

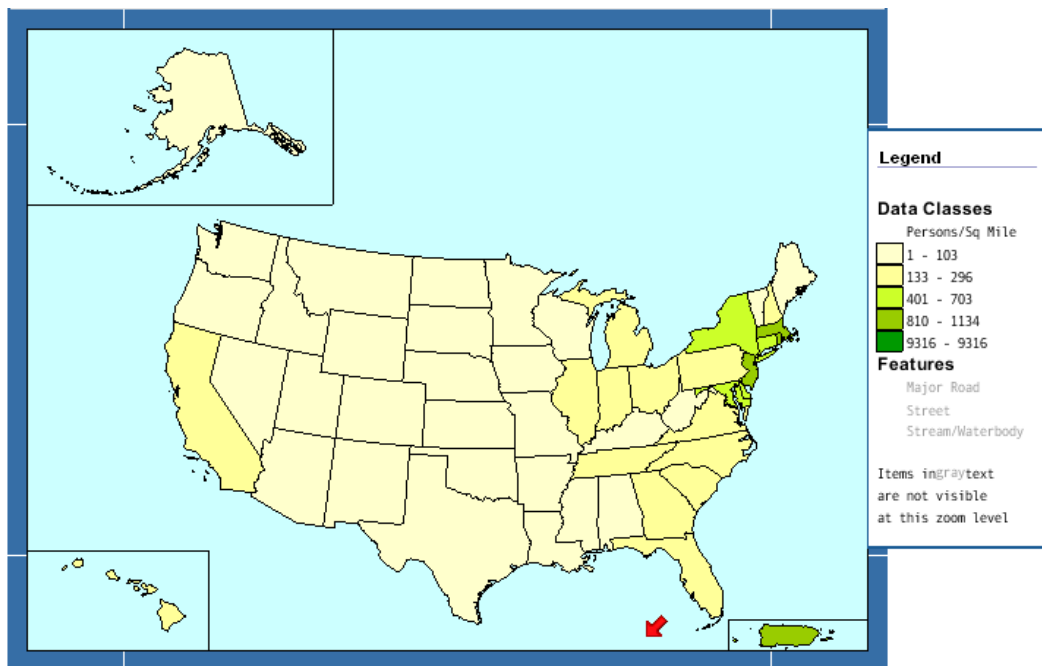
The Importance of Riverside Open Space

A letter of thanks to the Town of Sprague, CT.



Dan Clavette
Outdoor Coordinator
Troop 39 Summit Rhode Island
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Open space is precious, and opportunities to obtain open space lands will surely decrease as time goes on. Populations are never predicted to decrease and American demographics continue to spread out; New London County population increased 4204 (1.62%) from 2000 to 2006¹. Southern New England also has some of the nation's highest population densities as seen in the picture below.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Summary File 1, Matrix P1.

Riverside open space is even more distinctive due to its rarity, especially here in Southern New England. A healthy river corridor enhances everyone's quality of life, helps communities retain and respect their heritage, improves water quality, protects their viewsheds, increases wetlands and riparian buffers, and improves habitat. The town of Sprague is already committed to such conservation efforts;

“Concentrate efforts on identifying and preserving natural resources in areas of town that have been identified as high priority, with special attention paid to the vicinity of the Shetucket River.”

2006 Plan of Conservation and Development Update, Town of Sprague

Another positive consequence of designating open space areas is that they have a tendency to promote citizen participation in the areas of local concern and need. I found an excellent example of this while reading through the history of Sprague;

“During the fiscal year June 30, 1964 to June 30, 1965 a recreation commission was formed and they applied for open space money to purchase 19.5 acres of land from The Baltic Mills Co.. This included the land the grist mill was on, land on River Street (, the skating pond on Main St. and the ball field on Main St. The land was purchased in 1967 and the softball field was rebuilt, lights were added and a Little League field was also built. In time a basketball court and tennis court were built. Later a soccer field and walking track were built as was the skating pond across Main St. from the ball field. “

The first step was to designate and acquire open space.

Limited Canoeing Resources

Our Boy Scout Troop is planning a 100 mile canoe trip on Maine’s St. Croix River in August 2008. In preparation, I have been looking for a local river to have an overnight “shakedown” exercise where we can practice low impact river camping. Navigable river waterways greater than 20 miles in length with overnight camping facilities are rare in southern New England.

Author Ken Webber’s river guide [Canoeing Massachusetts, Rhode Island and Connecticut](#) lists 25 local river trips. The only overnight accommodation that I could find was on the Shetucket River. Fortunately for our troop, the town of Sprague has offered us a location for our July 26th, 2008 overnight camp out.

Surprisingly, even the 407 mile long Connecticut River offers limited public overnight facilities; Connecticut State has only 3 overnight state-run campgrounds which fill up quickly. The CT Department of Environmental Protection is forced to implement strict guidelines and enforce steep penalties to keep order in these heavily used river sites. Furthermore, reduced fees are not available for nonprofit youth groups due to the high demands on these sites.

The Massachusetts section of the CT River is even sparser;

“The Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation is actively working with Conte Refuge, local towns, land trusts, and other nonprofits to preserve river habitat and

*develop recreational resources, such as campsites, since no public sites exist in Massachusetts river reaches”.*²

Summary

I would agree that Sprague’s most important resource is the Shetucket River and the people who have lived on it for generations. Sprague residents should be proud of their town and its unsurpassed natural beauty and history. I would strongly encourage town residents to pursue securing precious riverside open spaces and making these sites available to appreciative river paddlers.

We are grateful of your town’s hospitality.

Sincerely, Dan Clavette

Outdoor Coordinator
Troop 39 Summit, Rhode Island
80 Tillinghast Road
Greene, RI 02827
dclavette@irf.com

¹ Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2006 American Community Survey

² Source: The Connecticut River Boating Guide, p141