

DEERFIELD RIVER WILD & SCENIC: Fact Sheet



What is “Wild and Scenic”?

In 1968, the U.S. Congress passed the “National Wild and Scenic Rivers Act” which made it the policy of the United States that certain selected rivers of the Nation, and their immediate environments, that possess outstandingly remarkable scenic, recreational, geologic, fish and wildlife, historic, cultural or other similar values, should be protected in free-flowing condition for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations.

Why is the Deerfield River significant?

The Deerfield River is a unique recreational and natural resource that runs for 76 miles from southern Vermont through northwestern Massachusetts to the Connecticut River, traversing the beautiful Green Mountain National Forest, Berkshire Mountains, and Pioneer Valley hill towns. With rapids from Class II-V, it offers perhaps the best whitewater boating and rafting in Massachusetts. It is also an excellent trout fishery, with some of the best dry-fly fishing for wild trout in the East. The historically significant Mohawk Trail ran along the river and was a principal Native American travel route. Several tributaries, such as Cold River and Bog and Gulf Brooks, are wild free-flowing rivers. Multiple segments of the Deerfield River were identified on the National Rivers Inventory as having “outstandingly remarkable” values, and eligible for National Wild and Scenic Rivers designation.

How is a River Designated as a National Wild & Scenic River?

First, local communities along the river demonstrate support for the concept of a feasibility study. Then, Congress passes legislation authorizing a study. The National Park Service funds and conducts the study in close consultation and partnership with property owners, local and state governments, and other organizations with a stake in the future of the Deerfield River. A steering committee with representatives from local interests assists with the feasibility study, to determine that the river is eligible, feasible for designation, and that it is locally desirable for it to become designated. Each watershed community will consider whether and how to adopt the voluntary, locally-developed watershed stewardship plan. Each watershed community will consider and vote on whether to petition Congress that the river be designated as a Partnership Wild and Scenic River. Legislation authorizing a Wild and Scenic River designation is then passed by Congress and signed by the President.

How will my town benefit if this designation occurs?

Such a designation would likely bring federal technical and financial resources to help enhance and protect the river. Some studies have shown that there is an economic benefit to communities that value their rivers and promote them as a recreational tourist destination.

What is a Partnership Wild and Scenic River?

Partnership Wild and Scenic Rivers predominantly flow through private, municipal, or state lands, with little or no federal land ownership. Partnership Wild and Scenic Rivers are administered by the Secretary of the Interior through the National Park Service in partnership with local governments and non-governmental organizations. Communities protect their Partnership Wild and Scenic Rivers and related resources through a collaborative approach, often supported by cooperative agreements with the National Park Service. There are 15 Partnership Wild and Scenic Rivers in the Northeast U.S.

How can federal Partnership Rivers technical and financial resources help?

Partnership Wild and Scenic Rivers receive federal financial assistance, recently averaging around \$220,000 per year. The Westfield River Wild and Scenic Committee, for example, offers grants and technical assistance to individuals, communities, and organizations to help support river stewardship:

- Riparian Conservation Grants assist with up-front costs leading to long-term protection of land along the river.
- Community Grants are available to each of the Wild & Scenic communities and conservation partners to support river conservation efforts. Examples include riverfront road and bridge projects, improvement of fish habitat, water quality assessment, and plant and wildlife inventories.
- The Committee reviews and provides technical assistance to projects along the river under the National Wild & Scenic Rivers Act to help ensure they do not harm the values for which a river was designated.



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 or local ordinances
- Does not create new federal permits or regulations
- Does not change any existing land uses
- Does not prevent access to or use of the river or watershed lands
- Does not affect hunting and fishing laws

How does a designation affect my land and property rights?

It does not. Respect for private property rights and current land uses are fundamental components of long-term support for river protection.

Would a National Wild and Scenic River designation “federalize” the Deerfield River, resulting in federal control of a corridor along the rivers?

No. There is no authority for federal land use control associated with a Wild and Scenic designation. Town governments would continue their primary role in establishing and enforcing land-use requirements.

What financial or other obligations are required by supporting river designation?

The first step in supporting river designation is development and adoption of a watershed stewardship plan, which includes voluntary recommendations 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 local advisory committee (similar in structure to the current Study Committee) that would coordinate future stewardship plan implementation projects and raise awareness of river issues to help protect river values.



Won't the dams on the Deerfield River disqualify it from Wild and Scenic designation?

No. There are free-flowing segments of the Deerfield River and its tributaries. For dammed segments, flowing sections without impoundments may be eligible, if the dams provide reliable flows to maintain wild and scenic values. For example, the 17 miles of free-flowing river below Fife Brook Dam are heavily used for extended white-water rafting trips.

What are some nearby examples of designated Wild and Scenic Rivers?

Westfield, Assabet, and Concord Rivers (MA); Sudbury, Upper Missisquoi, and Trout Rivers (VT); Nashua and Lamprey Rivers (NH); Farmington River (CT) For a complete list, visit www.rivers.gov

Testimonials from the Westfield River in Massachusetts:

The Westfield River recently celebrated the 25th anniversary of Wild & Scenic designation. This designation has been a very positive experience for the Town of Becket. When the idea was first introduced in the 1990's, there was some opposition and fear about how the designation might change the way in which our community interacts with the river and indeed it has. The designation helped community members embrace what was unique and extraordinary about our river. It helped educate the community, introducing concepts and practical steps each of us can take to safeguard it. The Wild & Scenic committee organized after school and library programs, lectures and workdays to encourage river stewardship. The committee continues to foster a deep understanding of our impact on the river corridor. In addition, it has provided our community with grants for a variety of projects our town has undertaken along the river corridor. The designation enjoys enthusiastic support throughout the town of Becket. - Michael Wolski, Becket Resident, Fine Arts Painter

I have had the pleasure of being the Wild & Scenic Westfield River Committees Volunteer and Project coordinator for over eleven years. Over the years I have seen the ten communities we serve, even those who at first questioned the designation, embrace and applaud the committees exciting programs and restoration projects. Over three hundred volunteers spend innumerable hours learning about, enhancing, and protecting the Westfield River and its watershed. I emphatically support and encourage other communities and river systems move towards designation. To have a dedicated group looking out for and prioritizing river health, as well as the funding to encourage local stewardship and riparian enhancements, makes all the difference. Preserving something is far easier and less costly than trying to bring it back once it has been degraded. Designation empowers communities to protect and enhance their water resources. - Meredyth Babcock, Volunteer and Projects coordinator, Wild & Scenic Westfield River Committee

The Wild & Scenic designation has been a great boon to the river and the surrounding area. I am in a singular position as manager of the hiking trail to the first stone arched railroad bridges built in America, along the West Branch of the Westfield River. As the most outstandingly remarkable historic feature of the watershed, these bridges have a symbiotic relationship with the river. The Keystone Arch Bridges helped to raise the status of the river during the designation process, and in return, the designation has made it easier to gain funding for the Arches and the trail. Most recently and significantly is a National Historic Landmark Nomination, the highest such status, funded with \$35,000.00 by the Westfield River Wild & Scenic Committee, which wouldn't even exist without the W&S designation. The Arches have been named to the 1,000 Great Places in MA list as well as the 10 Most Endangered Historic Resources in MA list, bringing much needed attention to the entire area and it's riveting history. It's just a great pattern of spiraling environmental and historic awareness and improvement. - Dave Pierce, President, Friends of the Keystone Arches, Inc