



25 Years Wild and Scenic

The Maurice River and tributaries were designated as Wild and Scenic a quarter century ago.

This year CU Maurice River, a regional conservation organization, will be celebrating two momentous occasions: 50 years of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers Act and 25 years of our local rivers having been designated as Wild and Scenic by Congress. River protection groups and communities all over the nation are acknowledging the Golden Anniversary, and we will kick off

our Silver celebration in October with the rest of the country. Permit me to share a little background about our rivers and local designation.

The Maurice River (pronounced "Morris") draws from a drainage area of 386 square miles and meanders south for 50 miles, primarily through Cumberland County. Headwaters are in parts of Gloucester, Salem and Atlantic counties, emptying into the main stem of the Maurice and from there into Delaware Bay.

The major tributaries of the river are Scotland Run, Muddy Run, Menantico Creek, Muskee Creek, and the Manumuskin River. There are about 20 small lakes in the watershed, the largest of which is Union Lake at 950 acres.

The southwestern portion of the Pinelands also drains into the Maurice River. In fact the Pinelands Comprehensive Management Plan considers the entire Manumuskin watershed to be an ecologically critical area within the Kirkwood-Cohansey

aquifer; it is one of only two pristine rivers in the Pinelands National Reserve.

The Maurice River and three of its tributaries were designated as Wild and Scenic Rivers by the U.S. Congress and President Clinton on December 1, 1993. These tributaries are the Manumuskin, Menantico and Muskee rivers. In all, 35.4 miles are designated as “scenic” or “recreational.” Outstanding natural and cultural resource values are critical to defining such waterways as national treasures.

In the late 1960s the Department of the Interior studied 3 million river miles and found less than 2 percent eligible for designation as Wild and Scenic Rivers. The investigation was focused on free flowing rivers and outstanding natural and cultural resource values. Ultimately the Maurice, Menantico, Manumuskin and Muskee rivers are in an elite group that represents less than one percent of our nation’s rivers.

The outstanding natural resource values for our local rivers include the Atlantic

Flyway, pristine habitats that sustain rare species, and crucial food and resting areas for migratory birds, waterfowl, and fish. The Maurice River is also the second largest tributary of the Delaware Bay, an ecosystem of national and international importance.

Thousands of years before European settlers, Native Americans used the resources of the river. The river's name is thought to be derived from the Prince Maurice, a 17th century Dutch ship reputed to have sunk in its waters. Cultural resources connect past and present in maritime uses and existing villages. Extensive oyster, agricultural, and sand enterprises typify the region. Sands supported a thriving glass industry. Today scientific glass is still an important industrial component of the local economy. From the 1700s until the 1940s, diked farms lined the banks of the tidal Maurice. One diked farm remains in Millville and historically is referred to as the Burcham Farm.

Today, agriculture remains prevalent in the region. Vineland and Millville are the largest cities along the river. Numerous towns and villages are in

parts of the watershed, including Elmer, Franklinville, Newfield, Buena, Clayton, Brotmanville, and Glassboro. Within the tidal area are the city of Millville and the townships of Commercial and Maurice River. The latter two are made up of many historic villages.

NJ's Fish and Game Endangered and Nongame Species Wildlife Action Plan describes the region as having "the highest concentration of rare and endangered wildlife in NJ, accompanied by the lowest density of urban development in the state. The Delaware Bay Landscape is a region of global importance and offers considerable opportunities for conservation." The large contiguous blocks of forest are what supports so many rare and sensitive species of wildlife; in fact more than 50 percent of NJ's listed species can be found in the Maurice River drainage basin.

As a partnership Wild and Scenic River, the Maurice is managed by local communities' land use plans adopted in Memorandums of Understanding between the Department of the Interior and communities in the designated

area—Millville, Vineland, Buena, Maurice River and Commercial Townships. Numerous international organizations recognize the special attributes of our region and declare it a national treasure. It is very likely if you are reading this article that you live within these special watersheds and play an important role in how well-preserved they remain. To find out more about our rivers and your role in their protection, visit our website at cumauriceriver.org.