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New Push for Blackstone River National Park Status

by [Deb Gauthier](#) (email) Today

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Congressman Richard E. Neal, Senator Richard T. Moore and Congressman James McGovern at Lookout Rock in Northbridge yesterday in support of legislation to make the Blackstone River Valley a national park.

Photo Credit: *Deborah Gauthier*

A five-minute hike up a gradually steep incline brought about 30 people and a couple of dogs to Lookout Rock off of Northbridge's Quaker Street yesterday to one of the most beautiful views in the Blackstone Valley – the Blackstone River meandering through acres and acres of multi-colored woodland as far as the eye can see.

Lookout Rock is thought to have been the observation point for King Philip in 1675-76 during King Philip's War which pitted Native Americans against settlers in southern New England.

More than 300 years later, Lookout Rock is part of the Blackstone River and Canal Heritage Stage Park, partnered with the John H. Chafee Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor, and yesterday was the venue from which Congressman Richard E. Neal (D-2nd District) announced he will file legislation to make the corridor a national park.

It is companion legislation to a bill filed last year by Sen. Harry Reid of Nevada, Neal said.

Neal was accompanied by Congressman James McGovern (D-3rd District) and Sen. Richard T. Moore (D-Worcester/Norfolk District), both long-time supporters of the river park system.

Passage of the legislation, "will determine the future of those children seated on the rocks up there," Neal said, pointing to a family picnicking on Lookout Rock above him.



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McGovern looked back on the early years of the Blackstone River, then considered the hardest working river in the United States, powering mills all along its banks and ushering in the American Industrial Revolution.

"It was so vital to the development of the United States of America," he said.

A requirement to earning national park status is to show its national significance. "Making the case, we win hands down," McGovern said. "But it won't be easy. Some in Congress don't believe national parks are a good thing."

He will argue that a national park will be a "strong engine for economic development and the creation of jobs."

Moore "played a pivotal role," in the creation of the corridor, Neal noted. "Dick and I were young men when this all started," he said.

Formerly state representative, Moore was involved from the very beginning – helping to get through the state Legislature funding for the purchase of more than 1,000 acres which became the Northbridge-Uxbridge State Park. Lookout Rock and Rice City were part of that original purchase.

Legislation in 1986 created the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor encompassing 24 communities along the river, from Providence to Worcester; legislation in 1999 renamed the corridor the John H. Chaffee Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor to honor long-time supporter, the late Sen. John Chaffee of Rhode Island.

National park status is vital, said Donna Williams, chair of the Blackstone River Heritage Corridor Commission. National park status will bring funding so that work will continue on improving the environment, restoring historic landmarks and providing active and passive recreation.

If approved, the commission, which is set to expire in 2012, Black, Inc. will be formed through the National Park Service which will take over the work of the commission. If the commission dies without a national entity taking its place, the services currently provided by the NPS, such as park rangers, dies with it.

To the audience, she said, "you need to write letters to these guys," pointing to the Neal, Moore and McGovern. "And you need to send letter to the ones in Rhode Island. They need to have something to bring to the hearings to show that this is important to us."

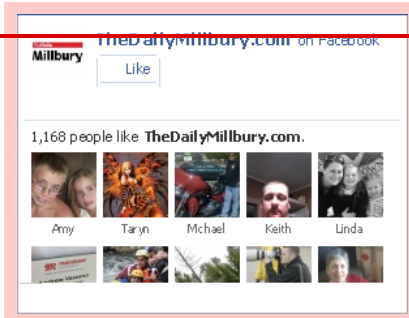
Neal said he expects to file the legislation in a week or two, after which hearings will be scheduled.

For more information on the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor Commission, visit www.nps.gov/blac/index.htm. For more information on the Blackstone River and Canal Heritage State Park, visit www.mass.gov/dcr/parks/central/blst.htm.

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