

Northern Forest Canoe Trail

Connecticut River Valley Wildlife Meander



The section of the Northern Forest Canoe Trail spanning between Stratford and Groveton, NH threads its way past beautiful vistas of rolling hills and farmland. The lazy current of the Connecticut River allows for a peaceful paddle through osprey, Canada goose and bank sparrow nesting grounds. Black bear may also be seen feeding in the area's cornfields. The nearby [Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge](#) provides protected habitat for these animals. Although the relaxing pace of travel and opportunities to view wildlife and are reason enough to explore this section of the Northern Forest Canoe Trail, there are also several places to disembark and investigate the human history that shaped this landscape.

If you would like to stay in the area the night before your paddle on the Connecticut you can find lodging in the towns of Stratford, North Stratford or Colebrook. ([Area Lodging](#))

Day 1

Begin your day with a delicious home-cooked breakfast at the [Blueberry Café](#) in North Stratford. If you still need to buy gear for your paddling trip, [Ducret's Sporting Goods](#) in Colebrook has a wide variety of boating, fishing and camping supplies. [Debanville's Store](#) and the [Stratford Market](#) are great sources for sandwiches and other basic grocery needs.

While you prepare for your paddling adventure, consider the benefits of hiring a local guide to join you. [Osprey Fishing Adventures](#) can assist with logistical preparations and shuttle services. Along the river, guides also reveal the subtleties of the river's natural ecosystems and tell stories of both the Native and non-Native people who have inhabited the landscape through history.

You will depart from the North Stratford boat launch between the ball field and the railroad tracks. There is also a put-in on the Vermont side of the River in Bloomfield. Look for the Northern Forest Canoe Trail Kiosk.

The brooks and streams feeding into the Connecticut River in this region powered grist, shingle, saw and stave mills for centuries. Finished products were then sent to market by the Connecticut River or by railway. The Connecticut River was also used for log drives from the mid-1800's to the mid 1900's.

High fuel and energy costs and a shift to overseas manufacturing have all contributed to a widespread closing of New England's wood products mills in the past two decades. Coos County and the towns along this stretch of the Northern Forest Canoe Trail have suffered massive job losses as a result. The local residents are now invested in creating a new vision for the future of the area.

As you paddle downstream, you may notice a sulfur odor in the air. You are passing Brunswick Springs, a sacred place long considered by the Abenaki to have healing powers. There are 6-8 springs in the area, each with its own unique chemical property. In the late 1800's and early 1900's, during the era of the construction of the Grand Hotels in northern New Hampshire, several hotels

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were built on this site. Visitors flocked to the medicinal springs. Each of the hotels built on the site burned down, as did most of the Grand Hotels in the region. Legend suggests that the hotels of Brunswick Springs were cursed because they attempted to profit from the sacred waters.

The Abenaki now own the site and have protected it from future development through land easements. If you visit Brunswick Springs, please be mindful of its significance and treat it with care.

Three miles into your journey, you will pass the outlet of Wheeler Stream which marks the beginning of a designated "Natural Section." In its entire 410 miles to Long Island Sound, this is the only designated "Natural Section" along the Connecticut River. There are no motors permitted along this section of river.

Enjoying a picnic lunch on one of the islands on the Connecticut river is a true pleasure. The sandy beaches on the islands just downstream from Smarts Mill Brook are particularly great for picnics and swimming. Although these islands are private, you are welcome to use them as long as they are not posted. Practicing Leave No Trace guidelines will help preserve the beauty of the area as well as the good will of local landowners.

Along the Connecticut River, you will observe great stretches of working farmland. Although it may not strike you as prime wildlife habitat, black bear can be observed feeding in the ripened corn fields. Of course black bears can hear twice as well as humans and have an excellent sense of smell (their nasal mucosa area is 100 times larger than that of humans) so they can usually sense our presence long before we know they are in the area.

Many different species of birds are also active along this river corridor and use the crop fields as a food source and for shelter and protection. You may also pass riverbanks riddled with holes; evidence of nesting bank swallows. These slender songbirds can be found in colonies ranging from 10 to 2,000 birds across North America and in parts of Europe and Asia. They feed solely on insects, a great trait in a North Country travel companion!

Consider yourself lucky if
you see a bear in the wild!

Canada geese also spend summer months feeding and raising their young on this section of the Connecticut River. Some Canada geese migrate 2,000 miles to their summer breeding grounds. Be mindful that the geese have lost their flight feathers and give them a wide berth, along with any other wildlife that you observe, while you paddle. It is easy to inadvertently separate parents from their nests by remaining too close and forcing them downriver.

You will camp for the night at the Northern Forest Canoe Trail's Maine Central Railroad Trestle Campsite which was constructed by the Kingdom Corps Youth Crew in 2004. Look for the granite pier in the middle of the water and pull off on the Vermont side of the river. The pier is a prime example of 19th century railroad trestle engineering and was part of a historic railroad corridor.

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If you prefer to stay in an early colonial farm house surrounded by over 50 acres of blueberry fields, try [The Blueberry Inn and Cafe](#) in North Stratford. You can arrange for the Inn owners to pick you up at the Maidstone Bridge.

Day 2

A few miles past your campsite, you will pass under the steel truss of the Stratford - Maidstone Bridge. This link and pin design structure was originally built c. 1885 by the Berlin Iron Bridge Company. There is a boat launch here where you can take out if you want to shorten the paddling portion of your trip.

If you choose to stay on the river, you will continue past the Fort Hill Wildlife Management Area managed by the New Hampshire Fish and Game Department. Keep your eyes out for a nesting pole with an active osprey nest perched at the top. Ospreys are magnificent birds of prey that feed exclusively on fish. They can be observed diving from 100 feet above and submerging themselves in order to catch fish 3 feet underwater.

The riparian zone (or shoreline) along the Connecticut is populated in places by silver maples and ostrich ferns which are sensitive to human traffic, but beautiful to behold as you float slowly downstream.

A couple of miles later, you will come to the confluence with the Upper Ammonoosuc River. The Northern Forest Canoe Trail continues east along the Upper Ammonoosuc, but you will stay on the Connecticut for 3 more miles and take out on the Vermont side before the now breached Wyoming Dam in Guildhall, VT. Keep your eyes peeled for the take out. There are no signs marking the dam or take out and **it is dangerous to paddle too far downstream.**

If you prefer, you can also choose to travel upstream for 1/2 mile along the Upper Ammonoosuc to a pull out in Groveton.



Once you leave the river, you have many options for lodging and dining. Enjoy a pizza or sub at [Stone's Pizza](#) or a home-cooked meal at [Everybody's Place](#). Enjoy a Jacuzzi and comfortable room at the [Trailside Lodge](#) in North Stratford or rent a cozy cabin at [Connolly Cabins](#). You can also camp at the [Big Rock Campground and Store](#) in Stratford. Lancaster, New Hampshire is also nearby and offers a wider selection of restaurants and hotels.