

Taunton River receives national designation

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Taunton — With a stroke of his pen, President Barack Obama signed a massive land management bill into law Monday, officially designating the Taunton River as “wild and scenic.”

The new federal law, a collection of nearly 170 separate measures, will protect more than 2 million acres of wilderness throughout the country, including a 40-mile stretch of the Taunton River. The legislation is one of the largest expansions of wilderness protection in a quarter-century.

“Passage of the bill helps ensure that the river will remain a valuable resource that can be enjoyed by future generations,” said Congressman Barney Frank, D-Mass., one of the bill’s main sponsors.

The Taunton River will now be incorporated into the National Park Service’s Wild and Scenic River management program. Federal funds available under the designation will help protect the waterway.

According to the new law, the section of the Taunton River running from the headwaters in Bridgewater to the Braga Bridge in Fall River will be designated under the federal Wild and Scenic program. The first 18-mile segment is classified as scenic, the next five miles recreational, the following eight miles scenic and the final nine-mile segment, from Muddy Cove in Dighton to the Braga Bridge, as recreational.

Sen. Edward M. Kennedy, D-Mass., was the main Senate sponsor of the legislation. “The Taunton River is an extraordinary part of our Commonwealth’s heritage and environment, and this national recognition is eminently deserved,” Kennedy said in a statement. “The communities along the river watershed have worked hard for this designation, and they deserve great credit for this achievement.”

The designation will create a Taunton River Stewardship Council to serve as the National Park Service’s principal partner of the in implementing and overseeing the designation. The council will have representatives from environmental organizations and each community along the river.

The Taunton River is the longest un-dammed coastal river in New England. It supports 45 species of fish and many species of shellfish, including seven types of freshwater mussels, and its archaeological treasures date back 10,000 years. The watershed is a habitat for 154 species of birds, including 12 rare types. It is also home to the river otter, mink, gray fox and deer.

The new federal law designates 86 new Wild and Scenic Rivers in seven states, bringing

the total number of rivers with that designation to 252.

Rebecca Wodder, president of American Rivers, one of the nation's leading river conservation organizations, attended the signing ceremony at the White House. "The signing of this bill is an expression of the home grown support for one of the largest environmental protection measures in decades," Wodder said in a statement. "From ranchers, rafters and hunters in the desert country of Idaho to anglers in Oregon to bird watchers in Massachusetts, the communities across country that clamored for these protections are celebrating President Obama's signing today."

A Wild and Scenic River designation protects riverside land, blocks dams and preserves a river's free-flowing nature. It also helps protect and improve clean water, as well as the river's unique historic, cultural, scenic, ecological, and recreational values.
