



CHAPTER ONE: Study Purpose and Background

Project Overview	13
Special Resource Study Process	15
Planning Context	17

Project Overview

With the passage of Title VII of Public Law 109-338 (October 12, 2006), the John H. Chafee Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor Reauthorization Act of 2006, Congress directed the Secretary of the Interior to conduct a Special Resource Study (SRS) of sites and associated landscape features within the boundaries of the John H. Chafee Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor (“Corridor”) that contribute to the understanding of the Corridor as the birthplace of the industrial revolution in the United States. The primary purpose of the SRS is to determine whether the resources being evaluated meet the criteria for inclusion as a unit or units of the National Park System.

This legislation also extended the Corridor Commission (“Commission”) an additional five years until 2011 and authorized development funds through 2016. By 2011, the Commission will have been in operation for 25 years. The SRS is being undertaken concurrently with an update to the Corridor’s 1998 management plan, which is also required under this public law.

By law (Public Law 91-383 §8 as amended by §303 of the National Parks Omnibus Management Act (Public Law 105-391)) and NPS policy, potential new units of the National Park System must 1) possess nationally significant resources, 2) be a suitable addition to the system, 3) be a feasible addition to the system, and 4) require direct NPS management or administration instead of alternative protection by other agencies or the private sector.

National Park Service policy requires that a special resource study be accompanied by an Environmental Assessment (EA), prepared in accordance with the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended (NEPA) and its implementing regulations (36 CFR 1500-1508), and Director’s Order #12, *Conservation Planning, Environmental Impact Analysis, and Decision-Making* (2001), and accompanying Handbook. This document also fulfills the requirements of Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended (NHPA), and has been prepared in accordance with the implementing regulations of the Advisory Council for Historic Preservation (36 CFR Part 800) and NPS Director’s Order #28: *Cultural Resources Management* (DO-28) and accompanying Handbook. Since a study presents management alternatives at a broad level, the EA is similarly broad and the analysis is general in nature. Implementation of any

action alternative would come only after action by Congress, and in the event that Congress authorizes the National Park Service to implement an alternative, the first order of business would be a general management planning process.

The study was conducted by an interdisciplinary team consisting of staff from the Northeast Region of the National Park Service (NPS) and the Commission. The study has been prepared in consultation with members of the Commission and other key stakeholders.

John H. Chafee Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor

History and Background

In September 1983, Congress directed the NPS to assist the states of Massachusetts and Rhode Island in their efforts to develop a linear park system along the Blackstone River. NPS was also asked to assess whether the Blackstone River Valley (“Valley”) might be eligible for inclusion in the National Park System and to explore ideas for cooperative conservation efforts. The study, *Blackstone River Corridor Study: Conservation Options – draft*, was completed through a joint effort of the National Park Service, the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Management, and the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management in 1984. The assessment found that the Valley’s resources were nationally significant and that its resources and representative themes were underrepresented in the National Park System. Public support was evident for a limited federal role in the Blackstone River Valley that emphasized federal recognition, coordinating interstate efforts, mediating use conflicts in the river valley (e.g. energy and industrial uses versus public use of the river), and studying and interpreting the valley’s historical resources.

The study proposed three long-term conservation options for the Blackstone Valley. One called for continuing and expanding the local efforts underway at the time. A second called for an increased commitment on the part of both states to coordinate their linear park proposals with technical assistance from the National Park Service. Finally, a third proposal called for formal federal recognition and assistance that would not involve federal land acquisition or direct management.

Congress established the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor in November 1986 for the pur-

pose of “preserving and interpreting for educational and inspirational benefit of present and future generations the unique and significant contributions to our national heritage of certain historic and cultural lands, waterways and structures within the states of Massachusetts and Rhode Island.”³ The Corridor was to provide “a management framework to assist the states of Massachusetts and Rhode Island and their units of local government in the development and implementation of integrated cultural, historical and land resource management programs in order to retain, enhance and interpret the significant values of the lands, waters and structures of the Corridor.”⁴ In November 1999, Congress renamed the Corridor the John H. Chafee Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor in honor of the late senator who championed it.⁵

Initially encompassing all or part of 19 municipalities in MA and RI, the Corridor was expanded in 1996 and now encompasses all or part of 24 communities from Worcester, MA to Providence, RI. The Corridor contains approximately 400,000 acres of land and is home to nearly 600,000 people.

The Corridor’s establishing legislation authorized the creation of an operating commission for an initial five years and provided for a possible five-year extension, which the Commission was granted. In 1996, Congress extended the Commission for ten more years, followed in 2006 with a final five-year extension requiring that the Commission cease operation in October 2011. The Commission would be responsible for the preparation and implementation of a management plan for the Corridor. Major management plans were completed for the Corridor in 1989 and 1998. Inventories of cultural and natural resources have also been completed.

According to a 2005 analysis prepared by the NPS Conservation Study Institute:⁶

The Commission set an ambitious agenda for the Corridor: heritage education, recreation development, ethnic and cultural conservation, environmental conservation, historic preservation, land use planning, and heritage-based economic development. Its most widely used tools in advancing the regional vision have been (1) public education;

(2) partnerships that pool local, state, and national resources; and (3) targeted investments that focus scarce public and private dollars on highly visible projects that reinforce the valley’s national story and build local pride and enthusiasm.⁷

Since 1987 the Commission has received a total of \$23,638,600 from NPS funding programs to implement its management plan, of which \$20 million required a 1:1 match. Financial and in-kind commitments from the two states, other federal agencies, communities, the private sector, and non-profit organizations have increased the Commission’s funds an estimated 22-fold – a public and private investment exceeding \$500 million that contributes to the Corridor’s goals and is either directly or indirectly attributable to Commission action.

In 2004, the Commission initiated the Blackstone Sustainability Study to evaluate the past 18 years of work in the Corridor and to serve as a foundation for dialogue about its future management. The study was completed by staff from and consultants to the National Park Service’s Conservation Study Institute based in Woodstock, Vermont. The Commission asked the Institute to evaluate four aspects of its work:

1. Commission accomplishments and progress in achieving strategies and goals established by the 1989 *Cultural Heritage and Land Management Plan*
2. National Park Service investment and additional monies leveraged as a result
3. Further actions and commitments that are needed to protect, enhance, and interpret the Corridor
4. The Commission form of management, identifying and evaluating options for a permanent NPS designation and other management alternatives for achieving the national interest in the Blackstone Valley.

At the heart of the Sustainability Study findings and recommendations is this key statement:

At this critical point in the evolution of the Corridor’s partnership system, there is a clear need to sustain an effective coordinating framework for the Corridor that bridges the 2 states and 24 municipalities and supports the partnership system. This includes (1) a strong management entity to carry forward the vision, provide effective collaborative leadership,

3 Public Law 99-647 An Act to Establish the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor in Massachusetts and Rhode Island.

4 Ibid.

5 P.L. 106-113, Approved Nov. 29, 1999, (113 Stat. 1501).

6 The National Park Service established the Conservation Study Institute to help the agency and its partners stay in touch with the evolving field of conservation, and to develop more sophisticated partnerships, new tools for community engagement, and new strategies for the 21st century.

7 Tuxill, Jacquelyn L., Nora J. Mitchell, Philip B. Huffman, Daniel Laven, Suzanne Copping, and Gayle Gifford. Reflecting on the Past, Looking to the Future: Sustainability Study Report. A Technical Assistance Report to the John H. Chafee Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor Commission. Woodstock, Vermont: Conservation Study Institute. 2005. P. 18.

and serve as the central network hub; (2) an ongoing relationship with the NPS, given the Corridor's well-documented national significance; and (3) secure, sustainable funding from diverse sources.⁸

Special Resource Study Process

Project Scoping

Internal project scoping for the special resource study process was initiated in spring 2007 with a series of staff meetings, site visits, and consultations with the Commission. As outlined below the study team consulted with industrial heritage scholars, staff from the National Park Service's Conservation Study Institute, community leaders, and other stakeholders to better define the scope of the study in terms of both its geography and the key issues to be addressed. Impact topics identified for analysis as a result of project scoping can be found in Chapter Five: Environmental Consequences.

Defining the Study Area

One of the first questions the study team had to consider was the geographic scope of the study. The key question was whether the resource study would examine the Blackstone River Valley as a whole or focus on one or more individual sites within the region. To assist in making this determination, the study team invited a group of six academic scholars to participate in a site visit and workshop in February 2008 that took a fresh look at the industrial heritage of the Blackstone River Valley. (A list of the participating scholars appears in the Appendix of this report.) The study team asked the scholars to be prepared to discuss the following questions:

1. How do historians understand or define the Industrial Revolution in the 21st century?
2. What are the nationally significant stories in the Blackstone Valley?
3. For each story, what is the period of significance? When does it begin and end?
4. Are there places in the Blackstone Valley that the study team should be considering for further evaluation?

The visiting scholars toured sites throughout the Valley, participated in a two-day moderated discussion with NPS staff involvement, and presented their initial findings to the public at the Whitin Mill (Alternatives, Inc.) in North-

bridge, Massachusetts. Approximately 60 members of the community came to participate in the public forum. The scholars also presented their findings in written summaries available on-line at www.nps.gov/blac/parkmgmt/special-resource-study.htm.

Among their findings the scholars noted that the small-scale industrial development of the Blackstone Valley represented a more common pathway to industrial development in the United States than the highly complex, capital-intensive model presented at places like Lowell. They were struck by the endurance of the mill village form and concept in the Valley and believed that the concentration and quality of the mill villages distinguished the Blackstone Valley from other industrial areas in the country. They also observed that the relationship between farm and factory in the Valley was worthy of note. Here, industry did not displace agriculture; they coexisted and supported one another.

The scholars' findings informed the definition of the study area and identification of focus areas within the Valley as well as the preparation of the project's Significance Statement. The participating scholars emphasized that the study team should be considering the Valley in a holistic way and that the entire Blackstone River Valley provided an appropriate boundary for the study area. They also noted that some areas within the Valley possessed greater concentrations of industrial heritage resources and higher levels of integrity than others.

Following the scholars site visit, during the spring and summer of 2008 the study team engaged in a Valley-wide resource evaluation. Given the large number of resources in the Valley, it was important to identify the best possible examples based on the following factors defined by the study team:

1. Areas that appeared to have the highest level of significance and resource integrity and the greatest opportunity to interpret different facets of the industrial history story or stories.
2. Areas that already had an established visitor services component (e.g., the Blackstone Valley Visitor Center or the Museum of Work & Culture).
3. Areas that offered opportunities to link to the Blackstone River and Canal and existing recreational trails (e.g., state park sites).

The study team visited 26 sites throughout the Blackstone River Valley that represent key resource types including agricultural areas, mill villages, and urban centers.

⁸ Tuxill et al. p. 9.

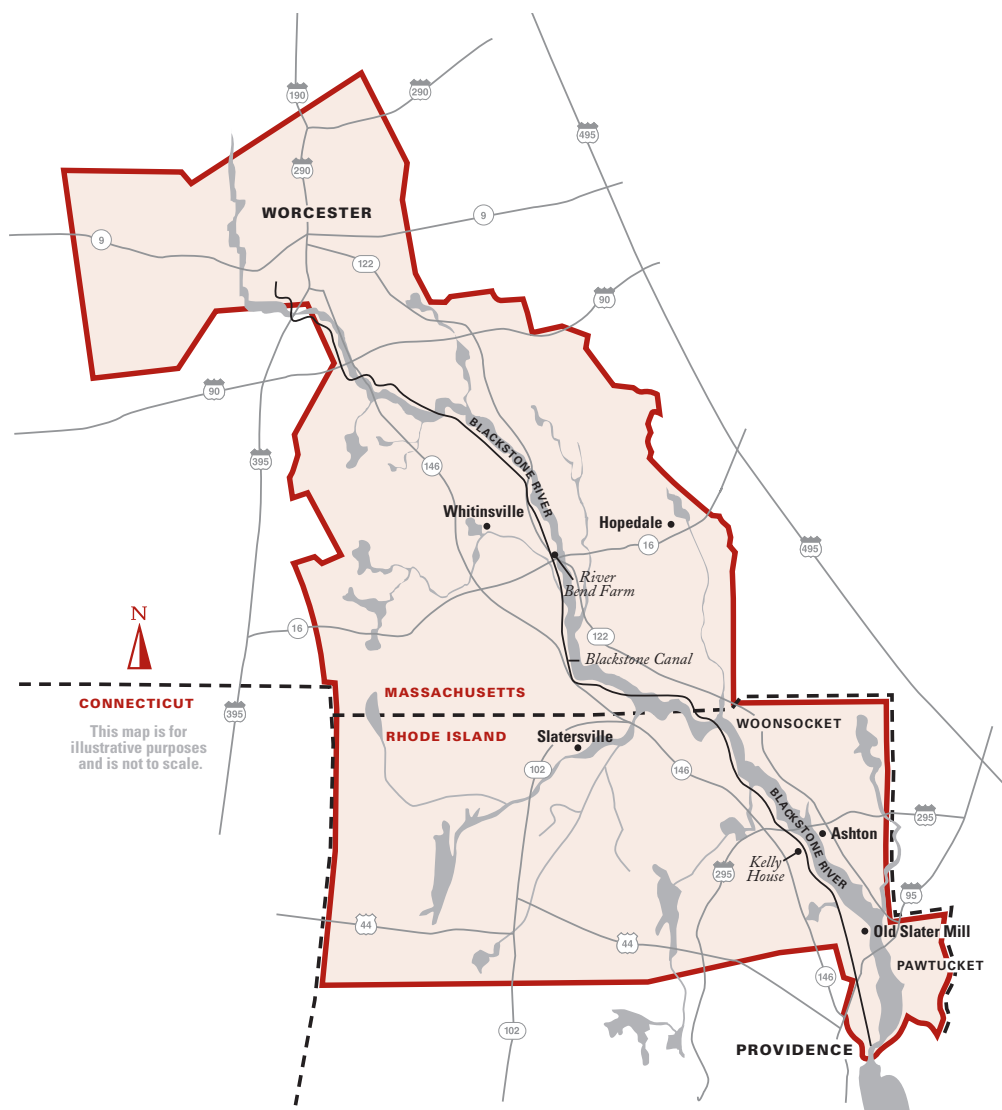


Figure 1: Study Area and Focus Areas.

Based on the factors defined above, the study team identified seven historic resource areas and five visitor service areas as focus areas within the larger study area:

Historic Resource Areas:

- Old Slater Mill National Historic Landmark District, Pawtucket, RI
- Slatersville Historic District, North Smithfield, RI
- Ashton Historic District, Cumberland, RI
- Whitinsville Historic District, Northbridge, MA
- Hopedale Village Historic District, Hopedale, MA
- Blackstone Canal, MA/RI
- Blackstone River and its tributaries, MA/RI

Visitor Service Areas:

- Blackstone Valley Visitor Center, Pawtucket, RI

Blackstone River State Park/ Kelly House, Lincoln, RI

Museum of Work & Culture, Woonsocket, RI

Blackstone River & Canal Heritage State Park/River Bend Farm, Uxbridge, MA

Worcester Visitor Center (proposed), Worcester, MA

Study Criteria

The areas comprising the current 394-unit National Park System are the cumulative expression of a single national heritage. Potential additions to the system should therefore contribute in their own distinctive way to a system that fully represents the broad spectrum of natural and cultural resources that characterize our nation. The NPS is responsible for conducting professional studies of potential additions to the National Park System when specifically authorized by an act of Congress. Several laws outline criteria for poten-

tial units of the National Park System. To be eligible for inclusion in the system, a proposed addition must (1) possess **nationally significant** natural or cultural resources; (2) be a **suitable** addition to the system; (3) be a **feasible** addition to the system; and (4) **require direct NPS management**, instead of alternative protection by other public agencies or the private sector. These criteria are designed to ensure that the National Park System includes only the most outstanding examples of the nation's natural and cultural resources. They also recognize that there are other alternatives, short of designation as a unit of the National Park System, for preserving the nation's outstanding resources.

An area or resource may be considered nationally significant if it:

- is an outstanding example of a particular type of resource;
- possesses exceptional value or quality in illustrating or interpreting the natural or cultural themes of our nation's heritage;
- offers superlative opportunities for public enjoyment or for scientific study; and
- retains a high degree of integrity as a true, accurate, and relatively unspoiled example of a resource.

National significance for cultural resources, such as those comprising the Blackstone River Valley, is determined by applying the National Historic Landmarks criteria contained in the Code of Federal Regulations at 36 CFR Part 65.

An area may be considered suitable for potential addition to the National Park System if it represents a natural or cultural resource type that is not already adequately represented in the system, or is not comparably represented and protected for public enjoyment by other federal agencies; tribal, state, or local governments; or the private sector. The suitability evaluation, therefore, is not limited solely to units of the National Park System, but includes evaluation of all comparable resource types protected by others.

To be feasible as a new unit of the National Park System, an area must be of sufficient size and appropriate configuration to ensure sustainable resource protection and visitor enjoyment (taking into account current and potential impacts from sources beyond its boundaries) and be capable of efficient administration by the NPS at a reasonable cost.

There are many excellent examples of the successful management of important natural and cultural resources by other public agencies, private conservation organizations,

and individuals. Most notably, state park systems provide for protection of natural and cultural resources throughout the nation and offer outstanding recreational experiences. The NPS applauds these accomplishments and actively encourages the expansion of conservation activities by state, local, and private entities, and by other federal agencies. Unless direct NPS management of a studied area is identified as the clearly superior alternative, the NPS will recommend that one or more of these other entities assume a lead management role and that the area not be considered as a potential unit of the National Park System.

Studies evaluate an appropriate range of management alternatives and identify which alternative or combination of alternatives would be most effective and efficient in protecting significant resources and providing opportunities for appropriate public enjoyment. Alternatives to NPS management are not normally developed for study areas that fail to meet the four criteria for potential units, particularly the "national significance" criterion.

If a special resource study finds that a resource meets the standards for potential designation as a unit of the National Park System, Congress may choose to enact federal legislation creating a unit.

Planning Context

The John H. Chafee Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor has served as a catalyst for regional initiatives since its creation in 1986. As a result, the Blackstone River Valley has developed a large regional constituency drawing from environmental, cultural, recreational, and economic interests. A number of bi-state, Valley-wide initiatives are currently underway to protect and preserve the resources associated with the Blackstone River Valley and to improve recreational access and opportunities.

The study team acknowledged the desires of the Commission and the public that the long history of federal activity and investment in the Blackstone River Valley region be recognized in the study process. The following elements were identified to ensure that these previous efforts were given adequate consideration:

- Preserve, protect and interpret resources throughout the John H. Chafee Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor that exemplify the Valley's nationally significant industrial heritage for the benefit and inspiration of future generations.
- Support the preservation, protection, and interpretation of the region's landscape features –

both urban and rural, including the Blackstone River and Canal – that provide an overarching context for the Valley’s industrial heritage.

- Educate the public about the industrial history of the Valley and its significance to our nation’s past and present.
- Protect the substantial federal investment that has been committed to key resources and facilities Valley-wide.
- Support and enhance the network of partners who will continue to engage in the protection, improvement, management, and operation of key resources and facilities throughout the Valley.

Regional Initiatives

Blackstone River Bikeway

Originally envisioned in the mid-1990s, the Blackstone River Bikeway is planned to extend 46 miles from Providence, RI to Worcester, MA. Currently, 14 miles of bike path are open to the public in Central Falls, Lincoln, Cumberland, and Woonsocket, RI. An additional 2.5 miles of bike path are open in Worcester and Millbury, MA. When completed, the bike path project will result in a mostly off-road alternative transportation route through the Corridor linking many of the Valley’s natural and historic features. The bikeway is being developed largely with federal transportation funding. The project is a cooperative effort of the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management, Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation, Massachusetts Highway Department, and the Rhode Island Department of Transportation, with support from the Commission and Blackstone River Valley communities.

Blackstone Greenway

In 2003, the Commission released a report titled “Trails and Greenways – A Vision for the Blackstone River Valley” that identified priorities for trail development in the region and described the potential for creating greenways. The two top priorities identified in the report were the completion of the Blackstone River Bikeway and the extension of the Southern New England Trunkline Trail (SNETT). The report identified a number of opportunities to link trails to each other and underutilized natural resource areas and to expand opportunities for access to navigable waters (“blueways”). Connecting communities and resources with a regional trail system has been a long-standing initiative of the Commission.

Blackstone Canal Preservation Study

In September 2005, a Preservation Study was completed for the 28-mile Massachusetts portion of the Blackstone Canal by Vanasse, Hangen & Brustlin, Inc., through a partnership between the Worcester Historical Museum and the Commission. This study identified and mapped Canal-related resources in eight communities. In addition, the Study included recommendations for the protection, stabilization, rehabilitation and interpretation of particularly significant and intact segments of the Canal. A similar survey of the canal in Rhode Island was completed in June 2010 by the same firm.

Campaign for a Fishable Swimmable Blackstone River by 2015

Spearheaded by the Blackstone River Coalition, the “Campaign for a Fishable/Swimmable Blackstone River by 2015” was launched in 2003 to assemble the appropriate agencies, organizations, and individual actors needed to clean up the Blackstone River. It has worked collaboratively with federal, state, and local agencies, as well as non-profit organizations, academic institutions, and businesses to create a bi-state watershed action plan that focuses on storm water management, wastewater treatment, land use and development, stream flow, recreational opportunities, and education and outreach.

The coalition consists of the Blackstone Headwaters Coalition, the Blackstone River Watershed Association, the Blackstone River Watershed Council/ Friends of the Blackstone, College of the Holy Cross, Lake Singletary Watershed Association, Massachusetts Audubon/ Broad Meadow Brook, Audubon Society of Rhode Island, Rhode Island Conservation Law Foundation, Northern Rhode Island Trout Unlimited, and Save the Bay. While not a member of the coalition, the Corridor is among the partners who support this initiative.

Update of Corridor Management Plan/ Transition to new Management

Commission staff is in the process of updating the Corridor Management Plan which will address the management transition from the Commission to the recently created non-profit, Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor, Inc. The plan is being developed consistent with direction in the Commission’s 2006 reauthorization act and with the work being completed for the Special Resource Study.