

Taunton River



Watershed Campaign

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TAUNTON RIVER A SIGNATURE AWAY FROM WILD AND SCENIC STATUS

Designation helps ensure long-term health of New England's most intact coastal river

March 25, 2009 (TAUNTON, Mass.) – The Taunton River Watershed Campaign today applauded the House's approval of the Omnibus Public Lands Act, which adds the Taunton River to the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. "The legislation passed by the house today is a major milestone in our campaign to save the Taunton River and its watershed," said Carolyn LaMarre, Executive Director of the Taunton River Watershed Alliance. "In taking this action, Congress has ensured that the river will remain free flowing in perpetuity, and will be protected now and in the future."

"To the many people who have been involved in bringing the Taunton River back into the public eye over the past twenty years, this is the fulfillment of a dream," said Bill Napolitano of the Southeastern Regional Planning and Economic Development District (SRPEDD), a strong river advocate since 1988. "Through this designation, the river has gained a voice and the public has received an affirmation of its commitment to the stewardship of this great river. It is also an occasion to reflect upon the hard work of those like Congressman Joe Moakley, who helped to make this day possible, but are no longer here with us to share in the joy."

Napolitano added that the leadership and perseverance of Senators Edward Kennedy, John Kerry, Jack Reed and Sheldon Whitehouse and Representatives Barney Frank, Jim McGovern and Patrick Kennedy were essential in getting the legislation to the President's desk.

Senator Kennedy's spokesperson Melissa Wagoner said, "Senator Kennedy is extremely pleased that Taunton River will now be part of the national Wild & Scenic River system. The river's unique history and biodiversity eminently justify this national recognition. Many volunteers in the cities and towns in the Taunton River watershed have worked hard for this day, and they deserve great credit for this important achievement."

“I am very grateful to Senator Kennedy for leading the effort to pass this bill,” Rep. Frank said. “The hard work of the environmentally concerned citizens in Southeastern Massachusetts has resulted in a great step forward for our region.”

The federal Wild and Scenic Rivers Act requires that rivers within the system be preserved in free-flowing condition and managed to protect and enhance their outstanding values. It prohibits the federal government from funding or issuing permits for water resource projects that would have a “direct and adverse impact” on those values. In the last 40 years, the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act has protected over 11,000 miles of rivers in the country.

“The Taunton River is the cornerstone of a 562 square mile freshwater system, providing essential services like water filtration, flood protection and recreation to 38 towns,” said Wayne Klockner, director of The Nature Conservancy in Massachusetts. “This designation will go a long way toward ensuring its future health and sustainable management.”

Jack Clarke, Director of Public Policy and Government Relations for Mass Audubon noted the river’s abundant fisheries, rich and diverse ecosystem, remarkable scenic beauty and the forty-miles of free-flowing water that makes the Taunton the longest undammed coastal river in New England. “These attributes were key to gaining the Wild and Scenic designation,” he said. “Connecting half a million residents of the watershed to each other, the river is also a great place for people to recreate and enjoy wilderness in the heart of southeastern Massachusetts.”

“The decades-long battle to save the Taunton is locally rooted, but the River is a regional treasure that connects Southeastern Massachusetts to the ocean via Narragansett Bay,” said John Torgan, Bay Keeper of Save the Bay--Narragansett. “We’re grateful to the Rhode Island delegation for recognizing that connection and working with their colleagues in Massachusetts to make this victory ours.”

Known to early human settlers as “Tetequet” or “Great River,” the Taunton rises from the Hockomock Swamp, a 17,000-acre wetland where small streams meander through grassy fens and white cedar and red maple woodlands.

The Taunton watershed’s nursery and foraging habitats support herring, rainbow smelt, silversides and other fish that play a critical role in supporting marine food webs. Striped bass and bluefish, which enter the river to feed on these species, are a significant recreational and commercial fishery. The upper River provides spawning habitat for migratory fish, is home to the Northern redbelly cooter (a federally-listed turtle), the globally rare bridle shiner, river otters, and seven freshwater mussel species.

“The Taunton River’s natural beauty, important ecology and cultural heritage make it one of our state’s most critical natural resources,” said Senator Kerry. “It is the longest coastal river in New England without dams, making it a haven for countless species of fish and other wildlife. For years, the communities and associations have maintained and preserved the river, and I’m proud to have been part of passing legislation to permanently protect the river for future generations to enjoy.”

“I’m very pleased that the Taunton River is poised to receive this designation,” Rep. McGovern said. “This day has been a long time in coming. The communities along the Taunton deserve enormous credit for all of their hard work and advocacy to make this designation a reality.”

Jim Ross, TRWA Board Member and past Chair of the Taunton River Wild and Scenic Study Committee said the Wild and Scenic designation establishes a Taunton River Stewardship Council, a community-

based management system with representation from the ten cities and towns along the river and makes the river eligible for federal technical and financial assistance for projects that preserve and enhance its values. “This designation will give the Taunton River and its outstanding values the national recognition they deserve,” said Ross. Noting that members of the Campaign will have a presence on the Council, he added, “Now we must get back to the work of keeping the Taunton a great river and a special place for everyone.”

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The Taunton River Watershed Campaign is a coalition of ten environmental and regional groups committed to the protection and restoration of the natural resources of the watershed. It includes: Taunton River Watershed Alliance, Environmental League of Massachusetts, Jones River Watershed Association, Mass Audubon, The Nature Conservancy, Save the Bay – Narragansett Bay, the Southeast Regional Planning and Economic Development District, The Trustees of Reservations, The Trust for Public Land and Wildlands Trust of Southeastern Massachusetts. For information about the Campaign, visit www.savethetaunton.org.