



# Middle Branch

Image donated by Hilltown local artist  
MICHAEL WOLSKI (www.MICHAELWOLSKI.com)

## Middle Branch Highlights:

- Over 65 volunteers surveyed approximately 70 miles of the Westfield River
- Middle Branch and its tributaries to the Littleville Reservoir are designated as "Outstanding Resource Waters"
- Glendale Falls is the highest waterfall in Massachusetts

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## WALKIN' THE WATERSHED - Stream Teams in Action 2007

65 VOLUNTEERS SURVEY OVER 70 MILES OF THE WESTFIELD RIVER!

Fifteen years ago, the Westfield River became Massachusetts' first National Wild & Scenic River. Today over 78 miles of the Westfield River are designated as part of the National Wild & Scenic River system.

In 2007, the Westfield River Wild & Scenic Advisory Committee sponsored an extensive shoreline survey of the East, West, and Middle Branches and several of the headwater tributaries. The goals of the survey were to:

- Inventory and assess the Wild & Scenic features along the Westfield River;
- Develop a roadmap of short-term and long-term strategies and actions;
- Assist communities in long-term protection of the Westfield River; and
- Encourage stewardship of the Wild & Scenic features.

Over 65 volunteers surveyed approximately 70 miles of the Westfield River. Using protocols developed by the Riverways Adopt-A-Stream Program, Stream Team volunteers used their observational skills to document scenic, historical, geological, recreational and ecological features along the river.

Shoreline Survey Reports and large format maps have been developed for each branch which highlight the assets, problems and priorities for action identified by the volunteers. This Executive Summary outlines survey findings and priorities for action along the Middle Branch of the Westfield River.



## THE MIDDLE BRANCH OF THE WESTFIELD RIVER

Beginning in the Peru Wildlife Management Area, the Middle Branch of the Westfield River connects remarkable scenic, geological, historical, recreational and ecological features.

Large expanses of vegetated riparian areas provide exceptional

vistas along the river corridor. Prominent overlooks and incredible views of the river can be found along the roadway following the river from Rte 143 in Worthington to near the confluence of Kinne Brook in Chester.

(Continued Middle Branch, Page 2)

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Coordinator 2007

Individuals and Businesses who  
donated prizes for the *Rapid, Riffle,  
Run* Drawing.

All the Stream Team Volunteers



## MIDDLE BRANCH, continued from Page 1

At Glendale Falls, powerful springtime water roars over steep rock ledges dropping more than 150 feet before joining the Middle Branch - forming the highest waterfall in Massachusetts. Other spectacular geological features include the West Worthington Falls, small cascades, and ledge outcroppings.

The Middle Branch provides a rare opportunity in southern New England of a naturally occurring high quality Class III whitewater run that is not dam controlled. Among Glendale Falls, Fox Den Wildlife Management Area and Littleville Recreation Area there are ample recreational opportunities including hiking, paddling, fishing, hunting, wildlife viewing, biking, snowmobiling, cross-country skiing and horseback riding.

## SCENIC FEATURES

Scenic features abound along the Middle Branch with some of the most photogenic being low cascades in hemlock-lined rocky gorges.

Large stretches of trees and native vegetation line the banks in many places creating a sense of wilderness as well as providing outstanding habitat.

Volunteers noted several scenic vistas and overlooks, waterfalls, and characteristics which contribute to the outstanding scenic features along the Middle Branch.

From its source to the Littleville Reservoir in Huntington, the Middle Branch is designated as "Class A: Outstanding Resource Waters" indicating near pristine condition and excellent water quality. The Middle Branch and its tributaries provide a variety of important habitats including outstanding cold water streams, prime juvenile salmon habitat, rare natural communities, and intact bird migration and wildlife corridors.

The North Chester Historic District is recognized for its significant contribution to the broad patterns of history. The historic district is comprised of residential buildings and outbuildings, several potential historic industrial archaeological sites, a burial ground, a chapel, former school, stone walls and a 19<sup>th</sup> century truss bridge with many of these features located along the banks of the river.

### *In their own words:*

"East River Road is extremely scenic and has a variety of vista points along the road as well as pull-off spots to park."

"The river slides, shoots and leaps more than 150 feet down over water-polished surfaces and ledges, creating a myriad of pools, waterfalls, and rivulets which can be explored and enjoyed for hours. The width of the polished rock allows ample sunlight to flood the falls, creating a delightful play between water, rock and light. This is a treasure of our local natural environment."

## GEOLOGICAL FEATURES

For centuries the Westfield River worked with the forces of geological time to create some of the most superb geological features in Massachusetts. The most noteworthy geological features along the Middle Branch are Glendale Falls and West Worthington Falls.

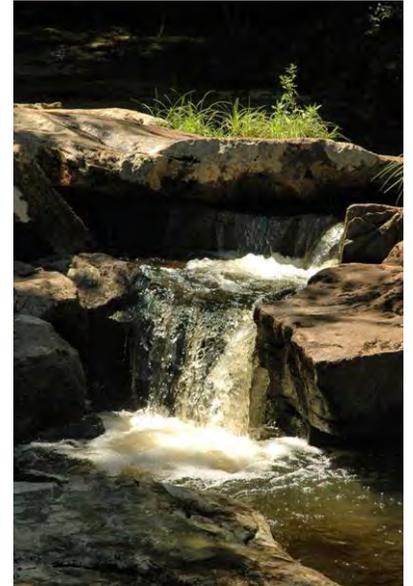
Volunteers noted gorges, as well as waterfalls, unique rock formations, outcroppings, ledges and other evidence of the power of the river's water.

### *In their own words:*

"The river bed is lined completely with round boulders. There is

very little sediment or soil in the stream bed as high water in the spring flushes through this section at high velocity. There are steep hillsides in this valley so when the snow melts, there can be considerable amounts of runoff in the river in the spring. I have often heard boulders crashing and knocking together in the riverbed when the river is running high."

"At Glendale Falls, the Westfield has peeled back the forest to reveal a swath of the 447 million year old Middlefield pluton, a granite emplacement resulting from the collision of continents eons ago."



## HISTORICAL FEATURES

Volunteers recorded evidence of cellar holes, stone walls, family graveyards, and old mill sites strewn along the banks of the Middle Branch.

The North Chester Historic District aligns the banks of the river and contributes to the historic and cultural stories still being told today. One of the most visually prominent structures in the district, the North Chester Bridge spans the Westfield River at Smith Road in the village center. The North Chester Village Bridge is the oldest of three surviving iron truss bridges in Chester and the second-oldest of twenty known R.F. Hawkin's iron highway bridges in Massachusetts.

### *In their own words:*

"The topographic map and aerial photo plainly reveal past [agricultural] land use along the Middle Branch. Scattered fence wire was observed as well on the east hillside of the surveyed segment."

"An old bridge (date carved on cornerstone - 1884) of fieldstones and mortar carries one-land dirt road."

"There are two parallel stone walls located just below Rte 143, which may have been the foundation of a structure."



## ECOLOGICAL FEATURES

The Middle Branch offers a unique high quality, high-energy riverbank natural community found along fast-flowing rivers that experience severe flooding and ice scour. Riparian habitat supports several rare and endangered insect species including river dragonflies such as Harpoon Clubtail, Rapids Clubtail, and Riffle Snaketail; Twelve-spotted Tiger Beetle, which inhabits the riverbanks; and the Ostrich Fern Borer moth, an inhabitant of the floodplain forest along the river.

Volunteers noted numerous species of flora and fauna and described some of the natural communities they observed. In addition, volunteers noted in-stream and stream corridor conditions, e.g. water quality, substrate, shade cover, and riparian vegetation.

### *In their own words:*

“The established wildlife that moves between the ridges and have been observed repeatedly crossing through this area include moose, whitetail deer, black bear, eastern coyote, red fox, bobcat, and fisher. Mink, muskrat and otter traverse up the river and its banks and two active beaver colonies inhabit small ponds that they have created in smaller tributaries. This is a natural corridor that has more wildlife traversing through it than in the nearby populated villages or clusters of housing.”



“The river is lined with deciduous and coniferous trees on both banks. These trees serve to stabilize the banks from erosion and their canopies shades the surface of the water thereby keeping the ambient water temperature cooler than if this section of river was in the open sun. This cooler temperature of the water is important for productive fisheries habitat.”

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*“Scattered sycamore trees were observed along the surveyed segment. This resource should be recognized as a special feature because they may represent the most northern occurrence.”*

## RECREATIONAL FEATURES



Volunteers found many people enjoying the river corridor. They recorded a myriad of uses – hiking, swimming, fishing, hunting, paddling, wildlife viewing, biking, snowmobiling, cross-country skiing, horseback riding, picnicking, nature study, etc. They noted the location of trails and public access sites, as well as suggestions for improving recreational trails and facilities.

### *In their own words:*

“The snowmobile bridge at Sam Hill Road has little space between the high water level and the

supporting stringers running between the bridge abutments. This is a situation where large trees or ice can take out a small bridge like this one. In fact, this bridge was rebuilt by the local snowmobile club a few years ago.”

“Though few continue on along the stream past the pool at the base of the Falls, there are many hidden treasures along this reach including a cold freshwater spring that swells up and flows parallel to the main branch of the river, and many different species of ferns, trees and mushrooms.”

## PROBLEMS

Volunteers identified problems found along their segments. Below is a list of potential problems which could degrade the river, habitat, recreational, scenic and/or historical features found along the river segments:

- Trash and dumping
- Artificial damming of a tributary stream
- Road maintenance and damage to streamside vegetation
- Runoff from East River Road
- Bank erosion along

East River Road

- Invasive species including Japanese knotweed
- Small patches of oil
- House falling into river
- Erosion on banks above Glendale Falls
- Potential beaver problems
- Runoff from parking area
- Slippery rocks creates recreational hazard
- Trampled vegetation, exposed roots and erosion
- Excessive dog poop

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*"The footing is quite tricky as one passes over the rocks. It would not be hard to fall, slide, or twist an ankle. It is clearly a "enjoy at your own risk" situation, but a sign or some type of warning might be wise."*



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*"If there is a designated trail, it is very poorly marked. This has led to multiple parallel trails along the south edge of the falls. Foliage has been trampled, and the roots of trees have been exposed, creating both treacherous footing and hastened erosion."*

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*"In general, landowners maintain very respectable filter strip. Landowners who take pride in maintaining proper filter strips along a significant resource areas are important assets."*

## ASSETS

Volunteers noted assets found along their segments. Below is a list of values and assets identified along the river and within its corridor:

- Trout and wildlife habitat
- Beaver habitat creates good habitat for wildlife, especially wildfowl
- Potential conservation areas
- Landowner's have high level of conservation awareness and stewardship
- Landowner's maintain respectable filter strips
- Intact riparian zone and unfragmented forests
- "Legacy" sycamore trees
- Good locations for wildlife viewing
- Potential recreational opportunities, e.g. canoe access and tenting if allowed by landowners
- Scenic and recreational values
- Lack of trash at Glendale Falls despite intense use
- Good water quality
- Extensive wildlife corridor



# Middle Branch: Priorities for Action

## Legend

-  DPW Outreach
-  Erosion
-  Invasive
-  Maintain Wildlife Corridor
-  Monitor Land Use Changes
-  Riparian Buffers
-  Trail Maintenance
-  Wild & Scenic Designation
-  Middle Branch of Westfield River
-  Town Line
-  Roads



Sponsor a workshop with Mass Electric Company and Town DPWs on road maintenance in riparian corridors.



Maintain snowmobile crossing and reduce likelihood of being swept away during flood due to its low clearance.



Maintain and enhance important wildlife corridors and unfragmented forests.



Address erosion concerns adjacent to roadway while protecting and enhancing habitat in the riparian corridor.



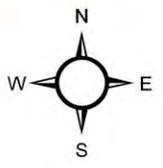
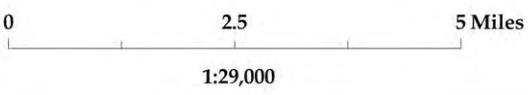
Eradicate Japanese knotweed and other invasives, especially in areas where it is not well established.



MAP PREPARED BY:  
Carrie Banks, Westfield River Wild & Scenic Coordinator  
September 2007

DATA SOURCE:  
Based on survey findings from Walkin the Watershed Stream Team Volunteers  
Base Map information from MassGIS

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## PRIORITIES FOR ACTION

Based on the survey findings, Stream Team volunteers recommended short-term and long-term actions to preserve, protect and enhance the special qualities of the Westfield River. The following is a summary of their recommendations.

### Short-term Actions (actions which can be completed in 6 months to a year):

- **Sponsor educational programs** for landowners and residents on how to keep river healthy
- **Monitor house falling into river**
- **Promote “Pooper Scoopers”** along river from the Kinne Brook Bridge heading towards Dayville
- **Conduct training with highway departments** to highlight importance of maintaining healthy vegetation along river. Consider holding in conjunction with power company who provides specialized mowing equipment to towns.
- **Cleanup ragged tree limbs** and try to allow riparian and roadside vegetation to recover
- **Conduct follow-up surveys\*\*\*** on several segments
- **Install and update informational kiosks\*\*\***

### Long-term Strategies and Actions (actions which take 1-5 years):

**Wildlife Habitat:** Maintain and enhance important wildlife corridors

- Establish “Keeping Track” transects to monitor and track wildlife movement
- Continue to work with landowners to protect and improve wildlife corridors

**Landowner Stewardship:** Recognize landowners for their stewardship and continue to encourage high level of conservation awareness with existing and future landowners

- Monitor landuse and landownership changes
- Encourage habitat protection and improvements, e.g. maintaining riparian areas and wildlife corridors, removing invasive species, or providing specialized habitat

**Invasive species:** Continue to monitor and, where appropriate, remove and eradicate invasive species.

Strategies may include:

- Educational workshops with landowners
- Mapping of invasive species to assess feasibility of removal
- Study techniques for removal

**Water Quality:** Promote and maintain good water quality

- Divert runoff from parking lot at Glendale Falls away from the river
- Monitor dog walking activities and encourage proper disposal of waste
- Conduct water quality sampling

**Recreation:** Make recreational improvements

- Continue to maintain and reduce likelihood of snowmobile crossing being swept away during floods
- Monitor area around snowmobile crossing for trash and other signs of “partying” activity
- Install hazard warning sign at Glendale Falls
- Clearly mark designated trail and allow trampled areas to recover at Glendale Falls

\*\*\*These action items are in progress. For more details, see “Looking Ahead...2008 the year of Wild & Scenic”, PG 8



**Westfield River  
Wild & Scenic  
Advisory Committee**

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We're on the Web!

See us at:

**[www.westfieldriver.org](http://www.westfieldriver.org)**

***LOOKING AHEAD... 2008 the year of Wild & Scenic***

In 2008, we will celebrate not only the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the National Wild & Scenic Rivers Act, but also the 15th Anniversary of the National Wild & Scenic designation on the Westfield River. In our continued efforts to protect this nationally recognized river, we have already integrated Stream Team Survey results into ongoing projects and activities.

Survey findings were incorporated into a new Volunteer Water Quality Monitoring Program which will be launched in the Fall of 2008. Stream Team volunteers will be able to assist in the collection of samples on the Middle Branch. In addition, follow-up surveys will be conducted

in the Spring and Summer to collect more detailed information along several river segments.

Throughout 2008, the Westfield River Wild & Scenic Advisory Committee (WRWSAC) will continue to work with the Stream Teams to develop Action Plans and implement the recommended actions for each of the branches. Project funding will be available through the FY2008 Partnership Rivers budget for the Westfield River.

Stream Team survey reports and maps will be displayed and made available in each of the Towns along the Middle Branch.

***About the Westfield River Wild & Scenic Advisory Committee...***

**The mission of the Committee is to preserve, protect, and enhance the special qualities and outstanding natural resources of the Westfield River watershed in concert with local communities.**

The Committee is comprised of representatives of the towns of Becket, Chester, Chesterfield, Cummington, Huntington, Middlefield, Savoy, Washington, Windsor, and Worthington, as well as the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, the National Park Service, Pioneer Valley Planning Commission, Berkshire Regional Planning Commission, The Trustees of Reservations, and the Westfield River Watershed Association.

**Westfield River Wild & Scenic  
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