

The York River Study and the National Park Service Partnership Wild and Scenic Rivers Program



In 2009, the locally-based Friends of the York River approached residents, town leaders, businesses and conservation organizations on an *exploratory effort* to determine if designation as a National Park Service (NPS) Partnership Wild and Scenic River [see back page] could be an effective way to recognize and protect the York River. In December 2014, Congress authorized a study of the York River to determine if its cultural, historic, ecological and recreational resources meet the criteria for designation and if there is local citizen support for river protection and management. The NPS is providing an estimated \$180,000 for the three-year study, to be led by a *local study committee*, which includes citizen volunteers from the four York River watershed communities. The overarching goal of the study committee is to build long-term community support for protection of the York River watershed.

YORK RIVER WATERSHED RESOURCES

The watershed is the area of land from which water flows to form a river system. Some of the many outstanding values of the York River watershed, which includes areas of York, Kittery, Eliot, and South Berwick, are its:

- Rich and well-preserved history
- Extensive and varied recreational opportunities
- High water quality for drinking water supplies and for fishing and swimming
- Thriving tourism and local fishing industry
- Extensive conservation lands within the watershed
- Diverse habitats that support important aquatic and watershed species, including rare plants and animals



YORK RIVER STUDY GOALS

The York River Study provides the structure, expertise, and funding to work together at a watershed scale. The study involves developing a watershed management plan and evaluating the suitability of a Partnership Wild and Scenic River designation for the York River. The process is voluntary and locally determined. The study committee is seeking community input to identify significant cultural, historic, recreational, economic and natural resources of the York River watershed. A management plan for the York River watershed will identify



and document important resources, threats to those resources, and strategies for long-term protection or enhancement of the resources. The study committee is aiming for all four communities to adopt the watershed management plan. As part of the study, the committee also will evaluate if the NPS Partnership Wild and Scenic River designation would be an effective measure for long-term river stewardship. If the York River is eligible *and if there is community support* for designation, a request to become a

Partnership Wild and Scenic River would go back to Congress for authorization.

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE PARTNERSHIP WILD AND SCENIC RIVERS PROGRAM

The 1968 Wild and Scenic Rivers Act preserves rivers in their free-flowing condition and protects their immediate environments that possess outstanding scenic, recreational, geologic, ecological, historic, and cultural value. The *Partnership* Wild and Scenic Rivers Program is a subset of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. It helps *communities preserve their own river-related resources* by creating long-term partnerships between the National Park Service (NPS) and local, regional, and state stakeholders to manage, promote, and protect the river's remarkable values for present and future generations.

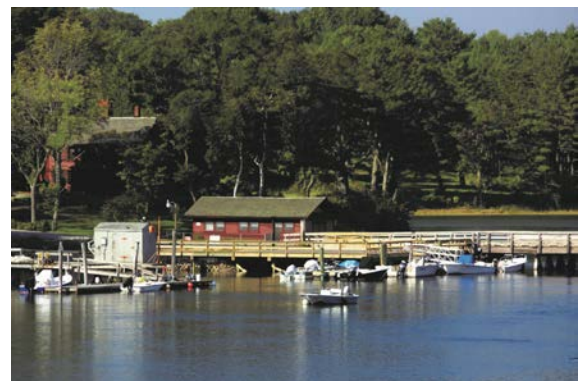
The *Partnership* Wild and Scenic River Program is for rivers that meet the National Wild and Scenic River System criteria and are characterized by historical alterations, extensive private land ownership along the river, and well-established traditions of local governance. This model has a proven track record of effectively creating river protection strategies that bring communities together in protecting, enhancing and managing their local river resources.



With the exception of the Allagash River in Maine, all of the other NPS Wild and Scenic Rivers in New England are designated through the Partnership model. Their common management principles include:

- River and land use management that is regulated through existing local and state authorities, the same as before a designation.
- An advisory management plan, which is locally developed through a participatory process and approved by watershed communities, guides river conservation actions.
- Responsibility for managing and protecting river resources that is shared between the local, state, federal and non-governmental partners on the local advisory committee.
- Reliance on volunteerism as a key to success.
- No NPS ownership or management of land associated with the designation; no NPS Superintendent, law enforcement, or similar elements of traditional federally managed units of the National Park System.
- Nationally-designated river protection, anchored by federal funding, leverages substantial additional state, local, and private funding.

A river designated as a Partnership Wild and Scenic River is required to remain free-flowing (i.e., there can be no new dams or flow obstructions) but *no new federal regulations or limits on local land use are associated with designation*. Local control still governs land use, subject to existing town and state statutes. The NPS does review *federally-assisted* water resource projects that would modify the waterway to protect the river and its locally-determined outstanding resources from adverse effects.



The Partnership Wild and Scenic Rivers Program is notable for safeguarding the special character of these rivers, while also recognizing the potential for their appropriate commercial and recreational uses. It encourages river management that crosses political boundaries and promotes public participation in developing goals for river protection and implementing actions for effective river stewardship.