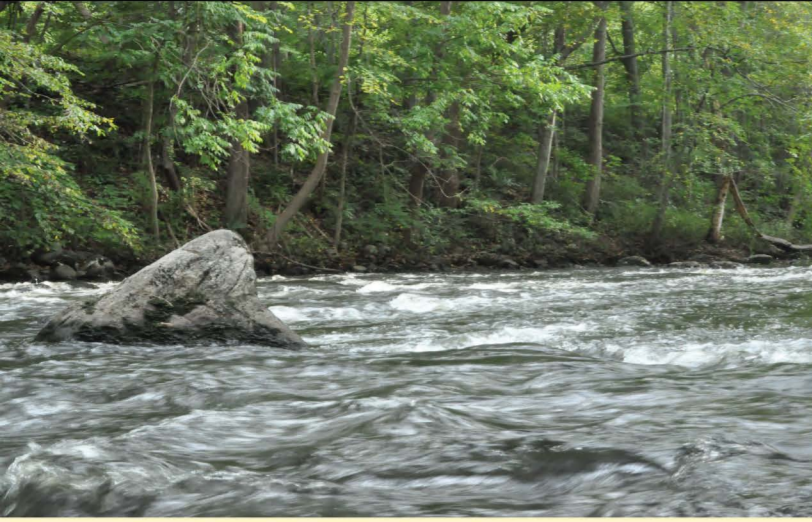


# MUSCONETCONG RIVER

Musconetcong National Wild & Scenic River

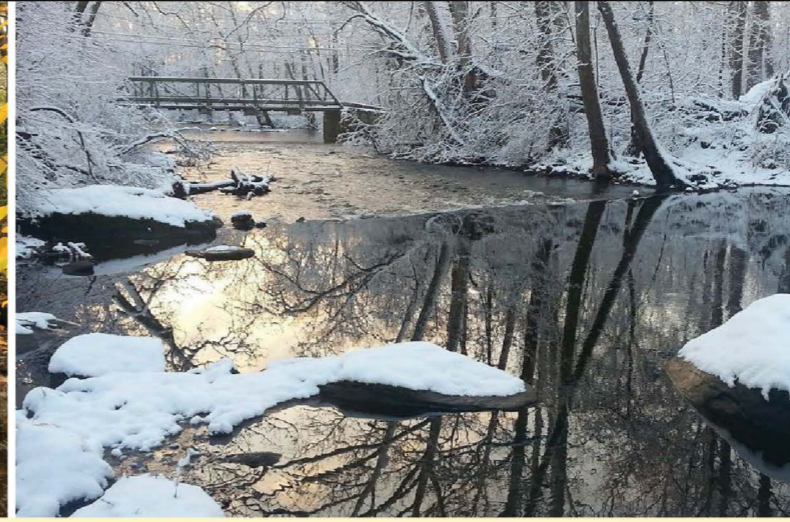
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior



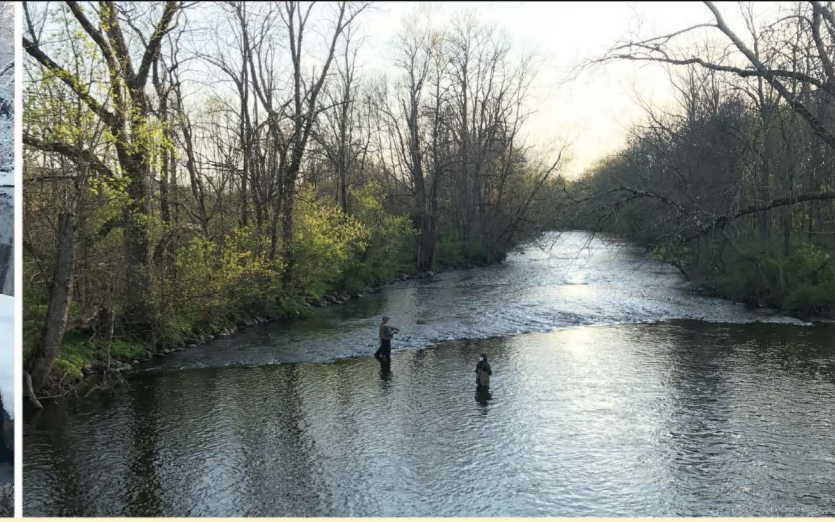
The Musconetcong River's Scenic and Recreational segment at Allamuchy Mountain State Park. Credit: Alan Hunt



Musconetcong River near Hampton. Credit: Alan Hunt



Musconetcong River with Point Mountain Road Bridge. Credit: MWA



Musconetcong River Fishing Access at Shurts Road. Credit: Alan Hunt

Musconetcong means "river of the clear water" in the language of the Lenape, the ancestral people of New Jersey and eastern Pennsylvania. Beginning at Lake Hopatcong — New Jersey's largest lake—and flowing southwest to the Delaware River at Riegelsville, the Musconetcong River travels 46 miles, descends 800 feet and drains over 157 square miles of watershed within the New Jersey Highlands. It is the Garden State's largest tributary to the Delaware River. More than 28 miles of the Musconetcong are a National Wild

and Scenic River, the nation's highest designation for free-flowing rivers of outstanding natural, cultural, and recreational value.

The Musconetcong River watershed contains two distinct regions. The Upper Musconetcong was carved by retreating glaciers over 13,000 years ago, leaving behind basins that form the headwaters' lakes. It is forested with residential development around its lakeshores. As the river flows downstream, its valley widens, revealing rolling hills framed by wooded

ridges. The Lower Musconetcong is an agricultural landscape with centuries-old farms and historic villages built around mills that once ground grain, forged iron, cut lumber, and made paper.

Today, the Musconetcong River is a prized fishery where anglers catch native eastern brook trout, brown trout, and stocked rainbow trout. On the river, kayakers, canoeists, and tubers paddle and float under historic bridges and through tree-lined canopies. On the land, hikers and trail

bikers may choose from flat, easy routes like that of the historic Morris Canal Greenway or backwoods paths across challenging terrains. For on-road bikers and automobile tourists, scenic roads lead to farmers markets and heritage sites. Photographers and artists may select from subjects ranging from open landscapes to close-ups of wildflowers and birds. Along the way, opportunities abound to observe and learn about nature and history—all supported by the free-flowing and remarkable Musconetcong River.

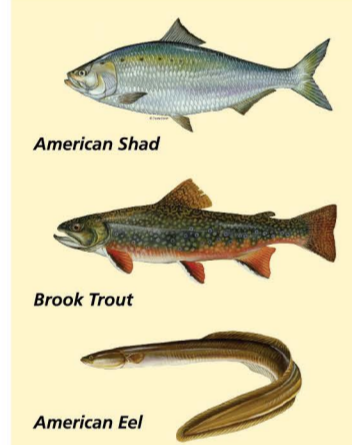


Kayak Launch at Asbury Mill. Credit: Alan Hunt

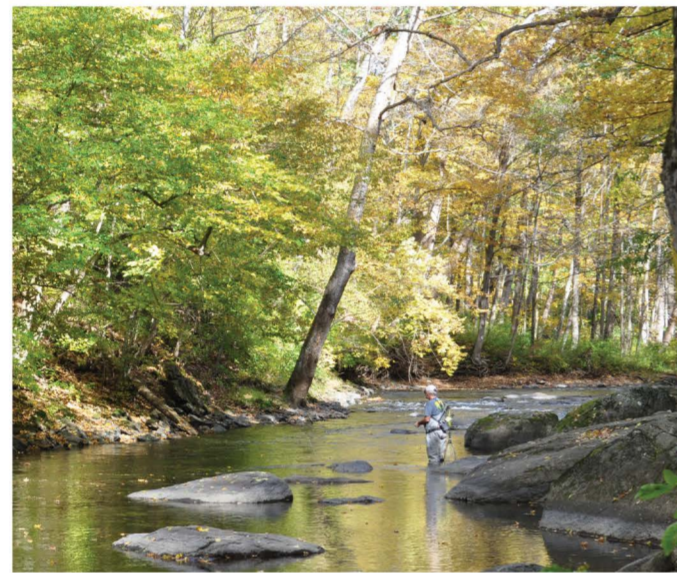
## On the Water

There are many ways for people to experience the Musconetcong River's extraordinarily clear water including fishing, paddling, nature watching, and educational programs.

The river is a high-quality fishery, with an access point for nearly every mile of its length. In addition to brown and native brook trout, the Musconetcong is stocked annually with more rainbow trout than any other river in New Jersey, making it arguably the Garden State's best-stocked stream. Several conservation areas support the native eastern brook trout, which is currently a catch and release only species.



As a result of mill dam removals, migratory fish species have returned to the Lower Musconetcong, including striped bass, American eel, and American shad. Beneath the water's surface, unseen by people, the Musconetcong River is teeming with life, including many tiny organisms such as insects, mollusks, and crustaceans. Of special note is the endangered brook floater, a freshwater mussel that grows to about 3 inches long.



The catch and release only Brook Trout Conservation Area at Point Mountain is popular for fly fishing. Credit: Alan Hunt

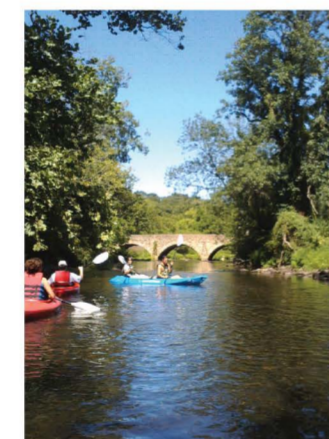
Its shell varies in color from yellowish green to greenish black and is often rayed with green or blue. These animals, referred to scientifically as, benthic macroinvertebrates, form the bottom of the food web and are very sensitive to changes in the environment. Many of these aquatic animals are food for fish, and anglers mimic many as handmade "flies" to lure trout.

The Musconetcong River provides seasonal opportunities for paddling and tubing, which next to fishing are the most popular water activities.



Brook Floater Mussel. Credit: NCWRC

Most of the Musconetcong flows freely downstream of the historic Morris Canal dam at Saxton Falls and free-flowing miles are increasing as partnerships among private landowners, local organizations, and governments result in the removal of abandoned dams.



Kayaking near Stephensburg. Credit: MWA

The Musconetcong Watershed National Water Trail is comprised of six trail segments of varying difficulty, from beginner to experienced. Floating along the river is one of the best ways to see wildlife, historic bridges and mills, and picturesque woodlands and fields.

People do not need to get out on the water to appreciate the native animals and plants. Riverfront trails in Stephens State Park, Hackettstown's Riverfront Park, and the Musconetcong Educational Trail in Asbury offer places to watch and learn about ducks, turtles, frogs, and great blue herons. These water-loving animals find most of their food in the river and from the berries, nuts, flowers, nectar, and leaves of native plants that thrive along the river's banks, floodplains, and wetlands.



Juvenile Great Blue Heron. Credit: flickr nature80020



Black Swallowtail on Wild Bergamot. Credit: Jeremy Travers

## On the Land

Even now in the nation's most densely populated state, the Musconetcong River watershed remains agricultural in character with large areas of preserved farmland. Growers produce important feed crops, such as corn, soybeans, and hay, with yields per acre that rival the most productive farming areas in the United States. Other local products include fruits, vegetables, dairy, meat, wine, and cider sold directly to the public at seasonal farmers markets and roadside farm stands. Several farms have year-round stores. This agricultural bounty could not have taken root without the watershed's clean water and rich soils.

Much of the landscape has healed from past destructive practices. Ridges stripped of trees in the



Agritourism in the watershed includes popular activities such as farm tours, corn mazes, pick your own produce and wine tastings. Credit: Alan Hunt

1800s have regenerated and are now covered by a mix of oak, maple, and hickory. Recent conservation efforts to restore riverbanks and riparian buffers, coupled with updated agricultural practices, have resulted in cleaner water and improved habitat along the Musconetcong River. Maturing forests along the river reveal occasional hemlock groves on steep slopes with a northern exposure. Forested wetlands feature red and silver maple, sycamore, basswood, black walnut, willow, fleshy hawthorn, and white oak. The autumn color with its intense yellow and red foliage along the river is truly spectacular.

Carefully regulated hunting and fishing are local family traditions dating back generations. White-tailed deer are a common sight. Larger mammals such as black bears, coyotes, foxes, and bobcats can be seen occasionally, joined along the



Hunt Family Farm. Credit: Alan Hunt



Riverfront Park, Hackettstown. Credit: Alan Hunt



Barred Owl. Credit: Wikimedia

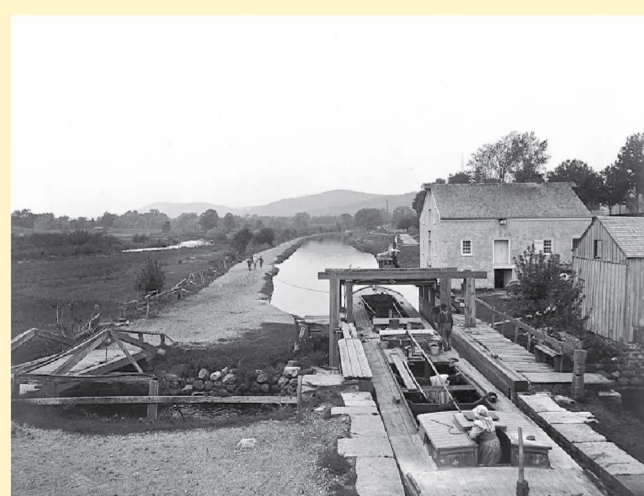
a common sight strutting across roads and fields, while along the river water-loving birds such as herons, wood ducks, common mergansers, and mallards are plentiful.

There are many ways to experience the watershed. Hikers and photographers enjoy sweeping views of the rural landscape from mountaintops, including at Point Mountain Reservation. The State of New Jersey's Wildlife Management Areas and New Jersey Audubon's Wattles Farm Sanctuary offer natural landscapes and birding opportunities along the river. Allamuchy Mountain State Park and Stephens State Park have extensive trail networks offering dozens of trails for short leisurely walks or longer difficult hikes.



Cross-country skiing on the Musconetcong Wildlife Management Area at Valley Road. Credit: Alan Hunt

## Heritage Deep and Strong



Morris Canal Lock 3 West at Waterloo Village State Historic Site. Credit: NJ State Archives

The Musconetcong River watershed has been inhabited for over 13,000 years. Earliest among these settlements is the Plenge Site, one of the few well-documented archeological sites of early native Americans who inhabited the eastern part of North America at the end of the last ice age. Beginning about 1,000 years ago, Native Americans settled into more permanent villages along the Musconetcong River. The river was rich with fish, and stone weirs, nets, and spears were used to harvest this abundant food source. Fertile soils were farmed and much of the valley's flat lands were grasslands managed by fire to maintain important game species, berries, and nut-producing trees. Many village sites have been identified and several stone weirs remain in the river.

In the early 1700s, European Americans travelled from Philadelphia up the Delaware River and its tributaries. This displaced the Native Americans of Lenapehoking, including the Munsee in the Musconetcong valley and the Unami east and south of Musconetcong Mountain. While many Lenape left New Jersey following the 1758 Treaty of Easton, eventually migrating to Canada and present-day Oklahoma and Wisconsin, the state remains a home today for several state-recognized tribes.

In the mid-1700s, the westward influx of migrants increased as roads improved, utilizing the same pathways through natural mountain gaps at Glen Gardner and Hackettstown that Native Americans used for millennia. Cultivated fields, pastures, and woodlots came to cover most of the landscape interspersed with churches, schools, inns, and houses. Farm families grew cash crops such as rye, wheat, flax, and oats. The change in elevation along the Musconetcong River provided many opportunities to build dams to power sawmills and gristmills, the latter grinding locally grown grains for flour, meal, and feed. Typically, these dams were constructed with large stone abutments on either bank, anchoring the ends of a timber or stone dam spanning the river. The dams diverted the river into ponds and millraces to turn the waterwheels that powered industrial machinery. Milling was the economic backbone for the founding of communities like Asbury, Beattystown, Bloomsbury, Finesville, Penwell, Stephensburg, and Waterloo. These communities are now part of the historical charm of the Musconetcong valley. The Asbury Historic District, for instance, is a walkable village with private homes displaying a delightful variety of revival style architecture of the 1800s. Its historic mill is occasionally open for public tours.

Industrialists also discovered seams of iron ore and built furnaces and forges. The stone ruins of former iron-working sites can be seen at various locations throughout the valley. After the center of America's iron industry relocated westward in the mid-1800s, other industrial sectors rose to prominence, notably large paper mills at Riegelsville, Hughesville, and Warren Glen. The Finesville-Seigletown Historic District, with its stone and brick buildings, playground, and quiet streets, exemplifies the region's industrial heritage founded on skilled trades and iron, wool textiles, paper, and machine tools.

In 1825, on the heels of the success of the Erie Canal, New Jersey investors began building the Morris Canal to connect together the iron regions of northern New Jersey and coal regions of eastern Pennsylvania with markets in New York City. The canal's opening in 1831 led to a boom in small towns and industries along its 102-mile route. The Musconetcong River supplied the canal with water, and portions of the canal—locks, lock-tender houses, inclined planes, dams, and the actual canal prism itself—remain today. A few decades later, railroads traversed the watershed's mountain ridges and gorges. The earthworks, tunnels, and bridges of these innovative transportation systems are still evident throughout the local landscape, including a canal lock exhibit at Saxton Falls and towpath trail at Florence Kuipers Park in Hackettstown.

Today, the Musconetcong River offers many opportunities to learn about its heritage, mostly through landscape exploration. Roads parallel the Musconetcong from Saxton Falls to Riegelsville, and a portion of this journey follows the Warren Heritage Scenic Byway. The river is crossed at many points by historic stone, iron, and concrete bridges offering a chance to enjoy scenic river vistas.

There are several heritage tourism sites open to the public. The Lebanon Township Museum at New Hampton is a former schoolhouse with regular visiting hours and changing exhibits. Life in a 19th century canal community can be explored at the Waterloo Village Historic Site, and the Asbury Mill (c. 1865) showcases the river's changing uses and provides river and trail access.



Fluted Stone Point, Prehistoric Plenge Site. Credit: Joseph A.M. Gingerich



Musconetcong Valley Presbyterian Church, c. 1837. Credit: Alan Hunt



Asbury Historic District. Credit: Alan Hunt



Railroad bridge at Chagewater, now removed. Credit: FOLTH



Historic Asbury Mill Interpretive Center, c. 1865. Credit: Alan Hunt



Mill pulley wheels and gears at Asbury Mill. Credit: Bill Leavens

## Working in Partnership

Of the approximately 3.6 million miles of rivers and streams in the U.S., fewer than one percent—12,734 miles—are protected by the National Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. These miles include some of the most primitive and breathtaking landscapes in North America. The names of many of the streams have Native American and pioneer origins, including the Musconetcong River, which was designated by Congress in 2006.

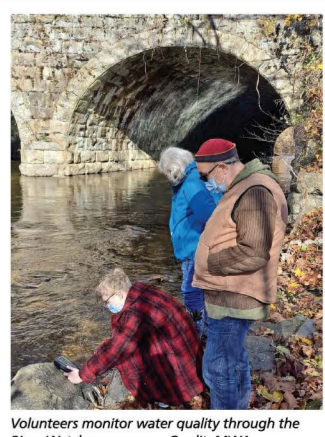
The Musconetcong is a Partnership Wild and Scenic River, a cooperative program of the National Park Service and the Musconetcong River Management Council's municipal, county, and non-governmental members. The National Wild and Scenic Rivers Act safeguards the free-flowing character of rivers by precluding them from being dammed, while allowing for the public to enjoy them. It encourages river management that crosses political boundaries, and promotes public participation to develop goals for river protection.

In 1992, local residents formed the Musconetcong Watershed Association (MWA), a non-governmental

organization, to advocate for preserving and protecting the watershed's unique natural and cultural resources. The MWA was instrumental in making the watershed a high priority for New Jersey's Green Acres land acquisition program, and in obtaining the river's National Wild and Scenic River designation. With a current membership base composed of individuals, families, businesses, and organizations, MWA is active with public educational programs, river cleanups, municipal outreach and ordinance review, water quality monitoring, and promotion of appropriate and scientifically sound state and local environmental policies.



Volunteers plant trees at a dam removal site near Warren Glen. Credit: Ryan Jorle



Volunteers monitor water quality through the River Watcher program. Credit: MWA





# MUSCONETCONG NATIONAL WILD & SCENIC RIVER

**There are many ways to explore the Musconetcong Wild & Scenic River's natural and historic resources. Publicly accessible lands include state, county and municipal parks, wildlife management areas and non-governmental conservation areas.**

**Historic Districts and Museums:** For lovers of historic architecture and small towns with charm, the Musconetcong is a never-ending delight from stone farmhouses and barns to village gristmills and general stores. Visitors are encouraged to shop and eat locally, as well as drive or walk around to view building exteriors, but keep in mind that most historic properties in the watershed are private. The **Lebanon Township Museum** in the former New Hampton School offers a look inside a genuine two-room schoolhouse, as well as exhibits on local history and art. If you've ever wondered how a gristmill operated, make sure to visit the **Asbury Mill Interpretive Center**, an environmental education center. **Waterloo Village Historic Site** is a preserved 19th century village along the Morris Canal with grounds open to roam during daytime hours with seasonal guided tours. Check with sites before visiting for operating hours.

**Historic Trails:** The **Morris Canal Greenway**, one of the region's premiere historic trails, begins at **Waterloo Village**, an authentic canal community, with a restored towpath, elegant homes, mills, a hotel, blacksmith, canal store and museum. The greenway offers a level trail for hiking and biking with opportunities to explore the towns and villages along the route. From Waterloo southwest to Phillipsburg, the canal followed the Musconetcong and Pohatcong valleys. It historically made use of locks and ingenious inclined planes to lift boats across steep terrain. The preserved ruins are visible along greenway trail sections. The section of canal in **Florence Kuipers Park** is a premier location to walk the canal towpath. The **Saxton Falls Dam**, originally built in 1830 to supply the canal with water, is also a great place to access the greenway.

**Scenic Drives:** The Musconetcong's historic travel routes paralleled the river, with river crossings at milling centers. These roads can still be followed today. Favored routes on the course of the lower watershed include **Asbury-Anderson Road**, **Asbury-Bloomsbury Road** (CR 632) and **Riegelsville Warren Glen Road** (CR 627), which passes through farm fields and historic milling villages. The **Warren Heritage Scenic Byway** (NJ 57) is dotted with farm stands, local restaurants and many places of historic interest. Waterloo Road traverses the forested Allamuchy Mountain and Stephens State Parks along the Morris Canal route.

**Wildlife Viewing:** Birders, nature photographers and wildlife viewers benefit from the diversity of environments offered by the Musconetcong Wild & Scenic River. Favorite spots to catch glimpses of large birds and mammals are at the constructed **Saxton Lake**, while the **Musconetcong Educational Trail** offers a way to learn about the many plants, smaller amphibians and insects that form a vital part of the local ecology.

**Native Plants/Pollinator Garden:** The Musconetcong Watershed Association River Resource Center in Asbury features a demonstration garden where visitors can learn about native plants and pollinators.

**Hunting:** Hunting is a regulated activity in New Jersey and requires a license and completion of a hunter education course. Hunting license and permit information is available from the NJ Division of Fish & Wildlife. Hunting is allowed in season at wildlife management areas, state forests, and many Hunterdon County parks. Hunters must have permission to hunt private agricultural or forested land even if the land is not posted. Hunters should always check regulations before hunting and obtain permission before hunting on private lands. The **Musconetcong Wildlife Management Area** off of Valley Road is a popular hunting spot, known for deer and ducks.

**Safety During Hunting Season:** Hunters and non-hunters should be aware of when hunting seasons are in effect, usually from mid-September to mid-February. Since hunting other than bow hunting for deer on state Wildlife Management Areas is not allowed on Sundays, it is the best day for non-hunters to enjoy wildlife watching during hunting season. Visitors are strongly encouraged to wear orange and confine visits to marked trails and broad daylight hours.

**Fishing:** The Musconetcong River is an extremely popular fishing destination with dozens of access points. Many river tributaries have native eastern brook trout and the river receives the most stocked rainbow trout in the state. Some of the best fly fishing in New Jersey can be had at **Point Mountain Preserve** and **Penwell**. Fishing is a regulated activity and anyone over the age of 16 must have a license from the NJ Division of Fish & Wildlife. In addition, a stamp is required to fish for trout. Check license requirements before fishing.

**Invasive Species:** Some invasive species present in the Musconetcong River can displace food sources for trout and other aquatic wildlife, hindering their survival. Please help control the spread of aquatic hitchhikers by using decontamination stations at water access points. Scrub wader treads before leaving the river and traveling to another fishing location. Rinse boats before traveling to another lake or river.

**Paddling:** The Musconetcong's fabulously clear waters are perfect for kayaking or canoeing. Being on the river rewards paddlers with new perspectives on wildlife and the valley's heritage, particularly the historic mills and villages that relied on waterpower. The **Musconetcong Watershed National Water Trail** is a guide to paddling Lake Hopatcong, Lake Musconetcong, Saxton Lake and the Musconetcong River. The trail is divided into 11 segments from 4 to 12 miles long, or longer when combined. Public entry and exit points are provided. Conditions range from flat water to whitewater, and offer short and long trips for beginning to intermediate paddlers. Follow good water safety practices, including wearing a personal flotation device (PFD). Always check weather and water conditions before paddling. While the lakes may be enjoyed any time of the year, recommended river paddling conditions are when the USGS Bloomsbury Gage has a depth of at least 2 feet, above 3 feet can be dangerous.

**Hiking:** The watershed is easy to explore on foot with most parks offering unpaved trails. One of the most popular hiking locations is the **Musconetcong Gorge Preserve**, which offers over 4 miles of easy to strenuous trails along a narrow and deep stretch of beautiful river. **Point Mountain Reservation** offers a short, moderate 1-mile hike to an overlook with stunning panoramic views, as well as longer easy hikes following the river. Extensive trail networks are at **Allamuchy Mountain State Park** and **Stephens State Park**, and the 168-mile **Highlands Trail** begins at Riegelsville and continues north to the Hudson River.

**Trail Running:** Running on unpaved paths where there are steep gradients is a fitness activity known as "trail running" and offers a more vigorous workout than hiking. The **Charlestown Reserve** is a popular trail running location crossing the crest of Musconetcong Mountain over 2 miles of moderately difficult trails.

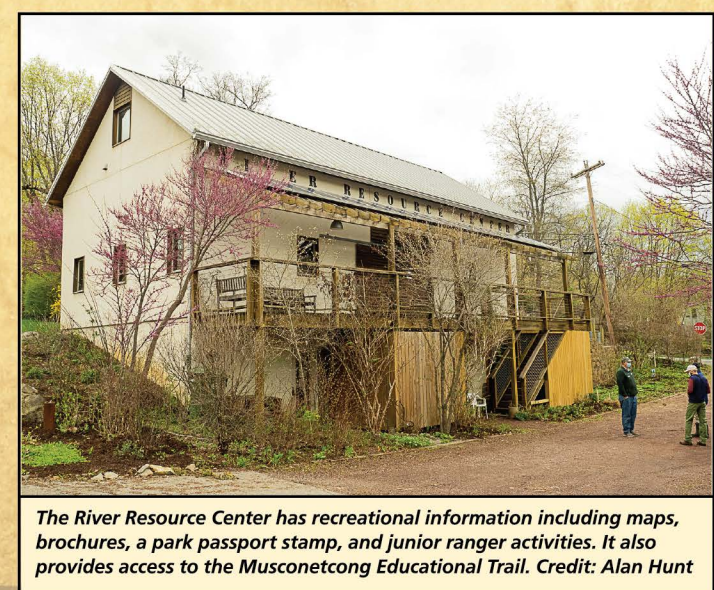
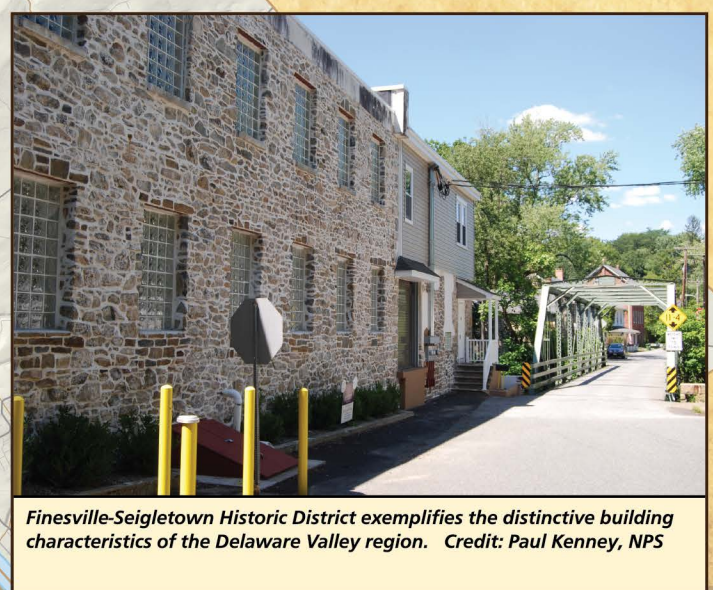
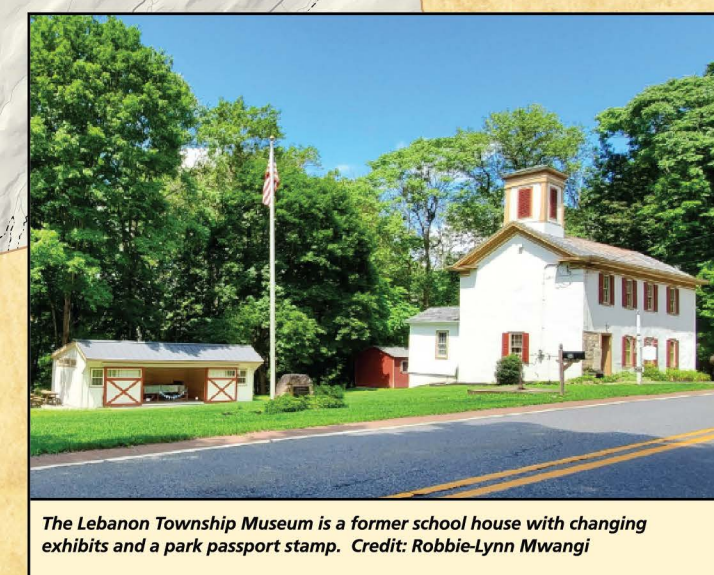
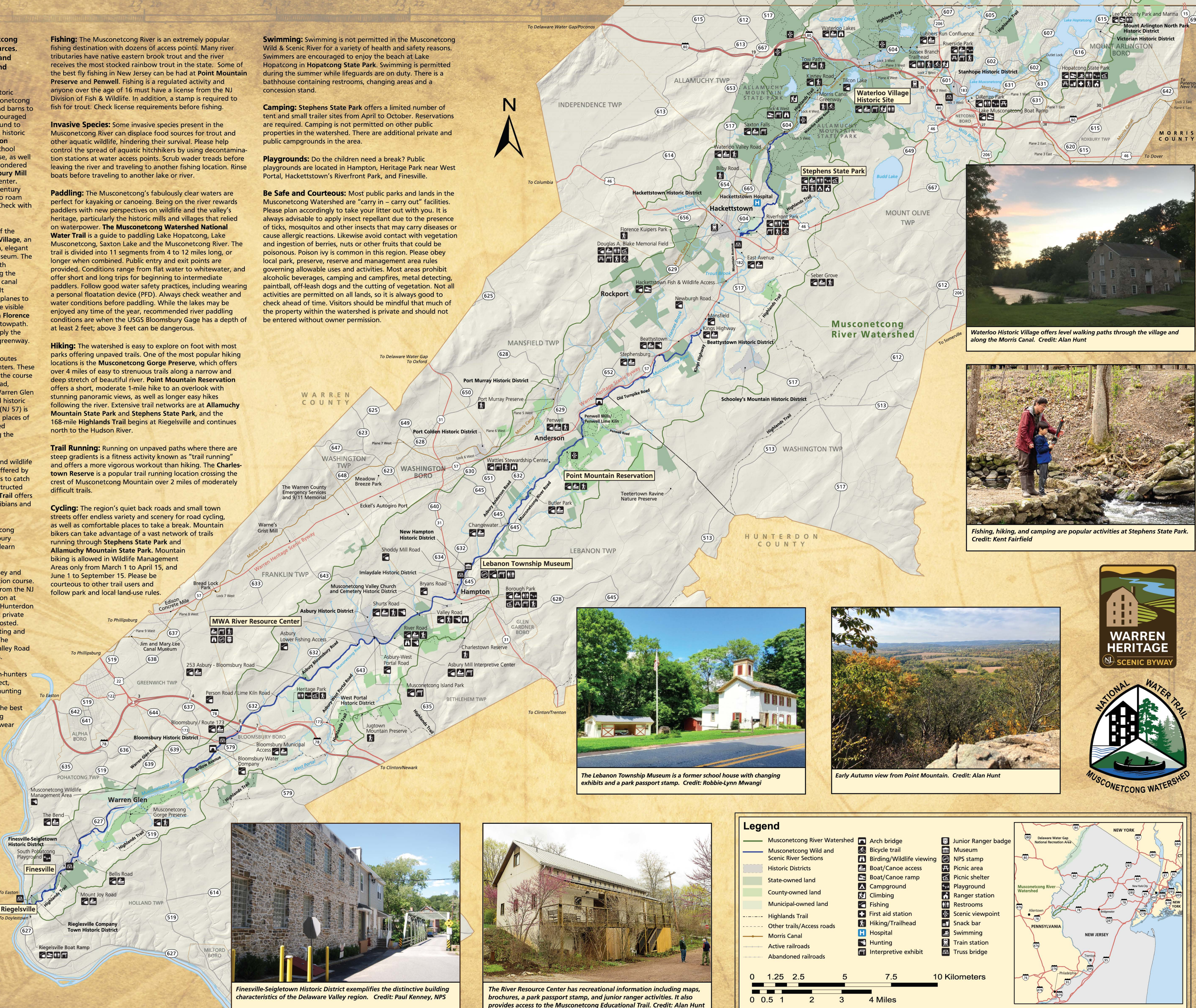
**Cycling:** The region's quiet back roads and small town streets offer endless variety and scenery for road cycling, as well as comfortable places to take a break. Mountain bikers can take advantage of a vast network of trails running through **Stephens State Park** and **Allamuchy Mountain State Park**. Mountain biking is allowed in Wildlife Management Areas only from March 1 to April 15, and June 1 to September 15. Please be courteous to other trail users and follow park and local land-use rules.

**Swimming:** Swimming is not permitted in the Musconetcong Wild & Scenic River for a variety of health and safety reasons. Swimmers are encouraged to enjoy the beach at **Lake Hopatcong in Hopatcong State Park**. Swimming is permitted during the summer while lifeguards are on duty. There is a bathroom containing restrooms, changing areas and a concession stand.

**Camping:** **Stephens State Park** offers a limited number of tent and small trailer sites from April to October. Reservations are required. Camping is not permitted on other public properties in the watershed. There are additional private and public campgrounds in the area.

**Playgrounds:** Do the children need a break? Public playgrounds are located in Hampton, Heritage Park near West Portal, Hackettstown's Riverfront Park, and Finesville.

**Be Safe and Courteous:** Most public parks and lands in the Musconetcong Watershed are "carry in - carry out" facilities. Please plan accordingly to take your litter out with you. It is always advisable to apply insect repellent due to the presence of ticks, mosquitoes and other insects that may carry diseases or cause allergic reactions. Likewise avoid contact with vegetation and ingestion of berries, nuts or other fruits that could be poisonous. Poison ivy is common in this region. Please obey local park, preserve, reserve and management area rules governing allowable uses and activities. Most areas prohibit alcoholic beverages, camping and campfires, metal detecting, paintball, off-leash dogs and the cutting of vegetation. Not all activities are permitted on all lands, so it is always good to check ahead of time. Visitors should be mindful that much of the property within the watershed is private and should not be entered without owner permission.



Rail excursions from Phillipsburg to the rebuilt Riegelsville station feature scenic views and a tour of a winery overlooking the Musconetcong and Delaware rivers. Credit: Alan Hunt

Finesville-Seigletown Historic District exemplifies the distinctive building characteristics of the Delaware Valley region. Credit: Paul Kenney, NPS

The River Resource Center has recreational information including maps, brochures, a park passport stamp, and junior ranger activities. It also provides access to the Musconetcong Educational Trail. Credit: Alan Hunt

**Legend**

- Musconetcong River Watershed
- Musconetcong Wild and Scenic River Sections
- Historic Districts
- State-owned land
- County-owned land
- Municipal-owned land
- Highlands Trail
- Other trails/Access roads
- Morris Canal
- Active railroads
- Abandoned railroads
- Arch bridge
- Bicycle trail
- Birding/Wildlife viewing
- Boat/Canoe access
- Boat/Canoe ramp
- Campground
- Climbing
- Fishing
- First aid station
- Hiking/Trailhead
- Hospital
- Hunting
- Interpretive exhibit
- Junior Ranger badge
- Museum
- NPS stamp
- Picnic area
- Picnic shelter
- Playground
- Ranger station
- Restrooms
- Scenic viewpoint
- Snack bar
- Swimming
- Train station
- Truss bridge

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