

The John H. Chafee Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor Commission and Preserve Rhode Island have undertaken the Blackstone Canal Preservation Study to facilitate a better understanding of the character and condition of the extant segments of the Blackstone Canal in Rhode Island. The goals of the Study are to assess opportunities for preservation, restoration, and interpretation of the Canal and its history, and to recommend key ventures for such action. The following five key ventures of the Canal were selected for further evaluation because of their high degree of preservation, unprotected status, accessibility to the public, proximity to other protected areas of the Canal, and high interpretive value.

CANAL BASIN TO RANDALL STREET, PROVIDENCE

The Canal Basin to Randall Street in Providence comprises a 0.6-mile length of watered canal trench beginning in the south at Park Row and extending north along Canal and Charles Streets to Randall Street.

The well preserved state of the Blackstone Canal in this area and its proximity to shops, restaurants and hotels of downtown Providence; the public recreation amenities and interpretative signage of Water Place Park; and the well-established National Park Service visitor center facilities of Roger Williams National Memorial all make this area a key venture for physical restoration and expanded interpretation that will motivate visitors and residents to explore the other key areas of the Blackstone Canal in Rhode Island.

Physical restoration is recommended to include stabilization and repair of the canal/river walls here along with the removal of concrete caps that are not original. Expanded interpretation efforts could include placement of information about the canal,

such as a self-guided tour, at the Roger Williams National Memorial Visitor Center and incorporation of the canal's history into existing walking tours in the area.

LORRAINE MILL AREA, PAWTUCKET

The Lorraine Mill Area in Pawtucket comprises a 0.4-mile length of watered canal trench, beginning on the north side of the Lorraine Mill complex and extending north to the Pawtucket-Lincoln municipal line. This parcel contains the remaining extant sections of the Canal trench interwoven beds of the Canal and the Moshassuck River, as well as adjacent wetlands between Mineral Springs Avenue on the south and the Pawtucket-Lincoln municipal line on the north.

This key venture would involve working with the City of Pawtucket to preserve open space near Lorraine Mill through the implementation of a conservation easement. Other opportunities could include protection and maintenance activities with the Friends of the Moshassuck and educational activities with the nearby Slater School.



ASHTON DAM AREA, LINCOLN

The Ashton Dam Area in Lincoln comprises a 1.8-mile length of watered canal, beginning in the south at a point approximately 0.8 miles south of Martin Street and across the Canal from the northern leg of Maria Street, and extending north to Ashton Dam.

This key venture focuses on one of the best preserved sections of the Canal in Rhode Island and features a concentration of historical, recreational and natural resources that make this section a popular destination. The well preserved state of the Blackstone Canal in the Ashton Dam Area, its location within state park lands and its proximity to the Wilbur Kelly House/ Kelly House Museum make this a key area for protection.

But control of the river here is a significant challenge that remains under study. Construction of a flood control structure is a necessary future action. Interpretive efforts and protection of known archaeological resources in the area are also recommended.

MAMMOTH MILL AREA, NORTH SMITHFIELD

The Mammoth Mill Area in North Smithfield comprises a 0.4-mile length of watered canal, beginning in the south at the Singleton Street bridge and extending north to the town line and running between the railroad on the west and the Blackstone River on the east. This key venture can serve as the northern gateway to the Blackstone Canal in Rhode Island. The principal features from the Blackstone Canal period that remains intact are associated with the former Green Mill/ Mammoth Mill which operated using water drawn from the canal from the 1820s into the 1920s. The former mill site holds a variety of industrial features, including a tailrace. Opportunities can include preparation of a long-term plan for the site that would help determine if creation of a park or improved water access is feasible. Archaeological investigations are also recommended here to gain a better understanding of its historic operations. Signage would also help increase the public's appreciation of its importance.

INTERPRETATION THROUGHOUT THE CANAL CORRIDOR

Interpretation of the Blackstone Canal at various locations along the Canal in Rhode Island can play an important role in promoting public awareness of the Canal as a state-wide resource. The disjointed nature of the Canal in Rhode Island, where visible and watered segments of identifiable Canal trench are by original design interspersed with long stretches of slackwater passages in natural bodies of water such as the Blackstone and Moshassuck Rivers, makes it difficult for the public to recognize that the Canal historically was a contiguous feature in the landscape. Interpretive efforts could include signage matching existing Corridor signs in key locations that would broaden the stories currently told. Interactive events and activities are also recommended to more thoroughly engage visitors.

