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WOONASQUATUCKET RIVER WATERSHED COUNCIL

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## The Woonasquatucket: An American Heritage River

"Tonight, I announce that this year I will designate 10 American Heritage Rivers, to help communities alongside them revitalize their waterfronts and clean up pollution in the rivers, proving once again that we can grow the economy as we protect the environment." - President Clinton's 1997 State of the Union Address

On July 30, 1998 President Clinton designated the Woonasquatucket River as an American Heritage River. The Woonasquatucket is partnered with the Blackstone River for the purposes of this program.

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Undated photograph of Riverside Mills in Providence. The building in the foreground still exists. The rest of the buildings are gone and the site is now Riverside Park, a new city park in Providence. Photograph courtesy of the Rhode Island Collection, Providence Public Library.

Senator John H. Chafee nominated the Woonasquatucket and Blackstone Rivers for this designation. The proposal received immediate and strong support from Senator Jack Reed, Representative Weygand, Representative Kennedy, and Governor Almond, and residents of the 6 communities along the River, including Glocester, North Smithfield, Smithfield, Johnston, North Providence and Providence.

The river was chosen in part because of the significant role it played in the Industrial Revolution. The Woonasquatucket was one of the first rivers to be dammed by mill-owners to insure a steady supply of water year-round for their mills. In the last thirty years, as jobs have left the region and the mills have closed, the river has gone from a valued industrial asset to a neglected natural resource. In urban areas the river itself and its banks have become a

dumping ground for chemicals and large solid debris. In rural areas the river is threatened by development pressures that swallow up open space and pave over the river banks.

For more general information about the American Heritage Rivers program see the EPA's [American Heritage Rivers website](#).



Woonasquatucket River Watershed Council :: 27 Sims Avenue :: Providence, RI 02909

Tel. 401.861.9046 :: Fax: 401.861.9038

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