

# Brownfields

## Success Story

### Willimantic Whitewater Park

*Willimantic, Conn.*

The site of a former textile mill has been redeveloped as the Willimantic Whitewater Park, a 3.5-acre riverfront area that brings biking, hiking, kayaking and nature to the diverse community that surrounds it in downtown Willimantic.

#### History

Founded in 1893, Willimantic is known as Thread City for its history of textile mills during the 19th and 20th centuries. Sitting on the banks of the powerful Willimantic River in the Town of Windham, Conn., Willimantic was a major producer of silk and cotton textiles and operated as a rail hub in the early 20th century with more than 100 trains running through town daily. The city's decline began after World War II and continued until the mills had all closed by the 1980s.

The site of Willimantic Whitewater Park was once the home of the Windham Cotton Manufacturing Co. which closed its doors in the early 1920s. It was then home to a variety of industrial businesses, including a scrap yard in the 1940s, a gas station and car wash in the 1960s through the 1980s, and a fuel depot from the 1980s to 2000.

Started as a grassroots movement in the summer of 2002, the Willimantic Whitewater Partnership was founded primarily to create a whitewater kayaking park. When the former mill site, 3.5 acres on Bridge Street, became available for sale several years later, the group envisioned it as the perfect location for their park.

Home to Eastern Connecticut University and the Windham Textile Museum, this town now boasts a beautiful waterfront park and trail hub for biking, hiking, and kayaking. Part of the East Coast Greenway, Willimantic Whitewater Park has created a recreational hub for a multicultural community and attracts visitors for Riverfest, a family-oriented festival with kayaking, music and vendors.

#### Barriers to Redevelopment

Due to the industrial history of the site, the presence of heavy metals, asbestos, oil tanks, and other chemicals in the soil stood in the way of the partnership's plans for the site. Thanks to the commitment shown by the Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development to fund both assessment and cleanup activities at the site and a direct cleanup grant from EPA, an overall investment of \$356,000 in Brownfields funding enabled the project to become a reality.



#### EPA Grant Recipients:

Willimantic Whitewater Partnership, Inc. and Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development

#### Grant Types:

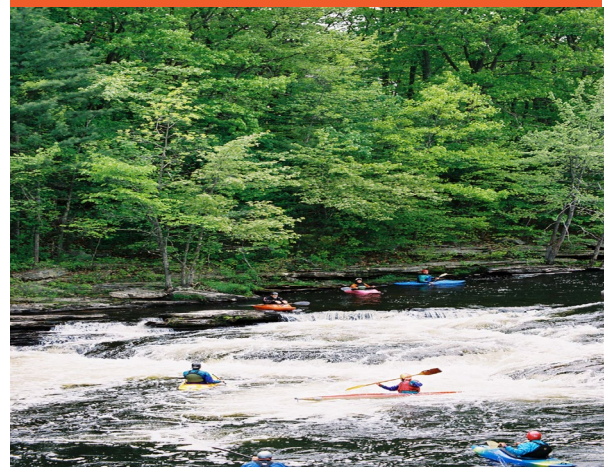
Assessment, Revolving Loan Fund, Cleanup

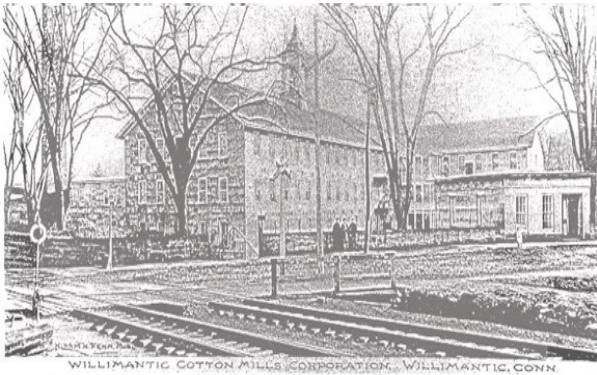
#### Current Use:

Recreational Park

#### Former Use:

Textile Mill





### Brownfields Funding Summary:

<u>Amount</u>	<u>Source</u>
\$31,000	Connecticut DECD assessment grant
\$125,000	Connecticut DECD Revolving Loan Fund for cleanup
\$200,000	direct cleanup grant from EPA

## Today

Willimantic Whitewater Park is now a revived urban recreational area that has evolved into a whitewater park and recreational hub along the Willimantic River. The park's trails follow converted railroad beds and the river, allowing biking, hiking and canoeing. In 2018 and 2019, a design competition was held at the park for renewable energy-producing public art. The winning design, Rio Iluminado, collects and converts sunlight into the energy equivalent to what would be consumed by 25 households. The park is seeking more funding for this aspect of their mission as well as more landscaping and trail-related amenities.



Courtesy of Pirie Associates



**"The EPA Brownfields Grant has helped us turn what was once a dumping ground into a source of pride and a recreational resource for the whole community. The Willimantic River was always there, hidden from view, but now it is revealed for everyone to enjoy. Work continues to develop our vision of creating an urban waterfront park, whitewater kayaking destination, and regional trails hub in the heart of Willimantic."**

Jana Roberson, President  
Willimantic Whitewater Partnership,  
Inc.

### For more information:

Visit the EPA Brownfields website at [www.epa.gov/brownfields](http://www.epa.gov/brownfields) or contact Dorrie Paar at 617-918-1432 or [paar.dorrie@epa.gov](mailto:paar.dorrie@epa.gov).