

## Legacy Restoration Fund Planned for Blackstone River Valley National Historical Park

March 14, 2024

The National Park Service Budget Justifications and Performance Information, also known as The Green Book, for Fiscal Year 2025 was recently released, indicating a proposed \$9 million in deferred maintenance reduction for Blackstone River Valley National Historical Park under the Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA).

This project would preserve the historic Old Slater Mill and Wilkinson Mill, including repairs to foundations, exterior envelopes, the site's raceways and river retaining walls, the Wilkinson waterpower system and wheel exhibit, and would provide code-compliant accessibility upgrades to the site.

This project would preserve and restore character-defining features of the mills, including the exterior of the Old Slater Mill and the Wilkinson Mill waterwheel. If passed, visitors will once again experience the sights, sounds, and power of an operational waterwheel and power systems in the basement of Wilkinson Mill. The river retaining walls and raceways that run from the river through the park and the basements of both mills would also be repointed to preserve raceway infrastructure and better withstand degradation.

In addition, accessibility improvements and code-compliance updates on the exterior and interior of Wilkinson Mill would allow the park to reopen the building, letting visitors experience the restored waterpower system and machine shop exhibits.

"This critical GAOA funding would allow the National Park Service to restore a key interpretive feature of The Old Slater Mill historic site, re-open an immersive museum for all – including our mobility challenged visitors – to experience in person, and help preserve the Old Slater Mill National Historic Landmark District for current and future generations of visitors," said Park Superintendent Eric Breitzkreutz.

Blackstone River Valley National Historical Park acquired the Old Slater Mill National Historic Landmark from the Old Slater Mill Association on March 31, 2021. Prior to that, the Old Slater Mill Association had owned and managed the site for 100 years. Slater Mill is America's first successful water powered cotton spinning mill. Its success helped trigger the Industrial Revolution across the Blackstone Valley and later the entire United States.

If passed, construction would be anticipated in 2026.

Supported by revenue from energy development, GAOA's Legacy Restoration Fund provides up to \$1.3 billion per year for five years to the National Park Service to make significant enhancements in national parks to ensure their preservation and provide opportunities for recreation, education, and enjoyment for current and future visitors.

More information about the Great American Outdoors Act and the Legacy Restoration Fund can be found at:

<https://www.nps.gov/subjects/infrastructure/gaoa.htm>