

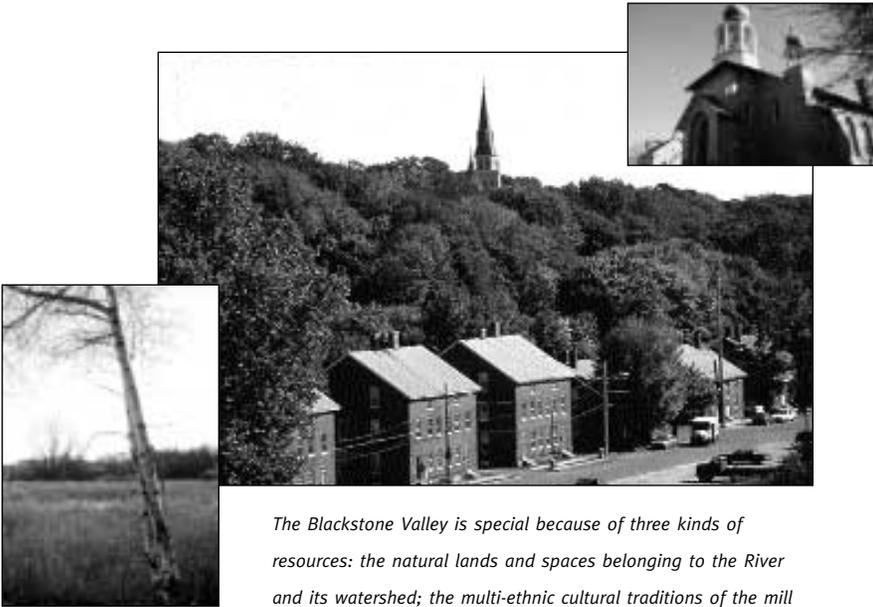
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Background

OVERVIEW

THE NATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE BLACKSTONE VALLEY

The Valley of the Blackstone River, which drains south-central Massachusetts and northern Rhode Island, had long been recognized by historians as the birthplace of American Industry. In the 1790's, Samuel Slater, a textile maker in Pawtucket, RI, first succeeded in adapting English machine technology to cotton-yarn manufacturing powered by water wheels. What had hitherto been a small cottage industry of hand-made products soon became America's first factory-based industry of mass production. Gradually, this radical new "Rhode Island System of Manufacturing," which created whole new communities dedicated to a single manufactory (textiles in the Blackstone Valley), spread rapidly, leading by the mid 19th century to profound changes in the cultural, political, economic, demographic and physical characteristics of the new nation. Strangely, this nationally significant story — an essential element in what is unique about American history — has been largely restricted only to industrial historians and local residents who had grown up recognizing their Valley as a special place.



The Blackstone Valley is special because of three kinds of resources: the natural lands and spaces belonging to the River and its watershed; the multi-ethnic cultural traditions of the mill communities; and the historic character of the mill villages and hilltop villages.

THE VALLEY'S RESOURCES

Historians teach that the significance of some regions is defined by their natural resources (the coal-mining regions of Pennsylvania, for example), others by their cultural and historic resources (the old seaports of New England are another). The Blackstone Valley, by contrast, had been defined by all three. Its unique natural resource was the River and its watershed. Its unique cultural resource was a multi-ethnic tradition of investor-owned town life dedicated to textile production. And its unique historical resource was the physical form of the mill villages, which line the river banks with their complex of mills and worker houses. These stand in marked contrast to the rural hill towns surrounding the Valley where farmers once produced the goods to feed the mill workers below.

The Cultural Heritage and Land Management Plan (Management Plan) frames the significance of the Valley's historical resources in this way: "The Blackstone River Valley is one of the nation's richest and best preserved repositories of landscapes, structures and sites that recall a neglected era of the American past: the Age of Industry." As the need for labor expanded through the 19th century, immigrants from many areas of Europe settled in the formerly Yankee towns. Many brought traditional folkways with them, further enriching and

deepening the cultural resources of the Valley. The natural resources of the region provided both the setting and the raw materials which sustained the Valley's economic and cultural development through its industrial era. In this inter-woven tapestry of natural and man-made forces, the Blackstone River remains the starting point. Its seemingly endless power to turn the water wheels of industry, quench the thirst of thousands who came to the Valley for work, and supply the myriad needs of textile production is central to understanding why this Valley made its mark on American history.

Historical Resources — The Management Plan characterizes the Blackstone Valley as a "unified working landscape of scenic mill villages, commercial town centers, rural open space and urban areas." Small mill communities clustered along the riverways, such as Slatersville in North Smithfield, are still illustrative of the Rhode Island System where whole villages were financed by a small group of investors. Housing, schools, libraries and churches all were built around the workplace that attracted families for employment in the mill. Slater Mill, the earliest site of textile manufacturing in the Valley, is well preserved, although the original mill village has evolved into the City of Pawtucket. Examples of early industrial villages which populate the Valley, can be readily contrasted with later 19th century industrial communities, such as Ashton, which are characterized by massive mill structures whose size responded to the growing scale of late 19th century production. With the rapid growth of industry and changing technology, transportation systems united and transformed the Valley. Colonial roads and early turnpikes, such as the still extant Central Turnpike in Northbridge and Sutton, were overlaid by railroads and highway systems spanning more than two centuries. Intact sections of the Blackstone Canal and Towpath lace through state park land in both states. By mid-century, the Providence and Worcester Railroad had eclipsed the Blackstone Canal as the principal means of commercial transportation in the Valley.

Background

Cultural Resources — In the Rhode Island System of Manufacturing, classes and cultures were separated in the development of neighborhoods such as Worcester's Green Island and Quinsigamond Village neighborhoods. Traditions and cultural identity were reinforced by establishment of churches, social halls and restaurants. French Canadians, Germans, Swedes, English, Irish, Dutch and many more groups came to the Blackstone Valley, leaving some part of their cultural mark on the landscape or folkway traditions. One of the more compelling interpretations of this story is contained in the exhibits featured in the new Museum of Work and Culture in Woonsocket, RI.

Natural Resources — Despite generations of development and change, the Blackstone River Valley hosts a rich array of natural resources which are evident in its rivers and tributaries, wetlands and rocky outcroppings, and forests and fields. The Blackstone River is the most significant natural resource in the region, linking two states and 24 communities by a natural system with a national story. Called "the hardest working river in America" at its zenith, the Blackstone was once harnessed by more than 40 dams over its 46-mile length. Over time, these impoundments created marsh and wetlands that are now an integral part of the region's natural ecosystem. State parks and forests also protect significant areas of both historic and natural resources. A developing system of trails and the Blackstone Bikeway will provide important connections to natural areas in the future.

The future of the Valley's natural resources has been determined important enough by Congress that the 1996 reauthorization act has required the Commission to complete a Natural Resources Inventory and Assessment as a stand-alone technical report. The Inventory, whose Executive Summary is appended to this document, will help direct the Commission's environmental agenda for the next ten years. Indeed, the well-being of the



The Natural Resources Inventory and Assessment, mandated by Congress as part of the Commission's 1996 reauthorization, will direct the environmental agenda of the Commission for the next ten years; its Executive Summary is appended to this report.

Blackstone and its river basin lands have been judged so important that the process of River Recovery has been selected as one of the four Core Commitments on the Commission's working agenda for the decade ahead.

THE COMMISSION AND THE HERITAGE CORRIDOR "EXPERIMENT"

When Congress established the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor in 1986, it established a bi-state, federally-appointed commission of local and state representatives to help preserve and interpret the unique resources and qualities that made the Blackstone Valley significant both to the nation and to its residents. When the Commission was established in 1986, it was part of a then novel idea to enlist the National Park Service in a partnership dedicated to helping states and localities conserve their special regions - those places where historical and natural characteristics had left their mark on American history. At the time, this was an ambitious experiment; no one knew whether it would work or not.

Called the "hardest working river in America" because of the countless mills which lined its banks and tributaries, the Blackstone was controlled by over 40 dams, whose man-made impoundments created ponds and wetlands now considered part of the Valley's natural ecosystem.





One of the Commission's principal objectives is to help residents envision their Valley as a regional place linked by a common set of economic, natural and cultural resources.

A REGIONAL VISION

The experiment was based upon a fresh approach to thinking about regional places. Rather than conceiving of the Valley as a set of self-contained, independent municipalities divided by political boundaries, the Commission began to help residents envision the Valley as a regional entity: an interdependent place linked by a common set of economic, natural and cultural resources. If approached as an inter-connected system, this new approach might engender new attitudes that would help revitalize the Valley as a place to visit, live, work and invest. But the vision for the Corridor as a whole is much larger than what the Commission, by itself, will accomplish. Unlike traditional National Parks, the Corridor Commission did not, nor does it now, own land, control significant sites, or have regulatory powers. The vision began to make a tangible impact on public and private-sector actions throughout the Valley. Many local leaders, private investors and residents began to think in regional terms, and to assign a higher value on preserving and interpreting the Valley's historic, cultural and natural resources.

A STRATEGIC APPROACH

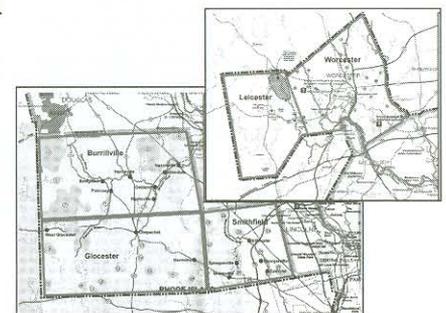
The Commission's most effective tools in nurturing this regional attitude have been three fold: public education, which reaches out to the grass-roots level; partnerships, which pool local and national resources; and targeted investments, which focus scarce public and private dollars on highly visible projects that reinforce a sense of the Valley's national heritage story and build local pride and enthusiasm. As individuals, the Commissioners are most effective as key players who influence the direction of the Valley. They bring their combined

agendas from their normal pursuits to the table, focusing and enhancing activities through the objectives of the agencies or interests they represent. As the Commission heads into its next decade, these tools and individual Commissioner's efforts will remain at the heart of the Heritage Corridor implementation strategy for the future.

WHY ANOTHER TEN YEARS?

In the mid 1990s, with the Blackstone Commission's federal authorization set to phase-out in 1996, not only did the existing 20 communities of the Heritage Corridor recognize that the Commission's real work had just begun, but four additional towns and the remainder of the City of Worcester sought to join the Corridor. To address this demand, the National Park Service conducted a Boundary Study in 1995 to determine the feasibility of extending the Corridor's boundaries and enlisting additional municipal partners. The result was a groundswell of local support. This display of ongoing determination from so many new and existing partners led Congress to conclude that the heritage area "experiment" was indeed working. In November 1996, Congress authorized the Commission to continue its mission for another ten years and add four new communities: the Towns of Burrillville, Glocester and Smithfield in Rhode Island, and the Town of Leicester in Massachusetts, and the rest of the City of Worcester.

Four new communities were added to the Heritage Corridor by Congress in 1996 including: Burrillville, Glocester and Smithfield, RI, and Leicester, MA. A fifth municipality, the City of Worcester, sought to have the balance of its area north of Quinsigamond Village added.



Over the next ten years, the Commission will remain committed to its priority goal of regional land-use management through ongoing initiatives such as educational workshops for developers and local officials, public forums for controversial issues, and longer-range initiatives such as planning along the Rt. 146 corridor.

Background

CONGRESSIONAL DIRECTION FOR THE NEXT TEN YEARS

With reauthorization, Congress gave a clear message to the Commission - stay the course! It basically said the Commission should not alter significantly the Cultural Heritage and Land Management Plan approved in 1990. The legislation did mandate the Commission to develop a "revised" plan within one year of enactment of P.L. 104-333. This revision or supplement to the Management Plan shall:

- "address the boundary change"
- include a Natural Resource Inventory
- develop a 10-year development plan outlining "resource protection needs and projects critical to maintaining or interpreting the distinctive character of the Corridor"; as well as a work program that reflects the authorized \$5 million and the partnerships necessary to carry out the plan.

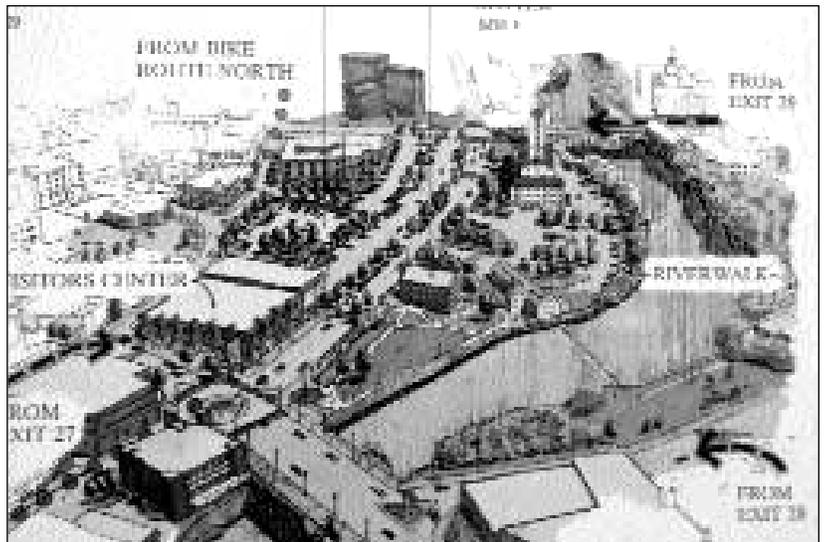
This document, The Next Ten Years, is meant as a companion piece to the Management Plan: it reaffirms the commitments of the last 10 years and describes an emerging Commission focus and strategy for the next ten years, calling attention to important work which remains undone. The Next Ten Years is a dynamic plan which provides the guidance of basic principles while recognizing the need to grow over the coming years in order to address changed circumstances. Not every idea or proposal which appears in this supplement may be accomplished, and some proposals undoubtedly will change in light of further examination, additional information, and new ideas.

CULTURAL HERITAGE & LAND MANAGEMENT PLAN OBJECTIVES

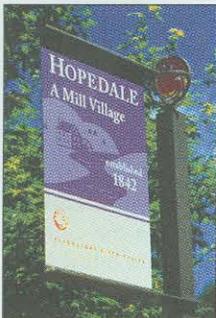
Approved by the Secretary of the Interior in 1990, The Cultural Heritage and Land Management Plan has served as the Commission's blueprint for action. Several overriding goals from that document continue to direct the Commission's work then as now:

- **PROTECT** the Valley's historic, cultural and natural resources in an integrated manner;
- **EDUCATE** and **INTERPRET** the Corridor's importance to the people of the Valley and its visitors;
- **FOSTER** specific activities that tap the Valley's unique resources and invite people to enjoy and celebrate them;
- **STIMULATE** the research necessary to understand the Valley's role in the American Industrial Revolution and the lessons it holds for our times; and;
- **COORDINATE** and **ENCOURAGE** all the partnerships that will be necessary to achieve these goals.

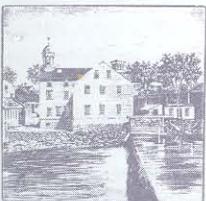
It should be noted that the Management Plan, which was appended by a series of five reports, including a Historic Resources Inventory, Design Guidelines and Standards, an Interpretive Plan, a Land Use Management Plan and an Economic Assessment, is now recognized as an early national model for the "heritage area" experiment.



The working agenda of the Commission remains comprehensive for the next ten years: continue to reinvest in the Valley's historic, cultural and natural resources; tell the industrial history story to a national audience; build local constituencies through heritage partnerships; carry out demonstration projects that encourage those partners; and continue coordination between state and federal agencies which share aspects of its mission.



Over 200 new signs have been installed throughout the Corridor as part of the Commission's corridor-wide signage system; dozens more are expected in the future throughout the new communities.



Through the assistance of the Commission, Slater Mill has been carefully documented by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) through archival photographs and measured drawings which become part of the Library of Congress collection.

Over the past ten years, the work of the Commission has been broad-based, drawing enthusiastic participation from local leaders from all walks of life, such as elected officials, local community advocates, the business community, historic preservationists, river stewards and other constituencies. The Commission's agenda has remained comprehensive: helping reverse a long-standing lack of re-investment in the Valley's historic, cultural and natural resources; launching a process of telling the Valley's unique story; cultivating local constituencies who would become the building blocks for effective partnerships; carrying out demonstration projects to encourage local initiatives; and enhancing coordination between state and federal agencies whose missions also address regional concerns.

At the heart of the Plan is a series of "integrated, linked actions" which were intended collectively to launch the Corridor concept across the Valley, integrating its full range of historic, cultural, and natural resources. Equally important, all of these projects were intended to stimulate spin-off activities-opening the River to recreation, for example, would lead to a greater appreciation of the Valley's natural resources, helping to build coalitions to enhance the riverway and support actions for a cleaner Blackstone River.

The Action Agenda for the First Ten Years is organized into seven key areas. The following is a summarized record of past accomplishments, noting areas where the Commission needs to continue or augment its work.

1. COORDINATION AND CONSISTENCY

Corridor Action Teams were intended to "make expertise available to communities or organizations who [were] ready to move ahead with activities on the Plan's Action Agenda....". This initiative evolved into Cooperative Agreements with key sites, such as Slater Mill Historic Site, and riverway projects, such as the Fisherville Dam; and into other highly targeted assistance programs which will continue with the Plan Amendment.

Valley-Wide Identity Programs included the development of a Corridor-wide identity system whereby design standards have been incorporated into signs, printed materials and exhibits. Over 200 signs have been planted along highways that guide visitors into our communities and heritage sites. Tour brochures, events calendars and guides assist with marketing the Valley and informing people about the many places and events to experience. The Commission publishes the "picks of the week" in partnership with the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council to over 80 media outlets, informing them of activities and events taking place in the Valley. A distribution system coordinated by tourism agencies and the Commission gathers information from heritage-related sites in the Corridor and offers free distribution to 100 sites in the region.

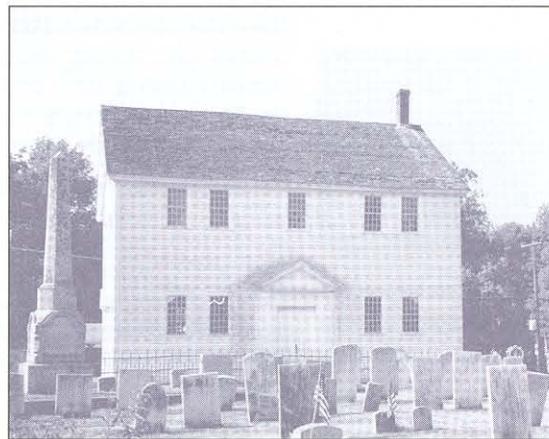
The Good News initiative was targeted at getting the "news" out to the public regarding the work of the Commission and its partners. Many successful preservation projects, which the Commission has helped sponsor or support, like the restoration of the E.N. Jenckes Store in Douglas, have been publicized; extensive networking to

spread news of partnership successes has also occurred through Corridor Commissioners, who have extended their commitment to the Corridor in other roles, such as leadership in the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council; recognition of these partnership efforts will continue to be important to the Corridor-wide strategy.

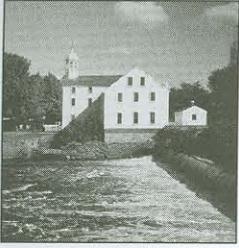
2. HISTORIC PRESERVATION

Inventory historical and archaeological resources: Some of the leading accomplishments included the listing of the Blackstone Canal on the National Register of Historic Places and measured drawing documentation of Slater Mill by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) of the National Park Service. The Commission will continue to champion National Register listings and development of local inventories. All Rhode Island communities have historic surveys complete; a goal for the Commission during the next ten years is to have all Massachusetts communities within the Corridor complete their surveys.

Preserve key historic districts, properties and sites that define the character of the Valley: Some of the key historic properties listed in the original Plan, which the Commission has assisted in preserving, include Waters Farm, where a living history program is being developed; the Blackstone Canal, where efforts at stabilization and interpretation have occurred at the Kelly House in Blackstone River State Park in Lincoln; Slater Mill, through programming at the future visitor center, which allows better preservation efforts at the mill site; and Chestnut Hill Meeting House, which is continuing preservation work. Other historic properties, which have been restored or where ongoing preservation activity exists, include the Uxbridge Common, the Hannaway Blacksmith Shop in Lincoln, the East Blackstone Meeting



Millville's Chestnut Hill Meeting House, one of the important historic properties in the Corridor, was assisted by the Commission in its preservation under the 1990 Management Plan.



The Action Plan for the first ten years set the stage for three new Visitor Centers now under development: the Pawtucket facility adjacent to Slater Mill, the Museum of Work and Culture in Woonsocket, and River Bend Farm in Uxbridge.

House, the Arcade Building in Blackstone, the Millbury railroad depot, E.N. Jenckes Store in Douglas, the Blackstone River Theatre in Lonsdale, River Bend Farm in Uxbridge, and the Lincoln Textile Building and Lincoln Street houses in Woonsocket. Other properties, which remain on the Commission's priority list, include Moffett Mill, which has been stabilized but needs restoration, the Mammoth Mill ruin, still unprotected, and the Fisherville Mill.

Provide professional planning assistance to Corridor towns and cities: The Commission has witnessed mixed success with efforts to help Valley municipalities implement local preservation zoning. In Chepachet, RI, for example, efforts were successful in passing zoning to protect that historic village, while in Woonsocket and Central Falls historic district zoning has been rescinded.

Provide information to the public about professional assistance, grants and guidelines available for historic preservation: While incentive programs for historic building rehabilitation, like low-interest revolving loans, remain a goal of the Commission, it has been instrumental in helping find preservation grants for historic properties in the Corridor, such as the Federated Church in Blackstone and the E.N. Jenckes Store in East Douglas.

3. INTERPRETATION

Seek the development of museums/information centers in Pawtucket, Woonsocket, Uxbridge and Worcester: The Commission and its various partners has successfully initiated the development and design of museums and/or visitor centers in three of these four communities: in Pawtucket at Slater Mill, in Woonsocket at the Museum of Work and Culture, and in Uxbridge at River Bend Farm. A key visitor center for Worcester, which is still in the planning stages, is expected to be developed in the vicinity of Hurley Square in the Quinsigamond Village area. Ongoing efforts to complete the visitor center in Pawtucket remain one of the highest Commission priorities.

Design and develop permanent, traveling and wayside interpretive exhibits: Consistent interpretive design standards for wayside interpretation has been developed by the Commission. To date, several sites have been equipped with wayside interpretive signs including the Little Red Shop, Slater Mill, the Willard House and Clock Museum, the Chestnut Hill Meeting House, River Bend Farm, and Plummer's Landing. Other exhibits have been developed at sites like Hayward Landing in Douglas where an interior display was created in the common area of this restored mill.

Design, produce and distribute interpretive materials, such as maps, guidebooks and brochures, that describe the historic, cultural, natural and recreational resources of the Corridor: A family of brochures, including Ranger activities, walking or driving tour brochures have been produced and distributed for several Corridor communities. Individual brochures are underway to be completed for each of the original twenty communities; at least four more are planned for new towns added to the Corridor.

Train volunteer interpreters: A Volunteers In Parks program has been established to complement and augment National Park Service rangers' interpretation of Valley sites and stories. The program is expected to grow through emerging initiatives such as the Blackstone Valley Institute, a learning program to include training new volunteers.

4. ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION

Improve the water quality of the Blackstone River: The Commission's Environmental Subcommittee has worked closely with federal and state regulatory agencies and property owners in both states to ensure a more consistent water flow; support has been given to the Friends of the Blackstone, the Massachusetts Audubon Society, and others for river cleanups; the Commission participated in the project scoping for the cleanup and remediation of the Peterson-Puritan Superfund site among others; the Army Corps of Engineers, in consultation with the Commission and other partners, has recently completed a feasibility study for restoring the River (and is now pursuing federal and state funds to begin the restoration process); but significant additional progress will be necessary to complete this long-term task.

Identify natural sites that are threatened, in need of action or assistance, or important to the completion or enhancement of state heritage parks within the Corridor: This is an ongoing task which has resulted in critical lands being added to the Blackstone Gorge Bi-State Park and a commitment by leaders in Massachusetts to establish a greenway along the Blackstone as part of the Massachusetts Turnpike/Rt. 146 corridor. Additional areas for protection are recommended in the recently completed Natural Resources Inventory and Assessment.

Protect open space within the Corridor: This recommendation has led to protection of Freegrace Marble Farm in Sutton, the historic quarry and kiln in Lime Rock, and the expansion of Heritage Parks in both states; it has also led to Commission support for groups like the Metacomet Land Trust, and the preservation of special natural areas, such as the Blackstone Gorge (which emerged as the first bi-state park) and the Valley Falls Marsh in Cumberland and Lincoln (substantial portions of which are now protected). Open space protection, however, will continue to be an important goal in the updated action strategy.

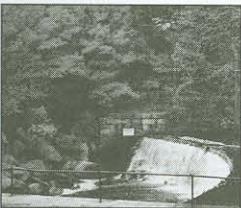
Support state, local, private, and individual efforts to enhance the environment: The Commission has co-sponsored special environmental events, such as the annual Environmental Congress, held by the Massachusetts Audubon Society's Broad Meadow Brook Wildlife Sanctuary; produced the conceptual design guidebook, *Visions for the Future* in collaboration with the Northern Rhode Island Economic Development Partnership, for 20 sites in eight communities in northern Rhode Island, which envisioned creative ways to focus development and preserve natural areas; and established an annual award in conjunction with the Environmental Congress to honor local individuals or groups whose work has improved natural systems. In addition to these efforts, the Commission remains committed through its proposed Institute program to working with existing municipal Conservation Commissions to protect natural resources.

5. LAND USE MANAGEMENT

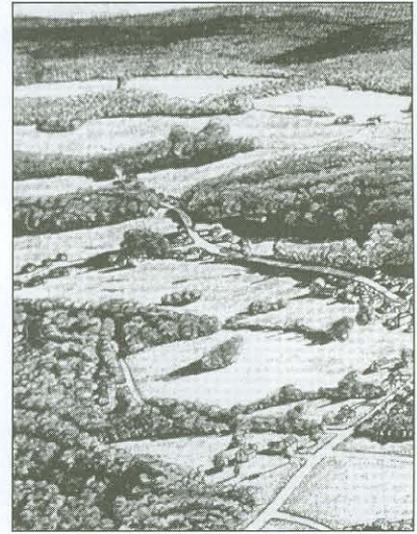
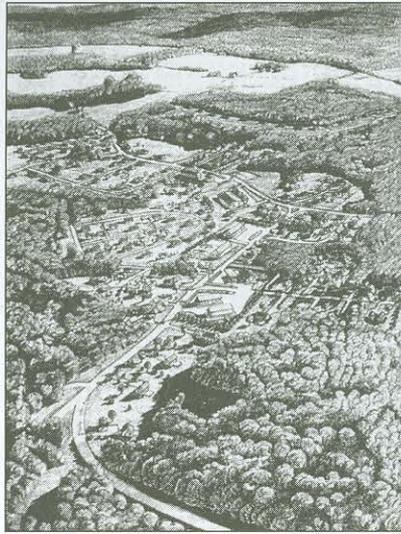
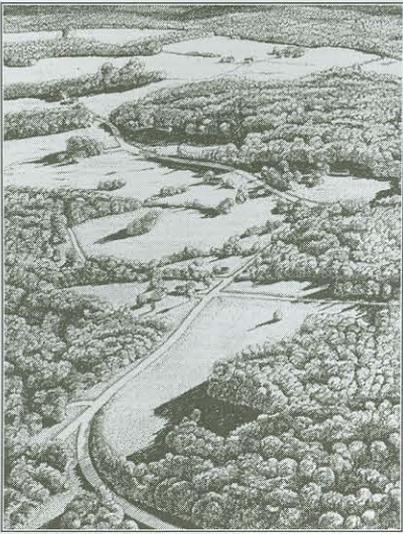
Integrate the Corridor's existing Management Plan into ongoing state and regional planning efforts: To date, the State of Rhode Island has incorporated the Management Plan into its State Guide Plan, and six of eight original Rhode Island communities added "Heritage Corridor" elements to their local comprehensive plans.



National Park Service Rangers serve as some of the Heritage Corridor's best interpreters through their tours, talks and programs.



While significant achievements in open space protection have taken place, most notably in the Blackstone Gorge and portions of Valley Falls Marsh, open space conservation will continue to be a top priority of the Commission's action plan over the next ten years.



In the past, the Commission has provided land-use planning and design assistance to numerous Corridor communities, including Millbury, Douglas, Slatersville, Mendon, Blackstone, Hopedale, Lincoln, Pawtucket and Grafton. Six communities also participated in the "Visions for the Future," a conceptual design book for urban and rural sites.

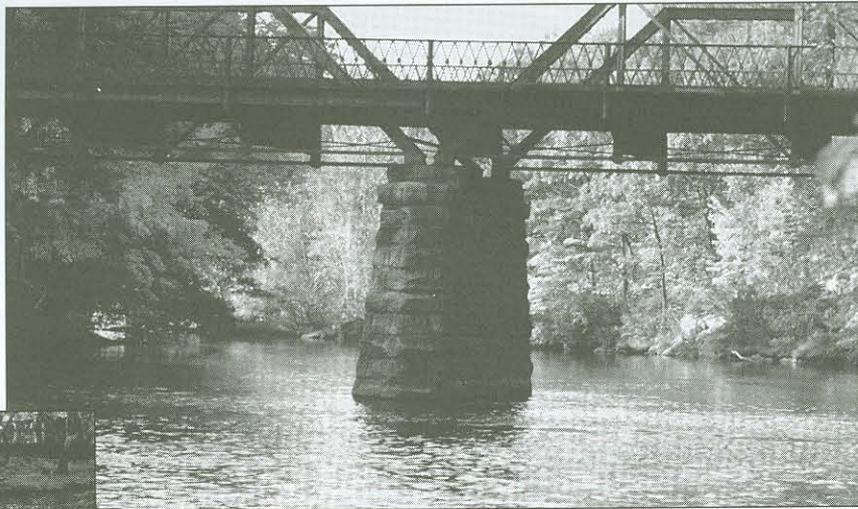
Provide information to the public about good land-use practices: The Commission has provided land-use planning and design assistance to several communities throughout the Corridor, including Millbury, Douglas, Slatersville, Mendon, Blackstone, Hopedale, Lincoln and Pawtucket, and collaborated with Grafton officials in creating design review guidelines for new development, as well as with six municipalities that participated in the Visions for the Future conceptual design guidebook. The Commission also helped sponsor a design charrette workshop in Woonsocket for the tax credit rehabilitation of 11 worker houses on Lincoln Street, and has held several public meetings for important issues, such as the Douglas Landfill, and a continuing gravel extraction use along the River in Cumberland and Woonsocket. In the future, the Commission expects to continue this mission in several ways through its Institute program, co-sponsoring land-use planning workshops with Valley communities, sponsoring workshops for local builders and developers to discuss site planning and design issues; recognizing the work of developers and builders and public officials which advances the goals of protecting and improving the Corridor's physical integrity; and developing an educational videotape targeted for decision-makers and community leaders that presents information about land use issues and tools for balancing conservation and growth.

Identify and inventory Corridor resources and conditions: The Commission has developed a Historic Resources Inventory and, most recently, a Natural Resource Inventory which are valuable reports used as a basis for action in the Valley. As dynamic collections of information, the inventories will periodically be updated and evaluated. Land information and site conditions along the Blackstone River have also been inventoried as a resource to be used by the Commission and other partners to help establish a Greenway along the River corridors and develop river access points.



While the Army Corps of Engineers recently completed a feasibility study for restoring the River, significant additional work remains ahead, including the identification of federal and state funds to carry out the process.

Enhance the character of the Valley: This ongoing effort has been fulfilled in numerous ways through direct technical assistance to Valley communities, and through the Commission's coordinating responsibilities in Section 9 (requiring Federal or federally-funded actions to be consistent with Corridor goals) of the original legislation establishing the Corridor. The Stone Arch Bridge in Slatersville will remain as a vital element in this premier mill village due to successful coordination and commitment on the part of the Town of North Smithfield, Polytop Corporation, Rhode Island Department of Transportation, Rhode Island Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission, and the Corridor Commission. Similarly, significant characteristics of the mill villages of Ashton and Berkeley were preserved and enhanced through careful consideration of improvements along Mendon Road (Route 122) in Cumberland. Exercising



Developing River Access Areas provides recreational and educational opportunities that create awareness of environmental protection issues

Section 9 authority will continue as an effective way to influence capital improvement projects for consistency with Corridor goals. Assistance with land use plans, as in Mendon, provided citizens an opportunity to explore the special character of the town in relation to development patterns and current zoning by-laws. Technical assistance for preserving community character has been built into the Commission's annual work program.

6. RECREATION

Complete or enhance state and local parks and forests within the Corridor: Several hundreds of acres of state and local parkland have been added over the past ten years. Remarkable efforts on the part of Cumberland have resulted in the creation of Valley Falls Heritage Park, Fanning Wilderness Area and William Blackstone Memorial Park in Lonsdale. Regional and national conservation organizations, like Metacomet Land Trust and The Nature Conservancy have preserved farmland and sensitive ecosystems, while providing recreational enjoyment too. With the active support of the Corridor Commission, Massachusetts DEM, The Conservation Fund, and the surrounding communities, additional lands around the Blackstone Gorge have been added. Continuing to protect land north of the Gorge to Millville center remains an important Commission goal.

Implement construction, maintenance and landscaping projects that provide greater public use and access to the River: Canoe and river access facilities, trails along the Canal and Towpath, the Blackstone River Bikeway and outdoor exhibits are all underway to create a more public river experience. Canoe access sites like those at River Island Park in Woonsocket and Plummer's Landing in Northbridge allow sections of the river to be navigated by even novice canoeists. At least eight more of these sites are being designed along the Blackstone through the Commission's river access program. Seven miles of towpath, in Rhode Island and Massachusetts state parks, are currently accessible and navigable to the public. Through achievable land protection strategies and minor improvements, at least 12 more miles could be made accessible for public enjoyment. Collaborating with various partners and state DEM's to

accomplish this in the next ten years is a high priority for the Commission. Work with the Rhode Island and Massachusetts DEM's to launch the Providence-to-Worcester Blackstone River Bikeway is expected to be completed in 2002 (construction of the Rhode Island section begins in the Fall of 1997); a three-mile section, largely in Worcester, will soon be built as part of the new Massachusetts Turnpike/Rt. 146 interchange.

Produce recreational publications: A canoe guide for exploring the Blackstone River, quarterly calendars of events, and recreational guides for exploring portions of the Canal made their debut during the Commission's first decade. This program will continue as more recreational sites and opportunities are made available.

7. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND TOURISM

Develop an economic development strategy for the Valley: While the development of a comprehensive strategy still remains ahead for the Commission, it has co-sponsored, in partnership with Historic Massachusetts, Inc., a "Red Brick Elephants" Conference, which explored many of the long-term issues connected with adapting the Valley's existing industrial infrastructure to new uses, such as effective or innovative ways to cleanup and re-use abandoned mills. Participation in regional economic development initiatives with both the Massachusetts and Rhode Island Chambers of Commerce have reinforced many of the Commission's objectives. It has also joined the Northern Rhode Island Economic Development Partnership and the Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce in regional strategic planning which has built on the Valley's historic and natural resources. Partnerships in regional transportation planning have led to collaborations on important projects concerning the Valley's character, such as the Massachusetts Turnpike/Rt. 146 corridor, the Great Road in Lincoln, and Mendon road in Cumberland.

Enhance town and urban centers: The Commission has worked with and supported several downtown centers on substantial preservation and building re-use projects that will draw new visitors into these areas with visitor centers



Completion of the Providence to Worcester Blackstone Bikeway remains a top priority of the Commission; construction of the Rhode Island section begins in the Fall of 1997 and will be completed by 2002; a three-mile section will soon be added as part of the new MA Turnpike/Rt. 146 interchange.

HOW THE PLAN WAS DEVELOPED

The Planning Subcommittee of the Corridor Commission was the primary lead in guiding the development of The Next Ten Years. In the first few months of an eight month planning period, Commissioners and staff became better acquainted with the newly added areas and participants. In March of 1997, the Commission held two Welcome Workshops, one in Worcester, MA and one in Burrillville, RI to solicit thoughts about important resources and critical issues facing the communities. Approximately 70 people attended each of the workshops. Following the workshops, the Commission held two working sessions related to the Plan supplement. An all-day retreat in May was held to consider past work and accomplishments, and determine an appropriate focus for the coming years. In July, the Commission worked to formulate and endorse the framework for determining a ten year development plan. During these months, the Planning Subcommittee met eight times, while a core group of Commissioners and staff had roundtable discussions with representatives from the economic development and tourism, and environmental communities throughout the Valley. A meeting with valley-wide planners was also held to discuss elements of the plan. Through the process, two full Commission meetings were devoted to discussing and developing The Next Ten Years. Other occasions were used to promote public participation, including an exhibit set up at River Bend Farm in Uxbridge during Canalfest.

In early September, the draft plan was distributed for public review to a library and municipal offices in each Corridor community. Approximately 150 draft plans were also mailed to various Corridor partners. Four informational meetings were held (two in each state) during the first several days of the review period. Initially slated for two weeks, the time frame for public comment was extended for an additional four weeks to enable further input. Written and oral comments were received and considered in developing the final document.



The Commission has worked with several communities to preserve and reuse historic buildings whose renovations are expected to draw new visitors downtown. Among the best examples is the Visitor Center under development at the Museum of Work and Culture in Woonsocket.

and museums located in historic or existing buildings. Among the best examples are the Museum of Work and Culture and the Main Street 2000 project, both in Woonsocket, and the Visitor Center under development near Slater Mill in Pawtucket. Urban design and planning assistance has been given to downtowns, such as Blackstone and Uxbridge, to support preservation activities and enhance appeal of these places. Over the next ten years, the Commission expects to be working collaboratively with several partners, including the City of Worcester, to develop a major visitor center around the Quinsigamond Village neighborhood.

Develop a tourism strategy and support tourism development that enhances Corridor values: The Commission has supported programming and tourism development activities through the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council in Rhode Island and the Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce in Massachusetts. The Blackstone Valley Explorer, a popular excursion boat partially funded through the Commission, has served more than 80,000 riders. A distinct Valley-wide sign system now taking hold reinforces the Blackstone Valley as a tourist destination. A unified, bi-state tourism strategy remains a goal of the Commission in the decade ahead.

While development of a comprehensive economic development strategy remains ahead, particular issues, such as the reuse of abandoned and underutilized mill complexes in the Valley, have been explored in partnership with organizations like Historic Massachusetts, Inc..

