

A preservation act

National Wild and Scenic River designation sought for Upper Taunton River

By Mary Julius

ENTERPRISE STAFF WRITER

MIDDLEBORO — William B. Taylor still remembers a spring day 80 years ago when he was digging worms to go fishing and he spotted a small, triangular piece of white quartz in the soil. He picked up the crudely chipped stone point and held it in his hand.

"It was my first arrowhead," said the 70-year-old Taylor, who grew up and still lives in the Tiltout section in north Middleboro where his family owned the 90-acre Riverside Farm and Orchards on Vernon Street along the Taunton River.

Since that day, Taylor has continued to spend countless hours looking for American Indian artifacts and has amassed a collection of more than 10,000 stone artifacts, many that were found in fields along the Taunton River from Bridgewater to North Middleboro, either by him or his father, the late William H. Taylor.

From knife blades, points, drills and now to gouges, adls, peckers and stone pipes, the collection gives a glimpse into a way of life that existed for thousands of years along the river's edge.

"It's still thrilling for me to pick up an arrowhead and know I'm the first person in 8,000 years to hold it," said Taylor, who occasionally writes for the Massachusetts Archeological Society bulletin.

Taylor will show slides and talk about his artifact collection and the archeological and cultural resources of the upper Taunton River at 7 p.m. Wednesday in the auditorium at Middleboro Town Hall.

During the meeting, which is being held as part of a three-year project called the Taunton River Wild and Scenic River Study, James Feenburgh of the National Park Service will also give a brief overview of the Wild and Scenic River Program.

"This is our first public outreach presentation from within our committee," said Bill Napolitano, director of environmental programs for the Southeastern Regional Planning and Economic Development District.

The purpose of the federally funded feasibility study is to prepare a report and gather facts to support the designation of the Upper Taunton River as part of the National Wild and Scenic River System.

The group is focusing on a 22.5-mile stretch of the upper Taunton River, which extends from the Town and Matfield rivers in Bridgewater and Halifax, to the confluence of the Forge and Taunton rivers in Raynham.

A group made up of 26 committee members from Halifax, Bridgewater, Middleboro, Raynham and Taunton, and a support staff of six federal, state, local and regional representatives, meet on a monthly basis to work on the project.

Maisy McDarby-Stanovich, an environmental GIS specialist at SRPED, is in the process of putting together a Web



William B. Taylor sorts his massive collection of arrowheads on his dining room table.

site with information about the study, which should be completed in March.

The Wild and Scenic River system includes 103 designated rivers. To be a part of the system, rivers must be free flowing and have at least one "outstandingly remarkable value" in the areas of history, fish and wildlife, culture, scenery, geology, archeology or recreation.

The government has identified 90,000 miles of river that are possibly eligible for inclusion in the WSR system, which is only 2.5 percent of all rivers in the country. Rivers in the system must have a management plan, which can help in controlling growth.

Rivers that are part of the national rivers system receive permanent federal protection and management funding.

The Wild and Scenic River statue is a

privilege reserved for special rivers whose adjacent communities recognize and are committed to the long-term protection of identified river values. Following the three-year study, the decision about whether to go forward with the federal designation will be made locally.

To Taylor, living near the Taunton River and watching the increasing wildlife, such as deer, osprey and great blue herons, he understands how important it is to preserve the resource for future generations.

"Something is happening here," Taylor said. "The river is definitely cleaning up. We need to preserve the river corridor."

Mary Julius can be reached at mjulius@enterprise.com