

Frequently Asked Questions – York River Wild and Scenic Study

York River Study Committee, updated May 2018

www.YorkRiverMaine.org

What is the York River Wild and Scenic Study?

The York River Wild and Scenic Study, which Congress authorized in December 2014, directs the National Park Service (NPS) and a local committee comprised of town-appointed members from the watershed communities to consider whether the York River is eligible and suitable for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. One of the study products will be a locally developed watershed stewardship plan to guide river conservation that communities can voluntarily implement. The study is funded by NPS.

What is the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System?

Under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, enacted by Congress in 1968, a river that possesses **outstandingly remarkable** scenic, recreational, geological, fish and wildlife, historic, cultural, or other similar values can be designated into the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System to preserve the river and its special values for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations. As of December 2014 (the last designation), there are 208 Wild and Scenic Rivers in the National System, totaling 12,709 miles in 40 US states and Puerto Rico. A subset called Partnership Wild and Scenic Rivers are designated rivers that flow through privately owned lands, not federally owned lands. Working in partnership with the National Park Service, communities protect their own outstanding river and river-related resources.

What will the Stewardship Plan include?

The Stewardship Plan, prepared by local stakeholders collaborating with regional experts and drawing from extensive community input, will include the entire York River watershed. It will document watershed resources (natural, cultural, historic, recreational and scenic) and water quality; and will identify voluntary locally-determined actions and strategies to protect or enhance resources that are valued by the watershed communities. The watershed stewardship plan will characterize threats and potential impacts to resources and include recommendations to preserve resources for present and future generations.

What happens when the Study and Stewardship Plan are complete?

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 York River be designated as a Partnership Wild and Scenic River. The National Park Service, with assistance from the Study Committee, will prepare and submit to Congress a Study Report that presents findings about the qualities making the York River eligible for designation and the level of community support for designation as a Partnership Wild and Scenic River under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. Congress may then enact legislation designating the York River into the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. 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 are the benefits of Wild and Scenic River designation?

- Provides access to National Park Service funding and expertise to implement a locally-developed watershed stewardship plan
- Provides ongoing capacity and structure to work at a watershed scale
- Helps leverage additional resources to implement the watershed stewardship plan
- Documents the unique values of the river and elevates local awareness of important watershed resources and stewardship opportunities
- Assures local voice in managing resources

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

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

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 (NPS) 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 NPS.

What are the features of 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
- An advisory stewardship plan, which is locally developed through a participatory process and approved by watershed communities, guides river conservation actions
- No National Park Service (NPS) land ownership or land management is associated with the designation
- Administration is through a local advisory committee consisting of members from the watershed communities, local partner organizations, and state and federal agencies
- Nationally-designated river status, anchored by NPS funding, leverages additional federal, state, local, and private funding to implement the local stewardship plan
- NPS reviews federally-assisted water resource projects to protect the river's outstanding resources

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

Local land use and property ownership is unaffected; existing state and local regulations that affect land use and development remain in effect. Regular community processes for adopting, implementing, and enforcing land use ordinances are followed, regardless of river designation and watershed stewardship plan adoption.

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.

How does the York River Study, or potential river designation, affect dredging of the York Harbor?

The York River Study Committee endorses maintenance dredging of the York Harbor in support of the federal navigation project that dates back to 1886. Designation of the York River into the Wild and Scenic Rivers System would in no way preclude or interfere with maintenance dredging for the existing York Harbor federal navigation project. Dredging is listed as a key action in the Stewardship Plan to support and enhance community-valued commercial and recreational uses of the river.

How do I find out more information?

More information is available on the York River Study Committee's website: www.YorkRiverMaine.org. Anyone interested in learning more or providing input is invited to attend monthly Study Committee meetings. Questions and comments can be emailed to the Study Coordinator at JH.YorkRiver@gmail.com.