

## 'Wild and Scenic' designation sought for rivers

This year at Annual Town Meeting, voters in nine Massachusetts riverfront communities will take up the topic of the Nashua, Squannacook, and Nissitissit 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 Nissitissit 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, Nissitissit, 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 visit [www.WildandScenicNashuaRivers.org](http://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 Nissitissit 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".

**What are the benefits of designation?** If 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 happens after the Town Meeting vote?** The nine Massachusetts communities involved in the Study, that adjoin the segments of the Nashua, Nissitissit, 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.