



DEERFIELD RIVER WILD & SCENIC STUDY

Wild and Scenic Study Completed

In 2024, the Deerfield River Watershed Association received a Woodlands Partnership grant to study whether the Massachusetts portion of the Deerfield River and many of its major tributaries qualify to become a National Wild and Scenic River. A local Advisory Committee, comprised of representatives from the towns of Ashfield, Buckland, Charlemont, Colrain, Conway, Deerfield, Florida, Greenfield, Leyden, Savoy, and Shelburne met monthly over nine months to guide the study. The resulting Deerfield Wild and Scenic River Study and Management Plan concluded that five reaches of the Deerfield River main stem and 15 major tributaries are eligible to be designated Wild and Scenic.

Why does the Deerfield River qualify to be designated Wild and Scenic?

The Deerfield River is a unique recreational and natural resource that runs 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. The Deerfield River is an exceptional river with key Outstandingly Remarkable Values that it worthy of National Wild and Scenic River designation:

- With rapids from Class II-V, the Deerfield River offers perhaps the best whitewater boating and rafting in Massachusetts.
- It is an excellent trout fishery, with some of the best dry-fly fishing for wild trout in the East. It is one of the three best coldwater fisheries in all of New England.
- The Deerfield River harbors a large portion of Massachusetts' trout population, and the upper Deerfield River is arguably the premier wild trout stream in Massachusetts.
- The historically significant Mohawk Trail ran along the river and was a principal Native American travel route, and the modern Mahican Mohawk hiking trail parallels some of this route.
- Historic New England villages are strung along the river, including Historic Deerfield, one of the few authentic colonial villages in the US, preserving a 330-year-old western Massachusetts village with 18th and 19th-century houses and a nationally significant collection of artifacts.
- The watershed near the Deerfield River hosts old growth forest, including the tallest tree in Massachusetts and the largest collection of tall white pines in New England.
- Several tributaries, such as Cold River and Bog and Gulf Brooks, are wild free-flowing rivers, rare in New England.

How is a river designated as a National Wild & Scenic River?

First, a river study determines the river is eligible and feasible for designation, and that it is locally desirable for it to become designated. Next, each watershed community considers whether and how to adopt the voluntary, locally-developed watershed stewardship plan. Each watershed community considers and votes on whether to petition Congress that the river be designated as a Partnership Wild and Scenic River. Legislation authorizing a National Wild and Scenic River designation is then developed and passed by Congress and signed into law.

How will towns and the region benefit if this designation occurs?

Such a designation would likely bring Federal technical and financial resources to help enhance and protect the river. Studies have shown that there is an economic benefit to communities that value their rivers and promote them as a recreational tourist destination. Designation prevents new federally permitted or funded dams or water resources projects that impact the free-flowing river and its outstanding values.

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 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. including the Westfield River in western Massachusetts.

How can Federal Partnership Rivers technical and financial resources help?

Partnership Wild and Scenic Rivers receive Federal financial assistance, recently averaging around \$210,000 per year. These locally administered funds can be used for projects to benefit the river, like trails, river access points, land protection, water quality improvement, or river rangers.



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

- Does not put land under Federal control or require public access to private land
- Does not force any changes in local ordinances or 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.

How can I support the Deerfield River Wild and Scenic initiative?

Write a letter of support to your local elected officials or Congressperson. Join the Deerfield River Watershed Association.