

**Site Visit Summary Report for North River in August County
Nominated for Exceptional Waters Designation
September 28, 2007**

As required by DEQ Exceptional State Waters Guidance Memorandum No. 04-2021, DEQ staff conducted a site survey of the North River within Augusta County to determine if the segment nominated for Tier III designation met the eligibility criteria required for regulatory designation as Exceptional State Waters.

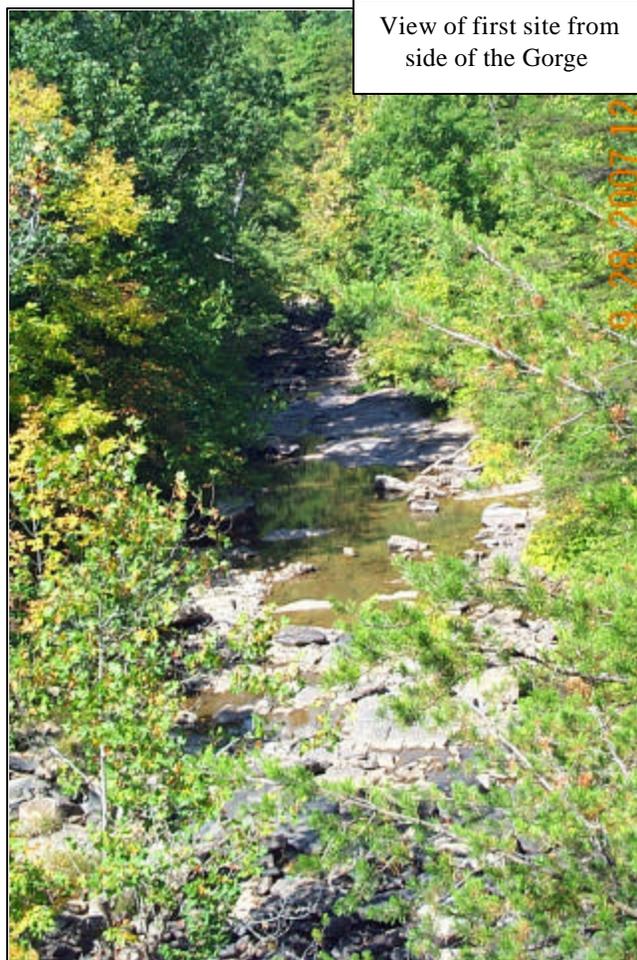
Boundary Description

North River from the Staunton Reservoir dam to the first crossing with National Forest lands boundary (near Girl Scout Camp May Flather). Total length of nominated segment: 5.9 miles.

Background

The North River is currently assessed as impaired for not supporting the aquatic life use. The impairment is from its headwaters downstream to Freemason Run which encompasses the nominated segment. The cause of the impairment is violation of the pH criterion. Eleven pH values out of 23 samples were below the minimum pH criterion during the 2004 assessment period. The impairment source is believed to be atmospheric deposition. Subsequent benthic macroinvertebrate sampling has indicated no benthic impairment but EPA requires that it be listed for violating the General (benthic) Standard. This section of the North River currently has a special standard for a pH of 6.5-9.5 due to past assumptions that it was underlain by limestone geology. Information from the US Forest Service and geology maps has indicated this is not the case and a subsequent change of the pH criteria to 6.0-9.0 during the current Triennial Review of the Water Quality Standards may result in the segment being delisted as impaired during subsequent assessments.

The North River below Staunton Reservoir is classed by the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (DGIF) as put and take Stockable Trout waters. Such waters are stocked from October through May with catchable sized trout. Some trout hold over through the summer may occur but is not expected due to either low summer flows and/or summertime water temperatures that are too warm. DGIF Class i or ii Wild Natural Trout Waters are considered by DEQ Exceptional State Waters guidance to automatically satisfy



View of first site from side of the Gorge

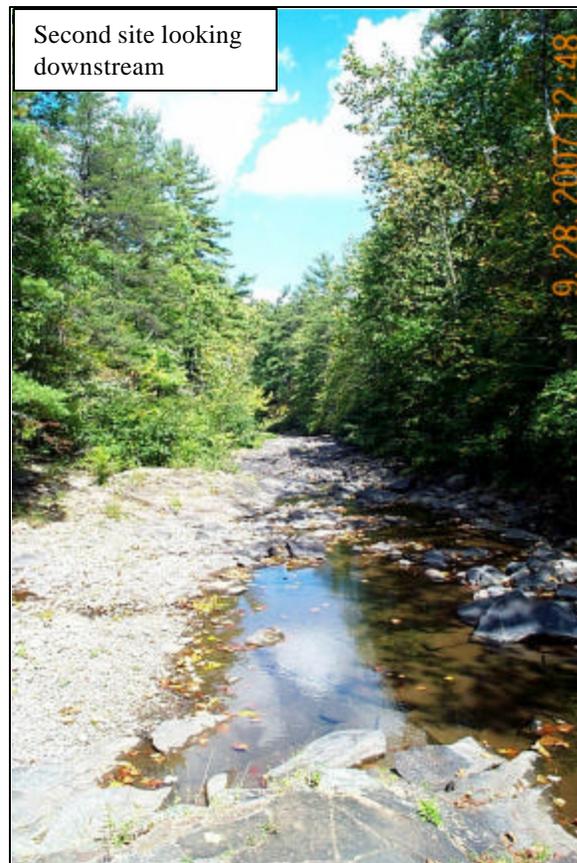
the exceptional aquatic community eligibility criterion. This segment of the North River is classed as Stockable Trout Waters.



Observations

The upstream portion of the nominated segment of the North River is accessible by way of a picnic area near the base of the dam and through a Forest Service fee camping area approximately one mile downstream. The trailhead for the North River Gorge Trail begins at this campground and ends at Forest Service Road 95 approximately four miles downstream. With the exception of the upper and lower endpoints of the trail, access to the river is extremely difficult as it passes through the gorge. Observations were made at four locations.

The first observations were made near the downstream end of the nominated segment near Camp May Flather where the river just begins to exit the North River Gorge. Here the sides of the Gorge are still relatively steep and well forested with occasional rock outcroppings. The general surroundings were very attractive and there was no trash or other signs of negative human impacts observed. The river substrate is cobble with some boulder and



exposed bedrock. A cursory benthic survey was done and benthic macroinvertebrate species of the plecoptera (stoneflies), and trichoptera (caddis flies) families were observed. A number of warmwater gamefish (smallmouth bass, rock bass) were observed in isolated pools. Flow was very low due to ongoing drought conditions.

The second site where observations were made was approximately $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile upstream near the confluence with Skidmore Fork. Here the river substrate is similar to that of the first observation site and the entire area is well forested. The environmental setting is very attractive and there was no sign of trash. A few benthic macroinvertebrates were noted (again, very low flow conditions due to extreme drought) as were cyprinid fish species (black nose dace, mountain redbelly dace, unidentified shiner species).

The third site was just downstream of the National Forest fee camping area. Observations here were similar to those downstream with the exception of slightly less exposed bedrock in the riverbed and groves of hemlock trees were more numerous and frequently dominated the stream banks. Again, the area is well forested and the environmental setting is very attractive and, even though in close proximity to an established campground, no trash was observed.



Third site looking upstream



The fourth area of observation was from the campground upstream to the Staunton Reservoir dam. This section of the river had a slightly greater volume of water though flow was still minimal. The floodplain of the North River in this section is considerably wider and more open and the environs are well forested with hemlock tending to be the dominant tree species.

Some areas lacked the typical understory vegetation and brush and had a forest meadow appearance. Closer to the dam is the North River Picnic Area with a few tables and a vault type toilet. The picnic area is simple and appears to be well kept (i.e. minimal negative human impact). See Appendix A for additional images.

Recreational Opportunities

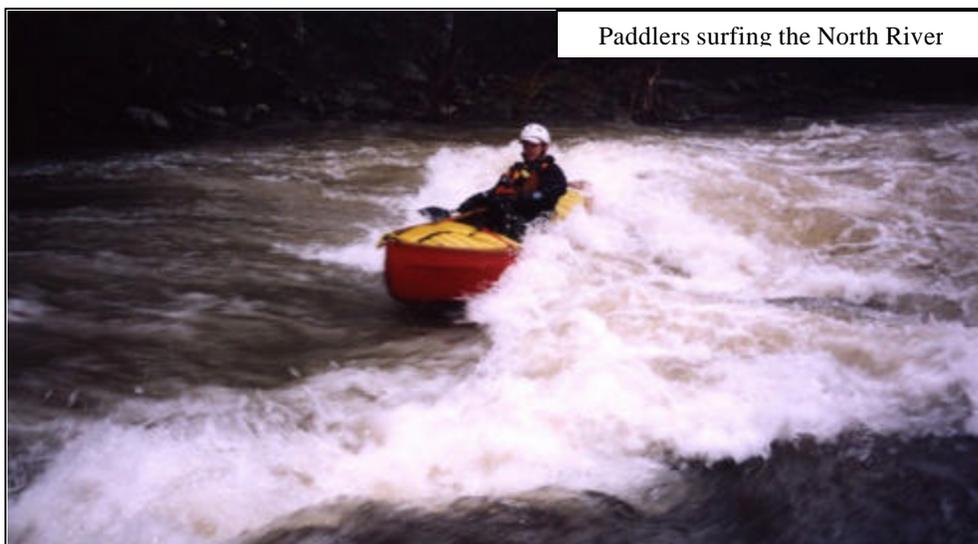
North River Gorge Trail is a scenic, 4.2-mile trail that winds between Lookout and Trimble Mountains, crossing the North River nine times. The trail provides for an outstanding day hike and primitive camping is allowed. As mentioned previously, there is also the North River Campground available for camping trailers or tent camping. There is a \$5.00 nightly fee per camping unit. The number of campsites varies, depending on the type of camping equipment and amount of space used by individual campers. There are vault type toilets and a hand pump water source though the water is not potable unless properly treated.

The nominated segment of the North River provides opportunities for day hikes, overnight backpacking and/or primitive camping, stocked trout fishing (during cooler months), smallmouth bass fishing, photography, and bird- and wildlife watching. Although it is a relatively small mountain river, the North River provides very challenging whitewater kayak opportunities during higher stream flows.

(Source: http://www.americanwhitewater.org/content/River_detail_id_1976).

Conclusions

The environmental settings of the observed portions of the North River are very attractive and a large portion of the nominated segment flows through the most prominent outstanding feature, the North River Gorge. The segment also provides for quality outdoor recreational activities. It is the opinion of DEQ staff conducting the site visit that the nominated segment of the North River possesses an exceptional environmental setting and provides for outstanding recreational opportunities thereby meeting the eligibility criteria necessary to be considered for Exceptional State Waters designation.

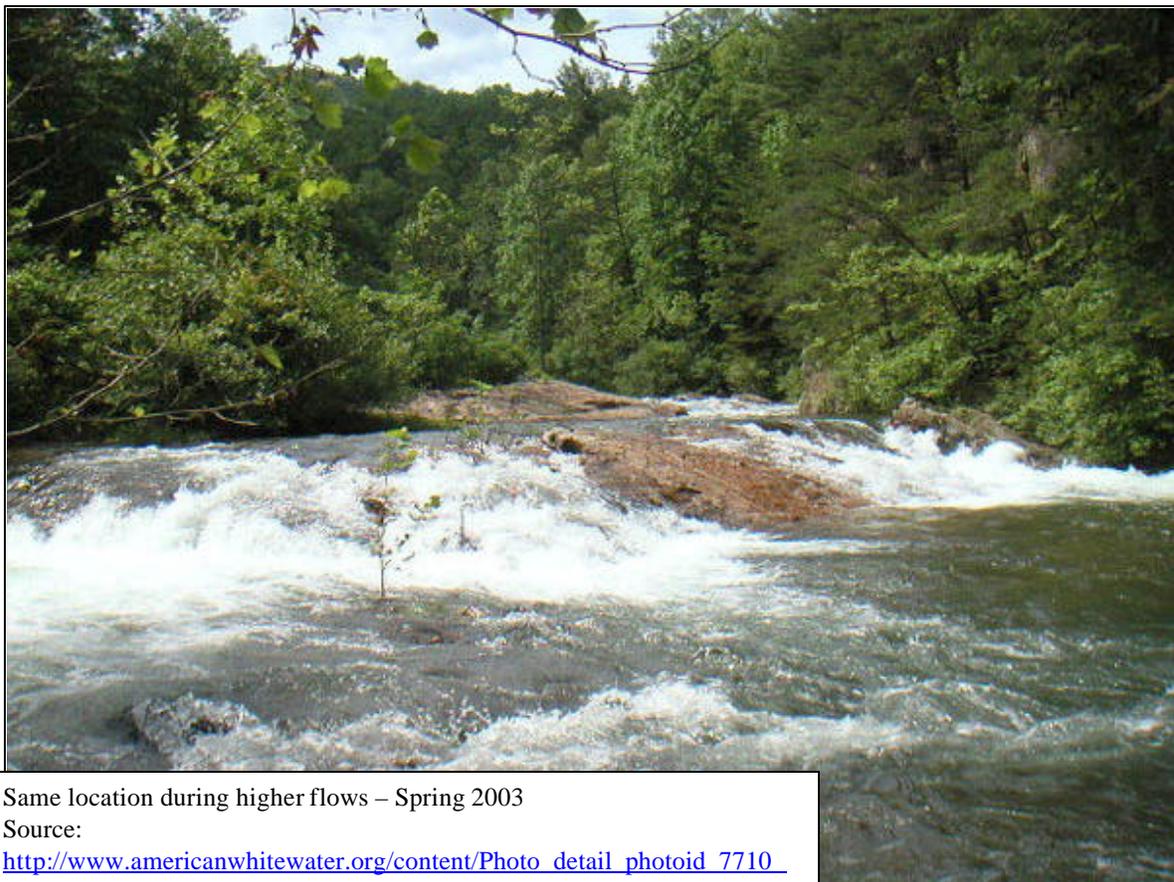


(Source: http://www.americanwhitewater.org/content/Photo_detail_photoid_10631)



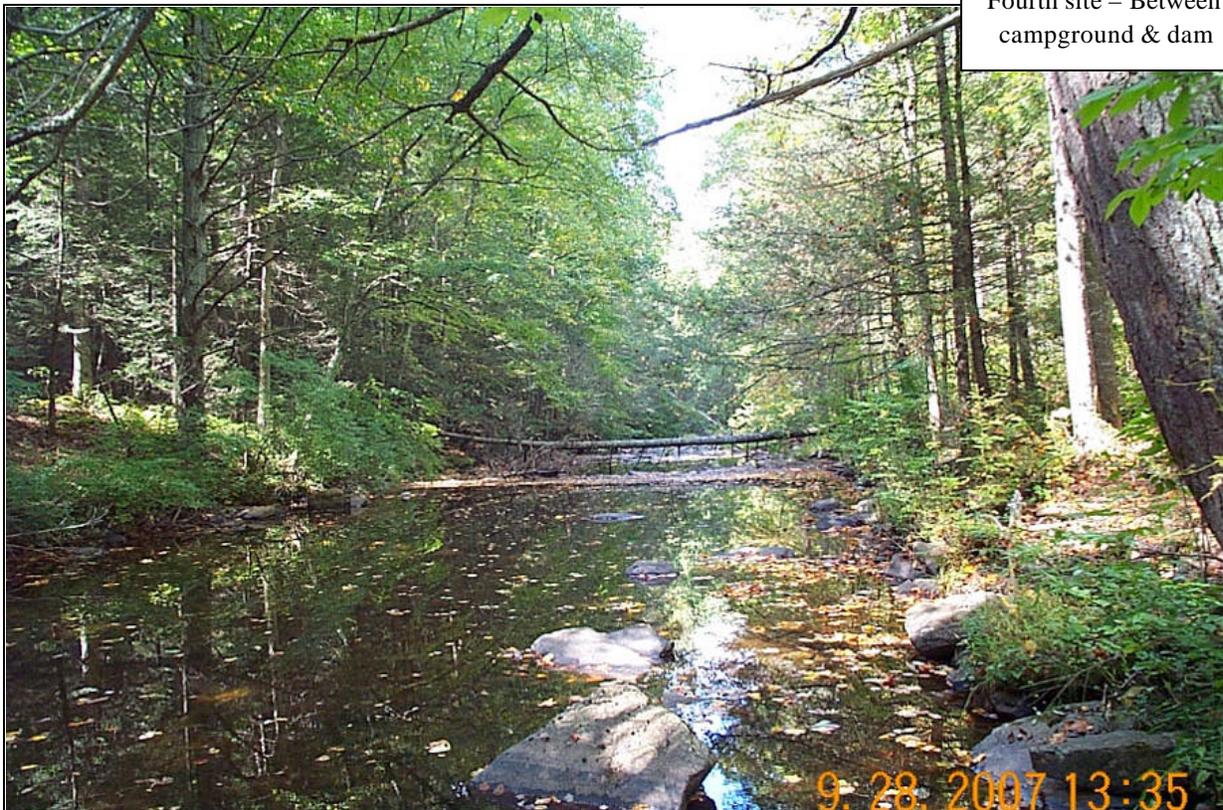
(Source: http://www.americanwhitewater.org/content/Photo_detail_photoid_10633)

APPENDIX A





Third site – Hemlocks
along stream bank



Fourth site – Between
campground & dam

Fourth site – Between
campground & dam



Below dam

