

# Brownfields Success Story

## Monroe Bridge Overlook (Monroe, Mass.)

Tucked away in the northwestern corner of Massachusetts, the tiny town of Monroe has worked for many years to turn an old mill site on the edge of a the Deerfield river into a park with beautiful views for residents and visitors to the region.

Paper manufacturing began at the former Ramage Paper Mill in 1887 and continued until 1996. Since then, the mill building had deteriorated significantly, particularly the wood portion of the mill, where hazardous building materials were found.

Monroe Bridge and a hydroelectric dam sit next to the mill. Across from the former mill building that was removed, the public has access to the river through stairs, a boat slide and a platform. Whitewater rafting companies offer excursions here to thousands of visitors a year. In addition, independent rafters and kayakers use the access. The power companies that own the dam have created and maintained these and other facilities along the Deerfield River.

The hydroelectric dam releases water for recreation and to protect habitat from May to October. The condition of the building, potential for further deterioration and debris falling into the Deerfield River left residents, business owners and local officials worried about the safety of kayakers and rafters and also contamination of a waterway that is a main economic driver for the region.

### Priming the Property for Redevelopment

Because of the condition of the wood portion of the mill, the town condemned the property in 2015. Property taxes had not been paid since 1999 and the owner was unresponsive. In April 2016, a court order gave the town permission to enter the building and assess the situation. Using EPA grant funds, the Franklin Regional Council of Governments conducted an assessment of the wood structure in May 2016 and found hazardous contamination. The site contained materials with asbestos as well as other hazardous materials, including florescent light tubes, light ballasts, tires, containers of oils and lead paint. In July 2016, the town ordered a demolition of the wood structure. The town voted to take the wood structure portion of the property by eminent domain and the local Select Board began securing funds and permission to do a cleanup, which included getting permission from the Massachusetts Historic Commission. In late 2016, the town voted to keep the site as a park in perpetuity.



View of Monroe, pre-1900s (photo credit Town of Monroe)

**EPA Grant Recipient:**  
Franklin Regional Council of Governments

**Grant Types:**  
Assessment and Revolving Loan Fund

**Current Use:**  
Public Park

**Former Use:**  
Paper Mill



Ramage Paper Mill site, before cleanup (photo credit Franklin Regional Council of Governments)



Cleanup in progress, along edge of river (photo credit Franklin Regional Council of Governments)

**“With a population of about 120 people, the Town of Monroe is truly a rural small town. Taking on a project of this size and complexity cannot be done without partners. We are thankful for our regional partner, the Franklin Regional Council of Governments; our state partner, the Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs; and our federal partner, US Environmental Protection Agency Region 1. This project was decades in the making, and there is still more to be done, but the mitigation of hazardous conditions and the creation of a wonderful overlook park will allow the Deerfield River to be protected and enjoyed for generations to come.”**

**Marcella Stafford Gore, Town of Monroe Administrative Assistant**

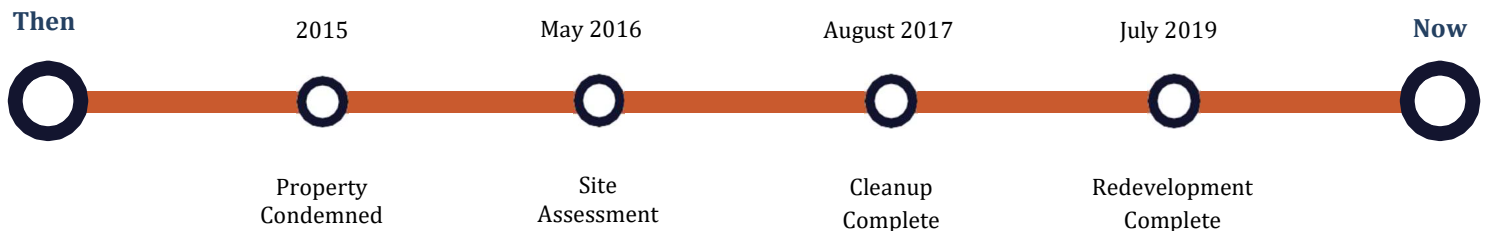
The Town of Monroe, with a population of 120, acquired ownership of the former mill parcel in December 2016 and the clean-up and demolition was done in August 2017.

Construction of the park and retaining wall began in June 2018. Franklin Regional Council of Governments staff worked with the Monroe Select Board and Monroe Historical Society to create signs telling the history of Monroe Bridge and the former Ramage Paper Mill. The project, including construction of the Monroe Bridge Overlook and the Depot Street retaining wall, was finished by July 2019.

Funds expended or committed to the Town of Monroe for the Ramage Wood Structure/Overlook Park project:

- \$38,000 assessment and project support funds from the Franklin Regional Council of Governments as funded by an EPA grant (\$26,423) and state DLTA grants (\$11,577)
- \$30,000 grant from the operators of the hydroelectric facility
- \$100,000 subgrant from Franklin regional council’s Brownfields Program (as funded from an EPA grant) for hazardous building assessment, cleanup and an updated Phase I Environmental Site Assessment .
- \$205,000 from the Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EOEEA) for demolition, stabilization of foundation, and to secure the site.
- \$1,037,000 from the MA EOEEA to stabilize the existing embankment for Depot Street and to construct the Overlook Park, with the Town’s commitment to maintain the park.

Total Project Cost: \$1,410,000



**For more information:**

Visit the EPA Brownfields website at [www.epa.gov/brownfields](http://www.epa.gov/brownfields) or contact James Byrne at 617 918 1389 or [byrne.james@epa.gov](mailto:byrne.james@epa.gov)