

US EPA ARCHIVE DOCUMENT

American Heritage Rivers Cover Sheet for Nomination Packet

To be considered, nomination packets must be received by 7:00 p.m. Eastern Standard Time on December 10, 1997.

Mail your completed nomination packet to:

American Heritage Rivers
Executive Office of the President
Old Executive Office Building, Room 360
Washington, DC 20502

Superfund Records Center

SITE: Centredale

BREAK: 17-7

OTHER: 490404

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12/10/97
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Or fax to: (202) 456-6546

Or e-mail to: See instructions on American Heritage Rivers
web site at <http://www.epa.gov/rivers>

1. Name of Proposed American Heritage River: Blackstone and Woonasquatucket Rivers
The Providence Plan, MA Audubon Society, Blackstone River
2. Nominating Organization(s): Watershed Association, Blackstone Valley Tourism Council
and the Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce
3. Primary Point of Contact: Jane B. Sherman
Title: Woonasquatucket River Greenway Project Director

Organization: The Providence Plan

Street Address: 56 Pine Street, Suite 3B

City: Providence State: RI ZIP: 02903

Phone: Work: 401-455-8880 Home: 401-861-3313 FAX: 401-331-6840

4. Certification and Signature of Primary Point of Contact:

To the best of my knowledge, the information contained in this nomination packet is accurate.

Name of Contact (print): Jane B. Sherman

Title (print): Woonasquatucket River Greenway Project Director

Signature and Date: Jane B. Sherman December 5, 1997



SDMS DocID

490404

Limit nominations to 15 pages of 10-point text or larger, using one-inch margins, excluding letters of endorsement of the nominated area. Letters of endorsement should include names, addresses, and phone numbers of the supporters. Letters of support should also indicate the level of support to be given to the American Heritage River plan of action by the individual or organization writing the letter. Letters of endorsement must be included in the nomination packet; letters of endorsement sent separately will not be considered. Due to constraints on the review and selection process, additional materials, such as videos, photographs and plans, will not be accepted; however, photographs may be embedded in the text if the total length does not exceed 15 pages.

Facsimile (FAX) of nomination packets will be accepted. Fax to (202) 456-6546.

Nomination packets may be submitted electronically. See instructions on the American Heritage Rivers web site at <http://www.epa.gov/rivers>.

If faxing or sending electronically, please also complete and mail the cover sheet along with any letters of endorsement.

The nomination packet must be received by 7:00 p.m. Eastern Standard Time on December 10, 1997.

Information supplied in the nomination packet will be used to determine eligibility for American Heritage Rivers designation and is required to receive program benefits.

Estimated burden for preparing this application is 32 hours per response. If you have comments on this burden estimate, contact American Heritage Rivers c/o Council on Environmental Quality, Executive Office of the President, Old Executive Office Building, Room 460, Washington, D.C. 20502. Information supplied in the nomination packet is public and may not be held confidential. An agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number.

BLACKSTONE - WOONASQUATUCKET AMERICAN HERITAGE RIVER APPLICATION

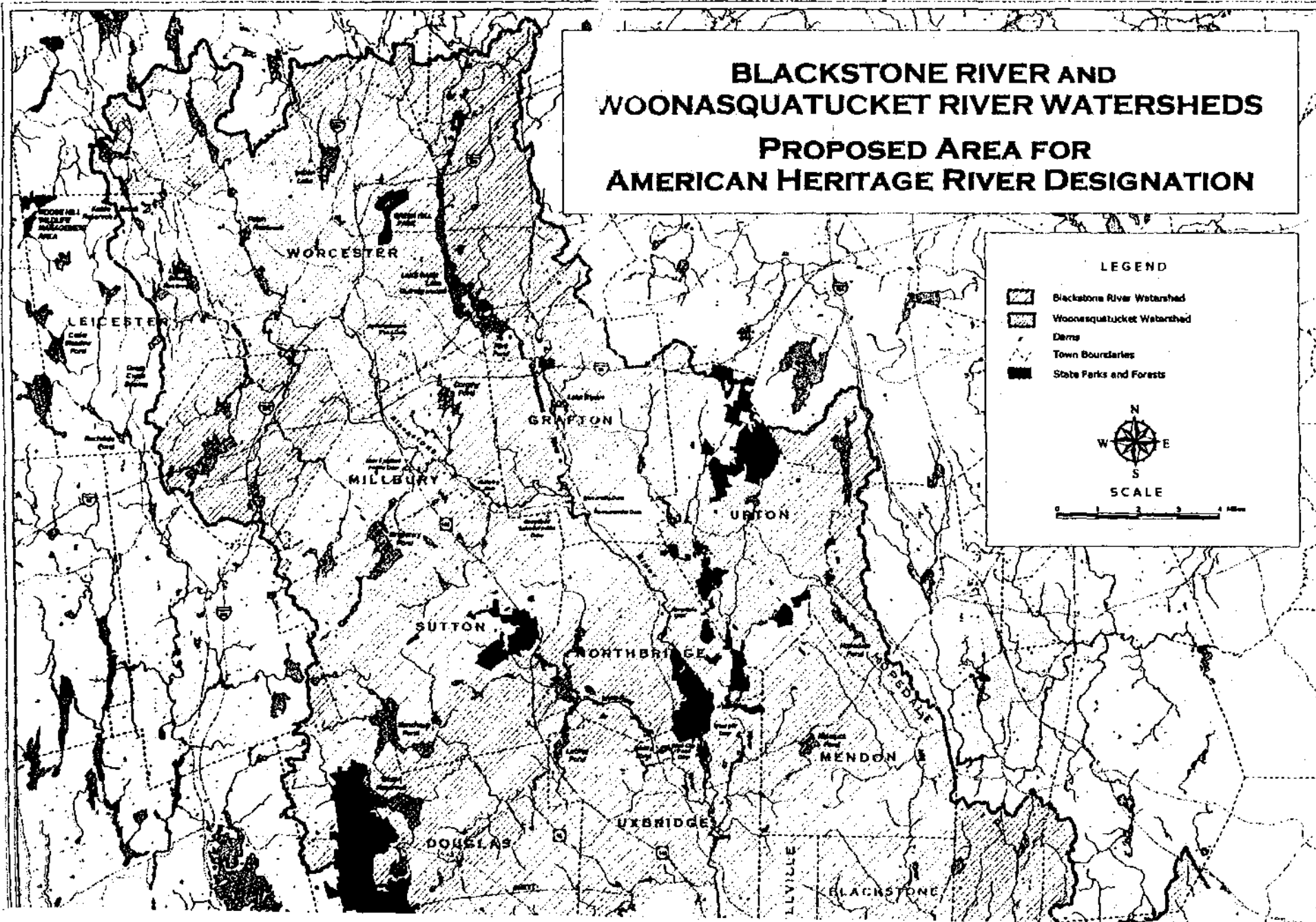
Introduction

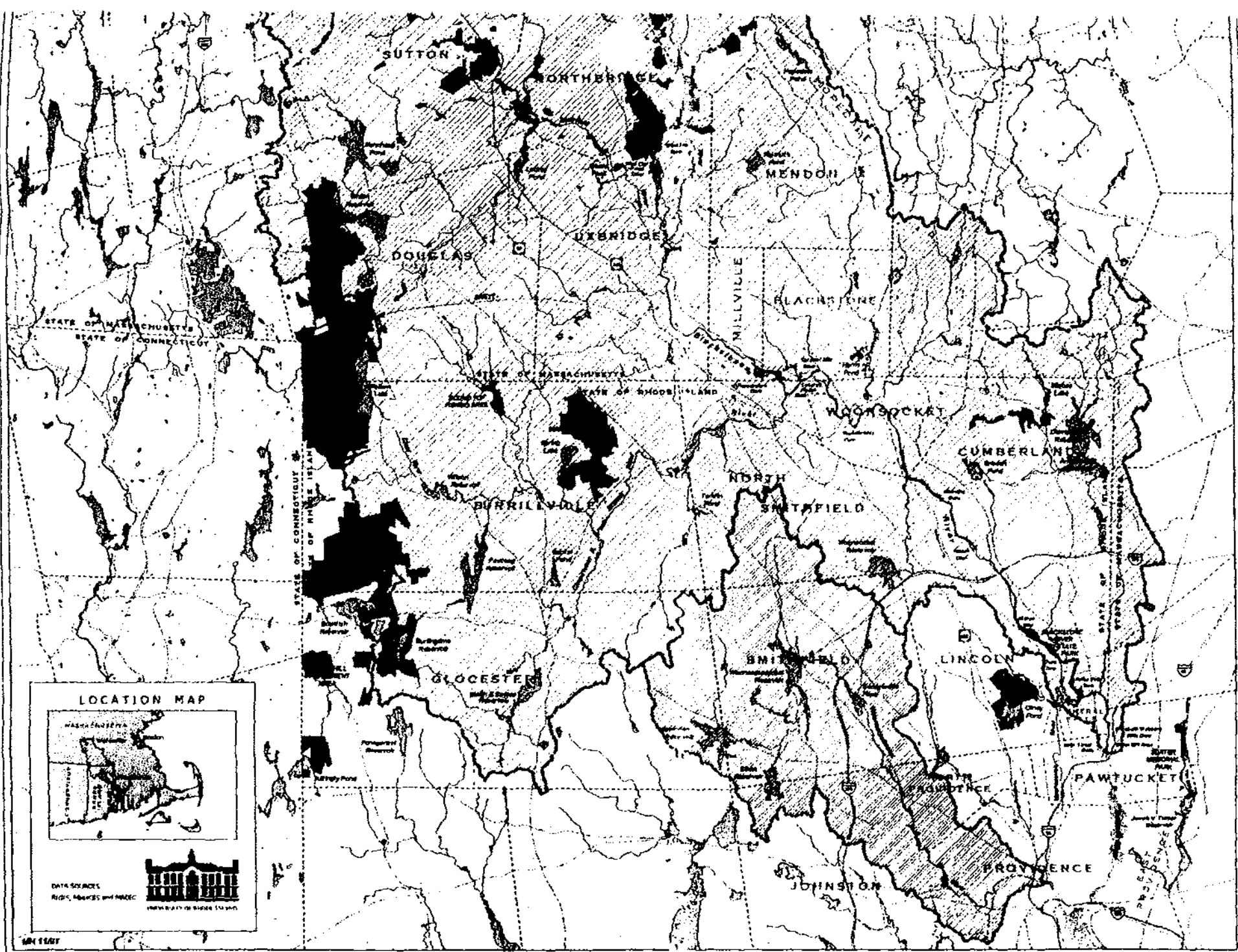
The Blackstone-Woonasquatucket Heritage River Area tells the story of people at work. It is the story of America's transformation from an agrarian society to one of manufacturing. It is the story of families at work on farms and in factories, of waves of immigrants, of entrepreneurs, of builders of roads, canals, and railroads. It is the story of innovation, boom, collapse, and recovery. In particular, it tells a dynamic, graphic story of Man and Nature: how natural and human resources can be wisely harnessed and cherished; how costly is their thoughtless abuse; and how essential their rehabilitation. The Blackstone-Woonasquatucket region contains thousands of buildings and whole landscapes which represent the history of the American Industrial Revolution and the complex economic and social relationships of the people who lived and worked here, making it one of the Nation's richest and best preserved repositories of landscapes, structures and sites that recall a neglected era of the American past: the Age of Industry. This river system powered the factories and was the backbone for settlement and development of this region from the 1600s to the 1900s. Here is the "Birthplace of the American Industrial Revolution."

The story does not stop there. The citizens of the 26 communities that make up the Blackstone-Woonasquatucket Heritage River Area are convinced that preserving key natural and historic landscapes enhances and protects the very resources, shared throughout the region, that are vital to the health of not only the region's environment, but are vital to its economy as well. Ambitious plans are in place to protect these precious resources and to restore the economic base to this region that was once the very heart of this nation's soul. The groundwork has been laid. There is tremendous energy from state and local officials. But more importantly, there is a proven, deep desire and commitment from the citizens of the Blackstone-Woonasquatucket region to implement those plans and create a healthy environment for generations to come. However, the obstacles that are the legacy of the region's industrial past are so overwhelming that, to effectively achieve their goals, a united federal, state and local effort is needed. Approval of this American Heritage River nomination will recognize the significant achievements these communities have already made. It will be a declaration that their aspirations are not misdirected. It will demonstrate for the entire nation that urban rivers are worth saving - that they have enormous untapped potential. Most importantly, designation will help to focus public attention on this vital river system and assure that available resources of technical and financial support will benefit the entire region.



BLACKSTONE RIVER AND WOONASQUATUCKET RIVER WATERSHEDS PROPOSED AREA FOR AMERICAN HERITAGE RIVER DESIGNATION





1. Description of the American Heritage River Area

The Blackstone-Woonasquatucket Heritage River Area is comprised of two connected and interrelated sections: the entire lengths and watersheds of the Blackstone and Woonasquatucket Rivers, which flow into Providence Harbor and meet to form the head of Narragansett Bay. The combined area includes the 60 miles of the two rivers, 26 communities in two states, over 450,000 acres, and serves one million people. The two river areas present an extraordinary range of environmental conditions: from pristine rural landscapes to densely populated inner-city neighborhoods and the historic central business districts of Worcester and Providence, the second and third largest cities in New England. Along these rivers nationally significant historic districts reveal the 19th century transition from farm to factory and the rise of urban communities whose immigrant residents were drawn from a wide diversity of foreign lands. More than a century of manufacturing polluted the rivers, left industrial toxins embedded in river-bottom silt, and degraded wildlife habitat. During much of the 20th century, communities abandoned their riverfronts. Today, through efforts from local, state and federal groups, water quality is improving dramatically, historical and natural resources are being preserved, neighborhoods are being rejuvenated, and the rivers are being reclaimed as community assets. Although conditions are improving, much more needs to be done.



The Blackstone River with its headwaters in Worcester, Massachusetts, flows 46 miles southeast, becoming the Seekonk River just south of Pawtucket Falls before entering Narragansett Bay. The Woonasquatucket River gathers its headwaters in the Town of North Smithfield, Rhode Island, then flows through the towns of Johnston and North Providence and neighborhoods in the northwestern section of the City of Providence before making a grand entry into Water Place Park in Providence's Old Harbor district.

About 1/2 mile before the Woonasquatucket reaches Providence Harbor, it is joined by the smaller Moshassuck River, becoming the Providence River and flowing into Narragansett Bay.

The most prominent topographic feature of the Blackstone-Woonasquatucket Heritage River Area is the Blackstone River and the valley it cut into the land. Along its 46-mile length the river drops a significant 438 feet, greater in fact than the fall of the Colorado River through the Grand Canyon. From its headwaters in North Smithfield, the Woonasquatucket flows 14 miles to Providence Harbor, dropping over 100 feet in its descent. The power of these falling waters was once harnessed by more than 45 dams which impounded water for the many mills constructed along these waterways. Over time, these mill ponds created marsh and wetlands that are now an integral part of the region's natural ecosystem. An unfortunate legacy of the region's manufacturing history is reduced water quality. During the factories' heyday, the rivers provided not only power but also a convenient and cheap way to dispose of industrial waste. It was truly said you could tell what color textiles were being dyed on a given day just by looking at the riverwater downstream. Decades of ill-use severely damaged natural habitats and deposited industrial pollutants which remain imbedded in riverbottom silt, especially behind the remaining dams.

While mill complexes were conveniently located near the rivers, hilltop and crossroad villages and farms were settled along the Valley's ridges and upland areas. The day-to-day agrarian and mercantile activities of early America are still reflected in these landscapes. Providence's Old Harbor was a seafaring hub of China trade in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Its merchants were responsible for financing early industrialization and for the development of improved transportation systems: roadways, the Blackstone Canal, and the Providence & Worcester Railroad. These improved transportation systems, most notably the Blackstone Canal, are responsible for transforming the crossroads village of Worcester into the largest inland seaport and manufacturing city of the 19th century. Diverse ethnic neighborhoods with distinctive triple-decker tenement housing and cultural nuances, were built around the many mills and flourished in the urban centers of Providence and Worcester. For several decades now, most factories in the area have been idle and these neighborhoods, as well as the mill villages along the rivers, have suffered from disinvestment and abandonment.

Today the historic patterns of land settlement are blurring. The region's traditional settlement patterns are disappearing as residential sprawl takes over former farmland and sections of early highways become commercial strips. Whole inner-city neighborhoods lie abandoned with buildings boarded up, or are replaced by large concentrations of public housing. Some manufacturing continues in historic mills while other mills have been recycled for office or residential use, abandoned, or demolished in favor of modern industrial and office parks located with convenient access to major highways, which threaten to replace the river corridor as the region's primary location for jobs and economic development.

2. Notable Resource Qualities in the Heritage River Area

The Blackstone-Woonasquatucket Heritage River Area contains an abundance of unique historic, cultural, and natural resources that offer special opportunities for exploring America's geologic, social, and industrial beginnings. It is a region whose long and nationally pivotal history is still visible through its historic buildings and landscapes and accessible through the living memory of its residents. While the area boasts many individually significant historic and natural landmarks, its most significant resource is its "wholeness;" the unique survival of an unparalleled concentration of integrated historic, cultural, and natural resources that can be made accessible to the public by preservation, interpretation, and strategic development. Several pristine natural areas exist where one can explore and discover the very geological origins of the region - how these lands were formed, and what made the region so suitable for settlement. Over 5,000 properties in the region are listed on the National Register of Historic Places, and thousands more are eligible for listing. Slater Mill National Historic Landmark in Pawtucket, RI, is the most noted historic structure in the region. It was here on the banks of the Blackstone River in 1790 that Samuel Slater built the first water-powered cotton spinning mill in the United States. Slater's 1793 mill is one of the few wooden textile mills still in existence. Preserved and restored, it stands as part of a museum complex which interprets the region's and America's industrial history. In addition to its industrial heritage, the region is also known for its leadership in espousing religious freedom. Roger Williams National Memorial in Providence, RI, commemorates the life and work of Roger Williams, who founded Providence in 1636 in order to establish the right to freedom of conscience.

Natural Resources:

The natural and built environments of the Blackstone-Woonasquatucket Heritage River Area are inextricably linked. This region is a rich patchwork of natural resources, including forests, meadows, wetlands, rivers and tributaries. Focusing public attention on efforts to combine historic preservation and environmental recovery makes this special landscape important to residents. The rivers and their watersheds have provided a rich habitat for flora, fish and wildlife, served as an invaluable food source to the first settlers in the region, powered the development of water-driven technology, borne the brunt of America's industrialization, and have slowly and silently managed a guarded recovery. Dams, canals and mills have altered the flow and hydrology of the rivers; timber harvests, settlement patterns, quarrying and agriculture have reshaped the land. Among the greatest concerns today are setbacks to our slowly rebounding river system, the loss of traditional landscapes, and the fragmentation of important natural habitats. The region's legacy of intense development left its waters polluted and their courses forever altered. Industrial activity and accompanying settlement left the rivers severely polluted with untreated sewage, detergents, solvents, heavy metals and other industrial wastes. While toxic sediments trapped behind industrial-era dams continue to plague the long term health of the rivers, considerable headway in water quality improvement has been made as a result of the Clean Water Act and other significant environmental efforts. Measurable signs of recovery are encouraging, but more remains to be done. Too many to mention in this context, a few examples of the area's natural resources must suffice:

- Large lakes and man-made reservoirs provide important sources of drinking water for the region. The upper Woonasquatucket contains the Stillwater and Woonsocket Reservoirs which are sources for communities in Rhode Island, while Lake Quinsigamond in Worcester and the Whitinsville Reservoir in Northbridge, MA are significant sources for Massachusetts communities. Misco Spring in Mendon, MA is the site of a natural spring and 100-year old water bottling operation.
- Large wetland areas provide habitat for resident (nesting) and migrating waterfowl, as do numerous other smaller lakes, impoundment's, smaller streams, and ponds, located throughout the region. Examples include the 100+

acre Coes Pond in Worcester, MA, Nipsachuck Swamp in Smithfield, RI and the 250+ acres of the Lonsdale Marshes in Lincoln, RI; the 277-acre Broad Meadow Brook Wildlife Sanctuary in Worcester, MA is one of the largest urban wildlife preserve in New England, containing (among others) the largest number of butterfly species of all the Massachusetts Audubon's sanctuaries; Rice City Pond, in Uxbridge, MA is an exceptional waterfowl observation site, although the pond itself is still one of the most polluted sections of the Blackstone River.

- The forests of Douglas, MA, western Burrillville and Glocester, RI, and Upton, MA contain extensive old growth stands, some of which have remained pristine since the turn of the century. The Rhode Island portion of the Douglas State Forest is the largest contiguous forest in the state. The RI North/South Trail is now being developed through this area to connect to the Mid-state Trail traversing the Douglas State Forest in Massachusetts.
- Lime Rock section of Lincoln, RI contains the area's only significant and one of only a few outcroppings of limestone in eastern New England. Quarried since the mid 1600s, the site is now host to one of the area's largest concentrations of rare plants associated with the underlying calcareous bedrock, such as the purple-stemmed cliffbrake, the walking fern and the showy orchid.
- The sheer granite cliffs of Purgatory Chasm, Sutton, MA and the large granite outcroppings and caves of Lookout Rock in Northbridge, MA, provide visitors with a unique chance to explore these geologic formations that were formed by the receding glacier thousands of years ago.
- Blackstone Gorge on the Massachusetts/Rhode Island border is over 150 acres of scenic beauty and the only remaining natural area on the Blackstone River. Below a rolling dam, the river narrows into a natural gorge and drops 20 feet through a rocky channel while cliffs tower more than 100 feet over the water. Just below the gorge is the confluence of the Branch and Blackstone Rivers.
- The region is a main flyway for migratory birds and waterfowl. The many wetlands, streams, and ponds provide substantive food and shelter for many migrating species.
- Over 60 threatened and endangered wildlife species are present in the region, and include the blue-spotted salamander, spotted turtle, wood turtle and the eastern box turtle. There are also over 100 species of rare and/or protected plants identified and listed by the Departments of Environmental Management for Massachusetts and Rhode Island, and in the Natural Resources Inventory and Assessment for the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor.
- Bogs, farmlands, orchards, waterfalls, springs, ledges, vernal pools and marshes all combine to provide habitat for a diverse society of plants and wildlife, as well as wonderful recreational and educational opportunities.

Both states of Rhode Island and Massachusetts have legislation to protect wildlife along the riverways, but there is a need to concentrate protection efforts on defending the borders of large parks, conservation areas, and wildlife management areas which now provide the necessary territory and corridor mobility to support a diversity of species. At the local level, towns are pursuing acquisition programs that expand protected areas, consolidate isolated open spaces into continuous corridors and greenways, and control development patterns with respect to location as well as size.

Historic Resources

The region's heritage is revealed in its many historic structures and landscapes found in dozens of mill villages, rural areas and urban centers. The State of Rhode Island has developed Historic Preservation Reports for each community in the state and an Historic Resources Inventory, which includes the Blackstone watershed communities in Massachusetts and Rhode Island, has been undertaken. A few outstanding examples include:

- Transportation systems unified the Blackstone Valley economically and culturally and linked local industry with national markets. There are many intact sections of the Blackstone Canal (Providence to Worcester, 1828) and its towpath, several which have been restored for recreational use. The Old Louisquiset Pike (1805-1806), built by hand by local residents, and the North Gate Tollhouse (1807) was one of the earliest constructed roads in the region. A large portion of the road remains intact, as well as the stone boundary walls and the Tollhouse. The Providence & Worcester Railroad (1847) which replaced the Blackstone Canal as the main transportation link for freight and passengers, still operates today almost exclusively for freight with occasional passenger excursions.

The associated bridges and remaining depots are considered to be some of the finest examples of engineering practices of the time.

- The rich architectural heritage of the area is diverse and well-preserved. Eighteenth-century merchants and nineteenth-century industrialists could afford to live in mansions and endow public buildings, but there are also wonderful examples of modest vernacular structures that formed a much larger part of the built environment of the region. The John Brown House, Providence (1786-1788), Hearthside, Lincoln, RI (1810) with its distinctive ogee-curved gable ends, the Asa Waters Mansion, Millbury, MA (1826), and the Stone House, Woonsocket, RI (1835) are just a few examples of the grand mansions. There is an abundance of both wood and brick mill-worker housing, still in use as residences today, located adjacent to their associated mills which show the progression in development and settlement patterns over a span of more than 150 years.

Whole mill villages have survived which show how the everyday life of mill workers was governed by the mill owners. The change from a society where work and time was dictated by nature to one that was ordered by the tolling of the factory bell is ever so clearly evident in these communities. Many of these villages are now National Register Districts or have instituted Historic District Zoning to protect, preserve and restore this nationally significant change in society. Examples of the more than 150 intact villages in Rhode Island are Georgiaville, Greystone, Ashton, Albion, Lonsdale, Manton, Allendale, Manville, Slatersville, etc.; and in Massachusetts there exists Rockdale, Whitinsville, Hopedale, Manchaug, Bramanville, Upton, Armory, etc.. While many of these villages have been protected, others are threatened by urban blight, abandonment, or loss of village character from suburban sprawl.

- Agriculture was the mainstay of early settlers to the region, and is still in evidence today. A few large farms have been protected, such as Waters Farm and Freegrace Marble Farm in Sutton, MA, and Chase Farm in Lincoln, RI. The opportunity exists to broaden the scope of educational and interpretive activities and to enhance these farms to create a living-history experience. There are a few large farms that are still in operation, but several more are in danger of being converted to large development tracts.
- Early seats of governmental activity and civic buildings that are remarkable in their architecture and rich in their history, play an integral part in telling the story of early America's struggle for religious freedom, social justice, and political autonomy. Some examples are the Chestnut Hill Meeting House, Millville, MA (1769), Worcester City Hall (1898), Friends Meeting Houses located throughout the region, the Old State House in Providence (1762), Masonic Building and Academy in Uxbridge, MA (1819), and the Brick Schoolhouse, Providence (1767).
- Commercial buildings are testaments to the entrepreneurial skills that provided goods and services and drove the region's early economy. A few prime examples of well-preserved resources are: the Grafton Inn, Grafton, MA (1805); Slatersville Commercial buildings, North Smithfield, RI (1828); E.N. Jenckes Store, East Douglas, MA (1833); Providence's Market House (1773); the Brick Bank, Mendon, MA (1825); Job Armstrong Store, Chepachet, RI (1827); and many more.

Cultural Resources:

The Blackstone-Woonasquatucket Heritage River Area has been populated for over ten thousand years. Bands of Native Americans included the Nipmuc, Wampanoag and Narragansett tribes which inhabited the region at the time of the first white settlements, and many of their descendants still live here today. During the Industrial Revolution in the 19th century, waves of immigrants brought diversity to the region. Each new group formed ethnic enclaves to preserve its language, religion and traditions in the New World. Today, immigrating groups continue to settle in the region, ever broadening the opportunity for creating cultural awareness and strengthening personal tolerances. This diversity can be experienced in the region's churches, neighborhoods, cultural centers and festivals. Film, theatre, educational programming, food, dance and festivals highlight and preserve the cultural diversity and creates a lively, living landscape. Examples of cultural resources are:

- Many museums throughout the area celebrate different aspects of the region's culture: The Museum of Work and Culture, Woonsocket, RI is dedicated to the history of labor and the battle for cultural survival; The Rhode Island School of Design's Museum of Art features a wide variety of art from world-renown artists, local artisans and historical artifacts; The Rhode Island Children's Museum is a hands-on experience for children of all ages; The

Worcester Arts Museum, the Worcester Historical Museum, and many more smaller museums throughout the region offer a wide variety of experiences.

- Heritage Harbor in Providence is a consortium of thirteen mainstream and minority museums joining together to rehabilitate a decommissioned "brownfield" power plant into a permanent home for their exhibits. By the year 2010, the institution will contain 130,000 square feet of museum space and more than 100,000 square feet of library and archive space.
- A wide variety of galleries showcase local and regional talent. The City of Providence sponsors a Gallery Night every third Thursday year-round, where trolleys transport the public around the City to almost two dozen sites, free of charge.
- Ethnic festivals and events are held throughout the year around the region, some celebrating a specific ethnic group, others combining several communities in a celebration of diversity.
- Traditional music and dance are celebrated and taught at several area theaters. The Blackstone River Theatre sponsors events and workshops, and many more groups teach their music and dance traditions.
- The rivers' connection with the area's culture is highlighted in many ways. Concerts, Civil War Camps and Re-enactments, Dance troupe performances, plays and art shows celebrating the river are held on the banks of the rivers. A recent, extraordinary, cultural resource is an environmental work of art titled, "Water Fire" by local artist Barnaby Evans, in which bonfires burn in braziers located along the centerline of the Woonasquatucket River in Providence's Old Harbor. Through the summer and fall, the fires are accompanied by ethnic music and attended by 5,000-8,000 for each bi-weekly event.
- Local and traditional crafts are practiced, demonstrated, taught and sold throughout the region at schools, festivals, museums, and many times on the location of their original use. A few examples are Waters Farm where living history demonstrations in early agricultural practices can be seen, Slater Mill Historic Site offers spinning, dying and weaving demonstrations and classes, and Vaillancourt Folk Art employs local artisans to create handmade gifts. Many local groups hold fairs and festivals throughout the year, where their individual crafts are demonstrated and sold.

3. The Communities' Plan of Action

The 26 communities and the two states of the Blackstone-Woonasquatucket Heritage River Area have been extremely active in envisioning and planning for their future. As a result of local, state and federal initiatives, there was a recognized need to improve water quality, revitalize derelict urban neighborhoods, to improve local economies, and to preserve the region's historic integrity. Considering the damage to the environment that had occurred over the previous 175 years, the grand exodus of manufacturing in the region, and the general slump in the local economy, the task seemed monumental, the obstacles insurmountable. But the same vision, ingenuity and persistence that had begun America's second revolution - "the industrial revolution," once again took hold. Individuals are working to save historic buildings, local citizens are banding together to clean up sections of riverbank, town and city governments have begun planning processes to revitalize downtown areas and abandoned neighborhoods, and state and local governments are planning on a regional basis for economic development and recovery. These efforts have continued over the last twenty years, and from time-to-time, several federal agencies have assisted in various efforts. The time has come to pull all these groups and agencies together, to combine the available resources, and to give the local and regional efforts the impetus and coordination needed to be effectively and successfully completed.

A wide variety of professionally prepared plans have been completed. They share a common vision in which natural, cultural and historical resources are preserved within a greenway and recreation corridor. While the scale and immediate context of these plans vary considerably, all of them articulate clear connections between the need to protect and rehabilitate natural and historic resources and the potential for economic development through tourism, waterfront development, and "brownfield" redevelopment. Another common theme of all the plans is the problem of disinvestment and abandonment. Altogether, the projects proposed in these plans represent a very significant amount of work. Yet the accomplishments already completed and the formal commitments in place for future projects justify the communities' belief that these plans are realistic and do-able. It is noteworthy that none of these plans proposes new regulations for enforcing compliance with its terms, nor has ambitions of taking away privately owned land for public use. These plans all operate by voluntary participation among individuals and the strength of a popular shared vision for how to make a better community.

Local communities have recognized the need to develop innovative zoning and land-use policies in order to protect their resources and to provide a healthy environment for their citizens. Of the 26 communities in the Blackstone-Woonasquatucket Heritage River Area, 22 have in place comprehensive community plans, and four are in the process of developing them. These plans provide guidance for creative zoning, infrastructure development, environmental protection, recreational development (including provisions for open spaces), and economic revitalization and stabilization. All communities have active conservation commissions to oversee local environmental activities, and several communities have instituted local land trusts to protect those areas that are vital to the overall environmental well-being of the region. Many communities have instituted local historic district zoning and Historic Commissions to protect those resources that define the character of their community. Even with all these elements in place, all too often communities are faced with a shortage of technical expertise and fiscal resources to effectively carry out their visions.

Regional planning efforts have assisted the 26 communities of the Blackstone-Woonasquatucket Heritage River Area in developing and implementing their individual plans and projects. Over 20 years ago, separate groups in Lincoln, RI, Uxbridge, MA and elsewhere throughout the area, alarmed by the disappearance of historic buildings and by the poor condition of the river, began local efforts to clean up sections of the canal, river and to preserve key local sites. Their numbers grew and their energies strengthened, but there was a realization that local efforts alone could not overcome the years of abuse and neglect to the environment and historic resources. State and federal officials were called upon to help, and a full-scale effort was launched to preserve the area's historic resources and to assist in restoring its environmental integrity - to make the riverways vibrant again.

With a renewed sense of hope, both states and the communities in the region began to seriously examine the existing laws and regulations to see how they might be revised to address the myriad issues plaguing and threatening the very core of the area. Issues that had been previously ignored or "swept under the rug" because of the endless tangle of problems and regulations governing their remediation, were reexamined to see how they could be resolved through creative planning and organization. Communities were encouraged by the states to develop comprehensive community plans to address the issues in their localities, while the states themselves developed plans to address the broader, regional issues. The supporters of this application hope that the Blackstone-Woonasquatucket American Heritage River designation will provide a focus for federal agencies to assist in resolving and remediating the difficult issues that the region faces.

Local businesses, economic development corporations and civic groups, recognizing the need to think and act regionally, have joined together to develop regional committees and plans that address those issues overlapping town, county, and state boundaries.

In 1992, the Woonsocket Industrial Development Commission that serves communities in northern Rhode Island, developed a series of "Vision" boards to visually show how individual communities could restore their historic centers by using innovative landscaping and streetscape improvements. Planned as a tool that communities could utilize for obtaining funding for community redevelopment projects, the "Visions" impact on the communities and the region have far surpassed the results that were originally envisioned.



- Providence has relocated entire river segments, built new bridges, connected the City through the use of the canal, riverway and bikeway, a series of parks and community gardens, all connected to core retail and commercial districts.
- Worcester and the Blackstone Valley are undertaking a massive project that will connect the Massachusetts Turnpike with several major highways; this project is a model highway project that is using state of the art techniques to revive the river, restore historic resources and involve affected communities in decision-making. As a result, a major greenway will be developed, river quality will be improved, brownfield sites will be remediated and reused, a major visitor center will be built and economic commerce will be increased throughout the region.

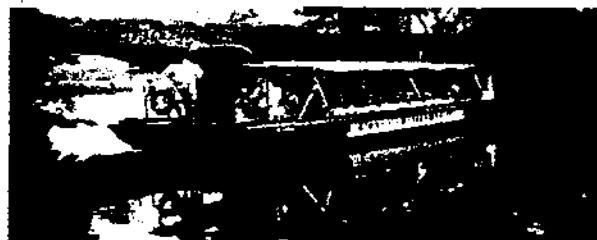
improved, brownfield sites will be remediated and reused, a major visitor center will be built and economic commerce will be increased throughout the region.

- The Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission is assisting with growth management scenarios and working with local communities, chambers of commerce and developers on guidelines for design, re-use of industrial sites and regional infrastructure programs.
- The Massachusetts Land Bank has also been involved in the Brownfields Redevelopment - most notably with the Draper Manufacturing Corporation site in Hopedale, and Fisherville Mill in Grafton, MA.

The tourism councils, chambers of commerce, and visitor and convention bureaus that service the Blackstone-Woonasquatucket region have virtually erased the state border by joining together to promote the region as a tourist destination. Regional initiatives include:

- The development of four major visitor centers and numerous smaller "visitor contact" locations where visitors can get information on area attractions;

The "Blackstone Valley Explorer" was built in partnership with public and private dollars and provides riverboat tours on rivers in the region; the Explorer has carried over 70,000 people in its five years since being built and provides environmental and historical



- The development of a regional information distribution system whereby the area's attraction brochures are collected at a central point and redistributed throughout the region;
- The publication of a quarterly "Calendar of Events" that is distributed through that system to highlight the region's array of cultural activities;
- A coordinated system of professionally produced photographic slides and promotional materials has been developed in order to promote the area to a world-wide audience;
- Special events have been jointly sponsored that showcase the entire region, including: the 1997 World's Canal Conference; Heritage Homecoming Days; and region-wide train, boat and bus excursions, bike rides, canoe races, and road races.

The States of Massachusetts and Rhode Island Departments of Environmental Management and Transportation have teamed together to implement several coordinated regional projects. Examples are:

- A north/south bikeway along the Blackstone River - construction of the first segments in both states is now underway, and when completed will consist of 46 miles of on- and off-road bikeway, greenways and parks, canoe launch sites, and historic and environmental interpretive sites, and will connect to the proposed Woonasquatucket bikeway and the existing East Bay Bikeway that now connects Providence and Bristol, Rhode Island.
- The first bi-state park at the Blackstone Gorge - 188 acres of this remarkable area will be preserved and developed into an environmental interpretive park complete with boat launch, walking and hiking trails, and interpretive signs.
- A coordinated system of signage and interpretive materials that allows visitors and residents to explore the many hidden treasures of the area and discover the many natural and historic resources.

Educational groups have banded together to coordinate programs throughout the region.

- Historic Massachusetts, Inc. has teamed up with local educators to develop a "teaching the teachers" program, an educational curriculum centered around the region's historic and natural resources.
- Massachusetts Audubon Society has teamed up with the Rhode Island organizations Friends of the Blackstone and the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council, and high schools in fourteen MA & RI communities to conduct water quality testing by students who then enter data into computer systems. They compare information and meet at an annual "environmental congress" among students and teachers.

- The Woonasquatucket Greenway Project has worked with the National Park Service to develop a "living map" highlighting communities and the watershed, the map is used in schools and in various neighborhood programs to educate inner-city youth about their watershed. They have also received a grant to have schools perform field trips, collect environmental data and develop a plan for improvements to the watershed.
- Web sites have been developed to highlight area businesses, historic, natural, and cultural attractions and provide a forum for educational materials.

Individually, towns have undertaken projects to protect their resources and have cooperated with regional and state organizations to implement broader plans. A few examples are:

- The Town of Northbridge, MA with assistance from the MA Audubon Society and the EPA has implemented a Toxic Diet Program to educate the general public about the effects of everyday products on the waterways. By identifying those products that have a negative effect and those that are "environmentally friendly," residents can make informed choices and put pressure on manufacturers to be more environmentally sensitive with their products. This project has resulted in a valley-wide program funded by the EPA and communities.
- The Village of Olneyville in Providence, RI has developed a plan to incorporate bikeway and pedestrian paths along the water's edge that incorporates historic mills and mill housing that will spur economic development, including an "ethnic marketplace" at the Atlantic Mills complex.
- The Town of Lincoln, RI has endeavored to preserve a two-mile section of the historic Great Road, the oldest continuously used transportation route in the area that began as a Native American trail and is now a scenic byway. The Town is spearheading the preservation and interpretation of historic structures and the development of a walking trail that will make these sites accessible to the general public.
- The Town of North Smithfield has developed a plan to preserve the historic village of Slatersville, the first planned mill village in the United States. Plans include the rehabilitation of the original rubblestone Slatersville Mill and reuse the factory as a place for incubator businesses; with restoration of the mill, the mill owners and Town also aim to preserve a stone-arch bridge and company-owned commercial buildings, and to develop interpretive signage along the waterways and around the Village's common.

The Cities of Worcester, Woonsocket, Central Falls, Pawtucket and Providence have aggressively attacked the urban problems of derelict neighborhoods, abandoned mills, river degradation and economic depression using a variety of creative and visionary tools and techniques.

The City of Worcester, Massachusetts, which contains the headwaters of the Blackstone River, has undertaken serious urban renewal projects in order to provide the economic infrastructure needed to revitalize its neighborhoods. Projects include: the recent opening of a new convention center; a multi-million dollar construction project of "Medical City" in the downtown area, an EPA National Model for brownfield redevelopment; rehabilitation of Historic Union Station (a National Register Listing) as a transportation hub; the connection of the area's main north/south highway, Route 146, to the main east/west artery, the Massachusetts Turnpike; the construction of the first segment of the Massachusetts portion of the Blackstone Bikeway; and, the planned development of a northern gateway visitor center for the Blackstone Valley. The City has implemented a program to identify and sign all rivers at their crossings, and to mark storm drains to identify those whose outflow is directly into waterways. The City is also exploring the possibility of daylighting streams and portions of rivers and the Blackstone Canal that were culverted or covered over in order to eliminate the odors of the open sewers they had become.

Worcester, along with Boston, is one of the two test case communities for the EPA's new stormwater regulations. Worcester was chosen, in part, for this designation due to its innovative local wetlands ordinance, which was the first such ordinance in New England to regulate development in parts under a "stormwater protection zone." In the past 20 years, Worcester, with assistance from state and federal funding sources, has completed over \$250 million in sewer improvements to separate combined sewer areas which serves to protect the Blackstone River. The most recent improvements were the separation of approximately 100 acres of combined sewer area in Downtown Worcester in association with the Medical City project.

Worcester is also noted for its aggressive brownfields cleanup program involving many historic sites. The City became the catalyst for the Central Massachusetts Economic Development Authority (CMEDA), which focuses on Brownfields Redevelopment in Central Massachusetts. Due to its success in Brownfields projects, Worcester is one of 40 communities short-listed for the EPA's "Showcase Communities" designation to be announced next year. In other environmental programs, the City has protected over 1,000 additional acres of open space in the past 10 years, and has embarked on an aggressive trails program. Worcester also spent in excess of \$75 million on a new water treatment plant which will result in improved drinking water, and subsequently, improved water quality to the Blackstone River. Worcester's \$100 million sewer plant, The Upper Blackstone Water Pollution Abatement District, has frequently been ranked as the second best sewerage facility in the country by the EPA. Worcester also boasts six watershed associations to augment its very active regional organizations such as the Massachusetts Audubon Society, Regional Environmental Council, Greater Worcester Land Trust, and the Blackstone Watershed Coalition.

Given Worcester's industrial legacy, with its many inventions in tool and die, shoe and wire manufacturing, etc., the City's newest legacy is truly an environmental legacy.

The City of Woonsocket, RI, once a thriving mill community with a heavy French-Canadian population, has seized upon its cultural and industrial legacy to bring its Main Street and ethnic neighborhoods back to life. The City instituted a Main Street 2000 program to be the catalyst for revitalization. Through this non-profit organization, many of the abandoned downtown storefronts and buildings have been rehabilitated to their former glory, and the downtown area has been developed as an historic riverfront retail center for the region, offering an array of specialty goods and services. Period street lighting, new traffic patterns, enterprise zones and refurbished mill housing have all contributed to a sense of renewed pride in community and a general boost in the economy. The City, working in conjunction with the Rhode Island Historical Society, has just opened a world-class museum in a refurbished mill, the Museum of Work and Culture. In its first month, over 4,000 visitors from across the country and Canada have been immersed in the story of immigration, mill life, and labor struggles. The City has turned degraded river front areas into parks with canoe launches, a riverboat landing, linear walkways and recreational fields. Annual river clean-ups and the employment of City-Year kids to conduct city-wide clean-ups have served to create a cleaner, safer city. Local groups are working alongside City officials to: restore the remaining four story, 1926 Stadium Theater; to highlight the French Canadian heritage through the Franco-American Jubile Association; and to create recreation space through schools and fraternal organizations.

The City of Central Falls, RI, is a compact, densely populated, and ethnic city of one square mile. Its problems are many and its resources are scarce. However, there is no shortage of community pride and spirit, and efforts are well underway to revitalize its economy. Since 1995, the City has been the recipient of Community Development Block Grant funding, portions of which have been used to develop a linear park and riverwalk with recreational fields known as Pierce Park and Riverwalk. Utilizing \$50,000 in Brownfield Economic Redevelopment Funds, the City is currently clearing a burned-out mill site adjacent to the Blackstone River, and will develop a recreational area, including a footbridge to the Blackstone River Island, acquired from the State of Rhode Island in 1996 for nature trails and picnic areas. Another project the City is currently planning in conjunction with tourism agencies and a major college, is to renovate an old mill building into a regional environmental education center on the banks of the Blackstone River. The "Central Falls Landing - Blackstone Valley Community Science and Technology Center" complex will consist of a multi-use facility that will serve as an economic stimulus for the City by offering educational, aquatic recreational and commercial activity for City residents and visitors. This is an ambitious plan that will perhaps require outside technical expertise and resources. However, this plan has the potential to serve a regional audience and is worthy of a combined regional effort.

The City of Pawtucket, RI, home to the Slater Mill Historic Site, has been working tirelessly to rejuvenate the downtown and riverfront areas. The City has improved its downtown traffic patterns, installed period lighting, refurbished the Slater Mill Historic Site park area, and is in the process of developing a southern gateway visitor center for the Blackstone Valley. A major project proposal that is in the final planning stages is a total waterfront revitalization that will see both banks of the Blackstone River come alive with

restaurants, shops, parks, a marina, trails and overlooks. Although the Riverfront Plan identified the potential for development along the River, it has already resulted in publicly and privately funded projects that have either been completed, are in progress, or will begin shortly. The City has recently completed the Town Landing that includes a public boat launching facility, public fishing areas and a landscaped 1/2-mile section of riverbank creating vistas of the river, opening up the view of the Main Street Falls. The City investment of \$450,000 was combined with a \$50,000 Community Development Block Grant to complete the project. Two private property owners have undertaken mill renovation projects, clearing out derelict portions of the complexes, opening areas to the riverbank and creating office and commercial space. As a Demonstration Project with Rhode Island Department of Transportation, a commuter water shuttle is planned to begin service next spring between Pawtucket and Providence that will serve to ease some of the burden on the state's major roadways.



The City of Providence, RI, where the confluence of the Woonasquatucket and Moshassuck rivers flow into Providence Harbor and join the waters of the Blackstone River (called the Seekonk River below Pawtucket Falls) to form the head of Narragansett Bay, has made truly extraordinary progress in rediscovering its largely forgotten and neglected waterfront. The process began in 1981 when the City and State created the Capital Center project on the northern edge of Downtown, just below the majestic State House, at the site of the original Providence Cove. Over a period of 200 years, the 60 acres in and around the original Cove had been filled in almost to its exclusion from the landscape, the course of both rivers altered, a canal built, the area was used for freight yards, bridged and decked for wide streets and surface parking, and was the location for a variety of buildings, including a former jailhouse. In 1984 the Providence Foundation, a non-profit organization of civic and business leaders, secured the support of the City, State and National Endowment for the Arts to create a plan for removing the decks covering the river, dig sections of new river channel (returning the rivers to their natural courses), build a new Amtrak train station and move existing tracks, and create a downtown park with pedestrian walkways along the river. With all work completed, the central feature of the plan area is known as Waterplace Park. The project was awarded the Presidential Design award in 1995 and has been showcased in several full-length feature films.

The City Council approved an adjacent project in 1992, called the Old Harbor Plan, which was drafted in consultation with a broadly representative steering committee and enthusiastically endorsed at public hearings. The centerpiece of this plan calls for the relocation of Interstate 195 as it slices through downtown Providence and across the river, its tentacles of access ramps and service roads driving wedges into the heart of the City. This relocation will reclaim the Old Harbor and forge the final link between Waterplace Park and Narragansett Bay. The project has completed all federal and state environmental impact requirements and has been added to the State Transportation Improvement Plan. Eventually, two miles of riverwalks, boat landings, parks and plazas will replace highway service roads and ramps. Adjacent neighborhoods will be reconnected to the waterfront. Forty-four acres of land currently occupied by I-195 will become available for projected new development of 4.25 million square feet. Private investment is expected to total \$650 million. Public improvements, not including highway construction, are estimated at \$25 million and will come from a variety of sources.

The Woonasquatucket River Greenway Project, sponsored by the Providence Plan, a 501(c)(3) corporation with a professional staff, has brought together 17 groups and agencies including neighborhood residents, owners of riverside property, community organizations, and city, state, and federal agencies. Working together, this remarkable coalition and its "environmental working group" has developed a detailed plan of action. Community forums were held to stimulate resident involvement and to identify neighborhood issues and aspirations. The results are a comprehensive plan that will recapture the visual and physical integrity of the river, provide a powerful tool towards revitalizing neighborhoods, enhance area amenities, and stimulate economic development.

The Woonasquatucket Watershed Coalition and the Greenway Project together are working with six local governments (including the City of Providence), state and federal agencies, and dozens of community nonprofit organizations. Residents in 10 Providence neighborhoods have joined this effort, representing about 50,000 people. The City of Providence has committed \$3 million to the Greenway Project. The Trust for Public Land, a national non-profit land conservation organization, has pledged to match the City's commitment. The City has requested a \$2.8 million allocation of state transportation funds, and the state has committed \$1.3 million of its federal ISTEA Transportation Enhancement funds. Financial support has also been provided by the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund, Citizens Bank, EPA Region 1, The Merck Family Fund, The Mary Dexter Chafee Fund, and the Providence Journal-Bulletin Newspaper.



The Greenway project has organized cultural heritage festivals to let neighborhood ethnic groups show off their culture and encourage cultural pride and tolerance. Canoe and kayak trips on the river have delighted children and urban residents who never imagined that they could explore the river within their own neighborhoods. Ameriways volunteers have carried out riverbank clean-ups, bulb plantings, and poster competitions in local schools. A Woonasquatucket Heritage Trail will link historic sites and teach residents about the historical significance of the area. A heritage and environmental teaching curriculum is being developed for use in grade 3 and middle school classes, assisted by an EPA Environmental Education Grant.

4. Who supports the AHR nomination and plan of action?

Attached letters of support show that this nomination is widely and strongly supported by residents, business leaders, civic organizations, and elected officials within the area. In every instance, the river area plans began as community initiatives supported by civic organizations and individual citizens. The support of municipal, state, and federal agencies was added, and public meetings, workshops, and project committees offered extensive public participation.

Grassroots enthusiasm for what has already been accomplished and a widely shared sense of personal rediscovery along these forgotten rivers is what has created the momentum for future projects and this American Heritage River nomination. The five sponsoring organizations for this nomination: The Providence Plan, Massachusetts Audubon Society, Blackstone River Watershed Association, Blackstone Valley Tourism Council, and the Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce, are representative of the many environmental, economic, recreation, and tourism based groups throughout the Blackstone-Woonasquatucket Heritage River Area that actively support this nomination.

Representatives of 26 local and two state governments as well as hundreds of concerned citizens and community groups throughout the region are actively involved in similar initiatives. Almost every project within the region is carried out through cooperative partnerships which guarantees local participation and community support as well as the ability to leverage limited resources of individual groups, giving the projects even larger support with greater results.

The very scale, scope, and cost of the projects mentioned in this application have demanded widespread public involvement and strong public support. Public leadership has been shared by all the communities and the governors of both states. The private sector leadership is unparalleled. Dozens of civic organizations and local, state and federal agencies have shared in the planning and implementation, and countless groups support and contribute. Most important of all has been the overwhelming popular support of the residents and businesses in adjoining neighborhoods and throughout the region. The rivers have come alive with canoes, kayaks, and excursion boats. The Blackstone-Woonasquatucket Heritage River Area has had a hard, uphill climb. Nomination as an American Heritage River would serve to validate local and regional efforts and would provide the all important impetus for the Blackstone-Woonasquatucket Heritage River Area to achieve its goals.



Blackstone-Woonasquatucket
American Heritage River Nomination