

# **Walking Through Fairfield's Open Spaces**

A Guide to  
Fairfield's Walking  
and Hiking Trails

Compiled by  
Frank J. Rice



## **Town of Fairfield Conservation Commission**

The Honorable John J. Sullivan  
Independence Hall  
725 Old Post Road  
Fairfield, Connecticut 06824

FIRST EDITION  
**June 2009**

## **Note to All Readers:**

The maps and descriptions of open space areas described in this Trails Guide have been compiled as carefully as possible. The Conservation Commission and the Town of Fairfield, however, make no guarantees as to the completeness or accuracy of the information included. Interested persons should respect the rights of private land-owners and all others. Further, users of the guide and the open space areas are responsible for complying with all laws, ordinances, and regulations that may govern use of Town-owned properties including, but not limited to, open space areas, roads, and easements.

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## ***Dedication***



**Ann Shaw Carter**

Dec. 5, 1922 - Sept. 26, 2005

*Ann spent her life serving Fairfield and her country. During World War II she worked as a riveter on F4U Corsair airplanes and in her spare time took flying lessons. After learning to fly she joined the civilian Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP) and completed basic training at Avenger Field, Sweetwater, Texas.*

*In 1947 she became the first woman ever to obtain a commercial helicopter pilot's license and began working for New York's Metropolitan Aviation Corp., flying sight-seeing trips around Manhattan.*

*She was an active participant in Town Government, including three terms on the Representative Town Meeting. She also served on the Park Commission from 1970 to 1978, was Chairman for some of those years, and was the Park Commission's representative on the Town's Environmental Planning Advisory Committee. She was a Conservation Commissioner from 1978 to 1985 and a Town Plan and Zoning Commissioner from 1984 to 1987.*

*Ann was very concerned about preserving the unique character of Fairfield and was always a passionate advocate of open space and the Town's open space program. This Open Space Trails Guide is dedicated to her.*

# Foreword

By Frank J. Rice

This Trails Guide has been prepared by the Fairfield Conservation Commission with the help of some very dedicated volunteers. We've all gained many personal benefits by walking through the Town's open spaces over the years and have always wanted to share our experiences with others who will also enjoy and learn from our Town's natural areas.

We hope this guide will serve two important purposes. First, we hope it will encourage use and appreciation of the Town's open space areas by providing information about the areas and their walking and hiking trails. Second, we hope that readers of the guide and visitors to the open spaces will think a little more about the concept of environmental stewardship whereby we can all participate in caring for our environment, helping to safeguard natural areas and resources for future generations. The Conservation Commission is a steward of the Town's open space areas; every visitor can be too.

So enjoy the areas and remember to always use care on the trails because the footing is variable and conditions in the woods can change quickly. Also remember to try to leave the trail a little better than you find it.

We invite you to contact the Conservation Commission with any comments and suggestions you may have regarding the open space areas and this Trails Guide, including any suggestions for improvement.



# Acknowledgements

Many persons assisted with preparation of this Trails Guide, including current and former members of the Conservation Commission, Town conservation officials, and citizens of the Town who volunteered many hours of their time in demonstration of their commitment to environmental stewardship and their support for the beneficial use and conservation of Fairfield's open spaces.

Special appreciation is due to Conservation Commissioner Frank J. Rice who is responsible for not only the vision to prepare the Trails Guide but also for compiling and organizing all of the information contained in the guide. In addition, Mr. Rice directed the volunteers who walked the trails, and he obtained the generous donations needed to print the guide and ensure its availability to the public.

Information included in the Trails Guide was selected from many previous publications of the Conservation Commission, including the Commission's open space management plans and other documents. Some good sources of information are listed in Appendix C. Photos are from the Conservation Department and contributions.

Thanks are extended to Erla Alexander, Phil Meiman, and Pam Ritter who provided editing assistance; to Ron Blatt and Bill Rice who assisted with the trails mapping; to the Town's CAD/GIS Specialist Juliana Harris who prepared the base maps; to Frank Stirna, Jr. who finalized those maps; and to Keith Placko who assisted with photography and word processing.

From the Conservation Department, Conservation Director Tom Steinke and Open Space Manager Ed Jones contributed vital information, assistance, and direction for all aspects of the project.

The Trails Guide could not have been prepared without the generous gifts of the following donors who demonstrated their support for conservation, outdoor recreation, and the Town of Fairfield's open space program.

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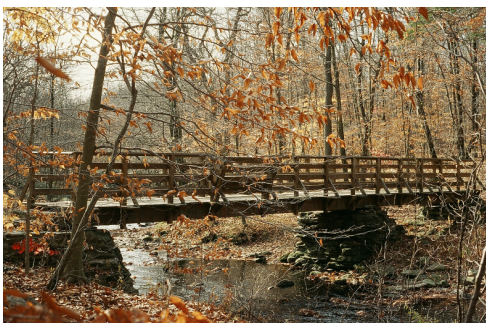
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# Introduction

The Town of Fairfield in southwestern Connecticut's Fairfield County is on the north shore of Long Island Sound. The Town is bounded on the west by the Town of Westport, on the east by the City of Bridgeport and Town of Trumbull, and on the north by the towns of Easton and Weston. Fairfield, with a population in 2007 of 58,173, is often described as a scenic residential community with notable historic districts, but it also supports substantial business and commerce and has two prominent universities.



*Open space areas are open to all.*

The Town has a long and distinguished history of acquiring special natural areas using Town funds, state and federal grants, and private donations. The lands so acquired are called open space areas (some are also known as “conservation areas”) and they’re found throughout the Town. They not only support outdoor recreation opportunities for all citizens, but also have vital natural resources and environmental values. Each area has its own identity and provides its own particular benefits. Together and by themselves, Fairfield’s open space areas help to establish the quality of life and character of the Town.

The open space areas range in size from less than one acre to over 180 acres. They include the large and forested Brett Woods, Hoyden's Hill, Grace Richardson, and Lake Mohegan areas in the northern part of Town. They also include smaller areas such as the areas along the Mill River--Fairfield's largest watercourse which flows through the center of the Town before it enters Long Island Sound at historic Southport Harbor.

Also part of the open space system are tidal salt marshes with vital connections to Long Island Sound. These marshes adjoin the Town's Ash Creek, Pine Creek, and Sasco Brook estuaries, and include formerly degraded areas restored to ecological health through the Town's nationally recognized marsh restoration program.

The Town's Conservation Commission is the steward of the open space areas, helping sustain them for future generations. Since the 1960's, the Commission and the Town's Conservation Department have conducted an on-going program to actively maintain, enhance, and otherwise manage the areas. Management is for the purpose of providing opportunities for hiking, fishing, nature study, picnicking, and other passive recreational pursuits, and to conserve plant and wildlife habitat, unique natural features, water quality, and other natural and historic values. The Conservation Department, by the way, is the first such department established in Connecticut and is responsible for day-to-day operations and carrying out the Commission's policies.

An extensive network of trails open to the public free of charge is found throughout the open space system. Depending on the

particular open space area, the trails are used for hiking, leisurely walking, horse-back riding, and cross-country skiing, and provide all of the benefits associated with enjoyment of scenic views and the natural environment. The trails also allow the open space areas to serve as outdoor classrooms for nature study by students of all ages.



*Open space areas preserve plant and wildlife habitat.*

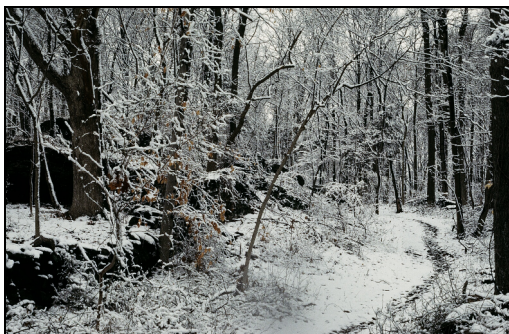
Although the Conservation Commission has prepared management plans for individual open space areas, it realized there was no single reference to the areas' hiking and walking trails. As a result, a dedicated group of volunteers, led by Commission member Frank J. Rice, embarked on an ambitious project to prepare such a reference. Expending untold hours, the volunteers walked every trail and assembled information on the history and natural values associated with each open space area.

This resulting Trails Guide--"Walking Through Fairfield's Open Spaces: A Guide to Fairfield's Walking and Hiking Trails"--includes maps and brief descriptions of each of the 13 open space areas that provide significant opportunities for walking and hiking. Maps of the areas are in Appendix A.

The guide also includes other information that we hope will be of interest to you, including information on the Town's several watersheds and estuaries, and a summary of the rules and regulations for use of the areas.

Publication of this first edition of the Trails Guide is made possible by generous gifts from the acknowledged donors. Additional copies of the guide are available at the Conservation Department in The Honorable John J. Sullivan Independence Hall; the Fairfield YMCA at 841 Old Post Road; the Fairfield Senior Center at 100 Mona Terrace; and at local retailers. For more information, stop by the Conservation Department or call the Department at (203) 256-3071. In the meantime, please enjoy the wonderful opportunities for appreciation of the natural environment that are available in the open space areas throughout the Town of Fairfield. And let us know of any additions or corrections we should make to improve our next edition of the Trails Guide.

The Trails Guide is dedicated to the memory of Ann Shaw Carter, an extraordinary public servant and passionate advocate for Fairfield's open space.



*Open space trails are used throughout the year.*



# Preparing for a Hike

Before visiting one of the Town's open space areas for a walk or hike, a certain amount of preparation is needed. You won't be entering a wilderness area but you will be using trails with variable surfaces and topography; you'll be walking over rocks and roots; and, in most of the areas, you'll be walking through the woods and may very well be out of contact with other people for a significant period of time. So you need to think about what you wear, what you should bring with you, what the weather forecast is, what time the sun is going to set, and all of the other things that it's prudent to think about in order to have a safe and enjoyable experience.



*Some trails are wide and level.*

Remember that you walk slower on a trail than on pavement. In the woods, it might take you an hour to walk 1½ to 2 miles, compared to walking on a road where you might be able to do 2 to 3 miles in an hour. Plan your time accordingly and don't bring young children with you until you're familiar with the trail. When walking, think "pick up your feet" to avoid tripping on rocks or other obstacles, including obstacles that might be covered by leaves.

Wear sturdy, good-fitting shoes and expect to get your feet wet during and after it rains and maybe even when it hasn't been raining for a while. For long walks you may want to bring along a light back-pack with such items as dry clothes (socks, for example, and rain gear), plenty of drinking water, snacks, flashlight, pocket knife, compass, insect repellent, sunscreen, map, and perhaps a first-aid kit. A camera or binoculars may add to your enjoyment and you should have a cell phone and whistle in case of an emergency. Dress appropriately for the weather and time of year.

Also, be sure to use good judgment when parking. Designated off-street parking is available at some of the areas but at others you will have to park carefully along the side of the road. Read the sections on access and parking for each open space area in the Trails Guide. Park with care; don't interfere with private driveways; and use the designated points of access.

If you think you're lost or lose your bearings, don't worry. Take your time to think about your predicament, retrace your steps if necessary, and remember you're not very far from civilization so you'll always be able to simply walk out of the area to a nearby road.

## **Precautions on the Trail**

While you shouldn't expect hazardous trail conditions, you need to be prepared and take certain precautions. Bring a companion along, especially if you're going to an unfamiliar area, and certainly tell someone where you're going and when you expect to be back.

You'll probably meet biting insects during the warmer months so use insect repellent and keep your skin covered if possible. When necessary, cover exposed skin surfaces with a strong sunscreen and bring sufficient water to avoid dehydration.

Be especially vigilant for ticks, including the deer ticks that can carry Lyme disease. Ticks are usually picked up when ground vegetation brushes against your legs and then they climb up your body. Keep your legs and ankles covered; apply insect repellent to clothing below your waist; and tuck your pant legs into your socks when walking through brush and grass. These precautions may keep ticks on the outside of your clothes where they can be spotted (wear light-colored clothing) and then removed.

If you're bitten, remove the tick as soon as possible. It's believed that ticks need to be embedded for 24 hours to transmit Lyme disease. If you find an embedded tick, carefully remove it using tweezers from as near the skin as possible, and save the tick to be tested at your local health department to see if it carries the disease. Always search your body and scalp for ticks when returning from a walk. Regular ticks are easy to spot, but deer ticks are only about the size of the period at the end of this sentence.

Don't approach any wild animal too closely and don't feed waterfowl. Also, don't touch the glossy leaves of poison ivy. Remember: "Leaves of three, let it be."

No drinking water is provided at the open space areas so bring plenty of water in an unbreakable container. Don't drink from the lakes or streams.



*Trail surfaces and topography vary.*

## **Distress Signal**

In the unlikely event that you do experience an emergency, the uniform distress signal in the woods is three audible or visible signs quickly repeated at regular intervals. Shout for help or blow a whistle or flash a light three times quickly, but do this only in an actual emergency. Any hiker hearing or seeing such a signal is obligated to respond. Answer a call for help with two signals and promptly search for those in need of help.

## **Conduct on the Trails**

Rules and regulations for use of the open space areas are posted at most of the areas. See Appendix B of this guide for some of them. In addition, please keep in mind the following basic principles followed by all good hikers.

## Good Hiking Principles:

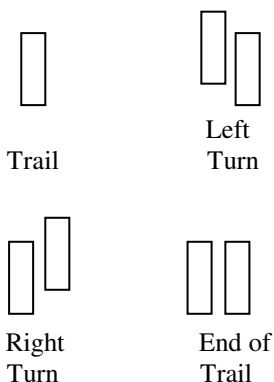
1. Obey all signs and stay on the marked and well-worn trails. By doing so you won't get lost and you'll avoid damaging sensitive habitats.
2. "Take only photos; leave only footprints." Leave all flowers, vegetation, wildlife, rocks, and other natural and man-made features undisturbed for others to enjoy.
3. Keep your noise level down. You'll not only show your respect for other hikers, but also increase your chances of seeing wildlife.
4. You can bring your dog to all of the open space areas but if you do, bring a leash, keep your dog under voice control at all times, and clean up after your pet.
5. Carry out any litter that you may have brought with you and think about bringing a small bag so you can help keep the trail clean by picking up any litter that may have been left by others. Do this and you'll accomplish the universal hiking goal of leaving the trail a little better than you find it.
6. Be friendly to everyone you meet on the trail.
7. If you encounter horses, remember they're often frightened by unfamiliar circumstances so move and speak appropriately.
8. Respect the rights of the owners of the private properties adjoining the open space areas. Don't walk beyond the bounds of the open space areas and don't cross private property to enter the areas.

9. Report any dangerous conditions or problems, including any unauthorized uses such as all-terrain vehicles and dirt bikes, to the Conservation Department at (203) 256-3071. If you do encounter an emergency, call the Fairfield Police Department at (203) 254-4800 or the 911 emergency services number.

## Trail Markings

Marking and maintaining blazes along the open space trails by the Conservation Department is an ongoing process even as this Trails Guide is being prepared. Depending on how soon you visit some of the areas, you may encounter some trails that are not yet marked. That shouldn't affect your enjoyment as you'll be able to follow the normally used trails shown on the maps in Appendix A of this guide.

The following convention is being used to mark the trails.



*Stay safe, have fun, and share your experience with others!*

# Watersheds and Estuaries

As you walk through the open space areas, over and along small streams and larger water courses, give some thought to where the moving water has been and where it's going. The open space areas, and the entire Town of Fairfield for that matter, are part of the watershed of Long Island Sound. This means that all of the water courses, and all of the precipitation that falls in the Town and runs off the land, ultimately drain into the Sound.

Within the Sound's big watershed are many smaller watersheds (think of them as "sub-watersheds"). Each is associated with one of the Sound's many tributaries, including the four tributaries that flow through Fairfield. From east to west, these are Ash Creek, Pine Creek, the Mill River, and Sasco Brook. All are vital environmental, recreational, and scenic resources. Further, where the fresh water of these watercourses mixes with salt water from the Sound, estuarine environments of much ecological value are found.



*Sasco Brook estuary.*

Long Island Sound is itself an estuary, designated an “Estuary of National Significance” by the U.S. Congress. The environmental quality of the Sound is greatly dependent on its tributaries and the smaller estuaries and intertidal resources along its shores. The Ash Creek, Pine Creek, Mill River, and Sasco Brook estuaries, for example, function as living filters where tide water and upland storm water flow through marsh grass and over mudflats to dilute, stabilize, and decompose pollutants.

The wetlands subject to the twice-daily ebb and flood of the tide in the Town’s four estuaries are intertidal resources of high biological productivity, essential for support of living marine resources. Nutrients stored and recycled within the tidal wetlands provide the foundation of the Long Island Sound food chain upon which all of the Sound’s fish, shellfish, wildlife, and waterfowl depend.

Upstream conditions in the watersheds are also ecologically significant. Fairfield’s watersheds, including their estuaries, are ecological systems of inter-related parts, defined by natural boundaries. Our man-made actions, both individual and cumulative, can cause pollution, increase the risk of flooding, damage fish and wildlife habitat, diminish scenic quality, and affect many other natural conditions and values.

The Town’s watersheds and their estuaries provide significant opportunities for scientific study of the natural environment and serve as outdoor classrooms for students of all ages. Fairfield’s River-Lab Program, for example, which is part of the science curriculum in grades three through six of Fair-



field's public schools and two private schools, makes use of the Ash Creek, Pine Creek, Mill River, and Sasco Brook as outdoor classrooms to study estuarine resources and the inter-relationships between those resources and upstream and upland activities. The outdoor study component of the River-Lab Program is operated by the Mill River Wetland Committee, a not-for-profit environmental education organization.

A fundamental relationship exists between the watersheds and Long Island Sound. The Sound depends on the environmental quality of its tributaries and watersheds; if water flowing into the Sound is polluted, the Sound would be polluted too.



*Upstream in the Mill River watershed.*

An important issue, and not just in Fairfield's watersheds but in all watersheds, is nonpoint source (NPS) pollution. NPS pollution doesn't come from a single, easy-to-identify "point" source such as a sewage treatment plant or industrial discharge pipe.

It occurs when precipitation runs off roads, parking lots, driveways, lawns, hillsides, and other watershed surfaces.

Many contaminants, including oil and sand washed off paved areas, excess fertilizers

and pesticides, and animal wastes, are picked up as water runs over the ground, into storm drains, and eventually to the water courses that empty into Long Island Sound. Poorly functioning septic systems leaking bacteria and excessive nutrients into the watershed are another source of NPS pollution.

Alone, each contributing source of NPS pollution has only a small impact. One car leaking a few drops of oil, for example, isn't much of a problem. The cumulative impact of a thousand cars is another story. NPS pollution can come from anywhere in a watershed and it all adds up.

The Conservation Commission encourages everyone's help to reduce NPS pollution. We can all contribute simply by increasing our awareness and understanding of how watersheds and estuaries work and how our everyday activities can inadvertently generate pollutants. Contact the Conservation Department for more information on this important topic.

The open space areas are important determinants of environmental quality in the Town's watersheds. Fairfield has long recognized that preserving open space not only provides recreational opportunities and enhances the Town's character, but also helps maintain and enhance watershed environmental quality, including water quality. When you're walking or hiking in the open space areas, take a few minutes to think about the different types of ecological functions and natural values--from plant and wildlife habitat to water quality values--that are provided by the environment around you.

The open space areas described in the Trails Guide are shown on Map 1 in Appendix A. They are identified below with respect to their locations in each of the Town's four watersheds and estuaries.

## **Ash Creek Watershed and Estuary**

How Ash Creek got its name isn't known for sure. Colonial maps show the creek as the Uncoway or Fairfield River. Later, the name Ash House Creek appears, perhaps because there was an ash house for making lye. Another source of the present-day name may be the British burning of the Town during the American Revolution that left the creek and the entire Town center covered with ashes.



*Ash Creek estuary.*

Today, Ash Creek forms part of Fairfield's eastern boundary with the City of Bridgeport. Of the Town's four watersheds, this one is the most impacted by urban development. The creek originates in northeast Fairfield as the Rooster River, becomes Ash Creek south of the bridge at King's Highway East, and then downstream of the Post Road widens into the main part of the estuary before entering Long Island Sound. Although surrounded by development, the es-

tuary contains significant tidal wetland areas. In recent years, much progress has been made through the efforts of the State of Connecticut, Town of Fairfield, City of Bridgeport, and neighborhood groups to improve environmental quality in the creek

The creek was particularly significant for the early development of Fairfield following settlement of the Town in 1639. It was the Town's main harbor; it provided a good supply of fish and shellfish; and its salt marshes provided pastures for horses and cattle. In the late 1800's, Fairfield began a program to eliminate mosquitoes and the resulting mosquito "ditches" can still be seen crisscrossing Ash Creek wetlands.

The banks of the creek are now lined with residential, commercial, industrial, and recreation-related development. The lower reaches, however, also help to form an estuarine environment with special ecological significance in the midst of an otherwise urban area. The estuary extends almost four miles inland from the mouth of the creek and includes the tributary Turney and Riverside creeks and their adjoining tidal wetlands. These wetlands suffered from the past construction of flood control dikes and, like wetlands in the Pine Creek estuary, are now being restored through the Town's efforts to reintroduce tide water to the areas behind the dikes.

Five Ash Creek open space areas, including marsh restoration areas, are part of the Town's open space system. Of the five, the Penfield Mills Open Space Area near the mouth of the creek and adjacent to the Town's South Benson Marina is the largest and is described in the Trails Guide. Pen-

field Mills provides opportunities for walking, picnicking, and enjoyment of scenic views of Ash Creek and Long Island Sound and its location provides an interesting glimpse into the early history of Fairfield.

## **Pine Creek Watershed and Estuary**

Pine Creek winds for over two miles from the Post Road to Long Island Sound. The estuary, sheltered from the Sound by the Pine Creek barrier beach (Fairfield Beach), is characterized by extensive wetlands and occupies much of the central part of Fairfield's coastal area.

Historically, many of the wetlands adjoining the creek were filled to develop Town facilities or residential subdivisions, or they were isolated from tidal exchange by the construction of flood control dikes. The resulting ecological damage created fire hazards and breeding grounds for mosquitoes to such an extent that the Town initiated a program in 1971 to restore the degraded tidal wetlands and their ecological values.



*Pine Creek estuary and Fairfield Beach.*

The marsh restoration program is described in the Conservation Commission's 1996 "Research Report Concerning the Multiple Use Management Plan for Coastal Open Space" and 1997 pamphlet "Marsh Restoration: Opportunities and Benefits from a Local Perspective."

The Pine Creek estuary is also characterized by the Town's Public Works Service Yard which adjoins the estuary and includes such municipal facilities as the wastewater treatment plant, Public Works garage, recycling station, and the closed Town landfill.

Eight open space areas generally conforming to the boundaries of distinct tidal wetland cells separated by roads, dikes, and other barriers have been designated by the Conservation Commission in the estuary. For the purpose of the Trails Guide, two of these areas have been grouped together as the "Pine Creek Open Space Areas." The trail that winds through the areas provides an opportunity for views of the creek and the vibrant ecosystem of the restored marshes. You can also see the self-regulating tidegates used by the Conservation Commission to help restore the marshes.

## **Mill River Watershed and Estuary**

The Mill River is the Town's largest watercourse and one of Fairfield's most significant natural features. It flows over an eight-mile course winding through the center of the Town.

The watershed is relatively large, covering about 35 square miles within Fairfield and

four other towns. Much of the northern part of the watershed is controlled for drinking water supply purposes. North of Fairfield, the river is impounded at the Easton Reservoir. Within Fairfield, Cricker Brook, an important tributary of the Mill River, was dammed to create the Hemlock Reservoir. Located to the west of Hoyden's Hill Open Space Area, this reservoir extends north into the Town of Easton. Further downstream, Lake Mohegan and Samp Mortar Lake are two other significant water storage areas (they're not used to supply drinking water) that affect the flow of water in the river.

Water quality in the river upstream of the zone of tidal influence is given the highest classification ("A") by the State of Connecticut which also lists the river as a "major" trout stream. The river is periodically stocked with trout and since it flows through a large populated area and is easily accessible, it's popular with recreational fishermen. The river supports a variety of fish species in addition to brook, brown, and rainbow trout, and it's been said that just about every niche of the river and its natural riparian areas are filled with fish, amphibians, reptiles, birds, and mammals.



*Mill River looking downstream.*

High tides carry salt water over two miles upstream in the river from Long Island Sound to the remnants of Perry's Mill dam.

Southport Harbor, a center of boating activity and one of the most scenic and historic locations on the Connecticut coast, defines the lower, most tidally influenced segment of the Mill River's estuary. Tidal wetlands and intertidal flats in the Harbor provide valuable fish and wildlife habitat and have important water quality functions.

The Mill River, with its ecological and scenic qualities and its historic, educational, and recreational importance, is often described as the foundation of the Town's open space program. In a 1971 request to the State of Connecticut to obtain funds for open space acquisition, the Town described its open space program in the Mill River watershed as part of Fairfield's comprehensive plan of development.

At that time, 38 years ago, it was written quite eloquently that "*The Mill River Valley program envisions a multi-purpose open space function involving conservation, recreation, beautification, definition of urban form, water resource protection, and flood control. As the River flows southerly from the [Merritt] Parkway to the Harbor, it traverses a series of neighborhoods. The function of particular open space tracts and the emphasis of use of particular sites will vary from place to place, in some cases, serving as neighborhood playgrounds and yet in others for continuity of greenbelt, water pollution control, and flood protection.*"



Today, Town-owned open space areas along the River and in the watershed range in size from less than two acres to 170 acres. The areas that provide significant walking and hiking opportunities are described in the Trails Guide and include: Hoyden's Hill Open Space Area, Grace Richardson Conservation Area, Lake Mohegan Open Space Area, Mountain Laurel Open Space Area; Samp Mortar Rock Open Space Area, Springer Glen Open Space Area, Flower House Drive and Duck Farm Open Space Area, Riverfield Open Space Area, Perry's Mill Ponds Open Space Area, and Mill Hollow Park and Open Space Area.



*Southport Harbor on the Mill River.*

## **Sasco Brook Watershed and Estuary**

Sasco Brook forms part of the boundary between Fairfield and the Town of Westport. The brook is about six miles long, beginning in northwest Fairfield, and its watershed is a little more than 10 square miles. Most of the watershed (about 78%)

is in Fairfield. Development in the watershed is predominantly residential, with the exception of commercial development along the Post Road. Where it is tidally influenced, Sasco Brook is often called Sasco Creek.

Although several bridges span the watercourse and have restricted the upstream reach of the tide over the years, Sasco Brook has not been subject to large scale, irreversible impacts, and its estuary contains some relatively undisturbed tidal wetlands.



*Sasco Brook estuary.*

Six open space areas adjoin the brook in Fairfield, including two just upstream of the zone of tidal influence. Further upstream in the watershed is the Brett Woods Conservation Area which is included in the Trails Guide. At about 185 acres, Brett Woods is the Town's largest open space area. Due to its forested, undeveloped character, Brett Woods has a significant positive impact on the water quality of the Sasco Brook watershed and estuary.

# Penfield Mills Open Space Area

## Location and Access

The 25-acre Penfield Mills Open Space Area, one of the Town's Ash Creek open space areas, is located at the end of Turney Road, nearby Riverside Drive and adjoining the Town's South Benson Marina basin. (See Map 2.) Vehicle access is via Turney Road. During the boating season, you'll have to stop at the marina guard house. A Town permit isn't needed for access to the open space area so just tell the attendant you're going to the open space. Turn left after the guard house and drive to the end of the access road where there's plenty of parking opposite the Town's boat launching ramp. A Town permit is needed to use the ramp.

Pedestrian access to Penfield Mills is available from Riverside Drive but no parking is available along the road.



*Looking east over Penfield Mills Open Space Area.*

## History

A walk through the Penfield Mills Open Space Area provides a revealing glimpse into the history of the Town. Ash Creek had an important role in the early development of Fairfield and was the Town's main harbor for many years. In the mid-1700's, Peter Penfield built a dam across the Creek to Great Island Marsh and built grist mills on either side of the creek. The mills were powered by the tides and became centers of activity, supplying vital foodstuff for the townspeople. They would also provide, over 200 years later, the name of this open space area.

At the same time as the tide mills were built, Fairfielders constructed a short-cut to the Black Rock area (now in Bridgeport) by building a wooden, "corduroy" road and bridge across the creek. Many residents helped build the thoroughfare since the Town levied a tax of either labor or money for public works projects. The road and bridge are long gone but their wooden remnants can be seen at low tide protruding from the edge of the marsh. Some of the old dam stones are also visible, near Great Island Marsh.

The upland and marshes near the mouth of Ash Creek were subdivided for hundreds of building lots in the early 1900's and the resulting development would provide homes for many families. At that time, and for many years afterward, upland portions of the present-day open space area were mined for sand and gravel and the excavated areas were filled with construction debris.

An earthen dike across Riverside Creek was constructed in 1957 to reduce the risk of flooding to neighborhood homes, but it also reduced tidal flow into the marshes and encouraged the spread of freshwater common reeds (*Phragmites*). The reeds presented a considerable fire hazard each fall and winter, and stagnant pools provided breeding areas for mosquitoes.

In 1964, the Town constructed its South Benson Marina basin and in 1968 used state and federal funds to acquire the land which is now the Penfield Mills Open Space Area. The Town then began work *“to restore this land to its earlier condition as a historic mill site with an orchard, meadow, woodlot, and marsh so visitors can enjoy the diverse cultural, historic, and ecological riches which were formerly balanced on this site.”*

In 2007, the Town, in conjunction with The Aspetuck Land Trust, purchased Great Island Marsh in the middle of Ash Creek. The Fairfield/Bridgeport town line passes through the middle of the island so Fairfield owns its side and the land trust owns the Bridgeport side.



*Entrance to the Penfield Mills Open Space Area.*

## **Vegetation and Wildlife**

The open space area supports a diversity of upland and intertidal vegetation. On the upland, there is a meadow, small fruit trees, and wood lot, along with shrubs and berry bushes. Civic groups and neighborhood volunteers helped the Conservation Commission and Department establish this vegetation. Maples, willows, black cherry trees, and locust trees are found along the perimeter of the meadow.

The marsh vegetation is also diverse. If you look carefully, you'll see several distinct zones of vegetation. In the most shallow and infrequently flooded areas, for example, you'll see the common reed and high tide bush, a shrub with fleshy leaves. Closer to the creek, salt hay forms cowlicks blown in every direction and often mixed with spike grass. In deeper, more frequently submerged areas, look for the colorful branching sea lavender (whose flowers are often dried and used by florists) as well as bright green, jointed glassworts and salt marsh aster. Closest to the water, tall saltwater cordgrass is the most common plant.

As you walk on the trail on top of the 1957 flood control dike across Riverside Creek, you'll see where the Conservation Commission has placed a self-regulating tidegate that lets tide water flow back into the creek, thereby restoring the salt marsh ecosystem that was damaged when the dike was first built.

The upland field, with its mixture of grasses, colorful flowers, and young fruit trees, is a good place to spot robins, thrushes, and a variety of other songbirds. Don't be surprised to find an occasional harrier hawk circling overhead or if you see and hear the pheasants that live on the edges of the field and woods. When the field is abloom in summer, you'll also see a number of familiar insects, including many varieties of butterflies, moths, and dragonflies.

Along the marsh trail you'll find an army of fiddler crabs scavenging for food. Also, look for clams and oysters and the broken shells of mussels which live with barnacles on the rocky peninsula alongside the marina.



*The view toward Great Island Marsh.*

The Ash Creek estuary is truly a lively place. On any given day you're bound to be treated to a glimpse of its many inhabitants. If you look carefully, low tide is the best time to observe bottom creatures. The salt marshes draw a crowd of fish, both big and small. If you happen to walk the trail as the tide is rising, look for minnows, mummichugs, and killifish. These fish are food for a variety of larger fish. Several of the popular recreational and commercial species, including winter

flounder and bluefish, breed and spend their early lives in these protective, food-filled marshes.

The black cherry trees along the upland edge of the open space area are perfect roosting spots for herons. Many of the mussel and clam shells you'll find on the marsh trail are dropped by these birds. Land animals, such as raccoons, opossum, and many marsh birds also benefit from the rich produce of the marsh, feeding on clams, crustaceans, fish, and the roots of plants. Several of their burrows are visible in the slope of the open space area above the marsh. Other conspicuous avian inhabitants are wrens, which dart among the grasses and eat their seeds, and the brilliant blue and white kingfisher which skillfully nose-dives into the water after fish and makes its home in the sandy hillside. On Great Island Marsh there is an osprey nesting platform that fledges young every year.

## **Trails**

As you walk the trails at Penfield Mills Open Space Area you follow the footsteps of many Fairfielders. Some sailed in and out of Ash Creek when it was a thriving harbor in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, some brought wheat and other grains to the creek's grist mills, and some traveled across the creek on a wooden road and bridge to Black Rock.

One trail follows the shoreline of the area, leading to a picnic area overlooking the creek and then to Riverside Drive. This trail passes over the top of the old flood control dike. It's also possible to walk through the meadow to and along the



shoreline of the creek from where you can explore the salt marshes and see the remnants of the Colonial-era corduroy road and the old dam stones near Great Island Marsh. There's also a path on the length of the peninsula that separates the marina basin from Ash Creek. The peninsula, not part of the original open space acquisition, was built-up with sediments dredged from the creek. A small parking area at the entrance to the peninsula is reserved for use by handicapped visitors.

In addition to exploring the salt marsh, picnicking, fishing from the peninsula, and enjoying views of Long Island Sound and Ash Creek, you can enjoy the children's playground in the meadow near the open space parking area and you can launch and land a canoe or kayak



*Open space picnic area overlooking Ash Creek*

Since 1973, the open space area has served as an outdoor classroom for environmental education. Fifth-graders from Fairfield public schools, for example, visit each autumn with trained volunteer guides from the Mill River Wetland Committee as part of the River-Lab Program.

# **Pine Creek**

## **Open Space Areas**

### **Location and Access**

The Pine Creek marshes occupy much of the central part of Fairfield's coastal area, south of the Post Road. While the Conservation Commission has designated a number of open space areas in the Pine Creek watershed and estuary, for the purpose of the Trails Guide we've grouped two of them together (encompassing about 110 acres), and we're calling them the "Pine Creek Open Space Areas." We've done so because the two areas provide the best opportunities for walking and hiking on the Salt Marsh Trail that winds through the estuary. (See Map 3.)

The principal point of access to the open space areas is through the Town's Pine Creek Recreation Area on Old Dam Road. Driving east on Old Dam Road, turn left just before the Kiwanis baseball field and proceed straight ahead to the gated entrance to the open space areas. There's plenty of parking here.

Another access point is behind the Fairfield Senior Center which is located on Mona Terrace, south of Old Field Road. There's parking at the Senior Center.

There are also pedestrian access points from Oldfield Road, the cul-de-sac at the end of Salt Meadow Road, and two points along Old Dam Road. No designated parking is available at these locations.



*Pine Creek estuary and open space areas.*

## History

Historical maps and descriptions of Colonial Fairfield indicate that few significant changes occurred in the Pine Creek area for about 300 years after the Town was settled. In 1914 there were an estimated 640 acres of tidal wetlands in the estuary. By that time, however, human activities were beginning to have a profound environmental impact on the creek and its tidal wetlands. Drainage ditches were being cut in many of the marshes to control mosquitoes and the Town started to acquire land that would be used for the development of municipal facilities, including a landfill.

As the Town developed following the end of World War II, more and more homes were built in low-lying areas and those homes experienced severe flooding from time to time. As a result, the Town built flood control dikes in the 1950's that provided a sense of security and allowed development to continue. Also at that time, which was during the height of the "cold war," the U.S. Government constructed a Nike missile launching site adjoining the estuary.

By 1972, almost all of the tidal wetlands in the estuary had been diked or filled for development, and the loss of wetlands was so extensive that only about 17 acres of unfilled, un-diked wetlands remained--a loss of about 98% of the estimated wetland acreage that existed in 1914. The tidal wetland vegetation behind the flood control dikes had died. As a result, conditions became especially favorable for mosquitoes; fish and wildlife habitat was degraded; the monoculture of *Phragmites* created a significant fire hazard; and the remaining wetlands lost much of their ability to filter pollutants.

In response to the environmental damage and other problems caused by the flood dikes, the Conservation Commission started the Town's marsh restoration program in 1971. This program--described in the Conservation Commission's 1996 "Research Report Concerning the Multiple Use Management Plan for Coastal Open Space" and 1997 pamphlet "Marsh Restoration: Opportunities and Benefits from a Local Perspective"--has had remarkable success and the restored wetlands have been incorporated into the Town's open space system.

Today, the Pine Creek open space areas provide opportunities for walking and hiking, wildlife observation, enjoyment of marsh views, and canoeing and kayaking when the tide is high.

## **Marsh Ecology**

*"Tidal wetlands provide vital ecological functions and have much beneficial value; they are environmental, economic, recreational, and scenic resources of great im-*

*portance.”* These are some standard words from textbooks, heard many times, that can be used to sum up the significance of Pine Creek’s tidal wetlands--called salt marshes because their salinity is now high.

The open space areas provide the opportunity for close-up views of tidal wetlands, including areas where the ecological functions and values of the salt marsh were restored after years of degradation. From the Salt Marsh Trail you can also see the self-regulating tidegates (SRTs) in action. The SRTs helped accomplish the marsh restoration by replacing the conventional “flapper” tidegates in the flood dikes across Pine Creek. Float systems on the SRTs are adjusted so the gates allow enough tidal flow for marsh restoration but automatically close at a predetermined tide elevation, before the flood-causing high tide peak is reached.



*Self-regulating tidegates.*

There are many good references on Connecticut’s tidal wetlands. You can start with the website of the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection ([www.dep.state.ct.us](http://www.dep.state.ct.us)) and search for “wetlands” and “wetland restoration.” You’ll find a link to the excellent book

*Tidal Wetlands of Long Island Sound* by the Connecticut College Arboretum and other helpful information.

To summarize, the Pine Creek marshes, along with all of Connecticut's tidal wetlands, function as living filters where pollutants are contained, diluted, or stabilized as tide water and storm water flow through marsh grass and over mudflats. Earlier in the Trails Guide, we talked about the relationship between Fairfield's watersheds and Long Island Sound and how the ecological health of the Sound depends on the environmental quality of its watersheds, tributaries, and marshes.

The marshes are ecological systems with high biological productivity; nutrients stored and recycled within them provide the foundation of the estuarine food chain. The dead leaves and stems of marsh plants enter the water, are broken down by micro-organisms, and become food for fiddler crabs, worms, snails, finfish, and shellfish. The marshes provide nesting, feeding, and refuge areas for shorebirds and wildlife communities; they store floodwater, stabilize the shoreline, and act as buffers against wave energy.



*Main entrance to the Salt Marsh Trail.*

The Pine Creek estuary today contains one of the largest tidal wetland areas in the state. Saltwater cordgrass (*Spartina alterniflora*) and saltmeadow cordgrass (*Spartina patens*) have recolonized much of the restored areas; large populations of marsh fiddler crabs and ribbed mussels have returned; and there are new populations of juvenile shellfish. The original populations of breeding fish, birds, and diamondback terrapins have not been completely restored, however, because the habitat requirements of these wildlife populations included not only wetlands but also adjacent upland areas that have since been filled, graded, dredged, or otherwise altered.



*“Johnboat” on Pine Creek.*

## Trails

Visitors entering the open space areas from the main entrance off Old Dam Road (where the missile launching site used to be) can cross an old railroad bridge section. The bridge section was once part of a bridge across the Connecticut River in the 1800’s and was moved to the Mill Hill Road railroad crossing in Fairfield later in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This structure is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Nearby the bridge are the self-regulating tidegates that allow Pine Creek to now flow through the flood control dike. The area near the bridge and the SRTs can be used for launching canoes and kayaks to explore and fish the creek.

After you cross the bridge, turn left to follow the Salt Marsh Trail along the southwest edge of the now-closed landfill. The trail leads to another SRT area near the Meadows Condominium and then continues to the Fairfield Senior Center and to Oldfield Road. The trail near the Senior Center has been designated as a wheelchair accessible trail and is currently being renovated.

If you enter the open space areas from the Old Dam Road entrance, you can also turn right before the railroad bridge and walk the length of the Pine Creek dike behind the baseball field.

It's about 1.4 miles on the Salt Marsh Trail from Oldfield Road to the end of the dike at Pine Creek.



*View across Pine Creek estuary from the dike trail.*



# Hoyden's Hill Open Space Area

## Location and Access

The 58-acre Hoyden's Hill Open Space Area (see Map 4) is centered on the plateau of Hoyden's Hill, the highest point in Fairfield. The open space area is on the northerly side of Hoyden's Lane, opposite the Town's H. Smith Richardson Golf Course. It's bounded to the west by the Town-owned "Parcel's" property and the Centennial Watershed State Forest which extends north to Beers Road. The Centennial Forest also borders the east side of the open space access road from Beers Road and the north property line of the open space area. Beers Road and Morehouse Highway mark the boundary between Fairfield and the Town of Easton.

The open space area is bounded on the northeast by the Rolling Hills Drive residential neighborhood which extends south to the Barbieri open space parcel. The Barbieri parcel adds 27 acres to the Hoyden's Hill Open Space Area; hiking trails are now being planned for this land.



*Hoyden's Hill Open Space and Hemlock Reservoir.*

The main open space entrance from Hoyden's Lane is shared with the Town's golf driving range. If the range is open, you can drive into the open space area and park along the driveway. Take care not to be locked in as the bar gate is shut when the range is closed. If the gate is closed you'll have to park with care along Hoyden's Lane. Pedestrian access to the open space area is provided at Beers Road and the Rolling Hills Drive cul-de-sac.

## History

Much of the land now included within the Hoyden's Hill area (and within the Grace Richardson Conservation Area) was part of a 271-acre tract acquired by the Town of Fairfield from the H. Smith Richardson family in 1966. Several smaller parcels were later purchased by the Town and added to the original acquisition, most recently the area known as the "Barbieri" open space parcel.

Prior to Town acquisition, much of the land that's now part of the open space area was used for agricultural purposes, dating back to at least the 18<sup>th</sup> century. A farm road once extended southward from Beers Road through the center of the present-day Hoyden's Hill Open Space Area, H. Smith Richardson Golf Course, and Grace Richardson Conservation Area down to Congress Street.

Stonewalls indicating historical property divisions and past agricultural uses criss-cross the area and are notable landscape features. Several of these walls mark the boundaries of 17th century "Long Lots," although the actual walls were likely not constructed until the 1800's.

In the early 1970's, the Town built the H. Smith Richardson Golf Course and formally set aside the Hoyden's Hill and Grace Richardson areas specifically for open space purposes.

Today, uses of the open space area are fairly diverse. The area contains a golf driving range, agricultural fields that until recently were privately cultivated under lease agreement with the Town, and trails for hiking, cross-country skiing, horse-back riding, and wildlife observation. There's also an old farmhouse that serves as the residence of the golf course superintendent; an old barn that dates back to past agricultural uses; and the outdoor shooting range of the Fairfield Police Department. Visitors needn't worry about the shooting range interfering with their hiking. The range is used infrequently and there are plenty of signs that alert everyone when it's being used.



*Entrance to open space area from Hoyden's Lane.*

In 1992, the Conservation Commission prepared and adopted the *Hoyden's Hill Open Space Area and Grace Richardson Conservation Area Multiple Use Management Plan* which includes management provisions to guide the beneficial use and conservation of both areas.

# **Topography**

Hoyden's Hill is a drumlin--a smooth, dome-shaped hill formed beneath moving glacial ice. The long axis of this elongated hill is oriented northwest to southeast, indicating the direction of ice movement some 10,000 to 20,000 years ago. The plateau of the hill is centered in the open space area and contains the highest elevation in Fairfield at about 443 feet above sea level. It's been written that the hill affords a view of Long Island Sound, but the view is now obstructed by the regeneration of forest vegetation.

Relatively flat topography with slopes of only 3-6% covers most of the open space area and makes the land suitable for a variety of purposes, including its historical farming uses. Steeper slopes, in the range of 15-20%, are found in the northern part of the area, including the trail to and from Beers Road. The open space area drains to the west through the Centennial Watershed State Forest and into the Hemlock Reservoir. The state forest land was purchased by the Department of Environmental Protection in 2002 from the Aquarion Water Company.

## **Vegetation and Wildlife**

Vegetation types include fallow farm fields, an abandoned orchard, hardwood hedgerows, old fields, and woodlands. The fields set amidst the woodland of Hoyden's Hill provide an important "edge" community and diversity of habitat for wildlife. The fields are separated by hedgerows approximately 10 to 30 feet wide and made up of a variety of trees such as sassafras, dogwood, red maple,

oak, ash, birch, and black locust. Shrubs such as barberry, honeysuckle and sumac, along with vines such as bittersweet and poison ivy provide a dense understory in the hedgerows.

Old field successional habitat is found west of the entrance driveway and north of the old barn. These are fields that have been colonized by red cedar, black cherry, and woody shrubs, and they will eventually revert to woodland if left unchecked.

North of the fields and the police shooting range, the open space area is densely wooded. The steeper hillside of the northwest corner of the open space area supports the most advanced forest growth, including large 24" to 30" diameter maples, tulip poplars, ash, oak, and hickory. Due to moist conditions created by runoff flowing down the slope, viburnum, blueberry, winterberry, sedge, ferns, and jack-in-the-pulpit grow on the hillside.

The fallow fields, hedgerows, and old fields interface with the woodland areas to create very productive wildlife habitat. The hedgerows separating the fields are attractive to birds, and the formerly cultivated fields are important to many wildlife species. The edges between the open and wooded areas are transitional zones (ecotones) between different habitat communities, and are especially valuable. Song birds, small mammals, fox, deer, raptors, upland game birds, and reptiles are commonly found in the open space area. The large unbroken expanses of forested land in and adjoining the area provide significant interior-forest bird habitat that elsewhere has been lost as a result of development.

## Trails

When you enter the open space area from the paved access road off Hoyden's Lane, you should follow the path to the right leading toward the barn. You can then walk into the interior of the open space through the abandoned orchard north of the barn. If you then follow the trail through the center of the open space area and down the forested northwest slope of Hoyden's Hill to Beers Road, you'll have walked about  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile.

The northern section of the old farm road that extends from Hoyden's Lane through the open space area to Beers Road provides the backbone for the hiking trail system. Portions of the farm road have been utilized as hiking trails, while some sections of the road have been allowed to develop into hedgerows adjacent to the trails. The remaining parallel stonewalls indicate the original route of the roadway across the farm fields

After crossing the police shooting range (walking north), the trail travels through woodland. At the northerly end, the trail regains the old roadbed bounded on two sides by stone walls and runs down-slope to Beers Road.

Mowed paths are maintained on either side of the fallow fields. A woodland trail that bypasses the shooting range is located along the eastern boundary; this trail travels north and connects with two cross trails leading west to the main trail that goes to Beers Road.

# Grace Richardson Conservation Area

## Location and Access

This open space area of about 87 acres in the Mill River watershed has always been called a “conservation area.” The designation reflects its rugged natural topography and the Conservation Commission’s priority management objective to preserve the area’s environmental features and values. The area is just south of the H. Smith Richardson Golf Course and it’s bounded on the west by Hoyden’s Lane, on the south by Congress Street, and on the east by Morehouse Highway. (See Map 5.) The Lake Mohegan Open Space area is a short distance to the southeast, across the Merritt Parkway.

Access to the conservation area is from the designated entrance at the corner of Congress Street and Morehouse Highway where several cars can park off the road in an unpaved area. Visitors then enter the area on the old farm road that once extended north through this property to Hoyden’s Hill.



*Entrance to the open space area at Congress Street.*

## History

The conservation area contains a prehistoric cultural resource site identified by the State of Connecticut as the “Congress Street Rockshelter” representing an encampment/shelter used by prehistoric Native Americans under a rock outcrop. It’s believed that occupation of this site in the southern part of the area occurred within the last 3,000 years but it’s also possible that use of the encampment dates back to over 8,000 years ago.

The more recent history of the conservation area is much the same as previously described with respect to the Hoyden’s Hill Open Space Area. Both areas were part of the 271-acre tract acquired by the Town of Fairfield from the H. Smith Richardson family in 1966. A farm road extended from the current entrance to the conservation area, through the center of the area and the land that’s now part of the H. Smith Richardson Golf Course and the Hoyden’s Hill Open Space Area, all the way to Beers Road.

Prior to Town acquisition, much of the land now within the boundaries of the conservation area was used for agricultural purposes, dating back to at least the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Because of its steepness, the land wasn’t suitable for cultivation as the land on Hoyden’s Hill is, but a good part of it was cleared for pasture use. A barn and farmhouse were located in the north-central part of the conservation area near what’s now known as the Farmstead Field. In addition, two dams were built on the watercourse east of the farmhouse and two small ponds (the “North” and “South” ponds) were created.



As on Hoyden's Hill, stonewalls indicating historical property divisions and past agricultural uses crisscross the conservation area and are notable landscape features. Several of these walls mark the boundaries of 17th century "Long Lots," although the actual walls were likely not constructed until the early 1800's.

In the early 1970's, the Town built the H. Smith Richardson Golf Course and formally set aside the area to the south of the golf course for conservation purposes and named this natural area the Grace Richardson Conservation Area.

Today, the main uses of the conservation area utilize the area's network of trails and include hiking, horseback riding, wildlife observation, and some cross-country skiing. Picnicking sometimes takes place on the higher ground east of the North Pond.



*Grace Richardson trail*

In 1992, the Conservation Commission prepared and adopted the *Hoyden's Hill Open Space Area and Grace Richardson Conservation Area Multiple Use Management Plan* which includes management provisions to guide the beneficial use and conservation of both areas. This

plan establishes the Commission's priority goal to preserve the natural features and ecological values of the conservation area.

## Topography

The area is characterized by steep slopes, rugged topography with a number of rock outcrops, and decreasing elevation from north to south. Elevations range from 346 feet above sea level along the northern boundary of the area to 110 feet in the southern part of the area near Congress Street. These topographic features are associated with the location of the area at the southern and down-slope end of the Hoyden's Hill drumlin.

Prominent features include two ravines, each of which contains a small, un-named watercourse that drains into Cricker Brook and eventually into the Mill River. The east ravine contains the area's two man-made ponds. The North Pond's about a quarter-acre; the South Pond's smaller. Their old stone dams have deteriorated, but are still functional.



*Stonewall and trail.*

The slopes flanking the ravines are quite steep, ranging from 15% to upwards of 50%, with exposed rock faces in several locations. Elevation changes down the drainage corridor channels in both ravines are relatively gradual and, as a result, narrow bands of wetlands have developed along the streambanks in the ravines.

The ravines are separated by an undulating ridge with steeply sloped areas, several rock outcrops, and areas of more moderate slopes. Steep slopes and exposed rock faces are also found in the southernmost part of the conservation area and are visible from Congress Street.



*Hillside trail.*

## **Vegetation and Wildlife**

Due to the conservation area's rugged topography, much of the area's once-cleared pasture land was abandoned many years ago. As a result, there's a relatively advanced stage of woodland succession. Many large tulip poplars, oak, maple, and birch trees are found throughout the area. Vegetation is mostly typical of an advanced northeastern hardwood forest, but many other plant communities are also represented.

The east and west ravines, the wooded ridgetops and hillsides between the ravines, and the meadows in the north-central part of the conservation area all have different vegetation characteristics. In addition, the conservation area also has some riparian/wetland habitat.

One of the largest eastern hop hornbeam trees (*Ostrya virginiana*) in Connecticut is found near the old springhouse in the east ravine.

Grasses, perennial flowers, red cedars, dogwoods and apple trees are prominent in the several meadows, including the Bluebird Meadow, and represent early stages of secondary succession.

This diversity of vegetation provides significant wildlife habitat values. Many species of mammals, reptiles, amphibians, and birds are found in the conservation area, including deer, raccoon, skunk, fox, opossum, squirrel, chipmunk, songbirds, mice, groundhog, raptors, and upland game birds such as grouse, pheasant and wild turkey. Since there's a large, unbroken expanse of forested land, the interior-forest bird habitat is very significant.



*North Pond.*

## Trails

The conservation area's trails provide opportunities for hiking, horseback riding, and cross-country skiing as well as opportunities for viewing the area's diverse topography and environmental features. Because of the steep topography and the narrow and sometimes rocky trail conditions, cross-country skiing is more difficult in the conservation area than on the adjacent golf course. Also, although the trails are sometimes used for horseback riding, there's only limited space for parking at the main entrance to the conservation area so it's difficult to park a horse trailer.

The trails generally follow the contours of the land, paralleling the ridges and ravines. The old farm road that once led to the farmhouse and barn in the north-central part of the conservation area now serves as the main access trail. The North Pond is reached after walking about 1,000 feet along the main trail from its beginning near the intersection of Congress Street and Morehouse Highway.

From the pond there are several trail choices. Continuing along the old farm road leads you to the Farmstead Field where the farmhouse and barn once stood. Walking east just before the pond, the trail leads to a small open area on higher ground and then to a trail that follows the eastern drainage corridor to the north and eventually loops around to the other side of the ravine. To the west of the pond is the entry to a more extensive and complicated trail system that covers the southern and western parts of the conservation area.

Trail surfaces are highly variable and include bare mineral soil, wet or moist soil, loose gravelly surfaces, ledge outcrops, and grassy areas. The degree of difficulty depends on topographic conditions, and some areas are quite steep.

The yellow trail (about 1.8 miles long) generally follows the perimeter of the conservation area and the red trail (about a ½-mile long) makes a shorter inner circle. Please stay on the marked trails to help preserve the forest and meadow habitats for the enjoyment of other hikers.



*Interior stonewall.*

# Lake Mohegan Open Space Area

## Location and Access

The open space area is just south of the Merritt Parkway and east of Morehouse Highway in the northeast part of town. (See Map 6.) The area isn't very far from the Grace Richardson Conservation Area which is across the parkway to the northwest. The entire open space area, which encompasses about 170 acres, is in the Mill River watershed. The river flows through the northern part of the area and into Lake Mohegan and then exits the lake through a spillway and continues south. The open space area is bounded by residential areas on the west, south and east. To the northeast is the headquarters of the General Electric Company.



*Lake Mohegan Open Space Area.*



A large parking area at the south end of the open space area, near the intersection of Morehouse Highway and Tahmore Drive, provides plenty of parking for visitors, including visitors to the Lake Mohegan swimming beach. Access to the swimming beach requires a Town permit but access to the open space area and the parking area is not restricted. You can also drive into the open space area by going north on Morehouse Highway and following the Cascades area access road. Parking is permitted in the lower area of the access road but it's limited.



*Main parking area for open space and beach users.*

Also, there are several pedestrian-only points of access: from Morehouse Highway; from Morehouse Drive near the Merritt Parkway; and on Eastfield Circle (for neighborhood use). There's no designated parking at any of these locations.

## **History**

When Fairfield was settled in the 1600's, the area now comprising the open space area was covered with a forest of hemlock and northern hardwoods. Then, as the Town developed and until the early 1900's, the forest was cleared and farming was the principal land-use in this part of Town. Open fields covered the area



where Lake Mohegan would later be created. In addition, during the 1800's this area near the Mill River was famous for producing spring water bottled by the Mohican Spring Bottling Company and sold as "the most delightful of all table waters" throughout the country. There were guest houses and hotels in the vicinity of the present-day open space area for visitors seeking the health effects of the spring water.



*Entrance for Cascades parking area.*

During the early and mid-1900's, gravel was excavated from the area immediately east of the Mill River and much of it was used in the construction of the Merritt Parkway. This excavation is responsible for creating the 17-acre Lake Mohegan and the smaller North Pond that are now within the open space area.

The open space area was established by the Town through acquisition of five separate parcels of land from 1967 through 1985, using a combination of Town funds, state grants, and donations from the General Electric Company. Natural features damaged by the previous gravel mining operations have been gradually restored by the Town since that time.

Due to its location, size, and natural diversity, the open space area today provides a variety of recreational opportunities that include walking and hiking, picnicking, fishing, and nature observation. Fishing is only permitted from the shoreline but is a major activity as the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection annually stocks Lake Mohegan and the Mill River with trout.



*Fishing at the north end of the lake.*

In addition, the beach and swimming area is the only supervised freshwater swimming area in the Town and is heavily used during the summer. The beach and swimming area is managed by the Parks and Recreation Commission. The rest of the open space area is the responsibility of the Conservation Commission.

Although the greatest amount of activity in the open space area occurs during the summer months, the area is actively used year-around and is one of the most popular of the Town's open space properties.

In 1990, the Conservation Commission adopted its *Lake Mohegan Open Space Area Multiple Use Management Plan* which guides the beneficial use and conservation of the area.

## Topography

Within the open space area, the Mill River and Lake Mohegan occupy much of the valley floor of the Mill River valley. The land rises quickly on both sides of the river and lake. As a result, the floodplain covers only a narrow strip alongside the river and lake and a good part of the open space area has slopes that exceed 15 or 20 percent.

The highest point in the area is about 270 feet above sea level on the eastern side of the valley. On the western side, the highest point is about 220 feet. The lowest point is the outlet of Lake Mohegan at about 80 feet above sea level.



*Mill River Cascades.*

Outcroppings of bedrock in the Mill River channel constrict the river about 1,200 feet upstream of Lake Mohegan, creating a short section of rapids where water cascades down a series of rock ledges. Known as the Cascades, this is a unique feature of the open space area and one of its major attractions.

## **Vegetation and Wildlife**

The diversity of vegetation types found in the open space area provides a variety of wildlife habitats including: forest, open fields, wooded swamp, and shrub/scrub complexes. Wildlife habitat also includes and is enhanced by the area's aquatic resources including Lake Mohegan and the Mill River.

Much of the area is covered by forest. Several stages of succession are present, ranging from early to mid-successional stands of young black birch to terminal communities dominated by beech, hickory, oak, and hemlock. Other forest species include sycamore, tulip, poplar, ash, and red maple. The understory includes viburnum, spicebush, and many flowering dogwoods.

The slopes east of Lake Mohegan were severely disturbed by the past gravel mining and left with little or no soil cover. These areas have slowly revegetated and are now covered with a mixture of grasses, wildflowers, and herbaceous plants. The open fields are now maintained through annual mowing by the Conservation Department.

Wildlife in the open space area includes mammals such as deer, rabbits, squirrels, chipmunks, fox, mice, and muskrats; a variety of birds such as ducks, egrets, herons, hawks, owls, woodpeckers and songbirds; and various amphibians and reptiles. Rare sightings of the Pileated Woodpecker and Bald Eagle have been reported. Many fish species have been identified, including large- and small-mouth bass, trout, bluegill sunfish, com-

mon sunfish, yellow perch, chain pickerel, brown bullhead, white sucker, and American eel.

## **Trails**

An extensive trail system is established throughout the open space area, providing the opportunity for short walks and longer hikes over varied terrain.

The yellow and red trails are the two primary routes. The yellow trail is about 2½ miles long around the perimeter of the area and traverses the steep hillside east of the lake. The trail later crosses the river north of the Cascades on a footbridge called the Mill River Bridge. You can start on the yellow trail from the south side of the main parking area.

The red trail is shorter than the yellow trail and measures about 1.6 miles in length. It's also flatter and more closely follows the edges of Lake Mohegan and the Mill River, providing access to the Cascades. Several secondary trails are also found in the area. Please stick to the marked trails to help preserve and enhance the forest and meadow habitats.

You may bring your dog but remember that all dogs must be on a leash from the main parking area until you reach the "100-foot" sign posted on the trail, at which time you may release your dog to run freely but under voice control at all times. Also remember to clean up after your dog.

# Mountain Laurel Open Space Area

## Location and Access

This open space area in the Mill River watershed is in the central part of Fairfield. It includes about 24 mostly forested acres south of the Merritt Parkway, just west of the Samp Mortar Rock Open Space Area and not too far from the Lake Mohegan Open Space Area. The river and Black Rock Turnpike are a short distance to the east. The area is surrounded by residential neighborhoods and its southern boundary adjoins Mountain Laurel Road. (See Map 7.)

The main entrance to the area is from Mountain Laurel Road where there's space for a few cars to park carefully along the north side of the road.

Another point of access is from the Town right-of-way at the end of Holly Dale Road. There's currently no parking here and this access is used by neighborhood residents.



*Entrance to the open space area.*

## **History**

This property was acquired by the Town in 1966 and dedicated for conservation purposes. It's now managed by the Conservation Commission to protect its forest habitat and other natural values and to provide opportunities for walking and hiking and passive enjoyment of the natural environment.

## **Topography**

The open space area is essentially a big ravine. An un-named stream flows almost directly south through the center of the area, eventually draining into the Mill River. The land rises steeply on either side of the stream and there are several high, rocky overlooks affording scenic views of the forested landscape. The area's highest elevations are between 200 and 250 feet above sea level on the western hillside

## **Vegetation and Wildlife**

The area is almost entirely forested with mature hardwood species including oaks, maples, and tulip trees with some birch trees mixed in too. The under-story is made up of mostly spicebush and dogwood along with some dense thickets of the open space area's characteristic mountain laurel. The forest floor is composed of brier, raspberry, viburnum, and various herbaceous plants. There's a small meadow near Mountain Laurel Road at the entrance to the open space area.

Buttercup, partridge berry, smartweed, pokeweed, bittersweet, and spotted touch-me-not are among the wildflowers that you will see in the area.

The mountain laurel thickets provide winter cover for deer, turkeys, and song birds. Other mammals that frequent the area include squirrels, rabbits, chipmunks, opossum, raccoon, and skunk. Some of the birds you're likely to see include grouse, cardinals, oven birds, mocking birds, sparrows, and woodpeckers.

## **Trails**

When you walk into the open space area, you can turn right or left to follow the "yellow" loop trail. Either way, you'll soon be walking up onto the higher ground of the slopes that are found on both sides of the stream course. You can do a full loop of about 8/10 of a mile that will involve climbing and traversing some fairly steep slopes.

You can also walk directly north on the "red" trail that follows the floor of the ravine, alongside the stream course, for a distance that's less than 1/4-mile. Then you can turn around and walk back on the same trail or follow the yellow trail back. There's also a shorter "blue" trail near the property's eastern boundary and the entrance to the area from Holly Dale Road.

Use care when walking in this open space area because the trails are steep, their surfaces are generally rocky, and they're often slippery.

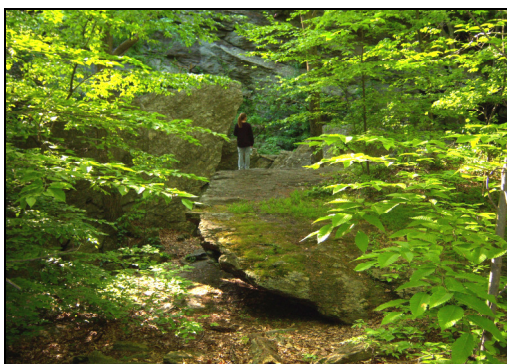


# Samp Mortar Rock Open Space Area

## Location and Access

This area is also called the Samp Mortar Rock Historical Site because of its unique history involving Native Americans and the Town's Colonial-era inhabitants. There are many interesting legends associated with the huge rock formations in the center of the open space area. In one flat rock you can see the round depression in the form of a mortar in which Native Americans would grind corn ("samp").

This seven-acre open space area in the Mill River watershed is just west of Samp Mortar Lake, which has its own interesting history. A short distance to the east you'll find the Mountain Laurel Open Space Area. The Samp Mortar area is bounded by Springer Road on the east and by residential properties on Rock Ridge Road, Holly Dale Road, and Oriole Lane on the other sides. (See Map 8.)



*Rocks and forest in the open space area.*

The only point of access to the area at the present time is from Springer Road where there's space for a few cars to park carefully along the side of the road.

## History

Written accounts of the Town's history describe the area as a sacred place for Native Americans who found shelter in the rocks, ground corn in the "samp mortar," and took sustenance from the abundant wildlife all around. In addition, the rocks figure prominently in legends involving the Town's early settlers and the Indian tribes, including a troubled romance that some have connected to the 1637 "Great Swamp Fight" with the Pequot Tribe in Southport. The Town would purchase much of the land that's within the current boundaries of Fairfield, including the samp mortar rock area, from the tribes in the mid-to-late 1600's.

By the 1900's, the samp mortar rock area had become a popular picnic spot for people arriving in horse-drawn carriages from as far away as New York City. In 1901, a dam was built nearby on the Mill River to create the Samp Mortar Reservoir to supply drinking water to sections of the Town. (The reservoir is no longer used for that purpose.)

Later in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Samp Mortar Rock area was privately owned and operated as a natural park and recreation area for the youth of Fairfield County. The area would be acquired by the Town in 1966 for the purpose of preserving its natural resources and historic values and providing opportunities for hiking and picnicking.

## **Topography**

The topography is steep and rugged. The most prominent landscape features are the huge glacially deposited boulders and the 30-foot high rock cliff face in the interior of the open space area. The high point, about 150 feet above sea level, provides a scenic vista of the surrounding forest

## **Vegetation and Wildlife**

The property is heavily wooded. Vegetation is mostly typical of an advanced northeastern hardwood forest, but other plant communities are also represented. There is, for example, a substantial understory of Mountain Laurel.

Many species of mammals and birds are found in the open space area, including deer, raccoon, skunk, fox, opossum, squirrel, chipmunk, mice, songbirds, and raptors.

## **Trails**

There are two maintained trails. The length of the “yellow” trail loop leading from the designated entrance at Springer Road to the historic rock formation and back is a little short of ½-mile. The “red” trail loops to the southeast promontory overlooking Samp Mortar Lake. Both trails have steep and rocky surfaces.

# Springer Glen Open Space Area

## Location and Access

This open space area of about 38 acres adjoins the east bank of the Mill River, just upstream of Mill Plain Road in the central part of the Town. Residential neighborhoods surround most of the area. Stillson Road runs along the area's southern boundary. (See Map 9.) The dam and outlet of the Samp Mortar Reservoir on the Mill River are about 2,000 feet upstream of the open space area.

There are four points of access onto the open space area. The Mill Plain Road and Pheasant Lane entrances are generally for neighborhood use due to the lack of parking. The two entry points on Stillson Road are more suitable for other open space visitors because there are a few parking spaces on the Old Ford roadway off Stillson Road, below the sharp curve. Please don't block the private driveway.



*Stillson Road entrance.*

## **History**

The Town established the open space area by acquiring several parcels of land between 1972 and 1978. The area is now dedicated for conservation purposes and provides the opportunity for walking, hiking, and enjoyment of the natural environment in the Mill River watershed. The area is not managed to provide recreational access to the river.

## **Topography**

A significant part of the open space area is within the river's 100-year floodplain and therefore level and often wet. The river here is relatively shallow and narrow. The land rises to the east and south from the floodplain and the highest point is about 120 feet above sea level in the southeast corner of the open space area. The topography is such that stormwater runoff generally flows in a northwesterly direction toward the river. During rainy weather, groundwater seeps are common along the slopes.

## **Vegetation and Wildlife**

The open space area contains dense, second-growth forest, wetlands, a wooded swamp, and a few open fields dominated by grasses and wildflowers. The forest includes mixed hardwoods such as tulip poplar, black birch, white ash, scarlet oak, sugar maple, red maple, black cherry, and red cedar.

The understory varies. There are thickets of greenbrier, grapes, spicebush, honeysuckle, and poison ivy, and other areas where the forest canopy is so dense

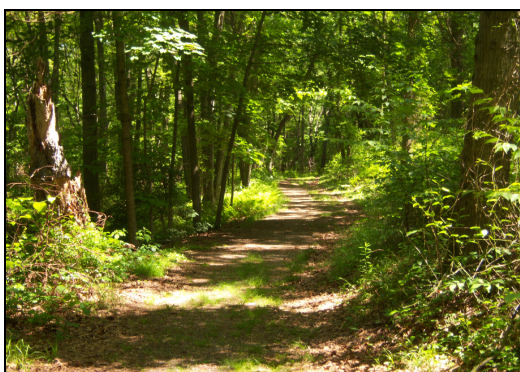
there's no understory vegetation. The Conservation Department has improved wildlife habitat by selectively felling some of the mature maples so sunlight can reach the forest floor.

Some of the wildflowers you may see are buttercup, goldenrod, Queen Ann's Lace, partridgeberry, milkweed, and bittersweet.

You may also see a variety of wildlife. The open space area provides habitat for song birds, wading birds, waterfowl, birds of prey; pheasants, wild turkeys, white-tailed deer, and many small mammals, amphibians, and reptiles

## Trails

If you enter the open space area from Stillson Road and loop around the area on the yellow trail and then return to Stillson Road via the Old Ford roadway, you'll have walked about  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile. There are several short trails that cut across the open space area and follow mostly level terrain. These will lead you through some different habitat types including upland woodland, floodplain woodland, meadow and glen, and red maple swamp.



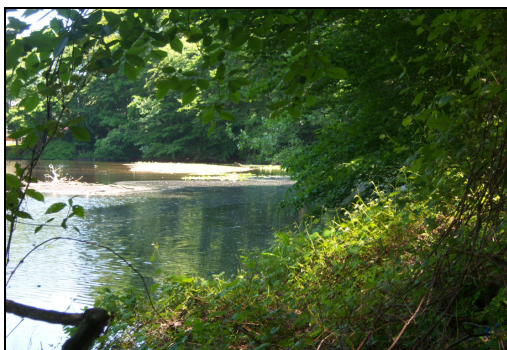
*Roadway trail near Stillson Road.*

# Flower House Drive & Duck Farm Open Space Area

## Location and Access

This is a relatively small open space area of about five acres on the east bank of the Mill River. The northern part of the area lies between Flower House Drive and the River. The southern portion of the area extends approximately 700 feet to the boundary along Duck Farm Road and this explains the area's name (see Map 10). Just to the south, across Duck Farm Road, is the Riverfield Open Space Area.

You can walk into the area from two locations on Flower House Drive and there is space for a few cars to park along the curb of the cul-de-sac at the end of the road. The other point of access is from Duck Farm Road where there's some space to park carefully along the side of the road.



*The open space area adjoins the Mill River.*

## History

The Town acquired two separate parcels to establish the open space area. The

Flower House Drive parcel was acquired in 1968 and the Duck Farm Road property was acquired in 2007. In the early 1900's, sand and gravel were mined from the nearby stretch of the Mill River and that's why the river is relatively wide here. Today, the open space area is managed by the Conservation Commission as part of the "greenbelt" of Town lands along the Mill River and a walking trail is provided over the length of the property.

## **Topography**

The Flower House Drive portion of the open space area includes a small ridge with steep slopes down to the river. The rest of the area, south to Duck Farm Road, is in the Mill River floodplain and is generally flat with mounds of earth associated with past gravel operations and is often wet.

## **Vegetation and Wildlife**

The area has both hardwood forest and wetland vegetation. Much of the area near Flower House Drive contains a thick growth of trees and shrubs, including mature black birch, oak, beech, and red maple. A variety of vegetation in the understory provides good habitat for many birds, small mammals, and amphibians.

## **Trail**

There's one trail and it extends from the northerly entrance off Flower House Drive to Duck Farm Road. About 1,200 feet long, the trail has an uneven surface and it doesn't provide access to the river. Trail improvements are now being planned by the Conservation Department.



# Riverfield Open Space Area

## Location and Access

The 20-acre Riverfield Open Space Area is on the east bank of the Mill River, just south of Duck Farm Road. (See Map 11.) The Mill River is the western boundary of the open space area and the eastern side is bounded by Riverfield School and the Hunter Road neighborhood. To the south is the Lakeside Drive residential area. The Flower House Drive and Duck Farm Open Space Area is to the north, on the opposite side of Duck Farm Road.

You can walk into the open space area from Duck Farm Road where there is space for a few cars to be parked carefully alongside the road. You can also enter the area from the school grounds.



*Woods and meadow habitats.*

## History

In 1958, the Town bought land on the east side of the Mill River to build an elementary school. Not all of this land was suitable for school construction so about 20 acres were dedicated for open space pur-

poses. The open space area is now managed by the Conservation Commission as part of the “Mill River Greenbelt.”

## **Topography**

The ground is low and flat, as you would expect, since the entire open space area is in the Mill River’s 100-year floodplain.

## **Vegetation and Wildlife**

The open space area contains examples of almost every stage of natural succession, from pioneer species to mature trees, making the area extremely valuable wildlife habitat for a variety of small mammals, amphibians, reptiles, and birds. The river flowing alongside the area adds to the habitat value of the open space area.

There are several clearly defined natural communities, including a red maple swamp near the path that runs from Duck Farm Road to the school; a wet meadow that extends from that path southwest to the Mill River; a field covered with dense shrub growth north of the boggy meadow; and to the south there are about six acres covered by pioneer or early successional vegetation that colonized the area after human disturbance of the land.

## **Trails**

Access to much of the area is limited by the swampy floodplain but there are two trails. One is a paved path about 1,000 feet long that runs south from Duck Farm Road to the school. The other provides a short loop on the higher ground in the southern part of the open space area.

# Perry's Mill Ponds Open Space Area

## Location

The 58-acre Perry's Mill Pond Open Space Area straddles the Mill River in the geographical center of Fairfield. The open space area is surrounded by residential neighborhoods. Bronson and Sturges Roads are to the west of the area (see Map 12); Mill Plain Road is a short distance to the east. Included in the area are remnants of the old Perry's Mill dam which is about 1,200 feet upstream from the Sturges Road bridge over the Mill River and a little over two miles upstream from the mouth of the river at Long Island Sound. The old dam site marks the northern extent of tidal influence on the river.

The main point of access is off Sturges Road where there's a small off-street parking area. Access points to the eastern part of the area are on Pell Meadow Drive and Perry Street where there's space for a few cars to park carefully along the side of the road. Currently, there is no dry access across the river within the open space area.



*Main entrance from Sturges Road.*

## History

Prior to settlement of the Town, the Mill River meandered peacefully through this area. There were floodplain swamps and a bog to the east, with sand and gravel bluffs to the west. The present-day ponds did not exist.

After the Town was settled, the area underwent extensive clearing for its conversion to farmland. The first major change to the Mill River occurred in the 1600's when a dam (the Perry's Mill dam) was built just south of the present Sturges Road entrance to the open space area. The dam harnessed water power to operate a grist mill. River crossings, or fords, were established upstream and downstream of the dam. Although the dam site is partly within the open space area, the mill building is outside of the area and privately owned.

Beginning in the late 1920's and continuing into the 1960's, gravel was mined from the river channel and adjoining wetlands (some of it was used to build the Connecticut Turnpike). This diverted the river from its natural channel, created several ponds, and left behind stockpiles of sand, gravel, and topsoil.

In the period 1968 to 1974, the Town acquired a number of land parcels for the purpose of establishing the open space area and subsequently dedicated the land for recreational and conservation purposes. Today, the area is used for recreational activities such as hiking, fishing, boating, nature observation, skating, and picnicking. Except during periods of low flow in the river, a canoe launched at the

Upper Pond in the open space area can be paddled almost without interruption all the way downstream to the Tide Mill Dam at Southport Harbor.

Since 1968, the open space area has also been the location for the outdoor segments of the River-Lab; an environmental education program for Fairfield school children. The volunteers who conduct this program are organized and trained by the Mill River Wetland Committee. In 1987, the Conservation Commission prepared the “Multiple Use Management Plan for Perry’s Mill Pond Open Space, Draft Concept Plan.” Provisions for beneficial use and conservation of the area are also included in the Commission’s 1997 *Multiple Use Management Plan for Coastal Open Space*.



*Fishing in the Lower Pond.*

## **Topography**

Most of the open space area is within the 100-year floodplain of the Mill River and exposed to significant flooding during severe storms and high tides. The area’s most significant landscape features are the two ponds (Upper and Lower ponds) with unnaturally steep banks created by the past mining operations and an eight-acre

freshwater bog in the eastern part of the open space area. The bog is also referred to as Pickerel Pond and is accessed from Perry Street. The high point in the open space area is about 35 feet above sea level on a knoll northwest of the bog.

The many topographical changes that occurred as a result of the past gravel mining operations are still evident in the open space area. Those changes have affected water flow, vegetation, wildlife habitat, recreational opportunities, and the visual character of the area. Mounds and berms of excavated material are still scattered throughout the area, some rising to 10 or 15 feet above the surrounding grade.

## **Vegetation and Wildlife**

Although this reach of the Mill River has been significantly altered by human activities, the open space area contains a variety of vegetative communities. These habitats collectively make up one of the most diverse ecosystems in Fairfield. Included are floodplain, bog, marsh, and upland forest communities and several types of open water aquatic habitats.

The river channel through the open space area is lined with dense to moderately dense woody vegetation typical of floodplain environments. Red maple communities cover a good part of the floodplain. Upland forest is found in the drier sections and includes black birch, beech, and oak trees.

The bog is the only known habitat of this type in Fairfield and it has unique botanical assemblages and wildlife populations. It's supplied with water not by the Mill

River, but by two streams to the east. Peat deposits under the south end of the bog measure almost 40 feet in depth; 15 to 25 feet of peat underlie much of the rest of the bog. Woody vegetation covers a good part of the transition area around the edge of the bog pond and includes sumac, buttonbush, dogwood shrubs, multiflora rose and raspberry.

Wildlife abounds in this open space area. Inventories conducted by the Conservation Department have identified as many as 48 species of birds and numerous species of mammals, amphibians, reptiles, and aquatic insects. The area provides habitat for animals living in the vicinity as well as those passing through during migration periods. In addition, a number of different fish species can be found in season throughout this reach of the river. Schools of the anadromous alewife concentrate here during spawning runs upstream to the Samp Mortar dam. In 2005, a fish ladder was built to ease the movement of herring and alewives between the Mill River and the Bog Pond.

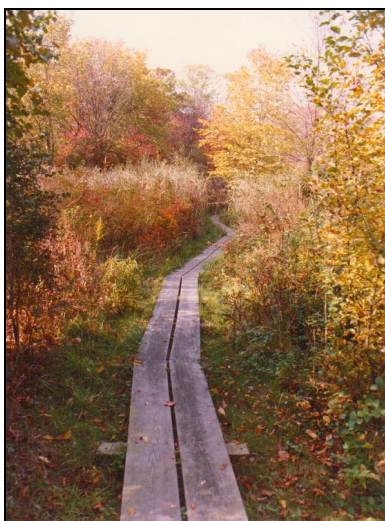
## **Trails**

There are three independent trails in the open space area, separated by the Mill River and private property. The “yellow” trail starts at the main entrance on Sturges Road and goes north, following the west side of the Mill River and the upper and lower ponds for almost  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile. The shorter, northern “orange” trail is entered from Pell Meadow Drive. The third, “blue” trail, is reached from Perry Street and provides a loop between the Lower Pond and Pickerel Pond that’s a little less than a  $\frac{1}{2}$ -mile long.

# Mill Hollow Park and Open Space Area

## Location and Access

The Mill Hollow Park and Open Space Area consists of about nine acres on the east side of the Mill River, just downstream of the Sturges Road Bridge. The area is bounded on the west by the Mill River and on its other sides by Sturges Road and Unquowa Road. (See Map 13.) This is Fairfield's southern-most tract of riverside open space and it's within the tidally influenced zone of the river. Looking downstream from the south end of the park and open space area you can see the Connecticut Turnpike Bridge over the Mill River. Also, just south of the area at Unquowa Road is a Town historic site known as the Colonial River Ford.



*Open space boardwalk.*



There are two points of access to the park and open space area. One is near the Sturges Road Bridge and the other is from Unquowa Road at the south end of the area. There's no parking along Sturges or Unquowa roads but you can park across the Mill River off Mill Hill Terrace and then walk across the Sturges Road Bridge to the park and open space area.

## History

In Colonial times, the Mill River Ford just south of the present-day park and open space area was an important crossing on the Post Road from Boston to New York City. It's written that George Washington crossed the Mill River at this point.

Much later, this area was the site of a dog biscuit factory. The Town acquired the land in 1960 and the deed specifies that it is forever to be used for public purposes.

In 1966, a ground-clearing operation removed many of the trees and lesser vegetation from the east side of the river and lowered the height of the river bank in an effort to dissipate flood waters. Private groups and the Town then sought assistance from the U.S. Soil Conservation Service to prepare a management plan for the area that included revegetation and construction of a trail system.

Today, the park and open space area is managed by the Conservation Commission in coordination with the Fairfield Parks and Recreation Department as part of the "greenbelt" of Town lands along the Mill River.

The park and open space area is enjoyed by nearby residents and other visitors. During the months of March, April, and May, the trail system is used by many Fairfield elementary school students who participate in the River Lab environmental education program sponsored by the Mill River Wetland Committee.

In 1997, the Conservation Commission prepared and adopted its *Multiple Use Management Plan for Coastal Open Space* which includes management provisions to guide the beneficial use and conservation of the park and open space area which, for the purpose of that plan, is considered part of the Perry's Mill Ponds Open Space Area.

## **Topography**

There is little topographic variation in the park and open space as most of the area is within the Mill River's 100-year floodplain. During exceptionally high tides, much of the area, as well as the parking lot west of the river, is inundated.

## **Vegetation and Wildlife**

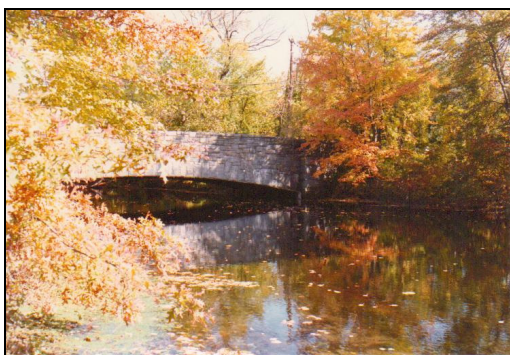
The park and open space area now has a variety of vegetation and wildlife habitat types, including red maple swamp, cattail marsh and *Phragmites* marsh. A small pond was dredged in the early 1970's to enhance wildlife habitat. There are early-to late-successional forest species, a small meadow north of the pond, and mowed grass areas along Sturges Road and the slope adjacent to Unquowa Road.

Within the area you'll find deer, squirrels, other small mammals, and birds. On the river, you can see ducks, geese and swans, and fishing is allowed along the shoreline.

## Trails

The trail system in the park and open space area was originally planned and established with assistance from the U.S. Soil Conservation Service in the 1960's. If you enter the area from either the north or south, you'll find a loop trail around the interior pond. The east and west sides of the pond are wet, so a boardwalk was installed along sections of the trail. The total length of boardwalk is about 1,000 feet.

The trail system allows visitors to walk through the park and open space area from the Sturges Road Bridge on the north to the Colonial Ford on the south, a distance of about 2,400 feet. Several short paths lead to the edge of the Mill River and are used by fishermen and those who wish to observe birds on the river.



*Sturges Road Bridge located upstream.*

# Brett Woods Conservation Area

## Location and Access

The 186-acre Brett Woods Conservation Area is the largest open space property and the only Town-owned open space area in the northwest part of Town. About 2/3 of the area is in the Sasco Brook watershed; the northern third drains to the Aspetuck River. Brett Woods has always been called a “conservation area” because of its nearly unbroken forest cover which makes it unique among Town open spaces in terms of the wildlife habitat it provides.

This part of Town is zoned for two-acre residential lots and the conservation area is surrounded by single-family homes. To the west is Gilbert Highway and the Westport-Easton Turnpike (CT Route 136); to the north is the Fairfield/Easton town boundary; to the east is Redding Road; and to the south is Catamount Road. (See Map 14.)



*North Street west entrance.*

From the west, the main points of access to Brett Woods are off of Gilbert Highway at North Street west and Treasure Road. The principal access from the east is off of Redding Road at North Street east. North Street once passed through the open space but now stops at the area's east and west boundaries. There's room for a few cars to park at each of the main access points. These points are also used by horseback riders, most of whom live near the conservation area. Due to the parking limitations, only a few horseback riders bring their horses to Brett Woods by trailer, but some trailers can be parked on the cul-de-sac at the North Street east access point.

In addition, visitors can walk into the conservation area from Judges Hollow Road, Fogg Wood Road, and the intersection of Mulberry Hill Road and Fallow Field Road. Parking is not recommended at these locations which are used primarily by neighborhood residents.

## **History**

Much of Fairfield's interior lands, including Brett Woods, was once considered commons belonging to all of the original settlers of the Town. Many thousands of acres of common land were divided and conveyed by the Town government to Fairfield residents between 1662 and 1671. The greatest amount of land was conveyed in 1671 in the form of "long lots." In northern Fairfield, the long lots were not immediately settled and the stonewalls used to mark their boundaries were not constructed until the early 1800's. Today, three existing sections of long lot stonewalls form portions of the

conservation area's boundaries and one long lot wall is in the interior of the area.

A number of other stonewalls in Brett Woods indicate more recent land divisions and past agricultural uses. The walls reveal much about the settlement and early history of the Town and the constraints of ledge and swamp on historical land use.

Unlike other parts of Town, there have been few significant land-use changes in Brett Woods since the long lot stonewalls were built. Creation of the conservation area began in 1941 when the Town received a gift of land from the heirs of George P. Brett. Thirty years later, the Town began to acquire other parcels utilizing funds provided by the Connecticut Open Space Land Acquisition Assistance Program. The end result was establishment of the conservation area (formally dedicated in 1986) and preservation of the area's unique environmental setting and natural forest values.

Today, Brett Woods supports a number of recreational uses including hiking, horse-back riding, camping in a designated area with a permit from the Conservation Department, fishing, and wildlife observation. In addition, Brett Woods provides significant opportunities for educational use. The relatively undisturbed environment provides an outdoor classroom for the study of vegetation and wildlife as well as the land's natural features.

In 1992, the Conservation Commission prepared and adopted the *Brett Woods Conservation Area Multiple Use Management Plan* which includes manage-

ment provisions to guide the beneficial use and conservation of the area.

## Topography

The topography of Brett Woods is characterized by a southwest to northeast-oriented ridge and valley system of glacial origins. There are two significant ridges: the East Ridge and the West Ridge. They have generally moderate side slopes but there are also numerous ledge outcrops and rock faces throughout the conservation area.



*Designated camping area.*

Significant drainage corridors are found in the long, narrow, and flat-bottomed valleys between the ridges. Elevation changes within the valleys are gradual and extensive wetlands have developed on the valley floors.

Elevations in the conservation area range from a high of about 345 feet above sea level to a low of 184 feet. The highest elevations are on the western ridge; the lowest are in the northern part of the area near Route 136.

South of the two ridges, and occupying much of the southernmost part of Brett Woods, is a large wooded wetland known

as the Catamount Swamp. The eastern and western wetland corridors flow south into the swamp.

Another significant landscape feature is the Brett Woods Pond which is north of the power line right-of-way that cuts through the center of Brett Woods in an east-west direction. The pond is located to the northwest of the watershed divide and flows in a northerly direction into the Aspetuck River.

## **Vegetation and Wildlife**

The name Brett Woods is very descriptive since practically the entire area, except for the pond and the power line right-of-way, is forested. A good part of the forest consists of upland deciduous vegetation, including oak and beech forest communities. Hemlocks and red cedars are scattered throughout the area and mixed coniferous species have been planted on the east and west sides of the pond. There are also dense thickets of mountain laurel, maturing beech stands, and black birch saplings.

In addition, there's significant wetland vegetation associated with the wooded and shrub swamps, wet meadows, wetland fringes, and ponded mudflats.

Wildlife is abundant on the open space area and includes many species of birds, mammals, reptiles and amphibians. Among the small mammals found in the area are the red fox, raccoon, red squirrel and eastern cottontail. White-tailed deer are common and there are also several species of turtles, snakes, frogs and sala-



manders, along with wading birds, song birds, raptors, turkeys and other birds.

The deciduous forest that covers much of Brett Woods contains nut-producing trees that are very beneficial to wildlife. In addition, the large shrub swamps provide significant food, cover, and nesting habitat for songbirds and waterfowl. There have been repeated sightings of the pileated woodpecker in the vicinity of the Catamount Swamp.

The most significant wildlife habitat resource in Brett Woods is the large, unbroken expanse of forest that's especially valuable for interior forest bird species that require a certain amount of forest land to support their breeding populations.

## **Trails**

There's an extensive trail network throughout Brett Woods. Many of the trails follow the contours of the land, roughly paralleling the ridge and valley system. In some instances, however, the trails cross directly over the ridge line as does the trail that follows the old North Street roadbed. Surface conditions on the trails include bare mineral soil, wet or moist soil, loose gravelly surfaces, ledge outcrops, and grassy areas. The trails vary in length, condition, and degree of difficulty so take care when hiking.

The yellow perimeter trail is almost two miles long. The red trail cuts diagonally across the property and is about 1¼ miles long. The blue trail is shorter at about a ½-mile and passes through the camping area. No sanitary facilities or drinking water are provided at the camping area.

You must obtain a permit from the Conservation Department (203 256-3071) to camp, and everything you bring in must be carried out with you.



*Cross country ski trail.*

# **Appendix A: Open Space Maps**



Town of Fairfield  
Conservation Commission

June 2009

# **List of Maps**

- Map 1: Town of Fairfield Open Space Areas
- Map 2: Penfield Mills Open Space Area
- Map 3: Pine Creek Open Space Areas
- Map 4: Hoyden's Hill Open Space Area
- Map 5: Grace Richardson Conservation Area
- Map 6: Lake Mohegan Open Space Area
- Map 7: Mountain Laurel Open Space Area
- Map 8: Samp Mortar Rock Open Space Area
- Map 9: Springer Glen Open Space Area
- Map 10: Flower House Drive and Duck Farm Open Space Area
- Map 11: Riverfield Open Space Area
- Map 12: Perry's Mill Ponds Open Space Area
- Map 13: Mill Hollow Park and Open Space Area
- Map 14: Brett Woods Conservation Area

## **Note:**

The open space maps in this Appendix have been prepared as carefully as possible. The Conservation Commission and the Town of Fairfield, however, make no guarantees as to the completeness or accuracy of the information included. Please be advised that the Conservation Commission and the Town of Fairfield are not responsible for any injuries or liabilities arising from the use of the maps and the areas described thereon. Use of this information is at the sole risk of the user.

# **Appendix B:**

## **Town of Fairfield**

### **Open Space Properties**

### **Rules and Regulations**

The following sections are excerpted from “Rules and Regulations, Fairfield beaches, waterways, channels, marinas, parks, and open space areas owned and operated by the Town of Fairfield, Fairfield, CT.”

**Section 2** (a) The operation of a motorized vehicle is prohibited on any beach, park, or open space area except in those areas designated for such purpose by the Park Commission or Conservation Commission, as appropriate, and excepting official vehicles engaged in maintenance or emergency activities.

(b) No person shall park or store any motorized vehicle, bicycle, boat trailer or personal property at any public bathing beach, boatyard, marina, or Open Space Area of the Town of Fairfield except in those areas set aside and designated for such purpose by the Park Commission or Conservation Comm., as appropriate.

**Section 4** (b) Persons using Town beach facilities and swimming in designated areas shall be appropriately attired. No person over the age of five years, male or female, shall allow his or her private parts to be exposed to public view while that individual is on public beach, park or open space property of the Town of Fairfield. For purposes of this section, “private parts” are defined as the genitals, and also as to females, that area of the breast known as the nipple.

**Section 10** Loaded firearms are prohibited on any Town beach, marina, park, or open space, except when carried by law enforcement officers in the execution of their duties.

**Section 11** (a) No person, or persons, or organization shall camp overnight or construct tents, stands, benches, shelter or other structure of a temporary or permanent nature, nor hold any sponsored gathering or function, on any Town park, beach, marina or open space without the express permission of the Park Commission, Conservation Commission, or their designee, as appropriate.

(b) No alcoholic beverages are allowed on Town parks, beaches, marinas, or open space without the express written permission of the Park Commission or Conservation Comm., as appropriate.

**Section 14** (d) No unleashed dogs allowed in Ash Creek Open Space Area. Dogs not permitted in picnic area or play area.

(e) All domestic animals required to be licensed, e.g., dogs, shall be kept under voice command or leash control by their owners at all times, on open space areas.

(f) All dogs shall be kept on a leash if the animals are within one hundred feet (100-ft.) of a parking lot or picnic area or other areas as may be designated by the Conservation Commission, on open space areas.

(g) Persons with dogs and vehicles shall park their vehicles in areas to be designated by the Conservation Commission, on open space areas.

(h) All persons shall remain on designated trails as marked by the Conservation Commission, on open space areas.

(i) All persons walking dogs shall endeavor to remain on designated trails as marked by the Conservation Commission, on open space areas.

(j) No more than three (3) dogs may be walked by a person on any open space area.

**Section 15** No person shall light, kindle or use any fire on any Town beach, park, marina, or open space, except in receptacles installed for this purpose, or by the authority of the Park Commission or Conservation Commission, as appropriate.

**Section 17** (e) The use of watercraft on Lake Mohegan, except those used by Town agents in performance of their duties, or as approved in writing by the Conservation Commission, is prohibited.

**Section 20** (b) All open space areas shall be open from dawn to one hour after sunset, except by authority of the Conservation Department.

(c) The operation of a motorized vehicle is prohibited on any Town park or open space, except in those areas designated by the Park or Conservation Commission, and except for official vehicles involved in maintenance or emergency operations.

**Section 22** No camping is allowed on any park or open space area, except by permit issued by the Park Commission or Conservation Department as appropriate.

**Section 23** No person shall pick any flowers, foliage or fruit, or shall cut, break, dig up, or in any way mutilate or injure any tree, shrub, plant, grass, turf, railing, seat, fence, structure, or any thing in any park, play lot, open space and beach, or cut, carve, paint, mark or paste on any tree, stone, fence, wall, building, monument or other object therein, any bill, advertisement or inscription whatsoever unless approved in writing by the Conservation Department or the Park Commission, as appropriate.

**Section 24 (a)** No stone or other missiles shall be thrown or rolled from, into, within or upon any park or open space area. (This section does not prohibit the use of a ball in designated playing areas.)

**(b)** Hunting, trapping, and discharging of firearms on or into any park or open space area is prohibited. Hunters crossing open space to gain access to State property may proceed through that open space only with an unloaded firearm.

**Section 25** Threatening, abusive, boisterous, insulting or indecent language or gesture in any beach, marina, park, or open space area is prohibited.

**Section 26 (a)** No person shall expose any article or thing for sale in any Town beach, marina, park, or open space area unless a permit is issued by the Park or Conservation Commission.

**(b)** No person shall destroy, injure or disturb any form of wildlife or its habitat on any Town beach, marina, park or open space excluding fishing, shellfishing and related activities.



**Section 27** No person shall discharge or set off within any Town beach, park, or open space area, firecrackers, torpedoes, rockets, or any other fireworks, except under special permit issued by the Park Commission or Conservation Comm., as appropriate.

**Section 28** No person shall dig up or remove any dirt, sand, stones, rock, or other things whatever, make any excavation, quarry any stone, or lay or set off any blast, or cause or assist in doing any such things, within any Town park, beach, or open space area, except under special permit issued by the Park Commission, Conservation Commission, or other duly authorized agency of the Town of Fairfield.

**Section 29** (a) No bottles, broken glass, waste paper, or other rubbish, shall be left in any Town beach, park, marina, or open space area, except in containers designated for that purpose.

(b) No person shall deposit solid waste in any Town beach, park, marina or open space area trash receptacle if the solid waste has been brought from outside said Town beach, park, marina, or open space area.

**Section 30** Golfing in Town parks and open space areas is prohibited without the express permission of the Park Commission, the Conservation Comm., or their designee, as appropriate.

**Section 31** Ice skating will be allowed in a Town park, or open space area, where a body of water has been posted as "Safe."

**Section 32** Mountain bikes or other unmotorized bicycles may be used on Conservation Department designated open space trails only. At no time may mountain bikes be taken off the trails.

**Section 33** No dumping is allowed on open space property, and is subject to fines as stated in the Code of the Town of Fairfield.

**Section 34** The feeding of any waterfowl is strictly prohibited.

**Section 35 (a)** A refusal to obey the rules and regulations of the Park Commission, Conservation Commission, Board of Recreation, Police or Fire Departments or any other authorized agent of any of these Commissions, shall be considered a violation of these Rules and Regulations.

**(b)** Any person who violates any of the rules or regulations of the Park Commission or Conservation Comm. may be subject to a fine of not more than \$90.00.

**The foregoing are in addition to such prohibitions and penalties as are provided by the Laws of this State and Ordinances of this Town.**

# Appendix C:

## Selected References

Beals, Whitney and Peter Westover. *The Pine Creek and Mill River Watershed, Fairfield, CT: An Ecological Guide to Open Space Land Use*. 1971.

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