



<http://www.cumauriceriver.org>

The Wild and Scenic Maurice By Jane Galetto

The National Park Service oversees the Wild and Scenic Rivers program. In 1968 they were asked by the US Congress to inventory the nation's rivers to determine which could be studied for protections granted by the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. In the mid-seventies field and aerial evaluations were made of eastern rivers, and the program eventually surveyed all the nation's waterways. Seventy-five percent of the rivers were excluded from consideration, primarily because of the density of development along their corridors. In fact, less than 2% of the rivers were eligible for further study.

In 1986 then-Congressman William Hughes, along with Senators Bill Bradley and Frank Lautenberg, petitioned Congress to commence a study of the Maurice River and its tributaries to determine its eligibility into the Wild and Scenic program. And on the 25th anniversary of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, the Maurice River and three of its tributaries: the Menantico, Manumuskin and Muskee Creeks; were included as federally-recognized Scenic and Recreational Rivers by an Act of Congress. The year was 1993 and locals had worked for seven years to see their rivers receive this special recognition.

Of particular interest in the study process were the outstanding natural and cultural attributes that these rivers possess. Significant resources included federally endangered species such as the short-nosed sturgeon, peregrine falcon and the then-imperiled bald eagle. In fact our region was key to the restoration of the bald eagle in New Jersey. Additionally, of interest are the many migratory species that use the river and the vast stands of wild rice. The Manumuskin is known for the purity of its waters and for a globally endangered vetch that grows upstream. The entire watershed is critical to the survival of fish and shellfish, shorebirds and waterfowl, as well as songbirds and raptors migrating the Atlantic Flyway. Half of New Jersey's threatened and endangered species can be found in this region.

Of specific cultural significance were the maritime uses of the river, especially those related to the oyster industry. Not only was the Maurice port to 500 oyster schooners in the late 1880s and early 1900's but it also was home to large coastal vessels that circumvented the globe!

The Native American tribe Lenape or “the people” made extensive use of the river’s resources. Archeologists have found evidence of Paleo-Indian occupation dating back over 12,000 and possibly as many as 32,000 years ago. The area’s sand deposits have provided raw material for the manufacturing of goods; in particular the region has a long history of glass production. In fact, the Eagle and Union glasshouses once located in Port Elizabeth were among the nation’s oldest glass manufacturers.

When you travel the Maurice River and its tributaries today it retains much of its undeveloped nature. The Wild and Scenic designation is intended to preserve these qualities as well as to make them accessible for today and tomorrow.