

The Eightmile River Watershed *A Wild & Scenic Study Update*

MAY 2004

Outstanding Resources Values of the Eightmile River Watershed Identified

The Eightmile River Wild & Scenic Study Committee has been working on a variety of efforts to identify and document the resource values that make the watershed and river system such a special place. During this phase of study, research has either been completed or is underway on vernal pools, natural communities, stream flows, and the cultural landscape. The outstanding resource values being considered for protection include:

Water Quantity – the amount of flow is often called the “master variable” protecting river resources since without adequate flow a river can not function well. Little impervious cover, the absence of dams or reservoirs, and only one water withdrawal all underscore a rare hydrologic system that is relatively intact and naturally functioning.

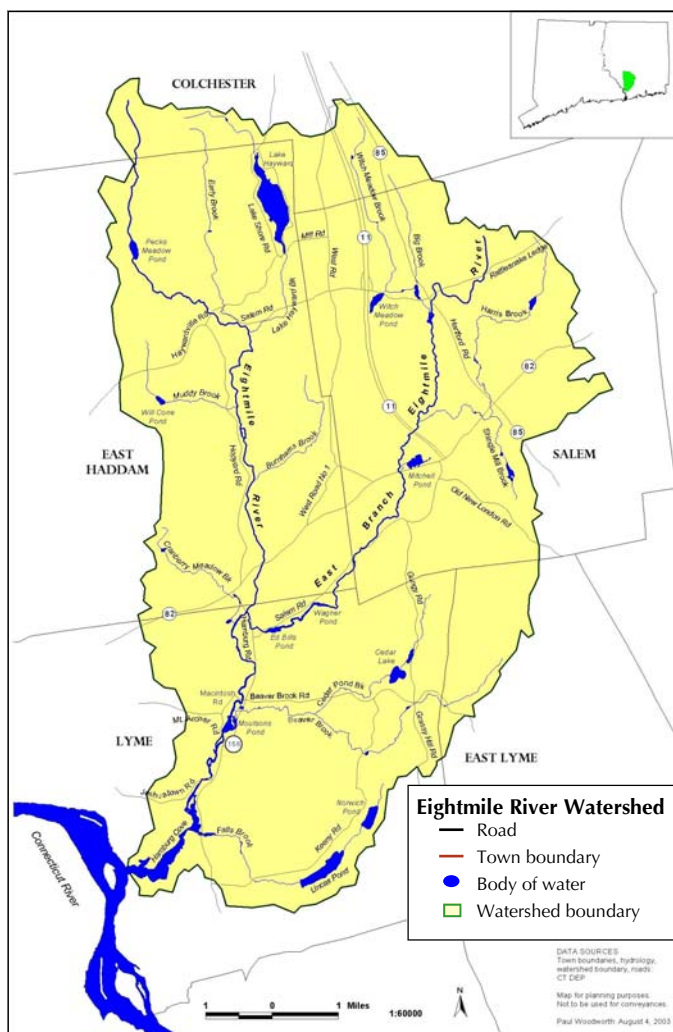
Rare and Diverse Species – the watershed is home to a host of unique plant species. Botanical field work re-confirmed two globally rare species and identified two other sites with globally rare natural communities. Nineteen new threatened, endangered, or special concern plant species, including 11 that are regionally rare, were also found in the watershed.

Geology – the point where present day North American and African continents broke apart is in the heart of the Eightmile River Watershed. The geology seen in the southern half of the watershed is the same geology seen in Morocco, a fairly unique situation in Connecticut!

River Ecosystem Quality – the watershed as a whole is a rare example of an intact, naturally functioning system. There are large unfragmented forest blocks, 85% forest cover, and numerous indicators of high habitat value, ranging from interior nesting birds to submerged aquatic vegetation and freshwater mussels.

Archaeology – a number of exceptional sites have been recognized in the watershed and placed on the National Register of Historic Places. Areas bordering the river have high potential for intact archaeological resources, and the proximity to the coast suggests the possibility that further significant resources will be identified.

Now that this phase of study is near complete, the Study Committee is gearing up to identify locally-led strategies to ensure long-term protection of these outstanding resource values. Community Forums held in May 2004 are the first in a number of opportunities for the community to discuss potential watershed management strategies and share ideas about how to protect the special nature of the Eightmile River watershed with the Study Committee.



Study Committee Reaches Out

The Eightmile River Wild and Scenic Study Committee held outreach meetings in the watershed towns of East Haddam, Lyme and Salem in Spring 2003 and 2004. Each of the sessions were very successful, with many participants and lots of good feedback.

Comments and questions were focused primarily on how watershed resources will be protected and how the study will be conducted. Comments about resource protection generally indicated strong community support for local land management and stewardship, protection of water quality/quantity, and better understanding local biodiversity. Questions about the study process focused on how best to protect private property values as well as leverage federal resources to achieve strong environmental protection. Lastly, an important concern voiced at each meeting was the desire for local land use decisions to remain under local control.

Input from these outreach meetings continues to be used by the Study Committee to understand the issues, concerns and priorities of the watershed community as a whole.



Photo: CRWP Archive

Chairman's Corner

The Eightmile River is the most outstanding river system within the Lower Connecticut River region – a region known as the "Tidelands" and named one of the 40 Last Great Places in the Western Hemisphere by The Nature Conservancy in 1993. As a riverine ecosystem, it is remarkably intact, free-flowing and virtually dam free. With excellent water quality and 85% forest cover, the river system is a haven for diverse and abundant fish populations, from native brook trout to blue back herring. This unusually robust river system contains globally rare species, an internationally recognized fresh water tidal marsh, and indicators of outstanding health such as native freshwater mussels. To top it all off, scenic beauty, historic character, and great fisheries flourish in this, the largest unfragmented forest region in coastal Connecticut.

Why does The Eightmile River need Protection?

The communities of East Haddam, Lyme and Salem make up 90% of the Eightmile River watershed. Over the last decade all three have experienced substantial development pressures. Incremental and poorly planned growth pose the greatest threat to the special qualities of the river system as highlighted above. Fragmenting forests and habitats, poorly managing stormwater runoff, and paving over important groundwater sources will all slowly degrade the features that make the watershed such a unique place. Growth can and will continue. With a Wild & Scenic designation, river communities will have the knowledge, tools and resources to ensure growth is approached in a way compatible with preserving the outstanding values of the Eightmile River.

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Stay Tuned!

Community leadership and involvement is critical for the study to be a success! The Eightmile River Wild & Scenic Education and Outreach Subcommittee is leading efforts to ensure the public is well informed about the study process and has ample opportunity to be involved. Community meetings and events will be held throughout the study, so . . .

Check the website for upcoming events!

The Eightmile Wild & Scenic Study Committee

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President, Lyme Land Conservation Trust

Randy Dill
Selectman & IWWC Chair, East Haddam

William Koch
First Selectman, Town of Lyme

Larry Reitz
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Sally Snyder
Watersheds Coordinator, CT DEP

With support from the National Park Service
Jamie Fosburgh, Rivers Program Manager
Kevin Case, Study Project Manager

Study Committee Meetings are held in the Towns of East Haddam, Lyme, and Salem on a rotating basis on the 4th Monday of each month. Check the website for specific dates and schedules.

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