

AN ASSESSMENT OF THE SHEEPSCOT RIVER  
IN THE STATE OF MAINE  
AS PART OF THE  
NATIONAL WILD AND SCENIC RIVERS SYSTEM STUDY

U.S. Department of the Interior  
Heritage Conservation and  
Recreation Service  
Northeast Regional Office  
Studies Division  
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## I. INTRODUCTION

### Background Information

Since 1975 the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service-formerly the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation - has been involved in a systematic nationwide inventory and evaluation of rivers. The purpose of this inventory is to delineate the basic scope of a National Wild and Scenic Rivers System and to identify those rivers which may qualify for consideration under the provisions of Section 5(d) of P.L. 90-542, as amended.

The final list of rivers, which combines the past study results of the Adirondack Province, the Ridge and Valley Province (Tennessee, Middle and Hudson Valley Sections), the Appalachian Plateau Province (Allegheny Mts. and Kanawha Sections) and the St. Lawrence Valley Province (Champlain and Northern Sections) with recent evaluations of the rest of the northeast region, is the result of a detailed resource evaluation which included site reconnaissance. Rivers on the list have passed the final system study evaluation phase. They are generally 25 miles or more in length (there are numerous exceptions) and are in a relatively undeveloped or natural condition and they have met the minimum criteria for further study and/or potential inclusion into the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System.

Although the list is final, it does not preclude the addition or deletion of rivers or river segments in the future.

### Study Mandate

The National Wild and Scenic Rivers System Study is authorized in Section 5(d) of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act (P.L. 90-542) as amended. Section 5(d) mandates the Secretaries of the Department of the Interior and Agriculture to

make studies to determine which potential wild, scenic and recreational rivers shall be evaluated as such by all federal agencies when they examine alternative uses of water and land resources. The Sheepscot River, along with rivers in thirteen other states, was investigated as part of this study.

On September 23, 1978 Nicholas Barth, representing the Sheepscot Valley Conservation Association requested the Northeast Regional Office of the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service to prepare a summary of the findings and recommendations on the Sheepscot River. Mr. Barth indicated that the Association could use this information to help further the protection and management of significant natural and cultural resources on the river. This report contains the findings of the study team.

#### Study Method

A uniform method of inventory and evaluation has been used for the study which allows rivers of similar characteristics to be compared and contrasted. Ecological, hydrological, geological, cultural, recreation and other features were evaluated using literature reviews, map interpretation, helicopter overflights films, ground surveys and other information sources existing at various governmental offices and with private groups. All of the raw data for this study is available for examination by the Association.

#### Summary of Findings

It has been determined that the Sheepscot River, from Davis Island, north of Wiscasset to the headwaters, has met the minimum criteria for further study and/or potential inclusion into the National Wild and Scenic River System.

This river segment meets the following major criteria of Public Law 90-542 which specifies that an eligible river must:

1. Be a free flowing river or stream.
2. Be free of certain types of alterations (i.e. bulkheading, riprapping, channelization, etc.).
3. Be largely undeveloped (rivers or sections of rivers with shore lines or watersheds essentially primitive or largely undeveloped).
4. Be adjacent to or within a related land area that possesses an outstandingly remarkable geologic, ecologic, cultural, historic, scenic, botanical, recreation or other similar value. (Interpreted to mean an area of multi-State or national significance).

## II. SHEEPSCOT RIVER

### River Resource Characteristics

The Sheepscot River is located in the State of Maine, within the Seaboard Lowland and New England Upland physiographic sections of the New England Province. The Sheepscot has both tidal and non-tidal segments. The river segment which meets the minimum criteria is approximately 64 miles in length. The predominate land use character of the Sheepscot's watershed is primarily forest land interspersed with agricultural and open land. In a general sense, the topography of the watershed can be described as rolling hills. The mean annual flow of the river is 243 cubic feet per second recorded at the North Whitefield recording station.

Visually, the Sheepscot River is comprised of a number of distinct units. Each of these landscape units are identified by a consistent ground pattern -- i.e., the distribution and the expression of structures, topography and vegetation is similar on the landscape. Each of these units generally are not separated by definitive boundaries but rather by zones of transition.

The first unit of the Sheepscot River, approximately 7 miles in length, starts at Davis Island north of Wiscasset and continues to the area near Head Tide. This segment, which is one of the most significant of the study segment, is dominated by the tidal character of the river and contains the historic settlements of Sheepscott, Alna and Head Tide. Adjacent to and entering the Sheepscot are the minor - but significant - Marsh and Dyer Rivers which are characterized by their vast and valuable expanses of tidal marsh.

The second unit of the Sheepscot River, approximately 16 miles in length, begins from near Head Tide and continues to the Long Pond area, and includes a segment of the West Branch of the Sheepscot River. This segment, which is dominated by a high percentage of agricultural and open land contains the towns of Whitefield, North Whitefield and Cooper's Mills.

Above Cooper's Mills, beginning with the Long Pond area, the third unit of the Sheepscot River is demarcated by the change in physiographic sections. The pronounced landforms and features, especially the bold, dome-like hills and glacial ponds and swamps, are extremely apparent and dominating within this 14 mile segment. Long Pond, James Pond and Sheepscot Pond by their expanse alone provide an unusual diversity of water environments and spatial sequences to this segment. Unfortunately, from a conservation perspective, the shorelines of these waterbodies have been frequently used as sites for second home dwellings.

Above Sheepscot Pond is the final unit of the study segment and the headwaters of the river. Within this sparsely developed area the Sheepscot meanders

up into the higher land elevations until it is a tiny stream. Field work on this section of the river indicated that a significant amount of logging with resultant siltation has recently taken place here.

#### Findings - The Threshold Requirements

A segment of the Sheepscot River, from Davis Island north of Wiscasset to the headwaters -- a total of approximately 64 miles was determined to be a potential candidate for the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. This river's characteristics meet the major "threshold requirements" of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act (P.L. 90-542). The merits of this particular segment, in relation to these requirements, are as follows:

1. The Sheepscot River segment which was examined is a 64 mile free-flowing river. Due to the hydrological characteristics of the river and its surrounding watershed the following rivers, which enter into the study segment have also been identified and should be considered as part of the total river area.

Marsh River - Confluence with the Sheepscot River to New Castle (6.5 miles)

Dyer River - Confluence with the Sheepscot River to North New Castle (4 miles)

W. Br. Sheepscot River - Confluence with the Sheepscot River to southwest of Windsorville (6 miles)

(It should be noted that due to time constraints the evaluations of these tributaries was general and should serve only as an approximation.)

2. The Sheepscot, with minor exceptions is essentially free of water course alterations such as channelization, bulk heading, rip-rapping, etc.

3. The Sheepscot River corridor, which for the purposes of this study was defined as that land area approximately one-quarter mile from each edge of the river, is largely undeveloped with significant amounts of tidal and non-tidal wetlands and other types of significant water bodies.

4. Numerous characteristics of the Sheepscot River may be considered "outstandingly remarkable" - of national and/or multi-State significance - either individually or collectively. The river characteristics which meet the outstandingly remarkable requirement of the "Act" are:

a. Sheepscot National Historic District

The boundaries of the designated District include the present Village of Sheepscot on both sides of the Sheepscot and Dyer Rivers; also the neck running south from the present village in Newcastle which was the site of the 17th Century village known as Sheepscot Farms, now a subject of archaeological interest.

The eastern boundary runs about half a mile east of the present village and half a mile north on Dyer's Neck. The contiguous territory north and east of the District contains buildings and other matter of historic interest of similar antiquity, but the area designated contains the concentration of sites and structures relating to the shipbuilding and brick making of the 18th and 19th Centuries, and a recent discovery of prehistoric remains.

b. Sheepscot River Area Oyster Bed

The northernmost natural population of the American Oyster in the United States and the only oyster bed entirely within Maine waters is found within

river segment. The area, due to over harvesting, has been declared a conservation area by the Maine Department of Marine Resources.

c. Atlantic Salmon Run

The Sheepscot is the southernmost well established Atlantic salmon run in the region.

d. Head Tide National Historic District

On both sides of the Sheepscot River, this late 18th - early - 20th century well preserved district is comprised of 14 structures. Primarily frame residences, these structures, typical of Maine rural design with Colonial and Greek Revival elements, include a schoolhouse, a church, and a store.

e. Reversible Falls

Below the Village of Sheepscott is regionally unique reversible waterfalls that is the only falls of its type which has been identified within the northeast region.

f. Recreation Features

The upper Sheepscot above Somerville has a unique and diverse range of flow gradients - including Class III sections - and water environments such as the Sheepscot, James and Long Ponds.

g. Scenic Features

The New England Upland section of the Sheepscot, from Somerville to the headwaters, and due largely to glaciation, has a significant visual and/or scenic quality. This high quality can be attributed to an extremely diverse juxtaposition and combination of landforms, water features and vegetation elements.



NOTE: It is important to understand that the System Study preliminary survey of rivers and should not be co the more detailed Congressionally mandated studie National Wild and Scenic Rivers Act which are con National Park Service.

(Additional note: The original (hard-copy) obtained from which this KRIS version of this electronic page was produced was incomplete. We regret any inconvenience but show that part of the text that we had available)