

The Fall River Herald News

## River's wild and scenic status official

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WASHINGTON — The massive land protection bill that bestowed the Wild and Scenic River designation upon the Taunton River is now official.

President Barack Obama Monday signed legislation that sets aside more than 2 million acres as protected wilderness.

The bill includes designating the Taunton River within the federal Wild and Scenic Rivers system.

Senators Edward Kennedy and John Kerry joined with former Congressman Joe Moakley, D-Mass., in 1999 to introduce legislation that would authorize a study of the river for consideration of the federal designation. Since that initial request, the study area was expanded in 2002 to include the lower portion of the river, including the section in Fall River.

As approved by Congress, the Taunton River from the Braga Bridge to the river's headwaters in Bridgewater will be designated under the federal Wild and Scenic Systems. Under the designation, the first 18-mile segment flowing north to south will be classified as scenic, the next five miles recreational, the next eight miles scenic and the final nine miles from Muddy Cove in Dighton to the Braga Bridge as recreational.

The Taunton River is the longest coastal river in New England without dams, supporting 45 species of fish and many species of shellfish, including seven types of freshwater mussels.

The watershed is a habitat for 154 species of birds, including 12 rare types. It is also home to the river otter, mink, gray fox, and deer.

With the designation in place, a Taunton River Stewardship Council will be established to serve as the principal partner of the National Park Service in implementing and overseeing the designation. The council will have representatives from each of the municipalities along the river, along with a variety of environmental organizations and the state.

The federal Wild and Scenic Rivers Act requires that rivers within the system be preserved in free-flowing condition and managed to protect and enhance their outstanding values. It prohibits the federal government from funding or issuing permits for water resource projects that would have a "direct and adverse impact" on those values.

A spokesman for Weaver's Cove Energy has said the designation will not effect the construction of a liquefied natural gas import terminal along the river's banks in Fall River.

The Omnibus Public Land Management Act was approved in the Senate March 19 and passed by the House last week. It includes more than 150 bills on parks, wilderness and land protection. The law represents one of the largest expansions of wilderness protection in a quarter-century.

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