

**FINDING IT** This DCR park parallels the Neponset River’s edge at the end of Brush Hill Road, a divided, tree-lined boulevard funneling into the interchange of Blue Hill Avenue and Blue Hills Parkway near Mattapan Square (Boston) just across the river. The park is set back from these roads behind a brick DCR building: free parking in a large lot.

**DESCRIPTION** A new three-mile bike and pedestrian path starts at Mattapan Square and ends at Neponset Valley Parkway in Hyde Park, passing Esplanade Park near its start. The park is shaded by mature oaks and other hardwoods. The riverbanks are a thicket of plant growth, including invasive, non-native thugs such as bittersweet and multiflora rose, nevertheless, the area is a quiet oasis -- for man and mallards – hardly imaginable so close to a major urban corridor.

**STEWARDSHIP OPPORTUNITIES** Abandoned shopping carts, beer cans, bottled water, cigarillo cartons, sports drinks, fishing lures, candy foil, and bait wrappers dot the riverbanks where Mallard ducks swim in the currents, and deer and raccoon traverse the mud. Too much litter ends up in the Neponset River and, eventually, in the ocean. Plastic non-deposit beverage bottles (“spring water” being the most prevalent) and Styrofoam pose a special problem. Not biodegradable, these containers only break into smaller and smaller pieces often ingested by aquatic and marine animals. Need to hydrate? No problem, carry a refillable bottle. Petition school systems and athletic teams not to serve bottled drinks and, at least, to provide recycling barrels, and support the installation of “hydration station” refilling fountains in public buildings. When enjoying the outdoors, carry a bag to collect litter found along the way, besides your own trash, and leave the environment cleaner than you found it.

**HISTORY** This area was originally territory of the Neponsett tribe of the Massachusetts confederation of Native Americans. The Mattahunt tribe named it “Mattapan,” meaning, ““a good place to be” or “a good place to sit,” perhaps because of nature’s abundance there. In the earlier industrial era, it was referred to as Milton Upper Falls. Fast forward to today: Neponset Esplanade Park is part of DCR’s Neponset Greenway master plan to construct a multi-use trail from the river’s mouth near Boston Harbor all the way to the Blue Hills Reservation. The five-year project to construct the Milton-Hyde Park portion of this trail has just ended and, because of it, many more urban residents will have opportunities to experience the Neponset River.

**ACTIVITIES** Several sturdy picnic tables and benches invite outdoor recreation, indeed, “a good place to sit... and be.” A boat launch at the water’s edge is provided for kayaks or canoes and upper observation platforms for wildlife or river-watching. Fishing is popular (license required). The “multi-use” paved trail is wide and smooth – walk; jog; bicycle; rollerblade; stroll baby carriages; exercise pets.