

# TAUNTON DAILY GAZETTE

## Wild and Scenic designation for Taunton River brings fund, recognition

Local environmentalists heralded the federal designation of the Taunton River as part of the National Wild and Scenic River System when it was finally approved in 2009 after more than a decade of efforts to gain the designation.

But what benefits has the designation brought for the Taunton River, its tributaries and the surrounding environment?

"It's still an entity in its infancy," said Jamie Fosburgh, the Boston-based Wild and Scenic project manager, for the National Parks Service. "I do think that it's been doing some positive things for the river. There has been direct funding. We were able to get money for the operation of the coordinating body for the Wild and Scenic, the Taunton River Stewardship Council."

The Taunton River Stewardship Council is a group of representatives from each of the 10 communities along the 40-mile Taunton River, along with a local American Indian group, seven nonprofit environmental organizations and two governmental bodies, including representatives from state agencies and the National Parks Service. The council is tasked with promoting the Taunton River and its natural value, and it also has a budget of \$26,000 this year to use for projects to promote or benefit the waterway and its surrounding environment.

"We have a small amount of money to work with," Fosburgh said. "We can spend it on various small contracts and to support the local stewardship groups. It's something. We try to do what we can with those dollars."

Fosburgh said another way that the designation has benefited the river is that it increased the stature of the river, which could help leverage potential funding for Taunton River-related projects in the future.

Bill Napolitano, who works for the Southeastern Regional Planning and Economic Development District, is a representative for the the Taunton River Stewardship Council. Napolitano said some of the most significant work that the council has been able to do thus far includes offering grants to local communities to install signs marking the Taunton River and its tributaries as Wild and Scenic, along with funding due diligence work on land acquisition and preservation related to property along the river.

Also, the stewardship council has organized outreach activities, including workshops on flood hazards, trail programs and events about channel markers and boating laws. Napolitano pointed to the creation of Sweets Knoll State Park in Dighton in 2010 as something the council contributed to, along with conservation work on the tidal oxbow on the Taunton River in Raynham.

Napolitano said that grants the Taunton River Stewardship Council gives to local nonprofit stewardship groups can range from several hundred dollars to \$2,500.

Napolitano noted that, initially, the council had \$30,000 a year devoted to such grants, which decreased to \$26,000 this year. And, at one point, the funds were frozen, he said.

"It's not a lot of money, considering you have 10 cities and towns," he said. "But, so far, we have been pretty efficient."

Napolitano said that, in the fall, the council is going to start working on creating a "Blue Way/Green Way" trail — for kayaking or canoeing and hiking or biking — starting in the Weir neighborhood in Taunton going to the Somerset area.

Scott MacFaden, director of land protection for the Duxbury-based Wildlands Trust, has been involved with so-called due process work for potential land acquisition deals related to land conservation along the Taunton River. So far, no deals have been finalized, he said, but Wildlands Trust has been involved in three or four land acquisition projects using grants from the Taunton River Stewardship Council to perform appraisals and title work.

"In almost all these cases, the projects would help preserve significant stretches of the river corridor itself," said MacFaden, who is a representative on the stewardship council. "The grants are hugely helpful for the work that we do. We don't have a lot of money ourselves. The council's funding is hugely beneficial."

Rachel Calabro, another member of the stewardship council and of Providence-based Save the Bay, said although her organization has not received a financial benefit from the Wild and Scenic designation, it helps in other ways. Her organization promotes the environmental well-being of the Narragansett Bay, which includes the southern tidal part of the Taunton River.

"We've used the Wild and Scenic designation to promote our healthy watershed and to promote those values that make it wild and scenic, the fisheries, the recreational aspects and the health of the watershed," Calabro said. "The designation has helped us really talk about the importance of the bay and why the fish are important. It's very important for the health of the entire ecosystem."