



## **The Commonwealth of Massachusetts**

October 17, 2008 William Francis Galvin, Secretary of the Commonwealth  
Massachusetts Historical Commission

Secretary Ian A. Bowles  
Executive Office of Energy & Environmental Affairs  
100 Cambridge Street, Suite 900  
Boston, MA 02114

RE: Proposed Upper Housatonic River Watershed Area of Critical Environmental Concern  
(ACEC), Pittsfield, Lenox, Lee and Washington, MA. MHC #RC. 45212

Dear Secretary Bowles:

Staff of the Massachusetts Historical Commission are pleased to provide comments regarding the nomination of the Upper Housatonic River Watershed as an Area of Critical Environmental Concern.

Appendix F of the nomination contains a detailed historical narrative compiled from local sources that highlights some of the important historical developments of the area.

The Massachusetts Historical Commission supports the nomination of the Upper Housatonic River Watershed Area of Critical Environmental Concern.

Review of the Inventory of Historic and Archaeological Assets of the Commonwealth indicates that a range of significant historic and archaeological resources are located within and immediately adjacent to the proposed ACEC. The Berkshire region of western Massachusetts and the Upper Housatonic River drainage contain much managed open space, and have not been as subject to the intense modern development pressures of the eastern portion of the state. Consequently, the concurrent intensity of cultural resource management investigation has been low. Because the majority of the proposed ACEC has not been subject to systematic archaeological survey, it is likely that many other significant historic and archaeological resources are present within undisturbed and archaeologically sensitive areas, than is reflected by the known site areas recorded in MHC's Inventory.

The Upper Housatonic River forms a portion of the wider Housatonic River drainage, which has been more or less continuously inhabited by Native American groups for settlement, resource procurement area and transportation routes from at least 10,000 years ago through the historic period. The Canoe Meadows area and adjacent uplands of southern Pittsfield, northern Lenox and northwestern Washington are documented centers of Native American occupation and land use from at least the Archaic and Woodland Periods (approximately 10,000 through 450 years ago) and may include unmarked human burials. Avocational collectors and archaeologists, including famous local residents such as Herman Melville and Oliver Wendell Holmes, found artifacts in the 19th century, but systematic professional archaeological investigations have been infrequent in the area.

Likewise, the October Mountain State Forest area in Washington has not been subject to systematic professional archaeological investigations but is highly archaeologically sensitive for Native American archaeological resources, associated with the use of the mountains for stone tool raw material quarrying, gathering and hunting. Undisturbed, level and well-drained areas along the Housatonic and its tributaries in Lenox and Lee are also considered by MHC to possess high archaeological sensitivity because of their favorable environmental characteristics.

During the historic period, the Upper Housatonic River continued to be occupied by Native American groups in cohesive communities. The Stockbridge-Munsee Community, now residing in Wisconsin, and tribes in Connecticut have participated in consultation about new development projects in the region. The river and its tributary streams saw a variety of agricultural, industrial and domestic activities occurring along its length throughout the 17th through early 20th centuries. The majority of historic properties recorded in MHC's Inventory are focused on the town centers in Lee, Lenox and Washington and there are fewer within the ACEC boundaries in these towns that have been subject to systematic evaluation for eligibility for listing in the National Register of Historic Places to date.

The Housatonic drainage within Pittsfield, Lenox, Lee and Stockbridge experienced a florescence as a summer vacation destination during the mid 19th through mid 20th centuries, including the construction of large estates, such as, the Holmes's Holmesdale, Herman Melville's Arrowhead and the nearby Mount, Edith Wharton's estate and the Tappan estate, now known as Tanglewood, listed in the State and National Registers of Historic Places, and some of which are also National Historic Landmarks.

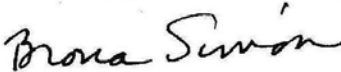
To facilitate this summer residential occupation, public structures, such as the Lenox Railroad Station and the Golden Hill Bridge over the Housatonic in Lee, both also listed in the State and National Register of Historic Places, were constructed. Heavy and light industries in these towns made use of the hydropower provided by the Housatonic, and several textile mills were located along the banks in Lenox and Lee within the ACEC boundaries during the 19th century. Dairy and small-scale agriculture was also practiced both in the fertile floodplains of Pittsfield along East Street, and the Lenoxdale and northern Lee areas, as well as in the hill farms of the eastern slopes of the October and Washington Mountains in Washington.

The eastern side of the ACEC in Washington is primarily comprised of the October Mountain State Forest, which includes evidence of Civilian Conservation Corps activities from the 1930s, as well as the small-scale farmstead agricultural occupations previously mentioned. Several historic cemeteries are also known within and adjacent to the proposed ACEC boundaries. Again, it is likely that significant, unrecorded historical archaeological resources are located within the boundaries of the ACEC, although modern gravel pits and construction, such as municipal and residential developments within the floodplain and upland areas may have disturbed cultural resources.

In summary, the proposed ACEC contains multiple significant historic and archaeological resources, which can provide important information for our understanding and appreciation of the history of the region. Surviving 18th and 19th century structures and landscapes have helped to preserve the historic character of this area. The documented history and preserved sites offer excellent opportunities for public education. The Upper Housatonic Valley African-American Trail, the Reverend Samuel Harrison House in Pittsfield, listed in the National Register, the W.E.B DuBois Boyhood Home Site, a National Historic Landmark, and the public educational efforts on the nearby Kampoosa Bog ancient Native American archaeological site, also a designated ACEC, are exemplary efforts in the greater Berkshire region that can be considered as models for public educational efforts within the Upper Housatonic River Watershed ACEC. MHC supports the designation of this area as an Area of Critical Environmental Concern.

If you have questions or require additional information please feel free to contact Jonathan K. Patton at this office.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Brona Simon".

Brona Simon  
Executive Director  
State Archaeologist  
Massachusetts Historical Commission

xc: Elizabeth Sorenson, DCR-ACEC