



## **Frequently Asked Questions** *Wood-Pawcatuck Wild and Scenic Rivers Study Committee*

### **What is a Wild and Scenic River?**

According to the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, enacted by Congress in 1968, it's a river that possesses *outstandingly remarkable values*, or something special that most other rivers in the area don't have. It could be amazing scenery; great recreational opportunities; unique geological features; abundant fish and wildlife; or important historic and cultural aspects. (The rivers of the Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed possess all of these attributes.) The goal of designating rivers as Wild and Scenic is to preserve their special values for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations. Nationwide there are 209 Wild and Scenic Rivers with 8 in New England. This year is the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act!

### **What is the Wood-Pawcatuck Wild and Scenic Rivers Study?**

This is a three year study by the National Park Service (NPS) to consider whether the Beaver, Chipuxet, Green Falls, Pawcatuck, Queen, Shunock, and Wood Rivers in CT and RI are eligible and suitable for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic River System. NPS has a Cooperative Agreement with the Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association (WPWA) to coordinate the Study Committee that includes members from watershed towns, state agencies, and other non-profit organizations. The Study Committee identified the special values of seven rivers in the Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed. RI and CT Congressional delegates will submit a bill in late 2018 that will add the rivers to the Wild and Scenic Rivers System.

### **How will the rivers benefit if they are designated?**

The rivers will be supported through a NPS program called the Partnership Wild and Scenic Rivers. This program has been used for 25 years for designated rivers that flow through privately owned lands, such as the ones in New England. Under this program, the participating towns of RI (Charlestown, Exeter, Hopkinton, North Kingstown, Richmond, West Greenwich and Westerly) and CT (North Stonington, Stonington, Sterling and Voluntown), will form an advisory committee with state, federal and nonprofit agencies to implement the Stewardship Plan. The Stewardship Plan will identify what is already in place that protects the rivers' special values; what are some of the threats to these values; and how we can continue this protection.

### **How would designation affect my property if I own land on the river or in the watershed?**

Local land use and property ownership is unaffected. There are no additional requirements to maintain your land, although the Stewardship Plan may have suggestions for good stewardship practices. All rights to keep, sell, donate or transfer your land to family remain. Existing state and local regulations that affect land use and development remain in effect. It does have the potential to increase property values.

### **Does this mean the federal government could take my property if it's on one of the Wild and Scenic Rivers?**

Absolutely not! Under the Partnership Wild and Scenic Rivers System the rivers continue to be managed by the watershed communities. NPS does not want to own any of the property and will make no effort to acquire it. Property can still be voluntarily sold or donated to local land trusts, towns or the states in the same manner currently used. Usually this is through state open space bonds and town or land trust funds. A Wild and Scenic designation may help provide more funds to the towns for property purchases, if this is a desired goal.

### **What are the benefits of Wild and Scenic River designation?**

- ❖ Draws attention to the special values of the river and gives them national recognition
- ❖ Helps protect the rivers for current and future generations
- ❖ Preserves a clean and plentiful water supply
- ❖ Protects the rural character of the river
- ❖ Assures that the local communities are an important part of managing the rivers
- ❖ Provides the capacity to work across town and state boundaries for the good of the river
- ❖ Provides access to National Park Service funding and expertise to implement the Stewardship Plan

### **What can I expect from a Partnership Wild and Scenic River?**

- ❖ River and land use management continues to be governed by existing local and state laws and regulations, the same as prior to designation
- ❖ The Stewardship Plan will guide river conservation actions
- ❖ Stewardship is through a local advisory committee consisting of members from the watershed communities, local partner organizations, and state and federal agencies
- ❖ Wild and Scenic Rivers status, with the help of NPS funding, encourages additional federal, state, local, and private funding to implement the Stewardship Plan
- ❖ NPS reviews all federally funded projects to assure that the river's outstanding resources are protected

### **What doesn't a Partnership Wild and Scenic River designation do?**

- ❖ Does not put land under federal control
- ❖ Does not require public access to private land
- ❖ Does not force any changes in local land-use decision-making
- ❖ Does not create new federal permits or regulations
- ❖ Does not change any existing land uses
- ❖ Does not bar access to or use of the river or watershed lands
- ❖ Does not affect hunting and fishing laws

### **What happens when the Study and Stewardship Plan are complete?**

Each watershed community will be asked to pass a resolution supporting the Wild and Scenic Rivers designation of seven rivers of the Wood-Pawcatuck watershed by Congress. Each watershed community will also consider whether and how to adopt the Stewardship Plan. The National Park Service will prepare and submit a Study Report to Congress that presents findings about the qualities making the rivers of the Wood-Pawcatuck watershed eligible for designation as a Partnership Wild and Scenic River under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. Our congressional delegates will introduce a bill into Congress that amends the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act to include the rivers of the Wood-Pawcatuck watershed. Regardless of the river designation decision by communities or Congress, the stewardship plan has value as a coordinated plan of action to protect important watershed resources.

### **What financial or other obligations are required of towns by supporting river designation?**

The first step in supporting river designation is development and community adoption of a watershed stewardship plan, which includes suggestions intended to protect or enhance resources and water quality. No financial commitment is required from communities to support river designation or to adopt a stewardship plan. If a river is designated, each town supporting designation would appoint members to serve on a watershed stewardship advisory committee (similar in structure to the current Study Committee).

### **How will the Stewardship Plan be managed by the advisory committee?**

The advisory committee will receive funding from NPS to implement the stewardship plan and manage any projects. The committee will conduct river restoration projects, continue to raise awareness of river values, monitor the status of the designated rivers and revise management plans as warranted.

**How do I find out more information?** More information is available on the Wood-Pawcatuck Wild and Scenic Rivers Study Committee's website: <http://WPWildRivers.org>. Questions and comments can be emailed to the Study Coordinator at [WPWildRivers@wpwa.org](mailto:WPWildRivers@wpwa.org).