



ESSEX NATIONAL
HERITAGE AREA

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**Essex National Heritage Commission and the Merrimack Valley Planning
Commission Announce Merrimack River Trail Planning Project**

May 25, 2011 (Salem, MA) -- The Essex National Heritage Commission (Essex Heritage) and the Merrimack Valley Planning Commission (MVPC) jointly announce a partnership project focused on further developing the Merrimack River Trail, a long envisioned 50-mile multimodal recreational trail along the Merrimack River. The strategic planning project entails the engagement of trail advocates and municipal officials in the seventeen Massachusetts communities that line the Merrimack River.

With the goal of promoting increased use of the Merrimack River Trail, the project seeks to build upon prior efforts by improving connections between existing sections. Tracing the river's route, the trail will ultimately connect six cities and eleven towns from Tyngsborough to Newbury, effectively creating the backbone of a continuous, non-motorized, on- and off-road trail system.

Funded with a Recreational Trails Grant from the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation, the early stage planning effort entails documenting existing and potential routes and preparing recommendations regarding the trail's future development. The project is being conducted in cooperation with the Merrimack River Watershed Council and Northern Middlesex Council of Governments.

“This collaboration between Essex Heritage, the Merrimack Valley Planning Commission, and the Merrimack River communities is a critical step towards creating a regional partnership to support the long-term development of the Merrimack River Trail” said Annie C. Harris, Executive Director of Essex National Heritage Commission.

Essex Heritage and MVPC will organize and facilitate a series of meetings with trail proponents and community officials to undertake a needs assessment and route identification process. A final report containing maps, findings, and recommendations will be available by early fall.

For more information, please contact Essex Heritage at 978-740-0444 or MVPC at 978-374-0519.

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About the Essex National Heritage Area

The Essex National Heritage Commission (Essex Heritage) is the non-profit management entity for Essex National Heritage Area, one of forty-nine heritage partnership parks of the National Park Service. Working in collaboration with the National Park Service, the Essex Heritage promotes public/private partnerships and develops and implements programs that enhance, preserve and encourage regional awareness of the unique historic, cultural and natural resources found within the Area. For more information, visit the website at www.essexheritage.org or call (978) 740-0444.