



## STERLING SECTION OF THE MASS CENTRAL RAIL TRAIL

As the trail name implies, this trail is part of the *Mass Central Rail Trail* (MCRT), constructed and maintained by *Wachusett Greenways*. The property is owned by the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), Division of Watershed Supply Protection.

### PARKING AND TRAIL LOCATION

There are two trailheads with ample parking: (1) At *Oh My Gosh Antiques* (the former Sterling Cider

Mill), which can be reached by taking Waushacum Avenue from Main St., Sterling (Rt. 12) and turning right after crossing School St. (2) At Gates Road, about ¼ mile from its intersection with Rt. 12.

### UNIQUE FEATURES

The trail is level and smooth (watch for bicycles and joggers) and is for the most part forested and offers a range of scenery, from woodland to wetland to vistas across West Waushacum Lake and The Quag. A half-mile loop foot trail, off the Sterling Section of the MCRT proper, takes you to the former location of the *Waushacum Park Picnic Grounds*.



activities include walking, biking, snowshoeing and cross-country skiing, open water fishing during designated DCR season and boating (only electric motors). Dogs, horses and all motorized vehicles are prohibited.

### TRAIL DESCRIPTION FROM THE FORMER STERLING CIDER MILL

**0.00 miles:** Start of trail is at the yellow post at the south end of the parking area. First part of the trail (about 1/3 of a mile) cuts through a cattail marsh where beaver activities can often be seen.

**0.33 miles:** Short bridge over small stream.

**0.38 miles:** Wetland changes to oak-pine forest.

**0.50 miles:** DPW buildings can be seen on the right

**0.73 miles:** Side trail to the right.

### LENGTH AND DIFFICULTY

The round trip distance, including the loop trail, is 3.8 miles. Without the loop, the distance is 3.3 miles. The difficulty is rated easy.

### ALLOWED AND PROHIBITED TRAIL ACTIVITIES

In keeping with DCR's mission of water supply and water quality protection, allowed

**1.27 miles:** Location of the train stop on the Fitchburg and Worcester Railroad Line.

**1.29 miles:** Loop trail leaves the Sterling Section of the MCRT to the left (black steel bench is a landmark) and following the shoreline of West Waushacum Lake.

**1.50 miles:** The trail turns left along a slight rise and continues directly away from West Waushacum Lake turning right by a gate to houses along Trebor Lane to parallel the outbound route along the lake shoreline.

**1.84 miles:** The side trail rejoins the Sterling Section of the MCRT at the location of the train stop.

**1.90 miles:** Trail crosses bridge between West Waushacum Lake and the Quag, with great views on both sides. After that, the trail follows a causeway, built by the Fitchburg and Worcester Railroad Line

**2.00 miles:** End of causeway

**2.17 miles:** Trail kiosk near Gates Road, which is the southern end of Sterling Section of the MCRT

**2.48 miles:** Crossing the bridge on the return

**3.82 miles:** Trail returns to yellow post at the northern terminus.

### HISTORY OF THE STERLING RAIL TRAIL AREA

The structure that today houses an antiques store and other small businesses was originally the Sterling Cider Mill. Founded in 1906 by



Walter Hildick Sr., it took advantage of Sterling's apple orchards and of the direct access to railroad transport. During its heyday, the mill produced 2 million gallons of apple cider, apple juice and cider vinegar. In 1980s the cider mill halted its pressing process due to environmental concerns, and in 1988 it finally closed down and moved its operation to Pennsylvania.

Near the bridge where the Quag and the West Waushacum join was the location of the *Waushacum Park Picnic Grounds* built in 1879 by the Fitchburg and Worcester Railroad Company with a train stop at the entrance. The Park offered the visitor a wide range of amenities: dance hall, bowling alley, merry-go-round, baseball diamond, boat and canoe rental as well as hotel and cabin accommodations. The annual boat parade attracted more than 1000 people.

Visitors arriving by train from Worcester in Sterling Junction could take a short walk to the *Sterling Camp Ground*, from where the steam yacht *Sterling* ferried them across the West Waushacum Lake to the wharf at the Picnic Grounds.

The need for clean drinking water in Boston, however, brought an end to the Picnic Grounds. In the early 1900s, both East and West Waushacum Lakes were acquired by the Metropolitan Waterworks (now DCR), but Waushacum Park continued to operate until 1915 when all the buildings were razed. The Loop Trail off the Rail Trail proper takes you to the site of Waushacum Park and is in fact a remnant of roads and paths of the former park.



#### FLORA AND FAUNA

Three distinct habitats can be experienced on this trail: a wetland, oak-pine forest and the lake. The cattail swamp along the rail trail is home to wetland birds, muskrats and minks. Listen for the "konkaree" of the red-winged blackbirds in spring and summer and look for green and great blue herons fishing along the marshes and shores of the Quag and West Waushacum Pond. During spring and fall migration a variety of ducks can be seen on the open water. Loons visit this pond on occasion. In the area of red oaks and white pines, squirrels, rabbits and chipmunks skitter across the trail. Deer and bobcat have been seen in the area. Lowbush blueberries are an attraction in summer. Buttonbush, water lilies and pickerel weed grow along the lake edges. Patches of vinca, an evergreen ornamental groundcover with a blue or white flower, are seen in spring and a patch of red pines with their rounded cones are clues to previous building locations before the land was purchased by the state.

#### WACHUSETT GREENWAYS

The mission of Wachusett Greenways is connecting communities with trails and greenways. This all-volunteer nonprofit group and its partners began in 1995 to build and maintain trails. The Mass Central Rail Trail (MCRT) is WG's largest project, connecting 30 miles along a former railroad between Barre, Oakham, Rutland, Holden, West Boylston and Sterling. ([www.wachusettgreenways.org](http://www.wachusettgreenways.org))

#### DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION AND RECREATION DIVISION OF WATER SUPPLY PROTECTION

DCR/DWSP owns 21,028 acres of land in the Wachusett Reservoir Watershed and manages these watersheds primarily for water quality protection, drinking water supply, and environmental resource protection purposes. Public access, therefore, is carefully regulated and controlled to protect over 2 million people's source of drinking water. Visit [www.mass.gov/eea/agencies/dcr/massparks/region-central/wachusett-reservoir.html](http://www.mass.gov/eea/agencies/dcr/massparks/region-central/wachusett-reservoir.html) for more details.

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**Open Space Implementation Committee (OSIC)** Sterling's OSIC was established in 2003 as a permanent town committee, to broaden awareness and enhance access to significant open space, cultural and recreational resources.