



# BOSTON COLLEGE

MORRISSEY COLLEGE OF ART AND SCIENCES  
HISTORY DEPARTMENT

US Environmental Protection Agency  
EPA Docket Center  
Superfund Docket  
Washington, DC 20460

DOCKET # EPA-HQ-OLEM-2021-0457 Neponset River

October 5, 2021

Dear EPA Docket Center,

I write with public comment on the proposal to make the Neponset River part of the EPA Superfund program. I strongly urge EPA to make the lower Neponset a Superfund site and continue ongoing efforts to make this area a source of vitality for this portion of Massachusetts.

I write as an environmental historian at Boston College: I regularly use the history of the Neponset and its historic mills to teach key moments in the history of places and peoples of the United States to my college courses. This summer I worked with the nonprofit curriculum development firm Primary Source to teach a group of K-12 teachers about Massachusetts and environmental history with a walking tour along the Neponset.

I also write as a citizen, tax-payer, neighbor of the Neponset—and as a mother, commuter, and Girl Scout volunteer. I have led groups of kids in the region and have canoed there with my husband, seeking respite from busy days and long quarantine. I have gained in appreciation of my local surroundings because of outings with the Neponset River Watershed Association.

In all of these ways, I witness the centrality of the Neponset to past and present life in this region. Long before European contact, tribal nations used the waters and the creatures of the Neponset. The Neponset Landing site was an important area of Massachusetts people's use of the Neponset River for travel, trade, fishing, and use of near-shore environmental resources. In an early era of English settlement, the river supplied mill-power that transformed small villages into lasting settlements. A powder mill at Milton Lower Mills armed English colonists in their war against Native coalitions that we usually call "King Philip's War." Later mills at the same location employed immigrants, swelled bank coffers, enmeshed New England in the slave-based economy of the plantation South, and enabled the commercial and social development of Massachusetts' South Shore. Many of these aspects of our past are shameful, some are inspiring, and all are deeply bound with the roots of American history in the Massachusetts Bay.

Now only a few people can use and enjoy the Neponset: only those like my family with the resources to have a canoe and a car to carry it. Children cannot swim, and families cannot fish. EPA Superfund support will help return this river to some of the community vitality it once held.

Development of the Neponset will also build upon important recent community efforts by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, the town of Milton, and the city of Quincy.

The Neponset River Greenway is an inspiring multi-community and state endeavor that has returned foot traffic and families to the shores of the Neponset. On any weekend day, people of diverse ages, races, ethnicities, and levels of mobility enjoy the breezes and creatures along that bike path. Milton has centered its Farmers Market on the Neponset Landing site, and after initial resistance communities in Milton have embraced the Greenway. Mattapan communities now stroll and bike along the shores of a river that for generations did not welcome them and had little public access. Meanwhile, Quincy recently devoted several million dollars to purchase and preserve privately-held lands slightly downstream of Milton Lower Mills, to ensure public access, stormwater runoff, and continued environmental stewardship.

The Neponset River is deeply polluted, and federal support will help make it cleaner, more accessible, and more used---as historical resource, as community resource, as a way to knit varied neighborhoods together.

As climate change transforms our coastlines, such river sites will be even more vulnerable and more valuable. Now is the time to center our attention on the Neponset.

Thank you for your work.

Yours truly,



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Quincy citizen, tax-payer, voter

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