

Will the Nashua River be designated 'Wild and Scenic?'

This year at Annual Town Meeting, voters in nine Massachusetts river-front communities will take up the topic of the Nashua, Squannacook, and Nisissit Rivers, and their possible designation as a "Wild and Scenic Rivers."

These nine communities, Ayer, Bolton, Dunstable, Groton, Harvard, Lancaster, Pepperell, Shirley, and Townsend have been participating with two New Hampshire towns as part of a Nashua River Wild and Scenic River Study Committee to explore designation of segments of the Nashua River from Lancaster to the New Hampshire border, and all of its two main tributaries, the Nisissit and Squannacook Rivers, as Partnership Wild and Scenic Rivers.

The Study Committee has developed a locally-driven, voluntary Stewardship Plan. At Town Meeting in each community, voters will be asked if they wish to accept that voluntary River Stewardship Plan and its recommendation that the Nashua, Nisissit, and Squannacook Rivers be designated as Wild and Scenic Rivers.

You can learn more about the Wild and Scenic project at the upcoming Public Information Meetings:

- Tuesday, April 3 at 7 p.m. at Town Hall in Harvard, prior to regularly scheduled Board of Selectmen meeting
- Monday, April 9 at 7 p.m., at the Town Hall in Shirley
- Tuesday, April 10 at 6:30 p.m. at the Town Hall in Pepperell
- Thursday, April 12 at 7 p.m. at the Bolton Public Library

The Public Information Meeting will be led by Study Committee members. All are encouraged to attend and learn more. For info about additional public forums in Ayer, Dunstable, Groton, Lancaster, and Townsend, and other events, related to this project



The Nashua River may be designated as a Wild and Scenic River.

CINDY HIXON PHOTOGRAPHY

visit www.WildandScenicNashuaRivers.org.

Elizabeth Ainsley Campbell, Executive Director of the Nashua River Watershed Association, says, "I have spent much of my life devoted to conservation efforts in this area, and I fully support the Nashua, Squannacook, and Nisissit Rivers being designated as Wild & Scenic."

Campbell, who is a member of the Nashua River Wild and Scenic River Study Committee goes on to say, "These beautiful rivers are home to incredible biodiversity and offer wonderful recreation opportunities. They are treasures for our local communities, and deserve to be protected now and for future generations."

Here are a few facts about the Wild and Scenic project:

What is a "Wild and Scenic River" designation? The designation of "Wild and Scenic River" is a national recognition given under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act that was passed

by Congress fifty years ago to preserve rivers in this country that are unique and special. Only rivers that are shown to have 'outstandingly remarkable resource values' can qualify for this designation. The outstanding values can relate to biological diversity; recreational and scenic values; and historical and cultural values. Less than one-quarter of one percent of all American rivers are designated "Wild and Scenic."

Do the Nashua, Squannacook, and Nisissit Rivers have outstanding value? Yes, is the answer from the Nashua River Wild and Scenic River Study Committee that has been studying the river for the past two and a half years. These three rivers have exceptional biological diversity, and are home to more than a dozen threatened, endangered, or species of special concern, from turtles to mussels to dragonflies, including a notably large population of state-listed Blanding's turtles. The

oxbows along the Nashua River in Harvard are one of the largest freshwater wetlands in all of eastern Massachusetts. These rivers are also of great value for recreation. Peaceful and scenic views are afforded from the Nashua River due to the extent of forested shoreline along much of its length, including the Oxbow National Wildlife Refuge (more than eight miles). There are multiple canoe access points on all three rivers and over 3,000 unique visitors annually recreate on the rivers. Riverside trails offer hikers and bikers extensive options as well. The Nisissit and Squannacook Rivers offer some of the best cold-water fishing in Eastern Massachusetts, and the Nashua River is a popular destination for bass fishermen. The area has given rise to many influential conservationists including Benton MacKaye, and 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 Stoddard Story" and the cleanup of the Nashua River has merited international acclaim and has been a model for watershed groups across the country.

What are the benefits of designation? If the Nashua, Squannacook, and Nisissit Rivers are designated as a Partnership Wild and Scenic Rivers, they will be elevated to a level of national significance. A locally-appointed Stewardship Council will be eligible to receive annual federal funding and technical assistance to implement the voluntary River Stewardship Plan. The three rivers will be protected from adverse federal actions including new dams, and designation could help prevent the potentially negative effects of activities such as in-stream utility line crossings. The designation is meant to empower the local communities to care for and protect their rivers.

What are the costs of designation? There are

none. There is no cost to residents of Ayer, Bolton, Dunstable, Groton, Harvard, Lancaster, Pepperell, Shirley or Townsend, or to the two NH towns. There is no federal taking of land. There is no impact on hunting and fishing. The designation does not stop local development, does not impact local zoning and property rights, and it does not require landowners to provide access to their lands. The Stewardship Committee is made up of local individuals and actions taken are locally driven.

What is in the voluntary Stewardship Plan?

The locally-developed, voluntary "Nashua, Squannacook, and Nisissit Rivers Stewardship Plan" was developed by the Study Committee with extensive public input. It includes recommendations on how to protect water quality and wildlife habitat, as well as recommendations for how to increase awareness and appreciation of the river and its special attributes. It also contains extensive information on the biological diversity of the area, the recreational use of the rivers, and the historical connections between the rivers and local communities. To view the Stewardship Plan, visit www.WildandScenicNashuaRivers.org.

What happens after the Town Meeting vote?

The nine Massachusetts communities involved in the Study, that adjoin the segments of the Nashua, Nisissit, and Squannacook Rivers, will all be voting to accept the voluntary Stewardship Plan and its recommendation to seek Wild and Scenic designation. The towns of Brookline and Hollis in New Hampshire have already voted "yes" on the question. After all 11 towns have voted, it will be up to the US Congress to pass legislation awarding the designation and up to the President to sign it.