

# G. SLATERSVILLE NATIONAL PARK AND BLACKSTONE RIVER VALLEY NATIONAL HERITAGE CORRIDOR

## 1.0 Introduction

### *Blackstone River Valley Industrial Heritage National Park*

The village of Slatersville is a region that reflects the historic significance of its industrial heritage making it a prime candidate for designation as a national park. There is currently a bill in congress to make the village part of a five-location national park that covers regions of Rhode Island and Massachusetts. This federally-funded and managed park would welcome visitors seeking to learn more about the village's industrial past and simultaneously protect the region's natural resources. The park would also include resources associated with RIDEM's Blackstone River State Park. Park rangers and volunteers would be present at the new National Park management office in Slatersville, leading regular park programs about the history of the area. With Slatersville converted into a national park and under federal funding, the National Park Service would likely partner with the non-profit commission managing the John H. Chaffee Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor.



Converted mill, Slatersville. A once-productive mill is renovated as upscale apartment housing.

The John H. Chaffee Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor (BRVNHC) includes twenty four communities totaling over 400,000 acres. This region extends from Worcester Massachusetts's Blackstone River to Narragansett Bay, Rhode Island. It was established by the United States Congress in 1986 for the purpose of "preserving and interpreting for the educational and inspirational benefit of the present and future generations the unique and significant contributions to our national heritage of certain historic and cultural lands, waterways and structures" within this area. Since 2011, the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor has not been under a federal commission. It is currently run by a non-profit commission that still receives federal funding. However, the BRVNHC will benefit from Slatersville becoming a national park because the National Park Service will likely provide park rangers to other key support services for the Corridor.

With Slatersville becoming a national park, certain areas of the Town will evolve to integrate improved visitor access to the land and simultaneously encourage sustainable growth. To do so, there are several specific initiatives proposed by the Town. First, in order to improve canoe and kayak access to the Slatersville reservoir, the historic raceway gate could be opened during daylight hours. Second, in keeping current with the Town’s Smart Growth initiative, the Town has proposed that a connector addition between the two granite block buildings at 11 and 7 North Main Street be constructed; the connector will allow for an elevator shaft and walkway between the two buildings, making it wheelchair accessible and ADA compliant. This addition will increase population density in a build-up rather than build-out manner, reducing urban sprawl. The walkways and vehicle lanes on the Stone Arch Bridge will be widened from 26 to 38 feet to facilitate improved access for those visiting the area (See Figure 1). Fourth, it has also been proposed that the unused parking spaces at Brigido’s plaza be converted into a “Park n’ Ride” for the 59X bus which connects North Smithfield to Providence. This will provide a convenient and sustainable transportation method for park visitors and commuters. The remaining area will be mixed use residential condominiums. Fifth, the National Park Service will ultimately base itself out of the current public library or town hall building for strategic placement within the new park.



**Figure 1** The Slatersville National Park and Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor Element consists of a set of goals which seek to both protect and enhance the significant historic, cultural and physical resources of the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor within the Town of North Smithfield. The goals of the Heritage Corridor Element are an expression of the local community, the State of Rhode Island and the Blackstone River Valley Heritage Corridor Commission.

## 2.0 Completed Goals

The Town of North Smithfield is proud to report the following former goals from the previous version of the Comprehensive Plan as complete.

1. Pursued technical assistance and funding to continue to update and evaluate the Statewide Historical Preservation Report.
2. Collaborated with the Historic District Commission to gather public support for preservation and identified/established local historic districts.
3. Identified properties that are threatened by development pressures, deterioration or inadequate resources to include the Slatersville Mill, Tupperware Mill, 1851 Scythe Works, the Forestdale Post Office, Stamina Mill Office and the Primrose Grange.
4. Targeted potential users and appropriate uses for key historic features compatible with preservation concerns.
5. Promoted land conservation and historic park restoration through the Conservation Commission and Parks and Recreation Commission.
6. Collaborated and supported the Corridor Commission in the establishment of a Greenway along the Blackstone and Branch Rivers.
7. Incorporated interpretive features and historic information into public projects, when appropriate.
8. Continued to apply for funding through the Corridor's Heritage Partnership Program which provides funding for heritage projects that develop heritage infrastructure or recreation, provide heritage programming, strategic design, preservation & enhancement or implement river recovery.
9. Helped local manufacturers become aware of and participate in state programs to keep mature industries in business and utilizing old structures.
10. Examined access to the bikeway from key areas off-site and compatibility with existing street traffic with DEM as design development begins.
11. Involved the Historic District Commission, the Conservation Commission, Scenic Rhode Island, and other interested parties in the review of local, state and federal projects.
12. Formed alliances with local businesses, landowners, regional foundations and groups such as National Grid to insure that key properties are protected.
13. Utilized the Council's tourism plan as a basis for developing strategies and programs.
14. Continued the annual Earth Day cleanup.

Insert a picture from last year's Earth Day cleanup- only a short caption would be needed (ex: Earth Day cleanup, 2013)

FORMED A NETWORK FOR INFORMATION  
SHARING WITH THE FEDERAL, STATE AND LOCAL REPRESENTATIVES

15. Utilized the Corridor Commission, DEM, the League of Cities and Towns and others for technical assistance on conservation easements, liability and other land acquisition and management issues.

16. Encouraged local board and commission members to participate in workshops sponsored by organizations such as Grow Smart RI and Statewide Planning that promote understanding of regulatory jurisdiction and procedures.

#### ENCOURAGED LAND USE NEAR RIVERS, STREAMS, WETLAND, AND RESTRICTIVE SOIL AREAS TO BE COMPATIBLE WITH ENVIRONMENTAL GOALS

17. Identified areas of the Development Plan Review (site plan) Ordinance for inclusion of site standards for improving environmental impacts.

### 3.0 Goals, Policies and Actions

#### 1. CONTINUE TO SUPPORT ESTABLISHED, LOCAL EFFORTS TO PROTECT HISTORIC, CULTURAL AND NATURAL RESOURCES

A. Encourage the Historic District Commission and the RI Historic Preservation Commission to take a more proactive role in protection through co-sponsored workshops and grants assistance to historic property owners.

B. Seek assistance from the Corridor Commission for support of National Register nominations and local historic zoning proposals.

C. Identify key parcels for land protection around Slatersville Reservoir and work with the Conservation Commission in developing a management plan.

#### 2. EDUCATE THE ENTIRE PUBLIC AND BUILD SUPPORT FOR THE PROTECTION OF LOCAL HISTORIC, CULTURAL AND NATURAL RESOURCES

A. Target individuals and professional groups which deal with local properties (i.e. realtors, etc.) for preservation education.

B. Disseminate the Corridor's Design Guidelines and Standards report to interested property owners.

C. Encourage the Historic District Commission to hold workshops for maintenance education for both non- and historic district property owners.

#### 3. PROTECTED KEY HISTORIC, CULTURAL AND NATURAL RESOURCES UTILIZING ZONING AND INCENTIVES AS TOOLS

A. Create a requirement through the subdivision process to require the development of conservation development design when important historic or natural features are present on-site as identified in the cultural and natural resources inventory.

B. Revise the Planned Development Zoning District to be more responsive to land conservation and resource protection.

4. DEVELOP AN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY THAT ASSISTS OWNERS OF HISTORIC MILLS TO MAINTAIN VIABLE USES INCLUDING ENVIRONMENTALLY-SENSITIVE INDUSTRY, BUSINESS AND RESIDENTIAL

A. Establish a mixed-use zone for the former Tupperware site that will include residential, light industrial and commercial uses. NO

5. SUPPORT THE BIKEWAY AS AN ALTERNATIVE TRANSPORTATION ROUTE AND RECREATIONAL/EDUCATIONAL FEATURE

A. Examine zoning along the proposed bikeway path for compatibility and economic opportunities.

6. TAKE PRO-ACTIVE ROLE IN LOCAL TRANSPORTATION AND DOT PROJECTS TO HAVE HISTORIC, CULTURAL AND NATURAL FEATURES CONSIDERED IN DESIGN

A. Collaborate with the Corridor Commission in the review of federally-funded projects using the Corridor's Historic Resources Inventory and the local Cultural and Natural Resources Inventory as a basis for discussion.

7. CONTINUE TO CREATE CONSERVATION AREAS AND DEVELOP PARKLAND ALONG THE BLACKSTONE AND ITS TRIBUTARIES CONSISTENT WITH CORRIDOR GOALS

A. Establish a "Task Force" approach in parks development for soliciting input and generating public support, particularly with the Meadows site.

B. Explore access possibilities to the Blackstone Gorge via Harkness Roads.

C. Continue to work with Blackstone, MA officials and other partners to achieve the vision that would make Kelly/Mammoth Mill a bi-state gateway park. NO

8. DEVELOP A REALISTIC, SHORT TERM TOURISM PLAN THAT WILL BE MEANINGFUL TO A VALLEY-WIDE STRATEGY

A. Identify the key features with tourism potential that could be tied into a large series of tourism activities.

B. Coordinate a North Smithfield tourism map with identified tourism sites valley-wide and regionally.

C. Collaborate with the Corridor Commission to develop theme brochures linking sites valley- wide with North Smithfield.

D. Collaborate with the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council for special events promotion.

## 9. EDUCATE THE ENTIRE COMMUNITY REGARDING WATER QUALITY AND HAZARDOUS WASTE

A. Produce an environmental home safety brochure for the general public in conjunction with the Corridor Commission.

B. Establish an annual Environmental Awareness Week with school and community educational programs. NO

## 10. PROVIDE DISINCENTIVES FOR INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND OTHER POLLUTERS

A. Establish heavy local fines for toxic dumping, wetland violations, water pollution, etc. and violation of terms of permits and support DEM's efforts to enforce statewide pollution prevention programs.

B. Withhold permit approvals/renewals from polluters until the situation is mitigated.

## 3.0 Plan Description

The BRVNHC encompasses 23 municipalities within the Blackstone River Valley and watershed from Worcester, Massachusetts to Providence, Rhode Island. It is a "unified, working landscape" tied together by the Blackstone River, Blackstone Canal and Providence & Worcester Railroad which serve as a focus and initiator for the historic forces that have shaped the Valley.

The Valley is historically significant for many reasons. It is the birthplace of the American Industrial Revolution, influencing the rest of the country through industrial use of water power and the development of the Rhode Island System of Manufacturing. In addition, it is an area filled with ethnic and religious diversity. Moreover, the Valley's remarkable history is revealed by the concentration of historic, cultural and natural resources that have survived the past two centuries. Today, it remains unique as efforts are undertaken to preserve and protect these special resources "right where people live and work." The context of a "working valley of mill villages, farms, cities and towns, transportation systems, river and canal...makes the individual elements of the Blackstone River Valley significant."



The John H. Chaffee Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor.

The Blackstone River Valley is this country's second designated "National Heritage Corridor" and the first bi-state National Heritage Corridor. To be successful,

coordination and consistency is to be promoted between the Federal government, the States of Rhode Island and Massachusetts, the Corridor Commission, other interested private parties, and the 23 municipalities of Worcester, Leicester, Millbury, Sutton, Grafton, Northbridge, Upton, Douglas, Uxbridge, Millville, Blackstone, Mendon, and Hopedale, Massachusetts and Woonsocket, North Smithfield, Cumberland, Lincoln, Burrillville, Glocester, Smithfield Central Falls, Pawtucket, and Providence/East Providence, Rhode Island. A valley-wide commission - The Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor Commission - was established by Congress and consists of local and state members nominated by the Rhode Island and Massachusetts governors, and appointed by the U.S. Secretary of the Interior. The early mission of the Commission was to "assist in the plan" for the National Heritage Corridor. This resulted in the creation of the *Cultural Heritage and Land Management Plan* for the Corridor officially adopted in 1990. *The Next Ten Years* is a supplement to the Commission's *Land Management Plan*. The document reaffirms the Corridor's basic goals and commitments and calls attention to important work which remains to be done.

The Corridor Commission has identified seven action areas which encompass the goals of the Commission, state and local governments, private groups and individuals: coordination and consistency, historic preservation, environmental conservation, land use management, recreation, and economic development & tourism.

The Town of North Smithfield supports and readopts the goals contained in the *Cultural Heritage and Land Management Plan*, and its various revisions/updates. North Smithfield plans to work within the framework established by the Corridor Commission and to develop and implement integrated cultural, historical and land resource management programs for the purpose of retaining, enhancing and interpreting the significant values of the lands, waters and structures of the Corridor. For these purposes, the following items serve as a framework for the future.

- Protect the Town's historical, cultural and natural resources in an integrated manner.
- Achieve an integrated land use management approach to maintain the Valley character.
- Protect the Blackstone River and its tributaries as the primary natural resource in the Valley.
- Encourage cooperation and consistency with other local communities in planning effort.
- Interpret the Valley's importance and sponsor activities which lead to public education and use of resources.
- Participate in Valley-wide planning efforts which link the Valley's resources and communities together.
- Support economic development which compliments the goals of the National Heritage Corridor.
- Actively engage in partnership projects which are consistent with the goals of the National Heritage Corridor.
- Encourage recreation development and programs which emphasize Valley resources provide links to other communities.

## 4.0 The Plan

### 4.1 Land Use and the Built Environment

One characteristic that makes the Blackstone River Valley nationally significant is the amount of historic elements and landscapes that remain intact from the time of the industrial revolution and even prior to that. While these elements are truly resources of North Smithfield, their presence can pose dilemmas to current growth and land use pressures. Within the historic industrial mill villages of North Smithfield like Forestdale and Slatersville, industrial era building stock predominates and is not always easily adapted to modern day spatial and functional needs or values. There is a conflict, sometimes real, at times perceived, that the old patterns of development do not meet current needs.



A North Smithfield farm. Urban development poses threats to much of the existing farmland in the Town.

This pattern of land use has changed since early industrialism in both populated areas (the built environment) and in relatively unpopulated areas (farmland and open space). Settlements along the Blackstone River and its tributaries, once devoted almost entirely to manufacturing, now represents opportunities to meet different needs, such as light industry, retail and housing. Urban areas and compact commercial/residential settlements require space for parking. Conversely, the need for housing and the desire for economic growth (giving way to office and industrial parks) pose threats to valuable open space, natural resources and farmland. The build-out analysis contained in the Land Use Element of this Plan is based on the findings of the BRVNHCC's 2001 Super Summit.

Transportation systems once comprised the old patterns of land use and greatly influenced their evolution. Growth necessitates the expansion or even creation of new networks to accommodate more people and newly developed areas. A sensitive relationship exists between increasing and improving transportation systems and preserving the historic, cultural and natural landscapes which contribute to the history and quality of life in the valley.

### 4.2 Regional Planning and Cooperation

For the first time since the Blackstone River Valley was a leader in textile manufacturing, the valley communities have begun to see themselves as a regional entity with a common heritage and a common resource: the River. With a number of valley-wide projects underway, there is a sense among communities that the whole valley is greater than the sum of its parts. Local parks and planned green spaces along the river have gained more significance by being part of plans for a linear park along the length of the Blackstone. The park will also include interpretive exhibits which will give more meaning to local efforts trying to raise public awareness of their heritage and significant local resources. The development of key recreational and interpretive features like Centennial Park along the Branch River and the public protection of Blackstone Gorge provide a focus for regional activity. The report prepared by the BRVNHCC describing

the Blackstone Gorge *Bi-State Park Development Concept Plan* is a good example of regional planning.

The potential for tourism as a positive, albeit limited, economic component further enhances the regional focus of local plans, and stresses the need for coordinated promotion efforts and consistency of interpretation of resources. Therefore, regional planning and cooperation are paramount toward realizing these opportunities.

### 4.3 Partnerships

Prior to the establishment of the National Heritage Corridor, inspiration and action took place in North Smithfield regarding preservation issues including the possible establishment of a linear park along the length of the Blackstone. There was a deep sense of pride in the heritage of the valley yet no driving force to link and support the many local efforts and ideas.

The creation of the Heritage Corridor in 1986 and a series of R.I. open space and recreation bond issues from the mid to late 1980's focused attention and resources on the Blackstone Valley communities. The momentum generated by these events had a tremendous effect in involving municipalities in the development of recreational features, purchase of open space and other Corridor-related projects. Although this initial wave of financial assistance and institutional credibility helped catalyze so many local efforts, other kinds of assistance are needed to complete on-going projects, plans and protection efforts.

Municipalities are not used to being in the role of the "developer", and so lack the experience and some of the resources necessary for a smooth completion process. There is a sense that opportunities will be lost, and resources including financial aid will unnecessarily diminish without some kind of coordination strategy and partnership commitment from all levels of government with the Blackstone Valley communities.

### 4.4 Conservation and Environmental Protection

While the rich industrial heritage has left many valuable resources behind throughout the landscape of the Valley, the nature of the manufacturing industry has also left behind a legacy of environmental woes. Properties particularly along riverways often contain toxic wastes and other hazardous materials which pose serious deterrents to reuse and development. The result is that North Smithfield has a significant inventory of lands and buildings which are underutilized or unusable due to this problem. Particularly, a number of EPA/DEM-identified hazardous waste sites (CERCLIS) are prevalent along the Branch River.

Wetlands and waterways also contain concentrations of metals embedded in silt and other toxins which seriously affect water quality, wildlife habitat and the appearance of the landscape. The sheer magnitude of the problem, the lack of expertise in handling it and the incredible cost in mitigating it, make any solution seem almost impossible.

Picture of the toxic condemned wetland area in Town. Brief description

Because there are so many instances of this level of pollution throughout Rhode Island, there is often a lack of movement or poor follow up on the part of DEM and/or the EPA. As North Smithfield focuses its attention on future development and providing recreational/interpretive opportunities along the Branch River and the Blackstone Gorge, a comprehensive approach must be taken in reclaiming these important lands and waters. In addition to the Gorge, the Commission's 1997 *Natural Resources Inventory and Assessment* specifically identified Woonsocket Hill and the Blunders worthy of particular protection.

## 5.0 Consistency Statement

The Blackstone Valley National Heritage Corridor Element supports the goals of the Comprehensive Planning and Land Use Act and is consistent with relevant State Guide Plan elements. The Element is also consistent with and supportive of programs and policies of the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management, the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor Commission, the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council, and the Blackstone River Watershed Association.

The following is a summary of the major elements of consistency between local and state and regional management plans for the Blackstone River Valley:

### ***State Guide Plan Element 131, Cultural Heritage and Land Management Plan for the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor***

This Element was developed cooperatively by planning staff from the National Heritage Corridor and the Town of North Smithfield. The relevant issues responded to are: Land Use and the Built Environment; Regional Planning and Cooperation; Partnerships; and Conservation and Environmental Protection.

The goals of the Corridor Management Plan are endorsed by this and other elements of the North Smithfield Comprehensive Plan. Strategies were developed to respond to the regional as well as local issues cited above.

### ***The Next Ten Years: An Amendment to the Cultural Heritage and Land Management Plan***

Developed by the Corridor Commission, this document supplements the Commission's original plan and in doing so also affirms the Commission's original goals and commitments. This Element and Plan support the creation and now improvements of heritage infrastructure and programming.

### ***State Guide Plan Element 151, Plan for Recreation, Conservation and Open Space (SCORP)***

This Element is consistent with this State Guide Plan Element and its current update. Other Elements of the North Smithfield Comprehensive Plan such as the Natural and Cultural Resources Element also express this consistency with the goals of the SCORP.