

CHAPTER 8

Tourism and Traveler Services



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There are many scenic, natural, recreational, historic, and cultural resources that attract visitors to the Route 122 Scenic Byway. Travelers experience a diverse landscape along the Byway. It varies from the historic downtown of Orange to a rural farm countryside to the wild lands of the Quabbin Reservoir. Downtown Orange has many fine examples of classic late 19th Century and early 20th Century residential and mill architecture. The agricultural landscape just beyond Orange's town center includes a prominent dairy farm and several still active historic farmsteads with barns, farmhouses, stonewalls, open fields, cows, horses, and mature stands of maple trees. In New Salem, Route 122 provides the vantage point for extraordinary views of the Quabbin Reservoir with views of distant forested hills and wildlife from otters to moose. The stretch of Route 122 that passes near the Reservoir has several designated recreational access points along the way.

The goal of this chapter is to provide information on existing resources, services, and attractions available to the Byway traveler; to identify any unmet needs related to tourism along the Byway; and to propose recommendations or identify potential projects to enhance and improve tourism along the Byway. The chapter contains a detailed inventory of existing tourism services available to the Byway traveler including the location of visitor centers and information agencies, as well as publications and websites that provide additional traveler information. A summary of attractions and resources along the Byway, including scenic and natural attractions, outdoor recreation opportunities, historic and cultural resources, events and festivals, and public restroom facilities, is provided. Many of these resources are discussed at length in other chapters of the report, and are listed, but not discussed, in detail here. References to the appropriate chapter are provided. Topics that are not covered in other chapters of the Corridor Management Plan are detailed in this chapter.

Tourist Information Centers Franklin County Chamber of Commerce

The Franklin Chamber of Commerce provides information for visitors and new residents regarding local cultural and recreational attractions as well as amenities, such as dining and accommodations.

Franklin County Chamber of Commerce
395 Main Street, Greenfield, MA 01301
413-773-5463
<http://www.franklincc.org/>.



North Quabbin Chamber of Commerce

The Chamber of Commerce in Athol works to promote the business community of the nine towns surrounding the Orange/Athol region, including New Salem. It also provides information regarding local attractions, especially outdoor recreational activities.

North Quabbin Chamber of Commerce
427 Main Street, Athol
978-249-3849
<http://www.northquabbinchamber.com/>.

Quabbin Visitor's Center

The Quabbin Reservoir is one of the largest man-made public water supplies in the United States. It was created in the 1930s by the construction of two huge earthen dams. The reservoir is fed by the three branches of the Swift River, and seasonally by the Ware River. The Quabbin's water covers 39 square miles; the reservoir is 18 miles long and has 181 miles of shoreline. When full, the Quabbin holds 412 billion gallons of water. The Quabbin Interpretive Services Program operates the Quabbin Visitor's Center, Education Programs, Teacher Workshops, and provides general information about DCR

resources. Three full time staff members are available to assist with visitor information and services. The center has an automated telephone system which provides 24 hour access to current information on fishing, hunting, programs, rules and regulations, and public access. (The Visitor's Center is not on the Byway, but on Route 9 at the southern end of the reservoir.)

Quabbin Visitor's Center
485 Ware Road Route 9
Belchertown, MA 01007
413-323-7221.
<http://www.mass.gov/dcr/parks/central/quabbin.htm>

Sources of Written Tourist Information and Websites

The Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) is a state agency that conserves and protects the natural, cultural, and recreational resources of the Commonwealth. Within the Byway corridor, DCR owns and manages the Federated Women's Club State Forest in New Salem and Petersham, the New Salem State Forest in New Salem, and also the Quabbin Reservoir and related recreational access facilities in New Salem. <http://www.mass.gov/dcr/>.

The Massachusetts Office of Travel and Tourism (MOTT) is a state office that promotes tourism throughout the Commonwealth. MOTT's website provides information on local attractions along the Byway and in the greater region. <http://www.massvacation.com/westernMass/>.

Mass Traveler is a website that is sponsored and maintained by the University of Massachusetts Regional Traveler

Information Center (RTIC), the local Chambers of Commerce, visitor bureaus and organizations, as well as the state tourism offices. The website provides travel and traffic information for Franklin, Hampshire, Hamden and Berkshire Counties. <http://www.masstraveler.com>.

North Quabbin Woods is a project of the New England Forestry Foundation (NEFF), an organization that is dedicated to providing for the conservation and ecologically sound management of privately owned forestlands in New England. The North Quabbin Woods Project operates a Visitor Center & Artisan Gift Shop located at downtown Orange. The North Quabbin Woods also operates a website which contains information on recreational activities, attractions, lodging, and dining in the North Quabbin towns of Orange, Athol, New Salem, Petersham, Phillipston, Royalston, Warwick, and Erving. North Quabbin Woods also produces and distributes an informational brochure on sites and attractions in this area.

North Quabbin Woods Visitors Center & Artisan Gift Shop
1 East Main Street
Orange, MA 01364
978-544-3332
Email: office@northquabbinwoods.org
<http://www.northquabbinwoods.org/>.

Experience North Quabbin is a website and printed brochure listing North Quabbin events and venues by town. A project of the North Quabbin Cultural Alliance of the North Quabbin Community Coalition, Experience North Quabbin is a regional effort to publicize the diverse cultural events that take place throughout the North Quabbin Region all year long. Hard copies of the brochure can be obtained by contacting Info@nqcc.org. <http://www.nqcc.org/ExperienceNQ.htm>.

Town Websites

New Salem – New Salem does not currently have a website.

Orange - <http://www.townoforange.org/Pages/index>. The Town of Orange is a recipient of the “E Government” award for its website.

Tourism Related Statistics

Tourism plays an important role in Franklin County. According to the Massachusetts Office of Travel and Tourism (MOTT), direct spending by tourists in Franklin County in 2008 totaled \$51.5 million, a 6.5% increase from 2007. These expenditures supported 380 jobs and payrolls of \$9.7 million. Local tax revenue generated from tourists visiting Franklin County in 2008 totaled \$1.6 million. The Upper Pioneer Valley Visitors Center located on Interstate 91 in Greenfield logged approximately 85,000 visitors in 2008.

In the North Quabbin area specifically, which includes the towns of Orange and New Salem, ecotourism has been identified as an industry sector that could help strengthen the region’s economic base. The International Ecotourism Society defines ecotourism as “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people.” Most outdoor activities such as hiking, biking, camping, canoeing, kayaking, swimming, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, fishing, and bird watching fall under the category of ecotourism.

Two reports have highlighted the opportunity for ecotourism in the byway region and offer recommendations for promoting the region as an ecotourism destination.

In 2001, the New England Forestry Foundation initiated an investigation into the potential for ecotourism in the North Quabbin area. The investigation resulted in a marketing report and the development of the North Quabbin Ecotourism Task Force in 2002, comprised of representatives from local government, businesses, and regional and state agencies. The following goal was identified in the marketing report: “To have a successful sustainable ecotourism program which builds local pride and ownership, and attracts visitors from outside the area.”¹ The following strategies were identified by the Task Force to strengthen ecotourism in the region:

- **Self-directed travelers.** Some visitors like to come and explore the region at their own speed. Strategies such as online maps, access to outdoor rental equipment, clear signage, and bathroom facilities all work together to improve the experience of the self-directed traveler and bring them back to the region for repeat visits.
- **Travelers who seek education and guided interpretation.** In addition to the above strategies, a cooperative of local guides who are knowledgeable about the natural and cultural history of the region would provide a customized educational experience to visitors.
- **Travelers who are interested in the culture and history of the region.** These visitors, whether self-directed or guided, would benefit from tours of local mills, antique shops, and festivals.²

In 2004 the *Northern Tier Strategic Investment Initiatives* report, created to identify new economic sectors to build a stronger and more diverse economic base in the northwest and north central area of Massachusetts, identified ecotourism as one sector the region should focus on. Recommendations for building the ecotourism sector included:

- Convene a Northern Tier Ecotourism Working Group.
- Develop more touring and recreation packages.
- Explore the idea of new sources of revenues – such as charging entry fees to state parks or local option taxes.
- Expand the regions’ tourism infrastructure – especially accommodations and restaurants.
- Begin an ecotourism branding campaign in the region: maps, brochures, signage, websites, and other communication tools that increase awareness of trail-based recreation, and programs and events that encourage healthy outdoor activities, should all reflect a unified image that appeals to ecotourists.³

Strategies and recommendations from these reports, along with other strategies for drawing visitors to the Byway region, should be explored to ensure the viability of the tourism industry in the future.

1. The North Quabbin Community Forestry Initiative. *Ecotourism Marketing Report*, Winter 2001/2002. <http://www.northquabbinwoods.org/images/The%20North%20Quabbin%20Ecotourism%20Marketing%20Report%20Final.pdf>
2. *Strategies for Ecotourism Development in the North Quabbin*, 2002 <http://www.northquabbinwoods.org/images/Ecotourism%20Report%20Summary.pdf>.
3. *Strategies for Ecotourism Development in the North Quabbin*, 2002 <http://www.northquabbinwoods.org/images/Ecotourism%20Report%20Summary.pdf>

Scenic and Natural Attractions

The section of the Byway that is located in New Salem travels through the northern end of the Quabbin Reservoir. This section of the Byway is both scenic and rich with natural resources that can be seen while traveling along the road. From the Byway there are also various permitted points of access to the Quabbin lands which allow for the close observation of natural resources.

Outdoor Recreational Facilities

The diverse outdoor recreational activities available along or near the Route 122 Scenic Byway include camping, hiking, mountain biking, horseback riding, hunting, fishing, rock climbing, cross-country skiing, canoeing, kayaking, road bicycling, and bird watching. An extensive and detailed listing of recreational activities and resources in and near the Byway study area is included in the Outdoor Recreational Resources Chapter of this plan.

There are two State Forests, New Salem State Forest and the Federated Women's Club State Forest, which offer a variety of outdoor recreational opportunities. The Federated Women's Club State Forest is located directly off of the Byway, while parts of the New Salem State Forest are located a short distance from the half mile study area. The Quabbin Reservoir, one of the largest man-made public water supplies in the United States, is directly accessible from the Byway, including a public boat launch maintained by the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR).

Historic Resources and Museums

Orange

The Orange Historical Society is located in downtown Orange in a Victorian-era house that is furnished and decorated from that time period. The house contains fifteen rooms of artifacts including children's rooms and a military room. The neighboring barn contains a 1904 Grout Steam Automobile, manufactured in Orange, highlighting the fact that Orange was the site of the first gasoline automobile factory in the United States. The barn also showcases an 1864 fire pumper and other industrial equipment. The Historical Society is open seasonally on Sundays and Wednesdays from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m., and is located at 41 North Main Street in Orange.

New Salem

The Swift River Valley Historical Society (SRVHS) was formed in 1936 to serve as the historical societies for the four communities of Dana, Enfield, Greenwich and Prescott that were taken for construction of the Quabbin Reservoir. The Museum complex consists of three buildings housing the collections of SRVHS: the Whitaker-Clary House, the Prescott Church Museum and the Carriage House. The Museum is open Wednesday and Sunday afternoons from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m. between June 1st and October 12th, and is located west of Route 202 on Elm Street in New Salem. The Museum's website is <http://www.foquabbin.org/srvhs.html>.

Cultural Resources

Orange

The Orange Town Hall Auditorium is known for its superior acoustical design by architect Eldridge Boyden. The auditorium seats 750 and hosts concerts, dances, plays, movies, and other events. It is located in the Orange Town Hall at 6 Prospect Street in downtown Orange.

The Peace Statue at Memorial Park is located in downtown Orange in Memorial Park on South Main Street. It is a nationally known statue dedicated to the veterans of World War I, depicting a soldier with one arm around a schoolboy with the inscription “It Shall Not Be Again.” It was sculpted by Joseph Pollia of New York and was unveiled in 1934.

New Salem

1794 Meetinghouse, Inc. is a 501(c)3 non-profit community arts organization founded in 1987 and dedicated to a twofold purpose: the creation and production of cultural programs which engage, entertain, and educate people of all ages in the North Quabbin region, and the preservation, maintenance and continued service of its historic building. In 1994, the restored building opened for its first summer performance season and has since become recognized as the only facility in the North Quabbin area to offer high-quality, yet affordable, artistic events reminiscent of big-city venues. <http://www.1794meetinghouse.org/>.

Annual Events and Festivals

Orange

The River Rat Race and Parade is an annual tradition that takes place on the Millers River in April in the towns of Athol and Orange. The event is a five-mile canoe race down a fast-moving, sometimes icy cold, stretch of the Millers River from Athol to Orange. It has been described as “the world’s zaniest canoe race.” The annual race is organized by the Athol and Orange Lions Clubs and includes a River Rat Promenade followed by the race. An awards ceremony is held at the finish line at Riverfront Park in downtown Orange. The event draws an average of 600 participants and between 8,000–10,000 spectators, and is a serious race on the national canoe race circuit.



The North Quabbin Garlic and Arts Festival is organized by a volunteer committee and the Seeds of Solidarity Education Center, a nonprofit organization located in Orange. The festival is a weekend-long event held every fall celebrating agriculture, arts, and culture in the North Quabbin Region. The annual event attracts over 10,000 people and features music, food, booths, games, demonstrations, and activities for all ages. It is held at the Forster’s Farm at 60 Chestnut Hill Road in Orange.

Celebrate the Harvest Festival is a town festival organized by the Orange Business Association every year in October. The celebration includes a classic car show, craft fair, and parade. The festival is usually held at Butterfield Park in Orange on 83 East River Street.

Starry Starry Night is an annual New Year's Eve festival held in downtown Orange. The event consists of hayrides, ice sculptures, and performances from musicians, comedians, and magicians. The night is capped off with a parade featuring giant puppets and a fireworks display at Memorial Park.

Brown Bag Concerts are a series of free concerts held at noon on Fridays in July at the bandstand in Butterfield Park at 83 East River Street, Orange, just off of the Byway. In the event of rain, the concert is held at the Orange Town Hall. The concerts are organized by the Orange Business Association and the Orange Cultural Council.

Orange Farmers Market is held from May 31st to September 27th on Thursdays from 3:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. at Butterfield Park on East River Street.

New Salem

The Rabbit Run ten kilometer race and three mile walk through the Quabbin Reservoir is held annually in May by the Town of New Salem Recreation Department. The race is named after the Rabbit Run Railroad, which once operated through the Swift River Valley connecting Athol to Springfield before the Quabbin Reservoir was created.

Lodging Inventory

According to research completed during the development of this plan there are three lodging establishments located in the town of Orange close to the Byway. Two are full service motels and one is a bed and breakfast. Additional lodging establishments are located outside of the immediate Byway area in Philipston (10 miles east of the Byway on Route 2), Gill (14 miles west of the Byway on Route 2) and Greenfield (approximately 19 miles west of the Byway on Route 2). Information on lodging is available from the Franklin County Chamber of Commerce (<http://www.franklincc.org/>) and the North Quabbin Chamber of Commerce (<http://www.northquabbinchamber.com/>).

Restaurant Inventory

There are a variety of places to eat along or near the Route 122 Scenic Byway. These establishments include seasonal maple syrup sugarhouses, dairy drive-in restaurant, pizza, ethnic food and a family style restaurant. There are also several take-out restaurants and country stores that sell food.

Restroom Facilities

There are no public restrooms currently available along the Byway.

Tourism and Traveler Services Issues and Recommendations

Issues

- There is a lack of public restrooms
- Many tourist-oriented businesses display tourist brochures, but there is no focused effort to provide consistent, Byway-wide information to travelers outside of the Visitor's Center and Franklin County Chamber of Commerce in Greenfield.
- The local historic organizations have very limited hours of operation. It is important to work to ensure that these facilities/organizations are available to both residents of the area and visitors to the Byway.
- There is a lack of signage directing visitors to the many natural, cultural, historic and recreational resources on and near the Byway.
- There is limited information available along the Byway to tell the public where the access points to the Quabbin lands are located.

Recommendations

- Identify potential locations and seek funding to establish a public restroom to serve the Byway.
- Work with existing tourism organizations, including, but not limited to the Franklin County Chamber of Commerce, and the North Quabbin Chamber of Commerce, North Quabbin Woods, towns, and other organizations to participate in the coordinated project to develop a marketing plan for all of the Scenic Byways in Western Massachusetts.
- Protect the scenic, natural, recreational, historic, and cultural resources of the area to ensure that it remains a special place to visit.
- Educate tourism promotion organizations and tourist-related businesses about the existence of the Route 122 Scenic Byway.
- Educate the local public about the heritage of the Byway.
- Design a unique logo for use in the Route 122 Scenic Byway related publications, signage, and media in order to create a consistent and easily recognizable theme for all promotional materials and that also complements the promotional materials and logos developed for the other Byways in Western Massachusetts.
- Coordinate marketing efforts with those being completed for the Worcester County section of the Byway.
- Establish a system of signs to guide and link travelers to the greater Western Massachusetts Byway Network.
- Develop and publish a comprehensive guide and map to Route 122 Scenic Byway tourist sites.
- Develop a guide, web content or other promotional/educational material that pays tribute to the unique history of the area and the towns of New Salem and Orange.
- Create a Byway Steering Committee comprised of representatives of the six towns along the Byway to prioritize and implement the Byway recommendations for the entire Byway (from Orange to Worcester).