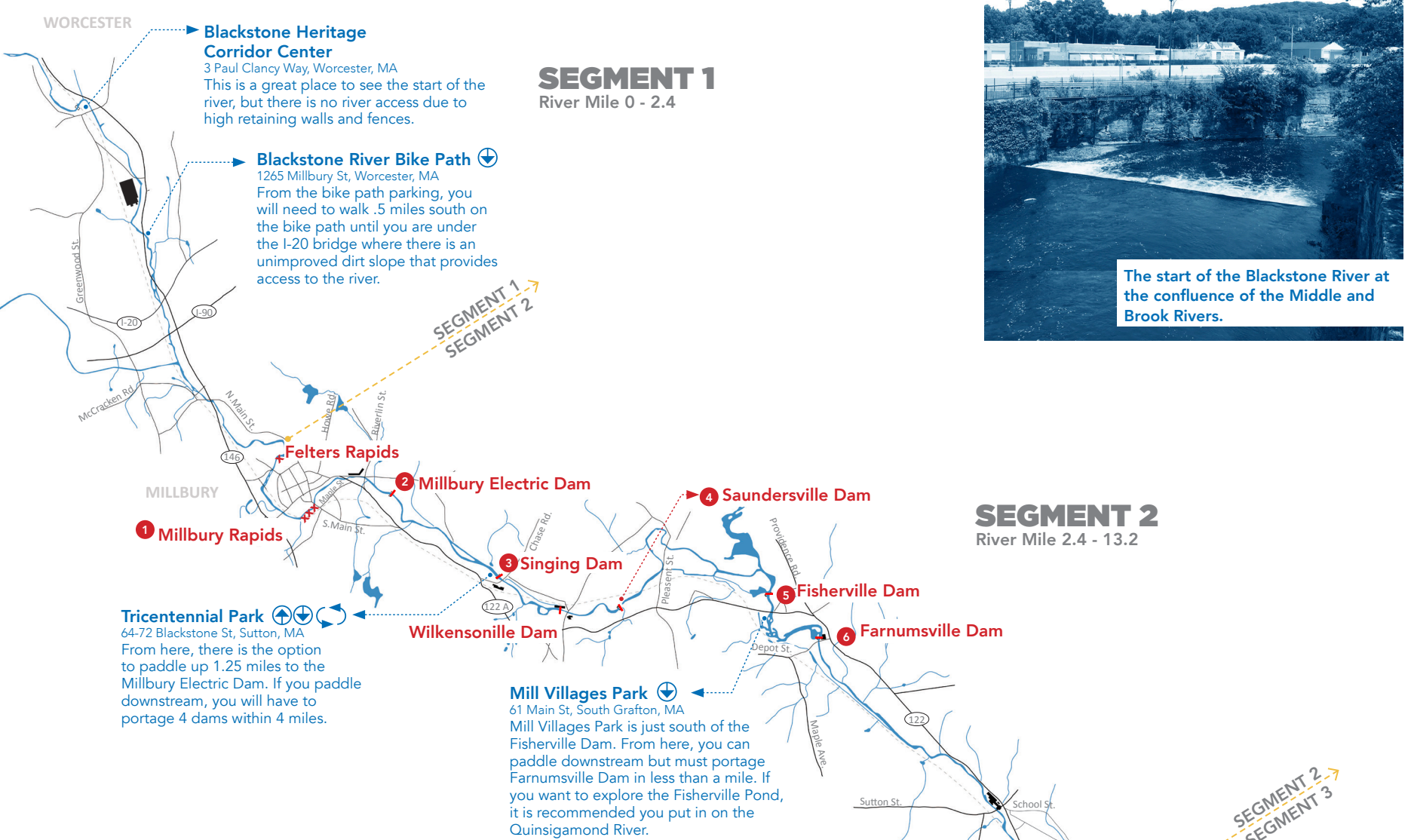
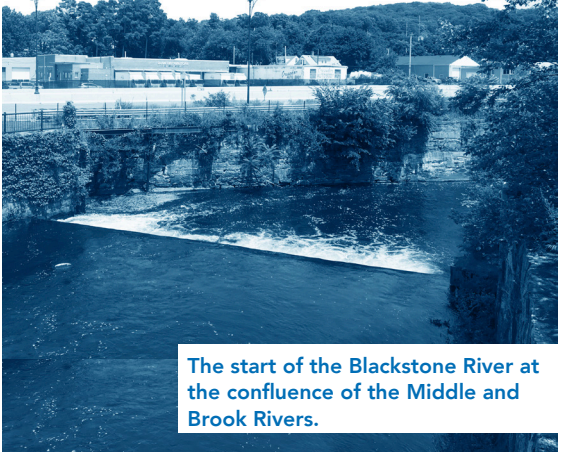


# URBAN EXPLORERS: A GUIDE TO PADDLING THE BLACKSTONE RIVER

From Worcester to Pawtucket



**SEGMENT 1**  
River Mile 0 - 2.4



The start of the Blackstone River at the confluence of the Middle and Brook Rivers.

## SEGMENT 1: The Urban Headwaters

Blackstone Heritage Corridor Visitor Center to Millbury Rapids  
Portages: Felters Rapids and Millbury Rapids

The Blackstone River begins at the confluence of the Middle River and Mill Brook. The Blackstone Heritage Corridor Visitor Center in Worcester is a great place to explore the start of the Blackstone River. However, given the high retaining walls, fences and urban runoff in this area, it is not possible to launch boats from the visitor center. The first practical place to put boats into the Blackstone River is where the river passes under Route 20. Park at the Blackstone River Bike path parking area off of Millbury St. and either carry or use portage wheels to transport your boat. 45 miles south (left) along the bike path to the underpass of Route 20 where there is a gradual slope down to the river. Shortly after putting in, you will need to pass under the Mass Pike bridge that has 4 culverts. During low flow conditions, the culverts can be clogged with downed trees and trash requiring a somewhat sketchy portage over the debris and through the tunnel. Avoid fast moving water and be careful where you stop - it

may look solid but it may just be debris on the surface and you may sink through. At river mile 1.8, the old broken McCracken St. Dam creates a drop that can be easily paddled through or portaged along the left side of the bridge abutments. At St. Bridgid's Cemetery, the river takes a series of sharp turns before leading into the Felters Rapids at river mile 2.4. Shortly after comes the class 3 Millbury Rapids. Unless you have expert boat handling skills, it is recommended that you portage the boats at the Cemetery and bypass the Felters and Millbury Rapids.

## SEGMENT 2: The Legacy Dams

Millbury Rapids to Riverdale Dam  
Portages: Millbury Electric Dam, Saundersville Dam, Fisherville Dam, Farnumville Dam, Riverdale Dam

This segment of river passes through forests and farms. It is easily navigable with a clear channel, but there are 6 dams that must be portaged. The Millbury Electric Dam is the first dam that must be portaged in an unimproved area at river right. Immediately after the dam there is short stretch of quick water before settling back into flat water. The next stretch of river passes by old farm houses and fields. The Singing Dam has an improved portage on river right. The Wilkenonville Dam is a breached dam that creates a 1-2' drop that can be paddled through under most conditions. The breached Saundersville Mill Dam is one of the more challenging portages. At the Pleasant St. Bridge, the river divides- the mainstem continues left, but going right along the former route of the Blackstone Canal is the better route. At river mile 8.5, the Quinsigamond River enters on the left at Fisherville Pond. The Fisherville Mill Dam can be portaged in an unimproved area just to the right of the dam. Shortly

after, the Farnumville Dam has been breached and the mill pond has largely been drained. There are parts of the broken dam in the river, so it should be portaged river right. Following the Farnumville Dam, there is an easy 3 mile paddle through several historic mill villages until you reach Riverdale Dam.

## SEGMENT 3: The Maze

Riverdale Dam to the Rolling Dam  
Portages: Rice City Pond Dam, Optional Millville Rapids

Between Plummers landing and the Route 122 bridge, the river is in a constant state of flux as it widens out in a broad floodplain. The river erodes the banks, creating new channels and breaching the canal towpath embankment. There are sharp and frequent turns in the section with downed trees that create very dangerous "strainers" in this section of the river. As an annual flooding can change the course of the river, it is often difficult to know which fork to choose and certain paths can lead to dead ends- it is very easy to get lost in this area. During low-flow conditions, it is possible that you may have to pull your boat significant distances. Reconnaissance of this area is recommended prior to paddling it. Alternatively, paddlers can portage at Riverdale or Plummers landing and put in at River Bend Farm. The Rice City Pond Dam and the canal spillway must be portaged via the canal on river right. You can either put back into the canal or into the river. If you put into the canal, you can paddle down a flat section of canal and then portage

across a meadow to steps down to the river above the Route 16 bridge. Following the Route 16 bridge, there is a short 1'-2' drop at the location of a historic dam. Following this and up until the Route 122 bridge, the river again begins meandering with frequent curves, strainers and downed trees. Following the 122 bridge, the river smooths out and is easily navigable. At river mile 24.6 is the Millville Rapids. Just before the Central St. Bridge, the river splits around an island. Go right at the island to portage, or left to go through the Millville Rapids. If you choose to go right to portage, under most conditions, you will end up walking your boat through a shallow rocky area to a place below the rapids where you can put in again. If you choose to go left and run the rapids, you will pass under the Central Bridge where a former dam is broken in the water. Many paddlers with good river reading skills shoot these rapids. Following the rapids, the river turns into flat water with an easy paddle until the Rolling Mill Dam at the entrance to the Blackstone Gorge.

## SEGMENT 4: Where the Wild River Meets Flood Control

Rolling Dam to Manville Dam  
Portages: Rolling Mill Dam, Blackstone Dam, Thundermist Dam

This segment includes both the majestic and wild Blackstone Gorge as well as miles of river that have been heavily altered and channelized as part of the Army Corp of Engineers Flood Control project for the City of Woonsocket. The Rolling Mill Dam marks the entrance to the Blackstone Gorge State Park. It is recommended that you do a long portage to bypass the Rolling Mill Dam, the Blackstone Gorge, and the Blackstone Dam. After putting in at Roosevelt Park, the river becomes channelized with fortified flood control rip rap for the next 1.5 miles leading to the Thundermist Dam. The Thundermist Dam must be portaged. Paddlers can put back in at River Island Park ~1 mile downstream. After putting in at River Island Park, the river passes through an urban segment of downtown Woonsocket. Starting before the Court St. truss bridge is a stretch of 1000' of Class 1 and Class 2 rapids with lots of rocks. Depending on the

water levels, this segment may require some careful maneuvering. Following the rapids, the river leaves the hardened and altered flood control river banks and becomes broad and placid as it passes wooded banks. Rivers Edge Park offers a hard packed sloped access to the river and plenty of parking. The Manville Dam has an 18' drop- one of the highest on the river- and must be portaged.

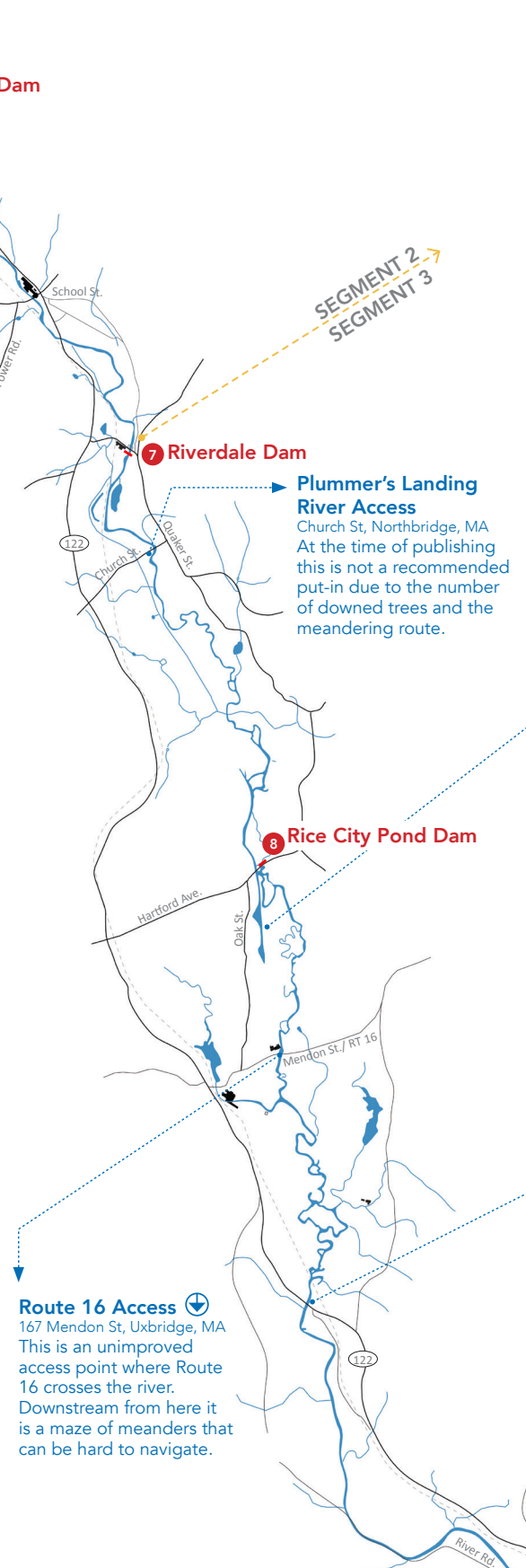
## SEGMENT 5: The Industrial Heritage

Manville Dam to Valley Falls Dam  
Portages: Manville Dam, Ashton Dam, Pratt Dam

Putting in at Sycamore Landing, you can paddle upstream to explore the arches of the Manville Mills old power system on river left. The mill burned down but the concrete piers and arches in the river still remain. The river is easy flat water with forested slopes for almost two miles until the Albion Dam. The Albion Dam has a portage on river right onto the bike path. The next 1.5 miles are relatively flat water caused by the Ashton Dam. The Ashton Dam has a portage river-right into the canal. The paddler has choices here. One option is to stay in the boat and continue down the canal to the takeout in the canal just above the dam. Take out there and carry the boat on the bike path across the Pratt Dam. Re-enter the river at an improved access on river left. However, there are times when downed trees make a canal impassable. The other option is to take out of the canal just after the dam and re-enter the river just below the Ashton Dam. The Pratt Dam is a mandatory portage, regardless of

water levels. While they may look tempting to run, do not attempt it. Multiple fatalities have occurred here. Following the Pratt Dam, the river passes through a dramatic contrast between the Lonsdale Marsh, the largest freshwater wetland in northern Rhode Island with dozens of species of birds and other organisms, in the industrial heart of Central Falls and Pawtucket. Following the Lonsdale Marsh, there are 4 dams in close succession that make this final stretch of river challenging. The section of the river has high retaining walls, so paddlers must exercise extreme caution- it is not recommended during high flow conditions or very low conditions, since you can't reach to get over the walls. Following the Main St. Dam, the Blackstone River becomes the tidal Seekonk River, aka the Pawtucket River.

**SEGMENT 2**  
River Mile 2.4 - 13.2



**SEGMENT 3**  
River Mile 13.2 - 26.4



SEGMENT 3: Dragging boats in dry river bed through The Maze.



SEGMENT 4: Rip rap river edge near Woonsocket.



SEGMENT 5: Retaining walls in urbanized Pawtucket.

### SAFETY

When planning an adventure on the Blackstone River it is important that you are well prepared. Paddlers should always wear a life jacket, bring a bailing sponge, and plenty of water to drink. When there are drought conditions, you may be dragging your boat over a dry river bed and when there is a rainstorm, the river can quickly turn to flood conditions. Caution and good judgment are necessary at all times. Paddlers should check water levels and the forecast prior to going out on the river. Upstream and loop paddles are only possible with normal to low-flow conditions.

Due to high amounts of stormwater inputs and the potential of Combined Sewer Overflows (CSO) containing partially-treated wastewater, it is recommended to avoid contact with the river for 48 hours after a heavy rainstorm overflow event. Even when there has not been a rainstorm, it is recommended that paddlers do not intentionally come into contact with the water and attempt to keep their mouth closed if the boat overturns. Paddlers should avoid prolonged contact with the water and should not swim. Paddlers may want to carry hand sanitizer and wash hands, clothing and equipment after paddling.

### DISCLAIMER

It is the responsibility of paddlers to do the reconnaissance needed to ensure that they are familiar with the river and that the water conditions are safe for paddling. Paddling is an inherently dangerous activity. Paddlers should ensure they have the training, knowledge and equipment sufficient for the activity and conditions. The organizations sponsoring this guide assume no responsibility for the safety of any persons, animals or equipment when using the paddling guide.

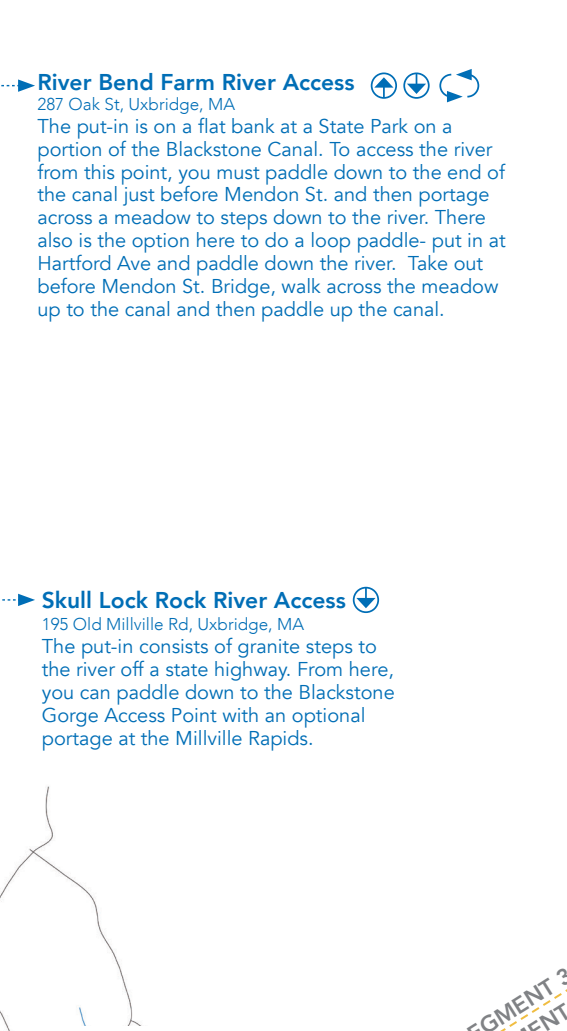


SEGMENT 1: Debris, logs, garbage, and branches can get stuck in the culverts under the Mass Pike bridge and need to be carefully portaged.

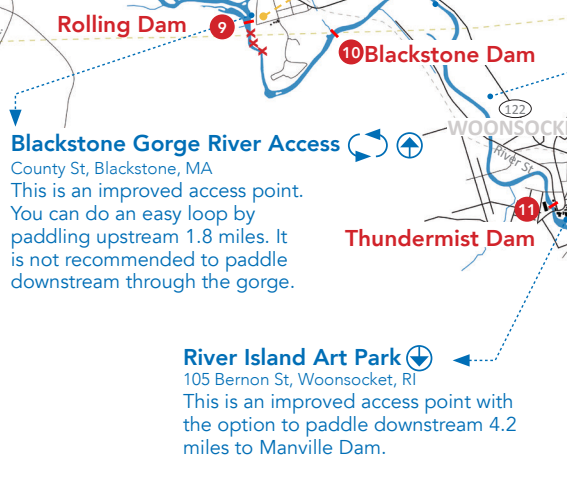


SEGMENT 2: Breached Saundersville Dam. Many of the dams in this section are breached, yet still need to be portaged.

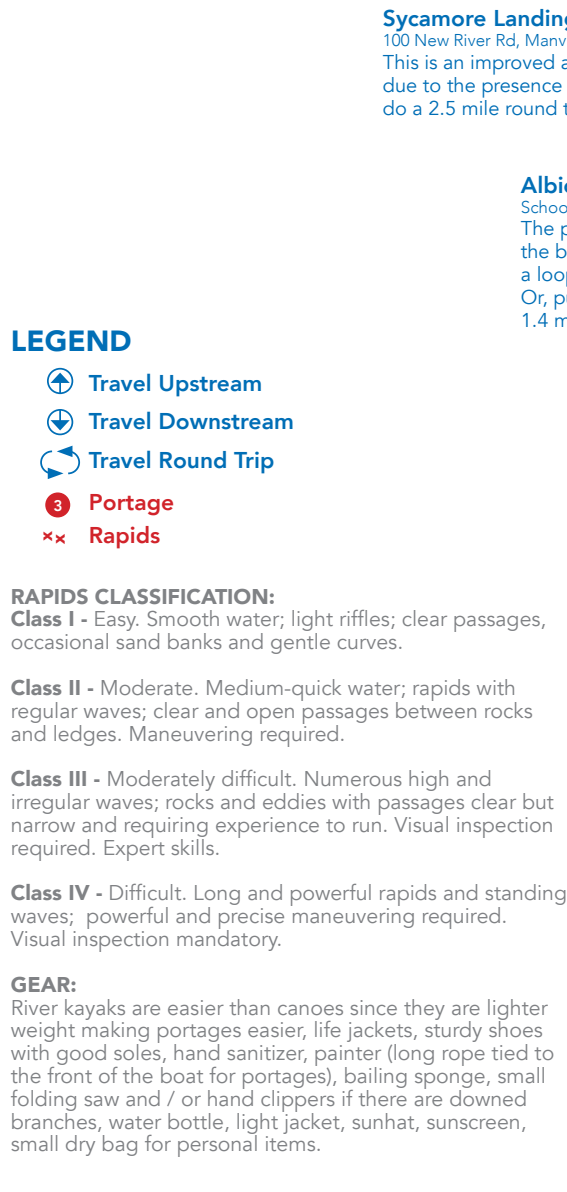
**SEGMENT 3**  
River Mile 13.2 - 26.4



**SEGMENT 4**  
River Mile 26.4 - 31.3



**SEGMENT 5**  
River Mile 31.3 - 44.8



### LEGEND

- Travel Upstream
- Travel Downstream
- Travel Round Trip
- Portage
- Rapids

### RAPIDS CLASSIFICATION:

- Class I** - Easy. Smooth water; light riffles; clear passages, occasional sand banks and gentle curves.
- Class II** - Moderate. Medium-quick water; rapids with regular waves; clear and open passages between rocks and ledges. Maneuvering required.
- Class III** - Moderately difficult. Numerous high and irregular waves; rocks and eddies with passages clear but narrow and requiring experience to run. Visual inspection required. Expert skills.
- Class IV** - Difficult. Long and powerful rapids and standing waves; powerful and precise maneuvering required. Visual inspection mandatory.

**GEAR:**  
River kayaks are easier than canoes since they are lighter weight making portages easier, life jackets, sturdy shoes with good soles, hand sanitizer, painter (long rope tied to the front of the boat for portages), bailing sponge, small folding saw and / or hand clippers if there are downed branches, water bottle, light jacket, sunhat, sunscreen, small dry bag for personal items.

**PLANNING YOUR TRIP:** The Blackstone River can be paddled as day trips or as a multi-day through-paddle. When doing day paddles, there are many access points where you can plan vehicle drops depending on the length of trip you desire. A multi-day paddle of the whole river takes 3-4 days. A support vehicle or portage wheels are recommended to help with the longer portages around the Millbury Rapids and Blackstone Gorge.

Whether you are planning a day trip or a through paddle, it is important to study the river beforehand to plan for the portages. There are 18 dams on the Blackstone river that must be portaged in addition to rapids that should only be paddled if you are an experienced paddler. The portages are listed on the other side of the guide. However, conditions change depending on the water levels so it is recommended to visit the dam sites by land before your paddle.

The Rhode Island Canoe & Kayak Association (RICKA), the Blackstone Valley Paddle Club, and Friends of the Blackstone offer regular day paddles on segments of the Blackstone River. If you are new to paddling, consider going with the group to develop paddling skills and to familiarize yourself with this unique river.

**THE BLACKSTONE RIVER** runs 48 miles from its urban headwaters in Worcester, MA to Pawtucket Falls, RI where it flows into the tidal Seekonk River. The river drops 438 feet in elevation as it flows across granite bedrock that was shaped by the Laurentide Ice Sheet. It passes through channelized granite walls in urban Worcester, alongside rural agricultural farms in Massachusetts, over dams in old

mill villages in Rhode Island, and through the cities of Woonsocket, Central Falls, and Pawtucket. Known as Kittakuck (or great tidal river) to the Nipmuc people, and Mishkittakooksepe to the Narragansett, the river was subsequently labeled as the "birthplace of the industrial revolution" for the development of the first water powered textile mill at Slater Mill in 1793, and later gained the reputation from the EPA as the "most polluted river in the United States." A tremendous effort has

been made to improve the water quality and although it is far from pristine, it still offers a wide range of paddling adventures and opportunities to connect with the urban and rural ecology of the region. Although there are many portages, almost the entire length of the river is navigable. Paddling the river provides "eyes on the river" and helps to ensure that the river is being stewarded for the human and more-than-human communities that depend on it.

1



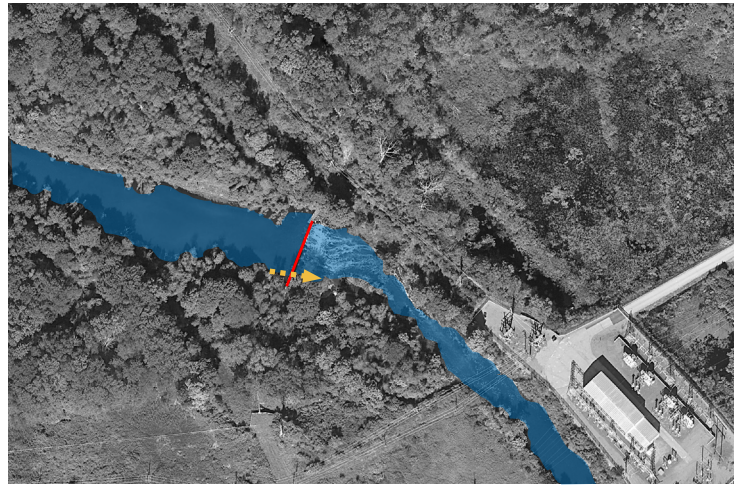
## FELTERS + MILLBURY RAPIDS

**River Mile:** 2.4  
**Difficulty:** This is a long but easy 1 mile portage.  
**Portage:** In high water, Millbury Rapids are Class 3 rapids. They are very narrow with high water. There are portions of two broken dams that make these rapids challenging. The bottom is very rocky with broken granite rocks along it. You can move into eddies between the three sets, if you are experienced with eddies. Excellent boat handling skills and helmets are recommended.

If you choose to portage the rapids, take out river right at the St. Brigid's Cemetery. Transport boats 1 mile to just south of the 122A bridge along the north side of the Goretti Grocery store parking lot where there are multiple informal places to access the river - be careful of poison ivy if you are sensitive. This is one of the long portages where paddlers would benefit from a support vehicle or portage wheels to help transport the boats.

400'

2

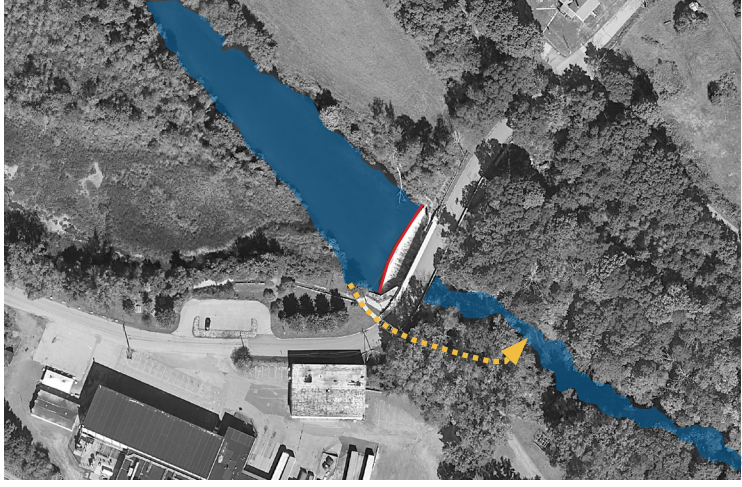


## MILLBURY ELECTRIC DAM

**River Mile:** 4.6  
**Height:** 15'  
**Difficulty:** Relatively easy during low-flow conditions, but potentially challenging during high flow conditions.  
**Portage:** The Millbury Electric Dam is portaged in an unimproved area at river right. Under medium to low-flow conditions, you can portage by walking down the rocks on the sloped front face of the dam. Under high-water conditions, portage can be very difficult. Portage signs at river-left do not appear to lead to a put-in downstream of the dam.

100'

3



## SINGING DAM

**River Mile:** 5.7  
**Height:** 10'  
**Difficulty:** Very easy - improved portage.  
**Portage:** This is one of the few improved portage spots on the river. There are two portage signs on river-right just above the dam with an improved takeout. Carry your boat across the road to the ramp that leads down to the river.

100'

4



## SAUNDERSVILLE DAM

**River Mile:** 6.7  
**Difficulty:** Medium- short but very steep portage down the face of the dam.  
**Portage:** This dam must be portaged river-left. The dam is a granite step dam. You can step down the front face of the dam fairly easily. Kayaks can be lowered down with the painters (rope) attached to the boat. This portage is easiest done with a partner who can catch and help lower the boat at the base of the dam. On river-right, there is a large hole in the dam where the river flows with great volume. This is a dangerous area with exposed re-rod and should not be shot.

100'

5



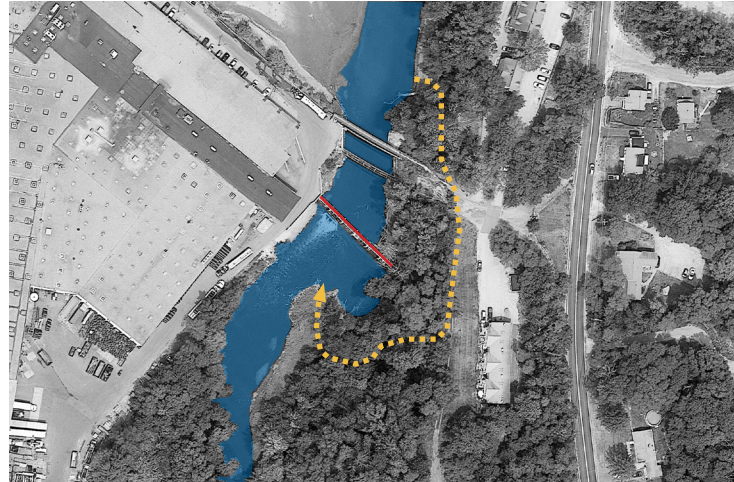
## FISHERVILLE + FARNUMSVILLE DAMS

**River Mile:** Fisherville 9.1 + Farnumsville 9.7  
**Height:** 10'  
**Difficulty:** Medium- both are unimproved portages.  
**Portage:** The Fisherville Dam is portaged in an unimproved area to the right of the dam. The fringe wetlands make the portage challenging since there isn't hard ground to step on in exiting the pond, yet it is possible. From there, you need to walk down a steep slope to put in below the dam.

Farnumsville is an old wooden crib-works dam which has recently broken, exposing a large hole in the center. The mill pond has been drained. Below the broken dam, there is debris including re-bar both visible above and hidden below the water's surface. This is a significant hazard and this dam should be portaged. The portage is lengthy because of the extended mud flats and ponded water. Take out about 250' above the dam on river right. As the area is overgrown, leave your boats and scout to find the best route to put in below the dam.

400'

7

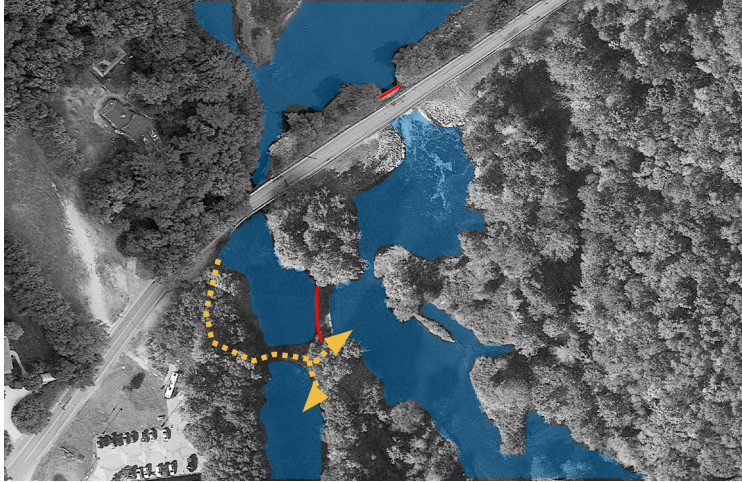


## RIVERDALE DAM

**River Mile:** 13.2  
**Height:** 14'  
**Difficulty:** Medium- long portage with no signage.  
**Portage:** There is a dirt access area at river left below a large tree. Walk up a small hill and across an abandoned road. Then walk down an access road until you see a small trail leading off through the forest back to the river where you can put in below the dam. Watch out for poison ivy in this area.

100'

8



## RICE CITY POND DAM

**River Mile:** 17.1  
**Height:** 21'  
**Difficulty:** Easy- very clear how to portage.  
**Portage:** This dam must be portaged. There is a large hole with a significant drop here. The canal and river merge along Rice City Pond with the canal on the right side of the river separated by segments of the old tow path. If you paddle up this section of the canal, you can see the Goat Hill Lock, and paddle into it in high water conditions. The take out for the portage is on the right side of the canal after crossing under the scenic stone arch of the East Hartford Avenue Bridge.  
**Put-in Option 1** - Put in on the canal and paddle south past Riverbend Farm and almost to the mills on Mendon St. / Rt 16. Take out on the left at the granite steps and portage across a small meadow to reach the put-in on the river to continue under the Mendon St./Route 16 Bridge.  
**Put-in Option 2** - Cross over the canal and put in on the river below the spillway.

100'

9



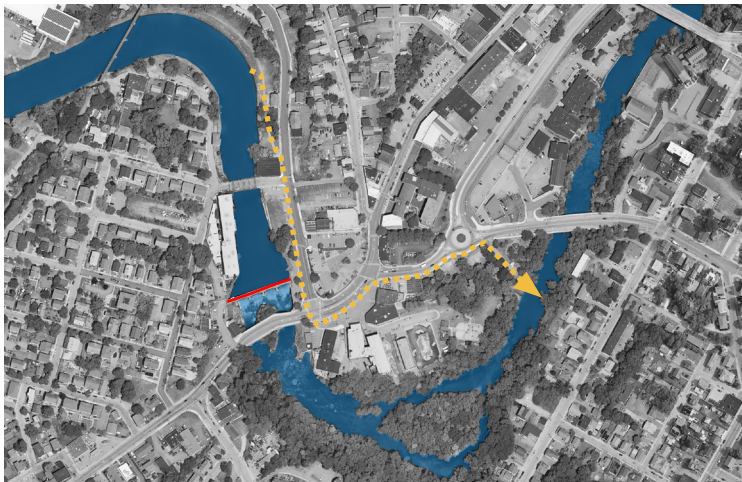
## BLACKSTONE GORGE

**River Mile:** Rolling Dam 26.4 + Blackstone Dam 28.2  
**Height:** 17'  
**Difficulty:** This is a long but easy 1.3 mile portage.  
**Portage:** It is recommended that you portage the Rolling Dam, the Blackstone Gorge and the Blackstone Dam as a single long portage for the following reasons- It is a short way between the two dams, the gorge has significant rapids, and the Blackstone Dam has severe hydraulics and steep banks which can make it challenging to portage.

The Rolling Dam is the entrance to the Blackstone Gorge and has an easy improved portage on river left that is part of the State Park. If you have excellent paddling skills you can put in below the dam for a stretch of Class 3 to Class 4 rapids, but it is recommended that you portage the Gorge and put back in below the Blackstone Dam or at Roosevelt Park just north of the Blackstone Viaduct. This is a long 1.3 mile portage, so a vehicle or portage wheels are recommended.

400'

11

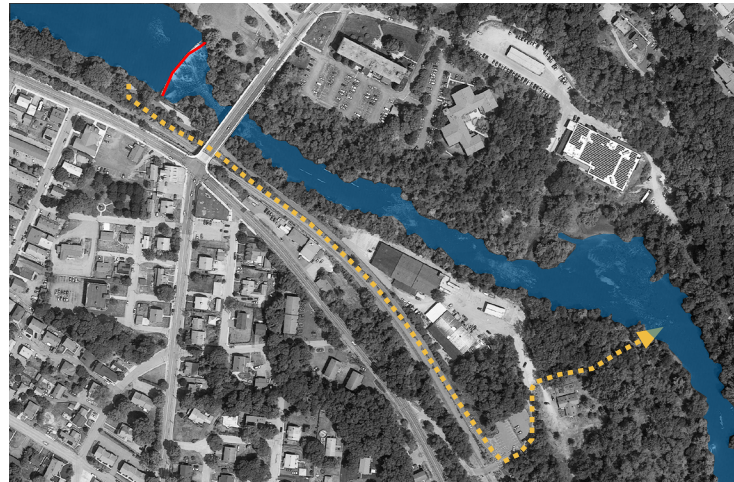


## THUNDERMIST DAM

**River Mile:** 31.3  
**Height:** 40'  
**Difficulty:** Challenging- the take out is on a steep rip rap edge and it is a long distance to the put-in.  
**Portage:** The Thundermist Dam is located in downtown Woonsocket surrounded by old mills and high river banks. While it is not impossible to portage here, it is extremely difficult. After the railroad bridge in Woonsocket, take out on the left above the Sayles St. Bridge. It is a steep bank that leads to a driveway that you can take up to River St. You can alternatively take out at Cold Spring Park, which has an improved access ramp. Wherever you decide to take out, you can put back in at an improved ramp at River Island Park.

200'

12

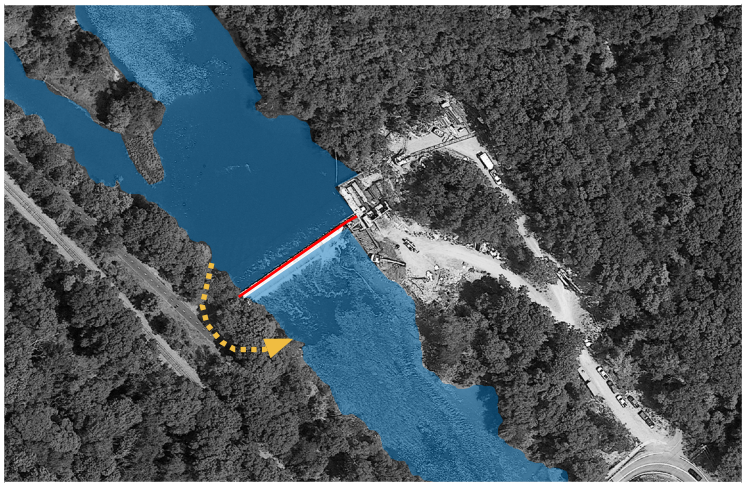


## MANVILLE DAM

**River Mile:** 34.3  
**Height:** 19'  
**Difficulty:** Medium- this is a long but easy portage.  
**Portage:** If you are ending your trip here, there is an improved take out at river left in a small mill pond. However, if you plan to put back in below the dam, you can take out in an unimproved area at river right. From there, you will need to carry your boat .5 miles down the bike path to the Friends of the Blackstone/ Blackstone River Watershed Council's property where there is parking and river access. Alternatively, you could take out river left at the parking area and use a vehicle for the portage to the Friends of the Blackstone/ Blackstone River Watershed Council's property.

200'

13

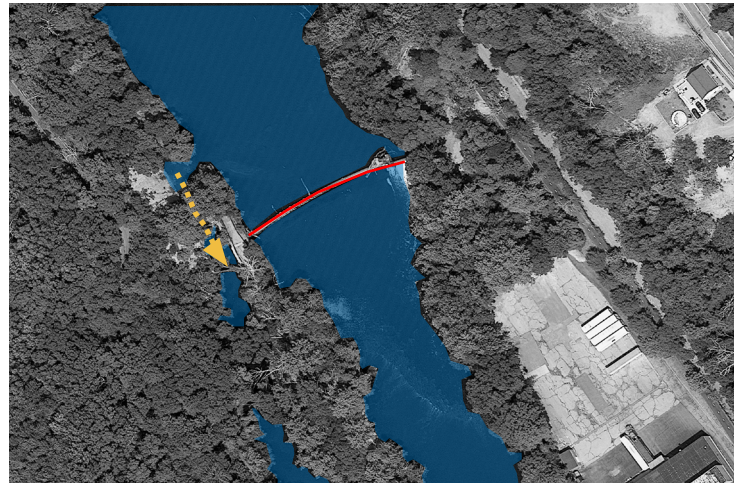


## ALBION DAM

**River Mile:** 36.0  
**Height:** 25'  
**Difficulty:** Easy  
**Portage:** There is an unimproved portage area on river right above the dam. From there, you will need to carry your boat a short distance along the bike path and put in below the dam.

100'

14

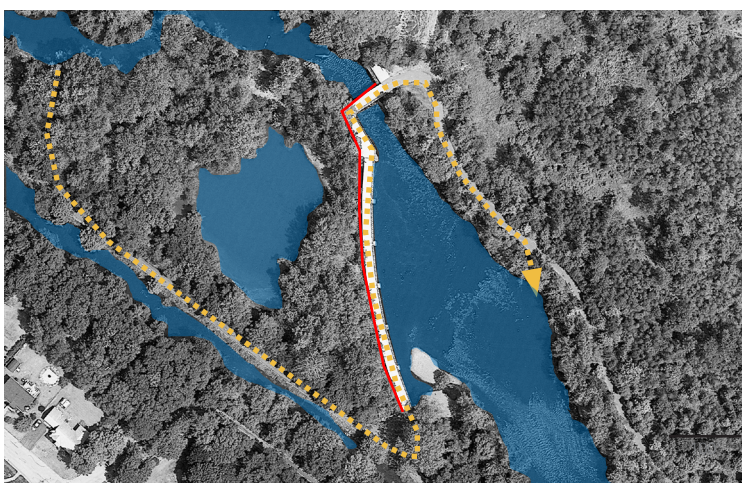


## ASHTON DAM

**River Mile:** 37.5  
**Height:** 10'  
**Difficulty:** Easy  
**Portage:** There is an unimproved portage area on river right into the canal. The paddler has choices here. One option is to continue down the canal to the takeout in the canal just above the Pratt Dam. Take out there and carry the boat on the bike path across the Pratt Dam. Re-enter the river at an improved access on river left. The other option is to take out above the Ashton Dam in the canal and re-enter the river just below the dam.

100'

15

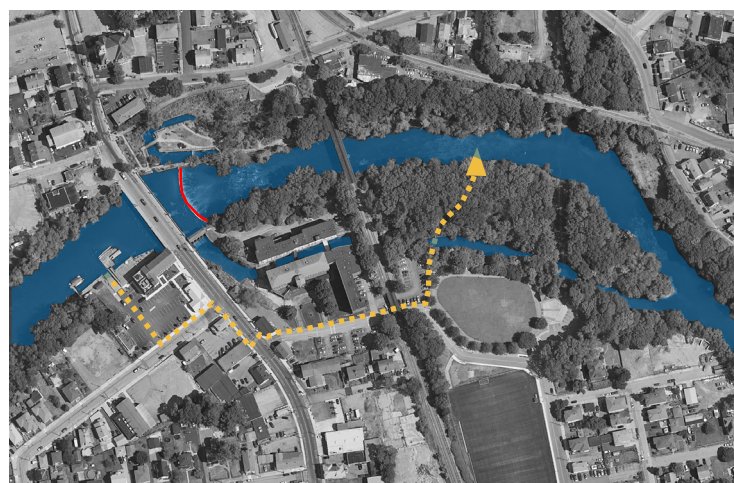


## PRATT DAM

**River Mile:** 39.9  
**Height:** 12'  
**Difficulty:** Medium- long and need to be careful of tubes.  
**Portage:** Despite the fact that the tubes may look tempting to shoot, do not attempt it. Multiple fatalities have occurred here. The takeout is at river-right. Carry your boat to the bike path and then across the dam. Continue a short way down the bike path for an improved put-in on river left.

100'

16



## VALLEY FALLS DAM

**River Mile:** 42.2  
**Height:** 10'  
**Difficulty:** Medium- requires crossing a busy road.  
**Portage:** The Valley Falls Dam has an improved public access point at river right. This is recommended as an excellent place for a trip to end unless you are committed to paddling the whole river. The section of the river below the Valley Falls Dam is heavily urbanized, has high walls, and has a high flow. If you choose to continue, after you portage at Valley Falls landing, boats must be carried a quarter of a mile and put back in at River Island park. After putting in at River Island park, it is a short 1 mile paddle until the Elizabeth Webbing Dam.

200'

17

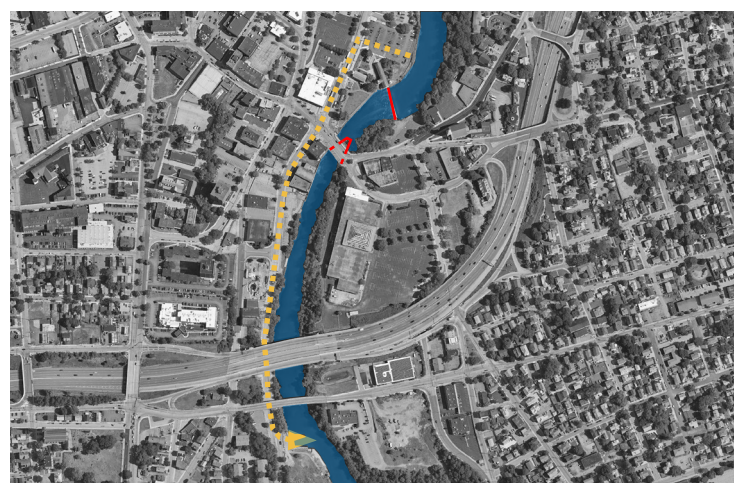


## ELIZABETH WEBBING DAM

**River Mile:** 43.3  
**Height:** 10'  
**Difficulty:** Medium- requires crossing a busy road.  
**Portage:** There is a float dock on river right that can be used to portage the Elizabeth Webbing Dam. If the floating dock is inaccessible, portage before the Roosevelt Ave bridge at the Chocolate Mill Overlook Park and carry boats .15 miles across Roosevelt Ave and through a parking area to put-in along the steep rip rap slope below the Elizabeth Webbing Dam. This portage is best done with a partner. In less than a mile, you will need to portage Slater Mill Dam.

100'

18



## SLATER MILL + MAIN ST. DAM

**River Mile:** Slater Mill Dam 44.5 + Main St. Dam 44.8  
**Height:** 7'  
**Difficulty:** Medium- should only be attempted with low flow conditions.  
**Portage:** During low flow conditions, paddlers can take out above Slater Mill Dam by lifting boats over the retaining wall. Do not put in below the Slater Mill Dam as the Main St. Dam is only 300' downstream. If you are continuing onto the Seekonk River, you will need to portage your boats .5 miles and put in at the Pawtucket Town Landing south of Division St. You should not paddle this lower section of river if the water levels are high.

400'