

# Musconetcong River Restoration Project

The Musconetcong River drains 158 square miles of rural New Jersey and is a major tributary of the Delaware River, the longest undammed river east of the Mississippi River. According to state record, there are 34 regulated dams located along the length of the Musconetcong, portions of which are designated in the National Wild & Scenic Rivers program. Aside from the Lake Hopatcong and Lake Musconetcong dams, the majority of these dams are no longer being used for their original function and are not in compliance with current state dam safety regulations.



## Relics of the Industrial Age

European settlement profoundly altered the river and surrounding landscape. Subsistence agriculture took root in the lower Musconetcong valley at the beginning of the 18th century. The fertile limestone valley was rapidly cleared for croplands, and agricultural production gradually evolved into commercial grain and dairy farming. Villages sprang up around the many gristmills built along the Musconetcong River from Finesville to Hackettstown. With these mills came the numerous dams that block access to spawning habitat for migratory and resident fish. Many of these dams also pose liability and maintenance challenges for their current owners.

## Bringing Rivers Back to Life

A healthy river can increase property values, boost recreational opportunities, attract tourists, reduce water pollution, and protect people and property from flooding. But dams also disrupt the natural functions of rivers, leaving many of them lifeless or cut off from their communities. American Rivers is working to ensure the Musconetcong River escapes this fate by partnering with the Musconetcong Watershed Association, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the Natural Resource Conservation Service and others to remove several dams on this river.





The Musconetcong River Restoration Project saw its first major victory in Summer 2008 with the removal of the Gruendyke Dam. Momentum continues along this New Jersey jewel as project partners work to restore another stretch of the river through the removal of the Finesville Dam. This dam currently blocks the passage of American shad, blueback herring, alewife, American eel and other species for almost three miles of the Musconetcong River (to the Hughesville Dam).

Removal of the Finesville Dam will increase access to spawning habitat for these migratory species, improve water quality, and enhance the recreational value of this reach for canoeing and kayaking, given that substantial reaches of the Musconetcong are currently used for fishing, canoeing, and nature watching. Perhaps even more importantly, the restoration projects that are currently being pursued will increase awareness of dam removal as an option and provide the momentum to remove more non-functioning dams and, if necessary, provide fish passage structures on others. It is known that the next four blockages on this river system – the Hughesville, Warren Glen, Bloomsbury Graphite, Asbury Graphite dams -- are no longer functioning as they were initially intended. It is also known there many more dams upstream that are no longer viable and out of compliance with NJDEP Dam Safety standards.

### Restoration in Action

Project partners, led by the Musconetcong Watershed Association, are currently working with an experienced engineering firm to study and design the Finesville Dam removal. The Musconetcong Watershed Association also oversaw the February 2009 removal of the Seber Dam, owned by the Town of Hackettstown, and originally built to create a swimming hole.

*American Rivers is providing funding for this project through our partnership with the NOAA Restoration Center.*



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