QuinebaugRiverPaddleGuide2012a.pdf](http://www.americantrails.org/NRTDatabase/trailDocuments/3846_QuinebaugRiverPaddleGuide2012a.pdf).

<sup>145</sup> [www.mrpc.org/home/pages/community-trail-maps](http://www.mrpc.org/home/pages/community-trail-maps).

<sup>146</sup> Formal trails are those on existing protected lands: governmental or private (i.e., land trust holdings or registered Conservation Easements) versus informal trails. Many towns have the following “Trail Use Disclaimer: It is the personal responsibility of the trail user to verify that the trail is designated for the specific use of interest. Respect property owners’ rights. Conservation areas are generally open to hunting in accordance the Massachusetts law, unless POSTED otherwise. Be aware of hunting seasons and regulations. ATV use is generally not permitted in municipal conservation areas.” ([www.shirley-ma.gov/sites/shirleyma/files/uploads/trails.pdf](http://www.shirley-ma.gov/sites/shirleyma/files/uploads/trails.pdf)) Additionally, note that Massachusetts DFG has a policy of minimizing walking trails.



## F: THE RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES

**GOAL F.1:** Encourage other recreational activities as appropriate.

**OBJECTIVE:** Be responsive to an existing and evolving variety of recreational interests.

- **Formalize pet policies** - Clarify appropriate recreational areas for dog owners. Reinforce or create pet waste ordinances (pooper-scooper laws) and restrictions on illegal dumping, such as at Groton Place informal “dog park” along the Nashua River, or otherwise secure and maintain pet waste disposal containers.
- **Consider deer population management** - Conduct browse studies to determine where deer overpopulation is occurring. Encourage deer hunting where setbacks allow to reduce overpopulations that impact wildlife habitat and which also lead to increased tick numbers and resulting increased cases of Lyme disease and other tick-borne illnesses in humans. Consider developing town-specific Deer Management Plans to control exploding deer populations unchecked by other predators since deer are the primary vector for such diseases.
- **Engage public in nature**-focused wildlife viewing and events - Encourage continued public support and participation in: a) the annual Groton-Oxbow National Wildlife Refuge Circle’s “Christmas Bird Count”, ongoing since 2000); b) “Big Night”: early spring first mass amphibian movement activities; and c) local turtle protection happenings. Encourage development of “wildlife viewing and photography platforms” where appropriate.

Note: See Mass Audubon Society’s “Nashua River Watershed Important Bird Area (IBA) Site”, [www.massaudubon.org/our-conservation-work/wildlife-research-conservation/state-wide-bird-monitoring/massachusetts-important-bird-areas-ibalimportant-bird-area-sites/nashua-river-watershed](http://www.massaudubon.org/our-conservation-work/wildlife-research-conservation/state-wide-bird-monitoring/massachusetts-important-bird-areas-ibalimportant-bird-area-sites/nashua-river-watershed).



*Birding events at the Surrenden Farm fields in Groton, MA are a popular recreational activity. Photo: Pam Gilfillan.*



*Wildlife viewing on the Nashua River. Photo: Al Futterman.*

**GOAL F.2:** Maintain contact with the public regarding their enjoyment of the rivers.

**OBJECTIVE:** Inform the public and be informed.

- **Publicize Wild and Scenic River program** - Provide Wild and Scenic River program information at community events, fairs, canoe races, fishing events, and other public gatherings.
- **Host a Wild and Scenic River event** - Consider developing a signature event, which would annually help further inform the public on the value of the rivers, their outstanding resources, the value of their designation as Wild and Scenic Rivers, and opportunities to engage in stewardship activities.
- **Watch future trends** - Track new types of recreational activities and equipment that cannot be foreseen in the future -- to make sure they are compatible with managing and protecting our rivers' ORRVs.
- **Study economic benefits of recreation** - Consider analyzing the economic benefits of recreation in the proposed designated area, possibly in partnership with the Freedom's Way Heritage Association, the regional planning commissions, or others.



*Mural depicting multiple uses of the Nashua River Rail Trail near the Trail in Groton, MA. Photo: NRW Archives.*

## G: SCENIC VALUES

**GOAL G.1:** Protect scenic views related to our rivers.

**OBJECTIVE:** Recognize the importance of views from the rivers and help preserve them.

- **Protect viewshed** - Encourage protection of traditional New England landscape patterns and scenic visual resources such as the viewshed across the Nashua River valley from the vicinity of Fruitlands Museum. This may include, for example, concerns regarding steep slopes, building heights, and outdoor lighting.<sup>147</sup> Protect traditional New England landscape patterns and visual resources by supporting resource-based economic activities—"working landscapes"—including sustainable farming, forestry, and ecotourism.
- **Assess exceptional views** - Consider conducting a formal scenic assessment of exceptional views (such as National Park Service's "Visual

<sup>147</sup> A reference/example of Devens Viewshed Overlay District containing regulations to limit the visual impact of new development on the Prospect Hill Overlook can be found at [www.devensec.com/rules-regs/decregs304.html](http://www.devensec.com/rules-regs/decregs304.html) - see Section (8)(i) . Also, see [www.nashobavalleyvoice.com/groton\\_news/ci\\_31402152/at-devens-planners-must-consider-view-business-builds](http://www.nashobavalleyvoice.com/groton_news/ci_31402152/at-devens-planners-must-consider-view-business-builds).



*Plein air painting at Fruitlands Museum in Harvard, MA. Photo: [www.fruitlands.thetrustees.org](http://www.fruitlands.thetrustees.org).*

Resource Inventory”)<sup>148</sup> to identify resources in need of protection that also include views from on the rivers toward undeveloped shoreline banks as the forested corridor or greenway is a much appreciated aesthetic resource.

- **Consider aesthetics in management plans** - Pay special attention as relates to aesthetics, in addition to forest health, when first drafting Forest Management Plans on Massachusetts public lands along the rivers.<sup>149</sup> The natural, “wild” appearance of the greenways as one recreates on the river is a key component of the special enjoyment the public derives on these rivers.

- **Adopt scenic river provisions** - Encourage municipalities to adopt and enforce “Scenic River Protection” type bylaws (similar to Townsend’s Squannacook River Protection bylaw and, at the Massachusetts state level, the Squannacook and Nissitissit Rivers Sanctuary Act passed in 1975).

<sup>148</sup> [www.ncptt.nps.gov/blog/nps-visual-resource-protection/](http://www.ncptt.nps.gov/blog/nps-visual-resource-protection/).

<sup>149</sup> There is no requirement that public lands in New Hampshire have a Forest Management Plan.



## ORRV Category: Historical and Cultural Resources



*Squannacook River at Townsend Harbor Dam in West Townsend, MA. Photo: William Rideout.*

**T**he historic significance of our rivers in the landscape—and in the relationship of people to the landscape—is evident across the centuries. Our outstandingly remarkable resource values in the Historical and Cultural category range from sites and buildings to nationally noteworthy social experiments. The “Rivers as Corridors” Chapter details the influence of early conservationists, and this chapter shines a spotlight on “The Marion Stoddart Story.” The arc of historical significance that we are tracing starts with the early settlers along the rivers.

**Early Settlers.** The rivers’ abundant food sources and their usefulness for travel made them important to Native Americans, whose presence has been documented by numerous investigations of stream-side archaeological sites. One such site suggests a large semi-permanent Nashaway village just south of the Meeting of the Waters, where the North and South Branch of the Nashua join. A second example is a native encampment along the Nashua River in Pepperell (the “Reedy Meadow Brook” site), near its confluence with the Nissitissit River, which is considered a major prehistoric resource.

Nipmuc groups, who called the area Petapawag or a “swampy place,” occupied Groton for many thousands of years. The many wetlands of Groton have played a big part in all of the town’s history, from the earliest settlers many millennia ago to the most recent decades. Wetlands and rivers have served as transportation corridors, life-sustaining sources of drinking water for people, plants, and animals, as well as sources of power and places for recreation.

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The locations and types of wetlands spread across Groton have influenced how the town has developed and continue to be important to the different themes that make up Groton. The

interpretive themes presented in the following section refer back to the role of water and its influence on history within the town.<sup>150</sup>

It has been suggested that the region's geography resulted in unique human settlement patterns. Former Archaeological Curator of Fruitlands Museum, Michael Volmar, described the extensive, 1,000+ acre freshwater estuary at the present Oxbow National Wildlife Refuge as being communally used for hunting and gathering by Native Americans. The natural resources—including seasonal shad, salmon, and alewife fish runs—were so abundant as to be a place where different bands could utilize such without concern for the usual territorial boundaries.

While evidence of some settlements has been found, one might have expected more. Local history buffs have pondered if “the lack of settlements was because



*Beaver lodges abound in the Oxbow National Wildlife Refuge.  
Photo: Mary Marro.*



In 1653, the first grant to buy land for a town—Lancaster—was along the Nashua River from the Nipmuck Tribe, known as the “fresh water people.”

the Native Americans considered the area sacred. This was their prime hunting ground so they took special care to protect it and keep it wild, [thus] settlements would have degraded it.”<sup>151</sup> There is a high probability of potential Native American archaeological sites in our area that have not yet been identified, according to the Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC) and local professional historian Michael Roberts of Timelines, Inc.<sup>152</sup>

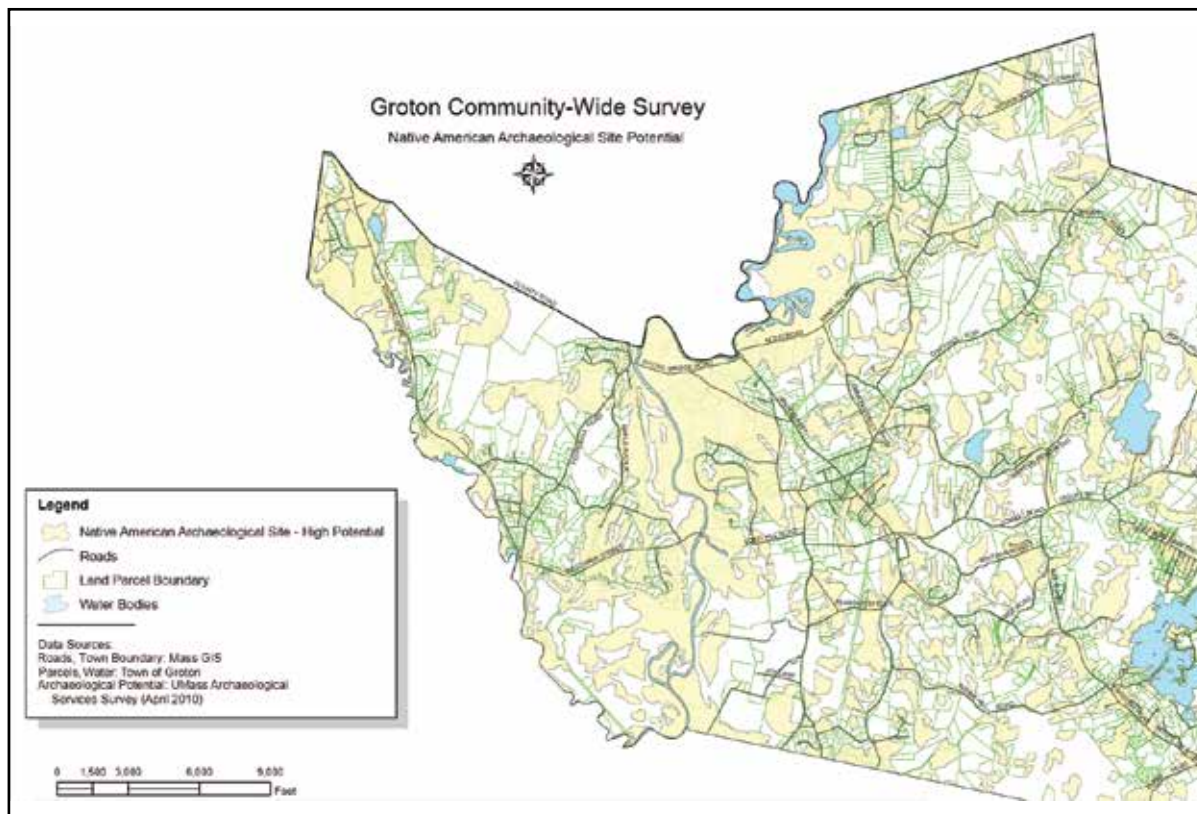
There is one confirmed Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) site in the Lake Potanipo area of Brookline, which was found when the ice harvesting facility (Fresh Pond Ice Company) was being constructed in 1905. The remains went through a NAGPRA review managed by Harvard University, and the remains were returned to the Abenaki native tribes in 2001.

Due to the presence of prime agricultural soils in the large floodplains along the banks of the river, there is a longterm agricultural history. Agrarian history dates back to the prehistoric Late Woodland Period. Native Americans burned the land to keep it open, which made it attractive to European settlers who arrived in the 17th century.

<sup>150</sup> University of Massachusetts, “Groton Community-Wide Archaeological Reconnaissance Survey,” (March 2011), page 32.

<sup>151</sup> Robert Pine, Director of Environmental Planning and Engineering at Pine and Swallow Environmental in Groton, Massachusetts, personal communication, September 6, 2017.

<sup>152</sup> “It is expected that the town [Groton] includes large Native American sites that would have spanned many millennia. *Petapawag* [Ameri-Indian (Nipmuc) place-name for present-day Groton] would have been attractive to such early settlers, as it is located along one of the area’s major rivers, and it is considered likely that such sites exist in the town. One or more of these sites may contain evidence of Paleoindian occupation that has not yet been recognized, or has been lost.” (“Groton Community-wide Archaeological Reconnaissance Survey,” pages 35-6) There is one other pre-historic site located just across the Squannacook River from Groton, the “Herfco Knoll” site, referenced on page 43 of this same Survey.



*Map of “Native American Archaeological Site Potential” from Groton Community-wide Archaeological Reconnaissance Survey.*

**First Towns, Trading Posts, and Mills.** Lancaster was one of the first inland towns established in Colonial America; a Native American trading post was set up near the Nashua River in 1643. Soon after, other European settlers followed to farm the rich soils of the Nashua Valley and, in time, the Squannacook Valley. Originally, it was “first begun for love of the Indians’ trade, but since the fertility of the soil and pleasantness of the river hath invited many more.”<sup>153</sup>

In 1653, the first grant to buy land for a town—Lancaster—was along the Nashua River from the Nipmuck Tribe, known as the “fresh water people.” This tribe was associated with the Nashua, or the Nashaway, the “river with the beautiful pebbled bottom.” Over time, the Native Americans did not



relinquish this land readily and there were many struggles. The first book written by a woman in America, *A Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson*, records her experience in 1676 as an “Indian” captive taken from Lancaster to Canada.

By the 1770s, Lancaster<sup>154</sup> was the wealthiest agricultural town in the area, largely as a result of

<sup>153</sup> Massachusetts Historical Commission, *Historic and Archaeological Resources of Central Massachusetts*, 1985), page 62.

<sup>154</sup> The town of Lancaster was officially incorporated in 1653 as “Lancaster on the Nashua,” summarizing the importance of that water resource to the citizens. See Town of Lancaster’s town seal.



the productive lands of the “Nashua interval,” the low-lying, rich bottom lands along the river. Similarly, Ash Swamp, the headwaters of the Squannacook River in Townsend, would become a “highly prized meadowland in colonial times, adjoining lowlands still in agriculture.”<sup>155</sup>

The Nashua River served as barrier to westward settlement for 100 years after the European settlers arrived. A monument near the river in Pepperell marks the site of the last attack by Native Americans in the area in 1745.

In Townsend, a sawmill was established at the Harbor in 1733, and a gristmill was added shortly thereafter. In Ayer, circa 1770, a grist and sawmill (Pierce’s) was built on Nonacoicus Brook, a tributary to the Nashua River in Ayer. Other early mills include a 1739 clothier mill on the Squannacook River (present day “Cooperage”).

Fessenden Mill, on the Squannacook River, at the precursor site of present Sterilite Corporation, consumed 25,000 board feet of lumber daily in the making of barrels. At its heyday, ~1900-1929, the factory employed about 300 people; it closed in 1960. In 1875, Townsend had 11 barrel factories. Townsend’s present state forest once belonged to Fessenden’s; the land was sold to the state after the devastating fire of 1927, which rendered it useless as a source of material for that barrel factory.<sup>156</sup>

The Petapawag Canoe Launch in Groton is situated on another Native American settlement site. The same spot was later a trading post and witnessed an early 17<sup>th</sup> century skirmish between English settlers and Native Americans. Another trading post in the vicinity dates back to 1656, where the owner John Tinker would use the river to transport goods from his home upriver in Lancaster. Groton’s first European settlement was located in the nearby J. Harry Rich State Forest, and numerous cellar holes remain from that time. The old stagecoach road from



*The Petapawag Boat Launch on Nashua River in Groton, MA.  
Photo: Cindy Knox Photography.*

Boston to Keene, New Hampshire ran through the forest to a ford in the river at the present site of the Route 119 Bridge known as the “Stoney Fordway” or “Stoney-wading-place.”

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The first settlement of Groton by European Americans was heavily shaped by the water resources of Petapawag. The rivers were used for travel. The wetlands were filled with abundant flora and fauna, and the many wetlands frequently flooded nearby plains, richly fertilizing the soils. This initial European American settlement was also influenced by their predecessors, the Nashaway Nipmuc. In the same way that the primary transportation route was along the Nashua River for the Nipmuc, the first reported permanent settlement was situated on the Nashua River. This first settlement was a trading house established in 1656 to conduct business with the Nipmuc. The trading post focused on commerce in furs. Around 1655 the trading post was operated by John Tinker (Michael Roberts, 2010), and was situated at the

<sup>155</sup> NRWA “Squannacook River Protection Plan,” 1984, reprinted November 4, 1996, page 33.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid, pages 41-42.



*Historic postcard: Hollingsworth and Vose Paper Mill in Groton, MA on Squannacook River.  
Image: Elizabeth Ainsley Campbell postcard collection.*

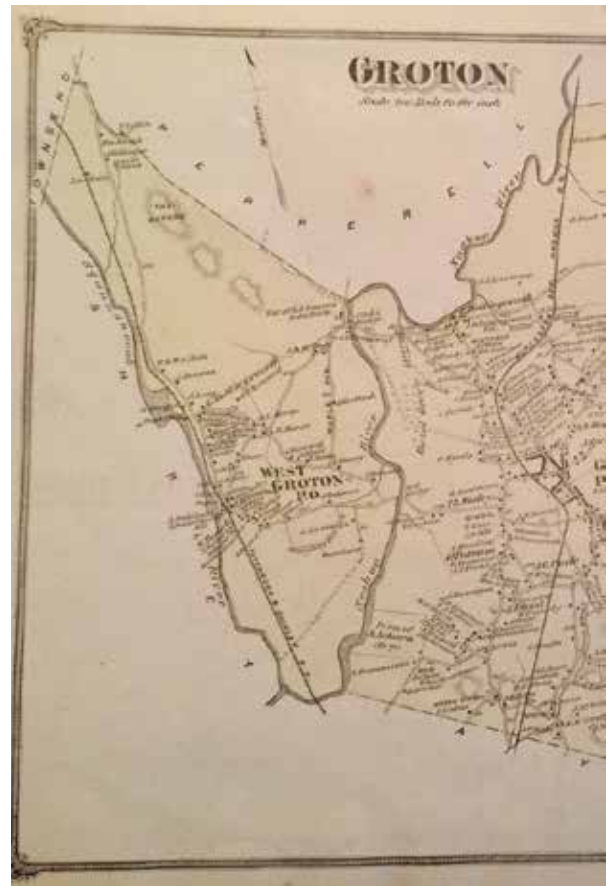


*Historic postcard: "The River and the Falls" showing Babbittasset Falls in Pepperell, MA. This is now the site of the Pepperell Dam.  
Image: Elizabeth Ainsley Campbell postcard collection.*

confluence of Nod Brook and the Nashua River. Settlers and their families soon followed the first traders, drawn by the environmental diversity, with freshwater resources for fishing, and fertile soils for farming. The trading post evolved into an early seventeenth century frontier European American settlement.... [A] second main settlement cluster developed in West Groton. Situated advantageously within a "V" formed by the Nashua and the Squannacook Rivers, West Groton arose as a late industrial period New England mill village.<sup>157</sup>

The Nashua River provided the original impetus for Pepperell's growth, when in 1730 a gristmill was established at Babbittasset Falls, site of the present dam. Paper mills operated continuously at this site from 1835 to 2002. Today, the run of the river Pepperell Dam is used to generate hydropower.

Regarding another mill, in 1843 the Hollingsworth brothers of Groton were granted a patent for manufacture of paper. In 1846, their mill on the Squannacook River in West Groton burned and was rebuilt. In 1881, Zachary Hollingsworth formed a partnership with Charles Vose. By 1955, the West Groton division of the international Hollingsworth and Vose Co. manufactured approximately 25 tons



*1875 "Beers Atlas" map of West Groton, MA.*

<sup>157</sup> Ibid, Groton Community-wide Archaeological Reconnaissance Survey, pages 48 and 50.



*Historic Fitch's Bridge in Groton, MA, originally built in 1898, is shown here prior to being demolished in 2013 and replaced with a pedestrian-only bridge. Photo: Olin Lathrop.*



*Current Fitch's Bridge in Groton, MA. This pedestrian-only bridge connects over 100 miles of trails that had been bisected by the Nashua River. Photo: [www.freedomsway.org](http://www.freedomsway.org).*

per day of specialized industrial paper. The mill has remained in continuous operation since 1852.

It is interesting to note that many of the tributaries to our rivers also have historic mill sites; for example, the site of the historic Shoe Shank Mill on the North Nashua River.

The site of the first bridge in Groton to span the Nashua River in 1725 is near the current Fitch's Bridge.<sup>158</sup> It carried the old county road, one of the oldest westward trails, leading to the then-wilderness of New York. In 2013, the Town of Groton voted overwhelmingly to expend a considerable sum of municipal funds to restore this historic bridge for pedestrian use.

The area where the Ayer Ice House Dam (presently Ice House Partners, aka Grady Research) is located includes the site beside the Old Shirley Road where hydropower was first used in 1790. The area was purchased in 1871 by Mr. William Mitchell to open a wool shoddy mill. His new company would take inferior wool remnants and turn them into affordable wool clothing. In 1873, the profitable facility burnt down. Even though he only had the company for two years, the area has always been referred to as "Mitchellville."

There have been other businesses at that location that also used the water power provided by the Nashua River. In 1906, a power plant there was used by the Fitchburg and Leominster Street Railway. They would provide trolley service from Ayer to as far away as Fitchburg, Leominster, and Lunenburg, and their electricity powered Whalom Park. After it was retired as a trolley system power station, it was purchased in 1933 by Mr. Michael Horgan, who used the facilities to generate his own power to make ice.<sup>159</sup>

**National Noteworthy Social Experiments and Efforts.** Three social undertakings are particularly noteworthy. Fruitlands Museum, a regional resource situated on 210 acres in Harvard, abuts the Oxbow National Wildlife Refuge. It includes the Fruitlands Farmhouse, a National Historic Landmark built in 1826 and home to Bronson Alcott's utopian experiment in agriculture and intellectual



A Historic District and its buildings along the Squannacook River in Townsend Harbor includes The Cooperage originally built in 1733 as a mill to saw boards.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid, Groton Community-wide Archaeological Reconnaissance Survey, page 82.

<sup>159</sup> Barry Schwarzel, Ayer Historical Commission, personal communication on November 8, 2017.



living in 1843. While short-lived, the experiment was influential in the Transcendentalist movement. Second, a Shaker Village existed along Nashua River in Shirley from the late 1700s to the early 1900s. Third, a Historic District along the Squannacook River in Townsend Harbor is known as a “safe harbor” due to the local Abolitionists who participated in the Underground Railroad network. The Conant House, reputed to be the oldest house in Townsend, is also reputed to be a “safe house.” Another source indicates that the name “Harbor” derives from the earliest days of the colonial settlement, when four fortified garrison houses were located in the area to provide refuge during Native American attacks.<sup>160</sup>

### Historic Properties, Districts, and Army Camps.

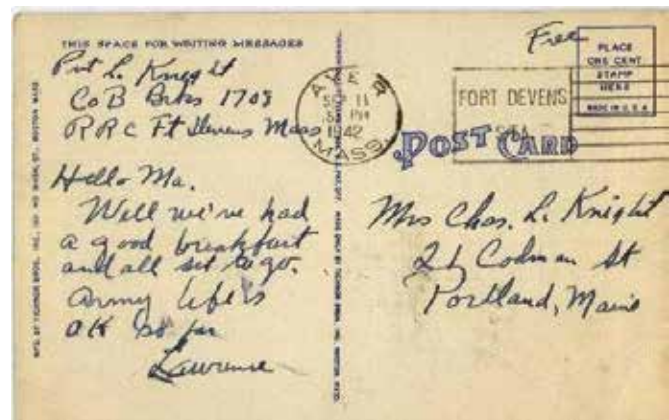
Harvard has three properties that are listed in the National Register of Historic Places: Fruitlands Museum (which is also a National Historic Landmark), Still River Baptist Church, and the Fiske Warren House, now part of Saint Benedict’s Abbey abutting the Nashua River. There are four National Register Districts: Vicksburg Square at Fort Devens, Fruitlands Museum, Harvard Center, and Shaker Village.



Historic postcard: “Fruitlands: The Home of the Alcotts, Harvard, Mass.” Image: Elizabeth Ainsley Campbell postcard collection.



Historic postcard: “Air View of Barracks at Fort Devens, Mass” with the Nashua River in the background.



Back of previous historic postcard of Barracks at Fort Devens, Mass.

Harvard has two local historic districts, Harvard Center and Shaker Village. Another National Register District is the Shirley Shaker Village (now part of Massachusetts Department of Corrections MCI-Shirley) near the banks of the Nashua River. Shirley was named “the Most Historic Small Town in the Nation.”<sup>161</sup> Devens has a Fort Devens Historic District and 89 properties listed on the National Register of Historic Places, four historic archaeological sites, and one prehistoric archaeological site.

A highlight of mid-19<sup>th</sup> century cultural history in our area is the former Civil War Camp called “Camp Stevens.” It was built on the banks of the Nashua River along a stretch of the old Fitchburg Road. (The KTR European Motor Sports business occupies the

<sup>160</sup> See the Townsend Historical Society at [www.townsendhistoricalsociety.org/thsh.html](http://www.townsendhistoricalsociety.org/thsh.html).

<sup>161</sup> Shirley Historical Society, “Most Historic Small Town in the Nation” at [www.shirleyhistory.org/mosthistoric.htm](http://www.shirleyhistory.org/mosthistoric.htm).



*Senator Edward Kennedy at the public dedication of conveyance of additional lands to the Oxbow National Wildlife Refuge in conjunction with the closure of Fort Devens, 1996.*

*Photo: NRWA Archives.*

old camp property today.) A memorial on the property commemorates the 950 men who served there and in the 53rd Regiment Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry. On November 2, 2013, the memorial was re-dedicated, following extensive work funded by the town of Ayer and a grant from the Massachusetts Sesquicentennial Committee to improve the site and allow easier access to the memorial.

A related component of 20<sup>th</sup> century cultural history is that parts of Ayer, Harvard, Lancaster, and Shirley were chosen as US Army Post Fort “Camp” Devens during World War I, where over 100,000 soldiers trained. It was substantially expanded during World War II to approximately 5,220 acres to become the largest military installation in New England. Notoriously, Fort Devens was the epi-center of the 1918 Influenza Pandemic. A Fort Devens Museum (incorporated in 2001) is dedicated to preserving the history of Camp Devens and Fort Devens.<sup>162</sup>

While Fort Devens was active, the US Government conducted many studies of Devens and the surrounding region; indeed, Plow Shop Pond in Ayer is considered one of the most well-documented ponds



*Historic postcard: Fresh Pond Ice Co. on Lake Potanipo in Brookline, NH.*



*Historic photo: Workers harvesting ice blocks at Fresh Pond Ice Co. on Lake Potanipo (source of the Nissitissit River) in Brookline, NH. Photo: [www.brooklineice-breakers.com/brookline-history-tour/fresh-pond-ice-company](http://www.brooklineice-breakers.com/brookline-history-tour/fresh-pond-ice-company).*



Devens, sited on the Nashua River, has a Fort Devens Historic District and 89 properties listed on the National Register of Historic Places, 4 historical archaeological sites, and 1 prehistoric archaeological site. Devens also has a Fort Devens Historical Museum.

<sup>162</sup> See [www.fortdevensmuseum.org](http://www.fortdevensmuseum.org).





*Left: Marion Stoddart speaking to the public. Photo: NRWA Archives.*

*Middle: Historic photo of Marion Stoddart's sons holding their noses while standing beside "Hold Your Nose: Nashua River Ahead" hand-made sign. The smell of the river for some distance from its shores was described as obnoxious. At its most polluted the Nashua River reduced the value of abutting and close-by real estate. Photo: NRWA Archives.*

*Right: Historic newspaper clipping titled "Polluted Nashua One Large Cesspool: Area Paper Mills Use River as Sewer" and captioned "Mrs. Hugh Stoddart of Groton, leader of drive to clean Nashua River." Photo: NRWA Archives.*

in the country.<sup>163</sup> According to MassDevelopment, the US Army has spent approximately \$160 Million to date in the environmental clean-up of Fort Devens. The Army base closed in 1996 leading to the expansion of Oxbow National Wildlife Refuge, which was initially established in 1974, through a number of land transfers from the Department of Defense to the US Fish and Wildlife Service. The Service acquired the Watt Farm, an additional 120 acres in the Town of Harvard in 2001.

**Railroads.** Interestingly, in 1846 the Nashua River valley became a railroad corridor to New Hampshire from Ayer and Worcester. Similarly, in 1847, the Peterborough and Shirley Branch Railroad was

opened through the Squannacook River corridor; thus, Ayer became the center of both south-to-north and east-to-west rail line. Additionally, since these railroads no longer operate, the Nashua River Rail Trail was built in 2002 and the Squannacook River Rail Trail will probably be completed in 2019.

Just prior to 1900, a railroad from Massachusetts to Milford, New Hampshire was built along the Nissitissit River over which, in the days before refrigeration, two daily shipments of ice were transported by the Fresh Pond Ice Company from Lake Potanipo in Brookline, New Hampshire to Boston for transport by clippers to such faraway places as Hawaii and India.

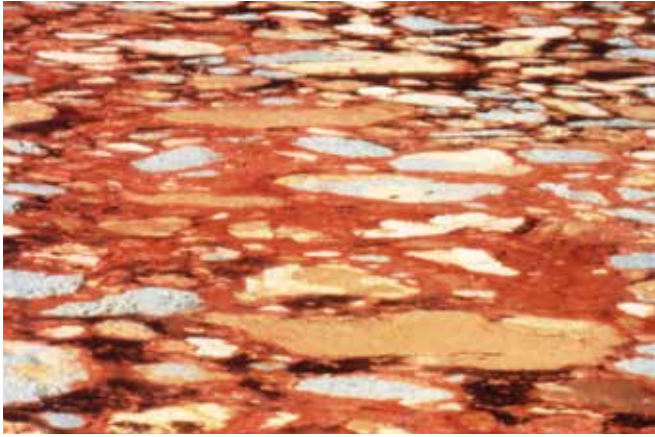


Prior to 1900 a railroad brought ice from the Fresh Pond Ice Company at Lake Potanipo in Brookline, New Hampshire to Boston, Massachusetts.

**"The Marion Stoddart Story" of River Restoration.** As described in Chapter 3 "The Rivers as Corridor," our area has a considerable history of having produced notable early conservationists including Benton MacKaye, William Wharton, Ellen Swallow Richards, Jeffrey P. Smith, and others. Each of these persons was influenced by this

<sup>163</sup> Ayer, Massachusetts, "Ayer Open Space and Recreation Plan" (2015).





*Historic photo of paper sludge and colored dye in North Nashua River in the 1960s. Photo: NRW Archives.*



“The Marion Stoddart Story” of River Restoration has garnered international recognition, served as a model to groups across the country, and inspired countless individuals.

region’s natural resources and took steps to conserve such. Marion Stoddart, who moved to Groton in the 1960s, is renowned for her conservation efforts.

In the 1960s when there were no laws against dumping pollutants into waterways, a group of concerned citizens set out to restore the Nashua River, one of the nation’s ten most polluted rivers. They dared to envision the unthinkable: “sparkling blue water with a ribbon of green along its banks.” They advocated for a revitalized river corridor that would be safe for people and wildlife alike. Led by Marion Stoddart, they galvanized the attention of towns, government agencies, businesses, and other residents—and soon all joined in pursuing the ambitious restoration goal.<sup>164</sup>

Although the Nashua River is thought to be a native word for “river with a clear- or pebbled-bottom,”



*Historic photo of paper mill sludge in North Nashua River and hanging from trees in the 1960s. Photo: NRW Archives.*

by the 1960s its recovery seemed an impossible task as the river—known locally as the “Nauseous River” because of its awful smell—was all but biologically dead. One could smell the river from more than a mile away, riparian real estate was worthless, it notoriously ran various colors from dyes dumped into the river by the paper mills, and the only wildlife were rats and sludge worms. Sludge banks along the Nashua exceeded five-foot depth in places.

Visually, the Nashua is, in short, revolting. Sludge and scum fill the stream, and discoloration and turbidity resulting from paper mill discharges and other wastes can be found throughout most of the river’s length. Fermentation bubbles are ubiquitous and obnoxious odors constitute a widespread nuisance.<sup>165</sup>

<sup>164</sup> “How a Housewife Transformed an Open Sewer into a Swimmable River,” *Huffington Post*, 7/07/2014 [www.huffingtonpost.com/ellen-moyer-phd/nashua-river-transformed-\\_b\\_5552680.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/ellen-moyer-phd/nashua-river-transformed-_b_5552680.html).

<sup>165</sup> Nashua River Watershed Association, “Plan for the Nashua River Watershed” (1972), page 40.



*The now iconic “before and after” photos of the North Nashua River in Fitchburg, MA. Photos: NRWA Archives.*

The river was so grossly polluted in 1969 that Fort Devens military personnel were warned to stay away from it. It was locally thought that if you fell into the river you should go to the hospital for inoculations. It had a “U” designation signifying “unsuitable,” meaning its condition did not meet any of the existing water quality standards classifications.<sup>166</sup> Even the 1952 *Conservation Land Use Plan for the Town of Groton MA* stated “...the Nashua River and the lower end of the Squannacook River, are so badly polluted that they have little value to Groton for any purpose.”<sup>167</sup>

In 1962, having rallied friends, neighbors, and local officials to work with her, Marion Stoddart and others formed the Nashua River Clean-up Committee. That Committee advocated for higher water quality standards for the river through the Massachusetts

Water Quality Standards established in 1967 (see Appendix B), and she even delivered a bottle of dirty river water to the then-Governor of Massachusetts, John A. Volpe. The Committee worked tirelessly for the passage of the federal Clean Water Act, solicited support for the clean-up from federal, state, and local government officials, engaged mill and other business owners in the cause, and educated citizens in every watershed town about the need to restore the river.

As the work of the Clean-up Committee progressed and drew more support, the decision was made to establish a non-profit environmental organization. In 1969, the Nashua River Watershed Association was formed. The Incorporators of the Association included community leaders from throughout the watershed, including Lee P. “Bill” Farnsworth, Benton MacKaye, Jeffrey P. Smith, William Whar-

<sup>166</sup> “Class A waters were designated as sources of public water supply. Class B waters were designated for aquatic life, recreation (swimming and boating) and aesthetics. Class C waters were designated for indigenous aquatic life, limited recreation (boating) and aesthetics. Class D waters were designated for aesthetic enjoyment only.” From Appendix C: Warren Kimball, History of Water Quality in the Nashua River and Tributaries.

<sup>167</sup> The Groton plan went on to say “There is not much that any town below the source of pollution can do to correct this condition beyond cooperation with the other towns affected, the industries concerned, and the State Department of public Health, which is working on the problem. We can make no recommendation other than the full cooperation of the town with the above agencies.” 1952 *Conservation Land Use Plan for the Town of Groton Massachusetts*.

We hereby waive all requirements of the General Laws of Massachusetts for notice of the first meeting for organization, and appoint Sixteenth day of October, 1969, at 5:30 o'clock P.M., at Groton, Mass., as the time and place for holding such first meeting.

(Type or plainly print the name and address of each incorporator in space below.)

NAME	RESIDENCE Give Number and Street, City or Town
Robert E. Boehne	Hourse Road, Bolton
Robert W. Brown	Dolton Road, Harvard
Lee P. Farnsworth	Harvard Road, Lancaster
Frank Hanchett	Dunstable
Harold Harley	44 Sunny Hill Road, Loxenburg
Bery L. Hauelsen	Bayberry Road, Japprell
Joyce E. Huff	22 Prospect Street, Fitchburg
Judith Holloway	Brookline Street, Japprell
Denton MacKaye	Shirley Center
Ernest A. Mitchell	Old Ayer Road, Groton
Andre C. Reggio	Farmers Row, Groton
Stephen L. Sabine	264 Karriam Avenue, Lancaster
Billy Smith	Love Lane, Hollis, New Hampshire
Jeffrey P. Smith	Cent Groton Road, Groton
Marion E. Stoddart	22 Lock Street, Nashua, N.H.
Lois Taylor	38 Henry Street, Clinton
Harold Vanasse	Broadmeadow Road, Groton
William F. Wharton	

And further state that the first meeting of the subscribers to said agreement was held on the 16th day of October in the year 1969

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*Nashua River Watershed Association (NRWA) Articles of Incorporation listing the names of the original NRWA incorporators, 1969; red arrows were added for illustration purposes. Image: NRWA Archives.*

ton; and, of course, Marion Stoddart. Marion's story has become the basis of the award-winning documentary *Marion Stoddart: Work of 1000*, which is described on the following pages.

"Changing values and attitudes, diligent enforcement of environmental laws and regulations, educational programs by schools and NGOs, the shift from manufacturing to service industries initiated the process of ecological recovery. The rate of recovery in the well-watered temperate climate of southern New England has been nothing short of remarkable."<sup>168</sup>

It took a quarter of a century to clean up a river that was "too thick to pour, too thin to plow."<sup>169</sup>



*Historic newspaper photo showing Senator Edward Kennedy, then Mayor of Fitchburg Bill Flynn, and Marion Stoddart in 1960s (exact date unknown). It was through the involvement of the public and their elected officials that attention was brought to the plight of the river, which eventually resulted in its celebrated clean-up due in large part to the building of several wastewater treatment plants.*

Today, a sparkling blue Nashua River runs from central Massachusetts to southern New Hampshire. It hosts many of the state's most popular fishing tournaments. Flora and fauna thrive in it, canoeists revel in it, and swimmers splash in some sections of it. It is now a nationally recognized example of river restoration. [See Appendix C: History of Water Quality, Warren Kimball.]

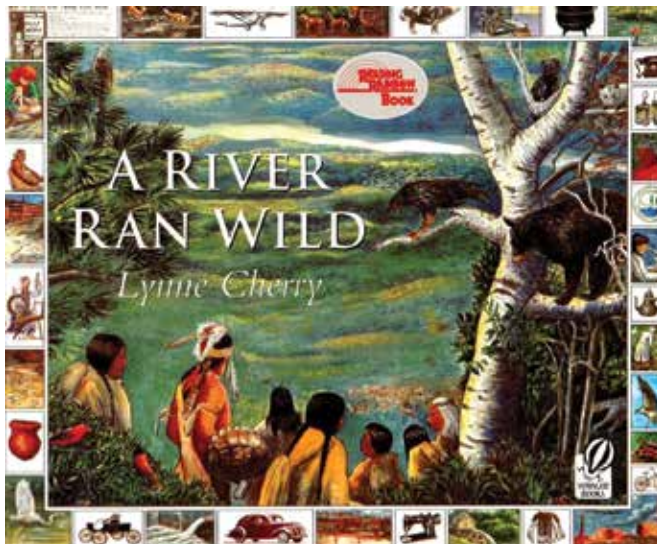
This inspiring story has been retold in *A River Ran Wild: An Environmental History* by Lynne Cherry, a children's non-fiction book first published in 1992, frequently used in school curriculums throughout the nation to address human effects on the environment, to show the changes of pollution throughout history, and to show how people in each period affected the Nashua River.

In 1993, *National Geographic* magazine spotlighted

<sup>168</sup> Paul Barten et al., "Land Conservation, Restoration, and Stormwater Management for the Squannacook and Nissitissit River Watersheds, MA & NH," (2001)

<sup>169</sup> Nashua River Watershed Association, "Plan for the Nashua River Watershed" (1972), page ii.



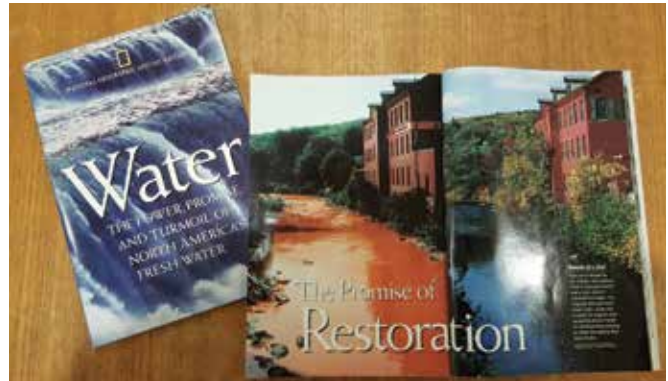


Front cover of “A River Ran Wild” by Lynne Cherry.

the Nashua River’s recovery in an article entitled “The Promise of Restoration: New Ideas, New Understanding, New Hope” in its special edition “The Power, Promise, and Turmoil of North America’s Fresh Water.” The article used dramatic “before and after” images of the North Nashua River, which continue to attract the most attention at the NRWA River Resource Center.

In 1987, the United Nations honored Marion Stoddart, naming her to the “Global 500 Roll of Honor.” *National Geographic’s* 2010 “Water: Messages of Hope for Earth’s Most Precious Resource” contains an essay on the Nashua River clean-up by Marion Stoddart. Most recently, her story and that of the Nashua River were made into an independent, critically acclaimed documentary film, *Marion Stoddart: The Work of 1000*,<sup>170</sup> which speaks to a model for effective leadership, advocacy, grassroots organizing, and coalition building to achieve one’s vision. Our locally celebrated natural resources are also a symbol of success.

The river’s recovery has sparked recreational use at places like the Oxbow National Wildlife Refuge; J. Harry Rich State Forest; Townsend State Forest; the Bolton Flats, Squannacook River, and Nissitissit



Front cover of *National Geographic* magazine Special Edition titled: “Water: The Power, Promise, and Turmoil of North America’s Fresh Water” which had a two-page spread of the now iconic “before and after” photos of the North Nashua River in Fitchburg, MA, which was labeled “The Promise of Restoration.”



Kayaking on the Nashua River. Photo: Jim Kay.

River Wildlife Management Areas; and the Groton and Shirley Town Forests, to name but some of the conserved lands abutting the rivers and protecting their shorelines.

170 Susan Edwards and Dorie Clark, “Marion Stoddart: The Work of 1000” (2010). See Documentary Educational Resources at <http://www.der.org/films/work-of-1000.html>.



*Marion Stoddart kayaking on the Nashua River. Photo: Nancy Ohringer.*



## Some Key Findings on the Exemplary Status of Historical and Cultural Features

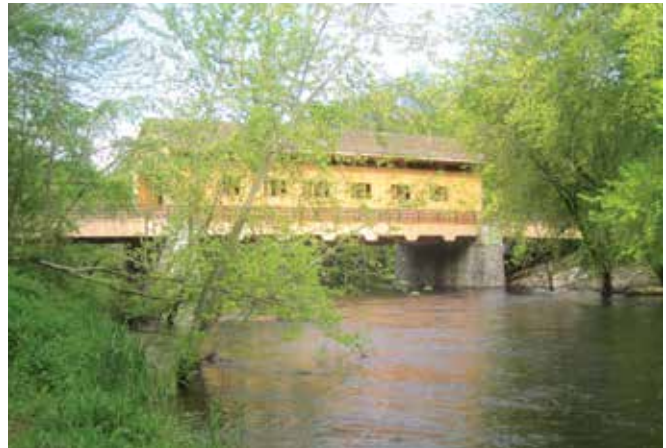
- **The story of the Nashua River clean-up has merited international acclaim** and has served as a model for watershed groups across the nation. **The Nashua River, once one of the top ten most polluted rivers in the country, was revitalized** due to the efforts of internationally recognized Marion Stoddart and others.
- The polluted “before” and revitalized “after” iconic photos of the North Nashua River instantly communicate this story, which has been recounted in the children’s book ***A River Ran Wild*** by **Lynne Cherry**. The book **has sold more than 1,000,000 copies** and is often used in classroom curriculums.
- **Marion Stoddart was recognized by the United Nations Environmental Program** in 1987. The story of the clean-up was featured in *National Geographic* magazine.
- The story of the clean-up and Stoddart’s role was documented in Susan Edward’s **award-winning film *Marion Stoddart: Work of 1000***, which has been shown in over two dozen film festivals across the country.
- Several notable early conservationists including **Benton MacKaye, William P. Wharton, Ellen Swallow Richards, and Jeffrey P. Smith**, among others, were influenced by this region’s natural resources and took steps to conserve these resources.
- Parts of Ayer, Harvard, Lancaster, and Shirley were chosen as US Army Post Fort “Camp” Devens during World War I and expanded during World War II to ~5,220 acres to become the **largest military installation in New England**.
- **Fruitlands Museum** is a regional resource on 210 acres in Harvard that abuts Oxbow National Wildlife Refuge. The Museum includes the site of a former Transcendentalist community, Bronson Alcott’s 1843 short-lived utopian experiment in agriculture and intellectual living.
- The Nashua, Squannacook, and Nissitissit Rivers are all included in the **federally- designated Freedom’s Way National Heritage Area**. A few of the many outstanding resources acknowledged by this designation include: the site of a major prehistoric resource, a Nashaway village, by the Meeting of the Waters where the North and South Branch of the Nashua join, and a native encampment near the confluence of the Nashua and Nissitissit Rivers in Pepperell. In addition, the 1,000+ acre freshwater estuary at the present Oxbow National Wildlife Refuge is noteworthy as being so rich in natural resources as to be communally used for hunting and gathering by the indigenous Native Americans, irrespective of territorial boundaries.
- **The first book written by a woman in America**, *A Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson*, records her experience as an “Indian” captive taken from Lancaster to Canada and later ransomed back home.
- The presence of **prime agricultural soils** in the large floodplains along the banks of the Nashua River were historically significant to the founding of the first colonial towns and are still heavily utilized to this day.



## Historical and Cultural Action Plan



*Historic postcard: "The Old Covered Bridge," the site of the current Chester Waterous Covered Bridge over the Nashua River in Pepperell, MA. On April 19, 1775 Prudence Wright led a group of Pepperell women to guard this bridge and captured a British spy. Image: Pepperell Historical Society.*



*Current Chester Waterous Covered Bridge over the Nashua River in Pepperell, MA. Photo: Jane Metzger.*

### A: REGIONAL CONSERVATION ETHIC

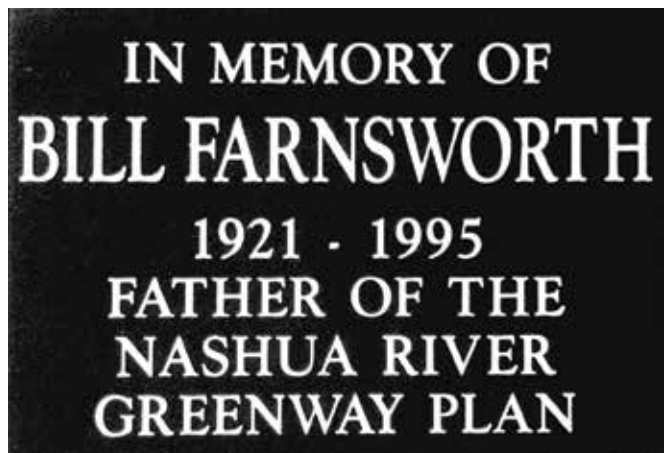
**GOAL A.1:** Celebrate the roles of influential conservationists inspired by the Nashua, Squannacook, and Nissitissit Rivers.

**OBJECTIVE:** Deepen our understanding of local conservationists.

- **Learn from the legacy of conservationists** - Encourage further research into the lives, legacy, and impact of local conservationists Benton MacKaye, William Wharton, Jeffrey P. Smith, Lee P. "Bill" Farnsworth, Ellen Swallow Richards, Marion Stoddart, and others. (For more information on these notables, see Chapter 3: The Rivers as Corridors.)
- **Use their legacy to teach conservation** - Encourage displays and programs that draw the public's attention to the work of these early conservationists and their connection to our region



*Lee Pierce "Bill" Farnsworth (1921-1995), longtime Lancaster resident who initiated the Nashua River Study Committee in 1962.*



**GOAL A.2:** Foster, stimulate, and support the next generation of conservationists.

**OBJECTIVE:** Inspire youth stewardship.

- **Teach youth conservation** - Develop and support programming that introduces youth to the concept of a conservation ethic and helps deepen their own conservation ethic.
- **Teach watershed planning and management** - Work with local educational institutions within the Nashua River watershed and Squannacook and Nissitissit River sub-watersheds to incorporate watershed planning and management into existing school curriculums and activities.



*Marion Stoddart speaks with youth circa early 2000s.  
Photo: NRWA Archives.*

## B: RIVER RENEWAL

**GOAL B.1:** Preserve the history of the clean-up of the Nashua River as a national model and preserve “The Marion Stoddart Story.”

**OBJECTIVE:** Assure continued access to the historic story.

- **Preserve the history of the Nashua River clean-up** - Support the NRWA in maintaining and adding to the materials in its Conservation Clearinghouse regarding the historic clean-up of the Nashua River, including Marion Stoddart’s efforts to control discharge into the river.
- **Celebrate *A River Ran Wild*** - Encourage the continued use of *A River Ran Wild* in schools and groups for youth; recognize and celebrate the impact the book has had across the country and internationally.



*Marion Stoddart reads to youth from “A River Ran Wild”  
circa early 2000s. Photo: Nancy Ohringer.*



**GOAL B.2:** Use the above goal as a springboard for initiating contemporary activities.

**OBJECTIVE:** Enable the story to be a “living story.”

- **Spread the message of Marion Stoddart** - Develop programming and materials as appropriate to continue to tell “The Marion Stoddart Story” to a variety of audiences.
- **Use Marion Stoddart’s work to inspire citizen action** - Develop programming and materials to utilize “The Marion Stoddart Story” as inspiration for undertaking local environmental projects that can be influenced or accomplished by citizen action—champion the difference that one person can make.
- **Build grassroots advocacy** - Encourage multiple partners, including land trusts, local, state, federal, and other entities to promote successful grassroots advocacy and be involved in protecting gains made during the clean-up and assure continued progress.
- **Engage users who affect water quality** - Engage with businesses (including farmers) and municipalities whose discharges impact water quality through promotion of watershed management.



Front cover of “Marion Stoddart: Work of 1000” DVD which was independently produced and released by Pepperell resident Susan Edwards.

**GOAL B.3:** Continue to document the River Renewal.

**OBJECTIVE:** Recognize importance of the data.

- **Continue water quality monitoring program** - Continue the NRWA Volunteer Water Quality Monitoring program, started in 1992 and now in its 25th consecutive year; preserve previous water quality data from other sources as available.
- **Continue to operate USGS river gage** - Ensure continued monitoring of the US Geological Service (USGS) gage on Squannacook River at Bertozzi Conservation Area, which has been operating and providing water flow records since 1949, and the Pepperell gage on the Nashua River, which has been in operation since 1935.



MA Division of Ecological Restoration stream gage on Gulf Brook, a tributary of the Nissitissit River, in Pepperell, MA.



**GOAL B.4:** Educate and engage the public in the ongoing story of the renewal of the river and what needs to be done to keep the rivers as healthy as possible.

**OBJECTIVE:** Encourage public engagement and action.

- **Teach watershed science** - Educate citizens about the geographic extent and functions of the Nashua, Squannacook, and Nissitissit Rivers watersheds, the specific needs for protection of and improvement to the rivers systems, and the benefits of a healthy watershed to individuals and communities.
- **Promote stewardship** - Encourage the public to speak out on issues and to participate in the stewardship of the proposed designated area.
- **Build an educational network** - Encourage organizations with existing education and outreach programs to continue and expand their efforts, through cooperation among those organizations. Develop methods to provide information and education about the Nashua, Squannacook, and Nissitissit River watersheds.
- **Champion the river as a classroom** - Support “on-water education,” notably NRWA’s River Classroom® program with Nashoba Paddler, which was started in 1998.
- **Inspire Greenway Heroes** - Promote the *Greenway Heroes: Profiles in Land Conservation*® short inspirational film on local land protection and similar materials to be produced in the future.



*Three teachers involved in hands-on water quality monitoring of Nashua River conducted as part of a teacher training course held by NRWA. Photo by Mary Marro.*

## C: HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL FEATURES

**GOAL C.1:** Identify, protect, and enhance important historical and cultural features, sites, and pathways related to the rivers and recognize the importance of the rivers to the development of the communities.

**OBJECTIVE:** Stimulate additional engagement with historical and cultural features.

- **Study our historical relationship with the river** - Encourage local historical societies and other entities as appropriate to undertake further research into the historical relationship between the adjacent communities and the rivers (such as, Babbittassit Falls, aka Pepperell Dam).
- **Emphasize our connection with the river** - Develop materials and public programming to highlight the connection between the communities and the rivers and to foster increased appreciation.

- **Consider economic benefits of historical-cultural focused tourism** - Consider doing an “economic benefits” analysis of historical-cultural focused tourism in the subject region, possibly in cooperation with Freedoms Way Heritage Association and regional planning commissions or others.
- **Consider maintenance and restoration of sites** - Consider maintenance and restoration of historical and cultural sites, for example, the Cooperage in Townsend Harbor.
- **Work on tributaries** - Consider similar work on features located on tributaries as well, such as Ponakin Bridge, an 1871 post truss bridge on the North Nashua River in Lancaster, in the National Register of Historic places.



*Harbor Pond and Squannacook River as seen from Townsend Harbor Dam in Townsend, MA. Photo: Cindy Knox Photography.*

## **GOAL C.2:** Recognize and protect important landscape features related to the rivers.

### **OBJECTIVE:** Take protective actions as appropriate.

- **Expand greenways** - Continue the expansion of a protected greenway along the rivers, their tributaries, and their headwaters.
- **Preserve agricultural soil** - Protect prime agricultural soils in the large floodplains along the banks of the rivers, which were historically significant to the founding of the first colonial towns and are still utilized to this day.
- **Protect historical and cultural character** - Raise awareness so that new development along the river corridors is compatible with the historical and cultural character of the surroundings and fully reflects the need to protect those amenities, including mill redevelopment (for example, RiverCourt Residences in West Groton).
- **Protect traditional landscapes** - Protect traditional New England visual resources and landscape patterns<sup>171</sup>—typified by colonial mills along rivers, leading to creation of a road system to connect the mills with town centers and farms, and in time by the presence of smaller villages which grew around mills—by supporting resource-based economic activities or “working landscapes” including sustainable farming, forestry, and ecotourism, in any way possible.
- **Nominate historic sites** - Develop documentation leading to the nomination of historic sites, an example of which is Surrenden Farm’s nomination to the National Register of Historic Places as a “Rural Historic Landscape.”

<sup>171</sup> “Lancaster’s rivers, its riverfront land, its traditional settlement pattern, and its extensive natural resources also are at the centerpiece of its historic heritage. Early settlers built homes and hamlets at the confluence of the rivers. Access in and out of town depended upon the bridges over these rivers.” [www.ci.lancaster.ma.us/sites/lancasterma/files/uploads/plan\\_historic\\_pres\\_element\\_vi.pdf](http://www.ci.lancaster.ma.us/sites/lancasterma/files/uploads/plan_historic_pres_element_vi.pdf).

- **Conduct a visual inventory** - Conduct a National Park Service “Visual Resource Inventory”<sup>172</sup> for important sites on all three rivers. Protect prehistoric resources - Investigate and protect all major prehistoric resources, including but not limited to the following sites: a Nashaway village by the Meeting of the Waters where the North and South Branches of the Nashua join, and a native encampment near the confluence of the Nashua and Nissitissit Rivers in Pepperell.
- **Consider interpretive signage** - Pursue suggestions in regards to interpretive signage of prehistoric resources.<sup>173</sup>
- **Protect post-colonial sites** - Protect post-colonial sites such as the Shaker Village along Nashua River (described on the National Register of Historic Places as an “ethnographic Shirley landscape”), which functioned from the late 1700s to the early 1900s.<sup>174</sup> Encourage further protection of the Shirley Shaker Village and prevent further degradation of remaining buildings.
- **Develop compatibly** - For any new development along the river corridors that towns have accepted, encourage compatibility with existing historic development.
- **Study and document historical and cultural resources** - Encourage further study of historical and cultural resources cited in the three Areas of Critical Environmental Concern to better understand, manage, and protect them (for example, post-colonial river fords like Union Turnpike in present-day Harvard). Document such historic sites, even if lacking structures, and landmark them with plaques<sup>175</sup> (for example, Thompsonville in West Groton and the riverside trading post of John Tinker, Groton’s first settler, in J. Harry Rich State Forest).
- **Consider restoring Grist Mill for operation** - Consider rehabilitation of the Grist Mill (owned by the Townsend Historical Society), immediately downstream of the dam at Harbor Pond in Townsend, to allow for public demonstration of an historic mill operation.
- **Address structural needs of dams** - Pay attention to opportunities for comment and input on structural issues surrounding dams, particularly the Canal Street (aka Mason Road) Dam in Townsend.
- **Support a Thoreau Trail** - Support development of potential “Thoreau Trail,” proposed by Freedom’s Way Heritage Association, which would cross the Nashua River on its 50+ mile course connecting Walden Pond and Wachusett Mountain.<sup>176</sup>
- **Encourage participation in Freedom’s Way Heritage Association** - Encourage greater participation in Freedom’s Way Heritage Association activities, as a community’s sense of place depends in part upon knowledge of its history, especially when historical sites and documents can be enjoyed first-hand.

172 National Park Service, National Center for Preservation Technology and Training, NPS Visual Resource Protection at [www.npccptt.nps.gov/blog/nps-visual-resource-protection/](http://www.npccptt.nps.gov/blog/nps-visual-resource-protection/).

173 The “Groton Community-wide Archaeological Reconnaissance Survey” suggests: “Several locations have been established along the Nashua River where large Native American settlements might have existed. Therefore, a suitable location for a sign would be a roadside view with a vista of the Nashua River or other scenic area to provide a sense of landscape...Content should also describe the Nipmuc homeland over the 12,000 years of occupation including that they were mobile people who moved with the seasons and made heavy use of the river for transportation, water, and food.” University of Massachusetts, “Groton Community-Wide Archaeological Reconnaissance Survey,” March 2011, page 82.

174 Historical and archaeological information is sensitive in nature; therefore, specific site locations are not identified in public documents.

175 The survey also recommends informational signage at the remains of paper mills and other archeological / historical sites. University of Massachusetts, “Groton Community-Wide Archaeological Reconnaissance Survey,” March 2011, page 84.

176 Be mindful of the August 23, 2016 Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife “Walking Trails Policy” which states their intention to keep MassWildlife properties in a natural state, in light of the possibility that the “Thoreau Trail” might bisect the Bolton Flats Wildlife Management Area.



- **Support preservation at Fruitlands Museum** - Encourage Fruitlands Museum to permanently protect undeveloped portions of its 200+ acre campus and its historic view. Provide environmental education - Provide continued environmental educational opportunities for a broad audience. Develop methods to provide information and education about the subject rivers.
- **Pursue archaeological investigations** - Support grant applications and efforts by the towns to undertake archaeological investigations as appropriate.<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> For example, the Town of Groton efforts to plan and implement an Intensive Archaeological Survey on Surrenden Farm, as there are known cultural resources of moderate archaeological potential therein consisting of historic period features including standing structures, cellar holes, stone walls, field drainage systems and other remains of the past not yet located and analyzed. “Surrenden Farm Resource Management Plan DRAFT,” October 2016, page 24.



*Potential sites for Visual Resource Inventory based on NPS VRI Program.  
For more info see <http://blmwyomingvisual.anl.gov/vr-inventory/nps/index.cfm>.*



*Historical Sites and Districts in MA: datalayer source is Massachusetts Historical Commission. For more info see Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System (MACRIS) at <http://mhmc-macris.net>.*







*Nashua River. Photo: Ken Hartlage.*

## Chapter 5: Post-Designation

### Town Votes and Next Steps

In the spring of 2018, the eleven participating towns will vote at their Annual Town Meetings on essentially the same warrant article.

In New Hampshire, the towns of Brookline and Hollis will vote on the following warrant article:

"To see if the town will accept the locally developed River Stewardship Plan drafted by the Nashua River Wild and Scenic Study Committee and its recommendation that the portion of the Nissitissit River flowing through {Brookline}{Hollis} be designated a Wild and Scenic River with the understanding it would not involve Federal acquisition or management of lands."

In Massachusetts, the towns of Ayer, Bolton, Dunstable, Groton, Harvard, Lancaster, Pepperell, Shirley, and Townsend will vote on the following warrant article:

"To see if the town of X\_\_\_\_\_ will accept the Nashua, Squannacook, and Nissitissit Rivers Stewardship Plan developed by the Nashua River Wild and Scenic River Study Committee, together with its recommendation to seek Wild and Scenic River designation."

If the town votes are affirmative, legislation will be submitted to Congress. For the rivers to be designated, the US Congress must pass the legislation and the President of the United States must sign it. Once designation occurs, the Study Committee will begin to morph into a Stewardship Council, as defined in the following section.



*The Nissitissit River begins here at the outflow of Lake Potanipo in Brookline, NH. Photo: Ken Hartlage.*

## Post-Designation Stewardship Council

Following designation, the Nashua, Squannacook, and Nissitissit Rivers Wild and Scenic Stewardship Council (Stewardship Council) will succeed the Study Committee and continue its efforts to create a participatory and cooperative stewardship framework.

**Organizational Structure.** The purpose of the Stewardship Council is to promote the longterm protection of the Nashua, Squannacook, and Nissitissit Rivers by:

- Bringing together on a regular basis various parties responsible for river stewardship.
- Facilitating coordination among them.
- Providing a focus and a forum for all river interests to discuss and make recommendations regarding issues of concern.
- Coordinating implementation of the Nashua, Squannacook, and Nissitissit Rivers Stewardship Plan.

The Stewardship Council will ensure that there is communication among all partners in the protection of the designated sections of the Nashua, Squannacook, and Nissitissit Rivers, and will provide a forum for discussion of river issues, priorities, and proposed actions.

The Stewardship Council will be the principal entity devoted to the implementation of the Nashua, Squannacook, and Nissitissit Rivers Stewardship Plan, and will establish priorities, work plans, action plans, and similar strategies to advance implementation of the Plan.

**Advisory Function.** The Stewardship Council will work to complement and support the roles and activities of partners working to implement the Stewardship Plan. It will *not* have regulatory authority. It will act as an advisor to existing entities that have management or regulatory authority on the rivers, including the individual member entities of the Stewardship Council. The Stewardship Council may undertake projects directly or sponsor projects in partnership with its individual member entities and partners.





*Nashua River. Photo: Cindy Knox Photography.*

**Responsibilities.** The Nashua, Squannacook, and Nissitissit Rivers Stewardship Council will have the following responsibilities:

- Meet on a regular basis, with all meetings of the Stewardship Council open to the public.
- Develop annual action plans and work plans based on the Nashua, Squannacook, and Nissitissit Rivers Stewardship Plan and the priorities set by the Stewardship Council to advance those work plans.
- Establish the approach and/or metrics for evaluation and assessment of progress towards its goals.
- Report annually to the member entities of the Stewardship Council on Council activities, accomplishments, and plans.
- Advise the National Park Service, participating member communities, and state and federal agencies, as well as other stakeholder entities, regarding issues and concerns related to the Nashua, Squannacook, and Nissitissit Rivers.
- Periodically review the Stewardship Plan and consider revisions and updates as appropriate. (See “Revision of the Plan” below.)

**Establishment.** If the participating towns vote at Town Meetings to accept the Stewardship Plan and its recommendation to seek designation, the Nashua River Wild and Scenic River Study Committee intends to remain active until designation is achieved. Once designation occurs, the Stewardship Council will be established. This will provide continuity and continued momentum between the completion of the study process and a formal designation. It demonstrates the high level of partner commitment to the longterm protection of the rivers.

With the continued presence of the Study Committee while pursuing designation, a number of actions recommended in the Stewardship Plan can be undertaken without delay, through local participation and volunteerism. In the event of no designation, the Plan will be a significant asset for planning and stewardship.

**Membership.** The Stewardship Council will consist of not more than 15 voting member entities. Core member entities will include the participating towns of Ayer, Bolton, Brookline,



*Squannacook River. Photo: Cindy Knox Photography.*

Dunstable, Harvard, Hollis, Groton, Lancaster, Pepperell, Shirley, and Townsend; the Nashua River Watershed Association; and the National Park Service. Each core voting member entity will have one vote. Two additional voting member entities may be elected by the core membership from not-for-profit or government entities that the Council feels will provide specialized knowledge and expertise to support the work of the Council.

**Appointments.** Each voting member entity will be encouraged to appoint one Representative and one Alternate. As stated above, each entity shall have only one vote. Appointments shall be made by each entity as appropriate, and are expected to be as follows: Boards of Selectmen (for towns); Regional Director or designee (for National Park Service); Boards of Directors or designee (for non-profits); and Division Director and/or District Supervisor or designee (for Massachusetts or New Hampshire Divisions or Departments).

**Terms.** It is recommended that Stewardship Council members be appointed for three years, if that length of time is compatible with the rules of the appointing entity. Stewardship Council members may be reappointed to serve additional terms.

**Conflict of Interest.** All Stewardship Council members will be required to fill out a Conflict of Interest form and follow conflict of interest laws as applicable.

**Suggested Appointees.** Appointees to represent the voting member entities could be selected from members of local government boards, riverfront landowners, local experts about a specific outstanding resource, and those who would provide active and informed committee representation.

**Advisory Committee.** The Stewardship Council may also form a non-voting Advisory Committee whose members may participate in committee deliberations without a vote. Members of the Advisory Committee might include representatives from:

- Devens, an Enterprise Zone, represented by the Devens Enterprise Committee
- Commonwealth of Massachusetts (for example, Division of Fisheries and Wildlife, Northeast and Central Districts; and, Division of Ecological Restoration)





*Squannacook River. Photo: Kim King.*

- State of New Hampshire (for example, Fish and Game Department)
- US Fish and Wildlife Service (for example, Refuge Manager, Oxbow National Wildlife Refuge)
- US Geological Survey
- Companies that own the three working dams (Hollingsworth and Vose Company; Ice House Partners, Inc./Grady Research, Inc.; and Eagle Creek Renewable Energy, LLC)

**Additional Participants.** Throughout the implementation of the Stewardship Plan, the Stewardship Council will stay in close touch with a wide variety of stakeholder groups and entities, some of whom may choose to attend regular meetings of the Stewardship Council. Such entities include, but are not limited to: Nashoba Paddler, LLC; Squann-a-tissit Chapter of Trout Unlimited; Ducks Unlimited; bass fishing clubs and local sportsmen's groups; Regional Planning Agencies; Massachusetts Department of Transportation and New Hampshire Department of Transportation; local and regional land trusts; conservation organizations such as Massachusetts Audubon, Massachusetts Rivers Alliance, and Beaver Brook Association; trail groups; Freedom's Way Heritage Association; historical societies; local sustainability commissions; and others.





*Nashua River. Photo: Cindy Knox Photography.*

## Procedures.

**Decision Making.** The Stewardship Council will endeavor to act by consensus whenever possible. Formal votes may be taken from time to time at the discretion of the Chair or by request of any member. On the occasions when votes are needed, a 2/3 vote of the formal voting member entities present is required to pass. *Roberts Rules of Order* will be followed.

**Quorum.** A quorum at any meeting of the Stewardship Council is 51% of the formal voting member entities.

**Officers.** The Stewardship Council shall elect a Chair and a Vice-Chair on an annual basis. Other officers may be elected by vote of the Stewardship Council, such as Treasurer and Secretary. The National Park Service shall not be eligible to hold any officer position of the Council, and only town-appointed members may serve as Chair and Vice Chair.

**Policies and Procedures.** The Council may choose to develop detailed policies and procedures that expand upon the administrative provisions of this Plan. Such expanded policies and procedures shall be consistent with the intent and provisions of this Plan.

**Revision of the Stewardship Plan.** The Stewardship Council shall conduct a thorough review of the Stewardship Plan and its recommendations at least every five years. If and when the Council determines that meaningful annual action plans cannot be developed consistent with the parameters of the existing plan, or a significant change of some sort needs to be made, the Council should undertake a revision.

When the Stewardship Council does a review of the Plan, it will include an assessment of whether the Plan is providing sufficient guidance regarding actions that can and should be taken on the tributaries of the designated rivers to protect their river-related ORRVs. Furthermore, it is the recommendation of the current Nashua River Wild and Scenic River Study Committee



*Let our rivers be an inspiration. Photo: Cindy Knox Photography.*

that the future Stewardship Council give careful consideration as to whether there are additional segments of the designated rivers, their tributaries, and their headwaters that might merit a future effort to seek expansion of Wild and Scenic Rivers designation. Examples include, but are not limited to, the North Nashua River.

**Funding/Staff.** The Stewardship Council will be responsible to secure funding for its work and staffing. Member entities will not be assessed or responsible for funding. That said, it is anticipated that the National Park Service (NPS) will provide a basic level of staff support and funding to the Stewardship Council and its operations through the Partnership National Wild and Scenic River designation, dependent upon congressional appropriations.

It is likely that the NPS may enter into a Cooperative Agreement with an incorporated member entity of the Council—as was done during the Study through the Nashua River Watershed Association—as the vehicle through which to provide such funding and staff support. Cooper-

ative Agreements are formal written agreements between NPS and a local partner to create the ability to designate federal funding or other federal assistance for supporting the implementation of the Stewardship Plan. The local partner would act, in essence, as the fiscal agent for the Stewardship Council and NPS. It is not anticipated that the NPS could enter into Cooperative Agreements directly with the Stewardship Council as an entity, as it lacks the sufficient legal foundation. It has been typical of Partnership Wild and Scenic Rivers in New England for the Cooperative Agreement to be established with a local non-profit organization, such as a land conservation group or a watershed association. Decisions about how available funding is to be spent are made by the Stewardship Council.

### **Roles of the Partners**

**Towns.** The Stewardship Plan calls for each town to be an active, voluntary participant in the Stewardship Council and in stewarding the ORRVs. As described above, each town will appoint a member and alternate to represent their interests and be responsible for communi-



cation between the town and the Council. It is expected that the Conservation Commissions and Planning Boards will continue to play important roles.

**Nashua River Watershed Association.** The Nashua River Watershed Association (NRWA), nearing the 50th anniversary of its founding, offers comprehensive knowledge of local issues associated with the ORRVs and has been working actively to steward them. The NRWA played a coordinating role in the Study Committee, and is available to play a similar role in the Stewardship Council if Council members so desire. The NRWA will appoint a member and an alternate to the Council.

**National Park Service.** If the Wild and Scenic River designation occurs, the NPS will coordinate any funding that is authorized by Congress for use in implementing the Stewardship Plan. The NPS will take an active role on the Stewardship Council, and, as funding allows, provide staff support and technical advice.

In addition, the NPS will represent the Secretary of the Interior in fulfilling the legislative mandates of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act: the NPS will review proposed projects that require a federal permit or use federal funding. Any such projects will be evaluated for consistency in protecting and enhancing the ORRVs, which make the rivers appropriate as components of the Wild and Scenic Rivers System.

There are no new regulatory permits associated with the designation. NPS conducts its reviews through existing federal regulatory programs, such as permitting under the Clean Water Act by the US Army Corps of Engineers or the US Environmental Protection Agency, and through the processes required by the National Environmental Policy Act, which provides for environmental impact reviews of proposed federal actions.

**Commonwealth of Massachusetts and State of New Hampshire.** Both states have departments that are active in managing water quality, supporting open space conservation, planning roads, and interfacing in innumerable ways with the anticipated activities of the Stewardship Council.

**Landowners.** There are no new regulations or rules associated with designation that impact private landowners. Private landowners, especially riverfront landowners, will be kept informed through a variety of means regarding the activities of the Stewardship Council, the many avenues to offer input, and ways in which they can help steward the ORRVs.

**Dam Owners.** The owners of the Hollingsworth and Vose Dam, the Ice House Dam, and the Pepperell Dam are important stakeholders. Over the years, they have partnered with member entities of the Study Committee on impactful projects benefitting the ORRVs, such as riverbank restoration and management of aquatic invasives. Their continued partnership will be important to the success of the Stewardship Plan.

**Other Stakeholders.** There are many other engaged stakeholders, as the list of entities who offered input and support attests, and they each will play an important voluntary role in stewarding the ORRVs as we go forward.

## What if Designation Does Not Occur

If designation never occurs, this Stewardship Plan can nonetheless serve as a blueprint for how the local towns and stakeholders can work together to maintain and enhance the Outstandingly Remarkable Resource Values of the rivers. That said, in the opinion of the current Study Committee, it would be enormously beneficial for the rivers to be designated as Partnership Wild and Scenic Rivers and to be eligible for federal funding and assistance to work in partnership to steward these spectacular rivers for generations to come.





*Bridge over Squannacook River. Photo: Kim King.*

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*Memorial Day commemoration on Squannacook River in Townsend, MA. Photo: Cindy Knox Photography.*

## Acronyms and Abbreviations

Acronym	Definition
ACEC	Area of Critical Environmental Concern
ADA	Encourage Americans with Disabilities Act
AMC	Appalachian Mountain Club
ATM	Annual Town Meeting
ATV	All-terrain vehicle
BMP	Best Management Practice
CE	Conservation Easement
CFR	Coldwater Fisheries Resource
CMR	Code of Massachusetts Regulations
CPA	Community Preservation Act
CPC	Community Preservation Committee
CR	Conservation Restriction
CRM	Cultural Resource Management
CSO	Combined Sewer Overflows
CSPA	New Hampshire Comprehensive Shoreland Protection Act
CVP	Certified Vernal Pool
DCR	Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation
DEP	Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection
DER	Massachusetts Division of Ecological Restoration

Acronym	Definition
DES	New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services
DFG	Massachusetts Department of Fish and Game
DFW	Division of Fisheries and Wildlife
DOR	Department of Revenue
DOT	Department of Transportation
DPW	Department of Public Works
DRED	New Hampshire Department of Resources and Economic Development
DWPC	Division of Water Pollution Control
EID	Eco Industrial Development
EOEEA	Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency
FERC	Federal Energy Regulatory Commission
FIRM	Flood Insurance Rate Maps
FWHA	Freedom's Way Heritage Association
FWNHA	Freedom's Way National Heritage Area
FWS	Fish and Wildlife Service
GIS	Geographical Information Systems
GPS	Global Positioning System
H&V	Hollingsworth and Vose Company
HDPE	High density polyethylene pipe
HOSPD	Hollis Open Space Planned Development
IBA	Important Bird Area
IDDE	Illicit Discharge Detection and Elimination
ISMCP	Invasive Species Monitoring and Control Plan
LCHIP	Land and Community Heritage Investment Program
LED	Light-emitting diode
LID	Low Impact Development
LWCF	Land and Water Conservation Fund
LWM	Large woody material
MA	Massachusetts
MCI	Massachusetts Correctional Institution
MESA	Massachusetts Endangered Species Act
MHC	Massachusetts Historical Commission
MRPC	Montachusett Regional Planning Commission
MS4	Municipal Separate Stormwater Sewer Systems
MWRA	Massachusetts Water Resource Authority
NAGPRA	Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act
NCT	Nashoba Conservation Trust



Acronym	Definition
NEFF	New England Forestry Foundation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NH	New Hampshire
NHB	New Hampshire Natural Heritage Bureau
NHESP	Massachusetts Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program
NMCOG	Northern Middlesex Council of Governments
NOI	Notice of Intent
NPDES	National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System
NPS	National Park Service
NRPC	Nashua Regional Planning Commission
NRRT	Nashua River Rail Trail
NRWA	Nashua River Watershed Association
NWCC	National Water and Climate Center
NWR	National Wildlife Refuge
ONWR	Oxbow National Wildlife Refuge
ORRV	Outstandingly Remarkable Resource Values
ORW	Outstanding Resource Waters
OSD-PRD	Open Space Conservation and Planned Residential Development
OSPD	Open Space Planned Development
OSRD	Open Space Residential Development
OSRP	Open Space and Recreation Plan
PAB	Public Access Board
PHC	Pepperell Hydro Company, LLC
PP/SO	Pitch Pine/Scrub Oak
PSA	Public Service Announcements
PVP	Potential Vernal Pool
RFTA	Refuge Devens Reserve Forces Training Area Devens
RGPCD	Residential Gallons Per Capita Day
RPA	Rivers Protection Act
RPC	Regional Planning Commission
RSA	Revised Statutes Annotated
SGCN	Species of Greatest Conservation Need
SNRS	Squannacook and Nissitissit Rivers Sanctuary
SP	Special Exception
SWQS	Surface Water Quality Standards
UFW	Unaccounted for water
URL	Uniform Resource Locator
USFWS	US Fish and Wildlife Service
USGS	US Geological Service

Acronym	Definition
VP	Vernal Pool
VRI	Visual Resource Inventory
WCE	Wildlife Conservation Easement
WCR	Wildlife Conservation Restriction
WMA	Wildlife Management Area
WPB	Wetland Protection Bylaw
WRPOD	Water Resource Protection Overlay District
WWTF	Wastewater Treatment Facility