



Willimantic River Water Trail Paddle Guide

A NATIONAL RECREATION TRAIL IN CONNECTICUT



SECOND EDITION – MAY 2013

Welcome!

The Willimantic River Water Trail provides more than 21 miles of paddling enjoyment and challenges between Stafford Springs and Windham, Connecticut, with only one short portage. This guide describes public-access launches and landing areas, as well as river features you will find along the way.

Like all streams and rivers, the Willimantic changes character every day, even hourly. While this guide cannot possibly predict your experiences on the water, it does provide basic information and sources for real-time information. The guide encourages you to ask questions, learn from others and make careful decisions before you head out. Ultimately, it's up to you to make good choices based on the weather, the river, your paddling expertise and equipment. More specific safety tips are suggested below.



CAUTION: Do not use this guide as your only source of navigational information. Conditions on the river change constantly, sometimes drastically. It is your responsibility to be aware of changing conditions and the abilities of your group so your decisions lead to a safe trip.

What Is A Water Trail?

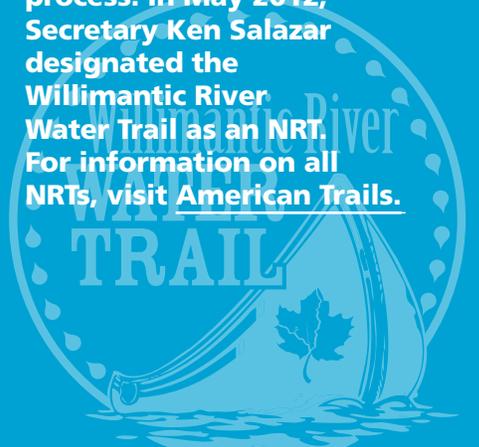
It is the combination of a waterway with paddle routes and segments, clearly described in maps and guides, managed for public access and conserved to protect land and water resources – the very resources paddlers come here to enjoy.

The Last Green Valley, Inc. is teaming up with paddlers, outfitters and river groups like the Willimantic River Alliance to create water trails on the rivers of the National Heritage Corridor. For more information, or to join The Last Green Valley or the Willimantic River Alliance, please go to www.tlgv.org or www.willimanticriver.org.



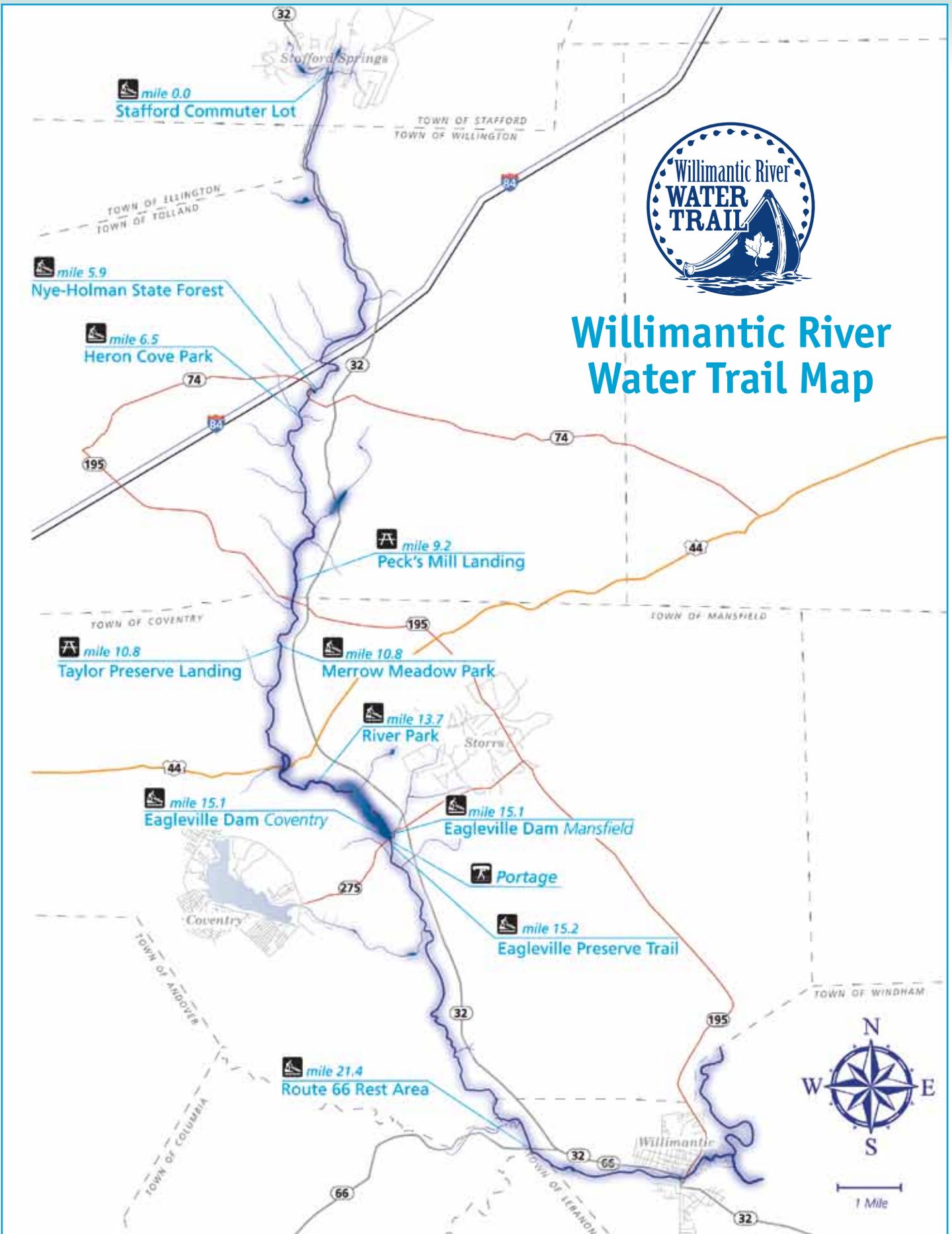
What is a National Recreation Trail?

The Secretary of Interior recognizes “exemplary trails of local and regional significance” as National Recreation Trails (NRT) after a rigorous application process. In May 2012, Secretary Ken Salazar designated the Willimantic River Water Trail as an NRT. For information on all NRTs, visit AmericanTrails.gov.





Willimantic River Water Trail Map



Overview of the Willimantic River Water Trail

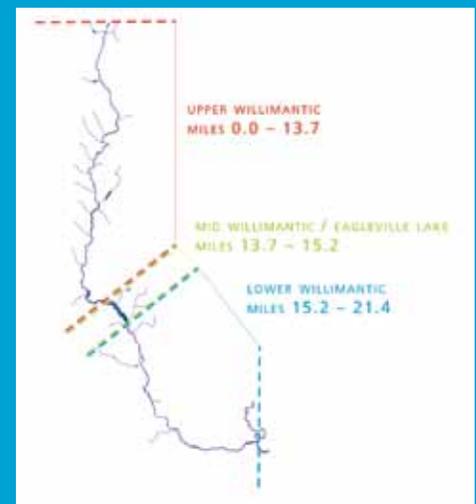
There are three major segments of the Willimantic River Water Trail:

- rapids & quickwater of the narrow upper section,
- flatwater impoundment above Eagleville Lake Dam and
- moderate current and flatwater down to Route 66.

Are You New to Paddling?

If you are a beginner or your group includes youngsters and novices, consider paddling at the following access site to practice and gain experience where there is no current.

RIVER MILE **LAUNCHE FOR LESS-EXPERIENCED PADDLERS**
13.7 Mansfield River Park Canoe Launch



On-the-Water Paddle Skills Training

Whether you are new to paddling or have messed about in small boats since you were a kid, there are always new skills to learn for fun and safety. The following groups offer excellent paddling and outdoor safety workshops:

- [Appalachian Mountain Club](#)
- [Collinsville Canoe & Kayak](#)
- [Eastern Mountain Sports Schools](#)
- [LL Bean Kayaking Courses](#)



How to Find Locations & Calculate Distance

River Mile

To describe locations and relative distances on the river, the guide identifies every point by River Mile, beginning with 0.0 at the Commuter Lot in Stafford Springs and ending with 21.4 at the Route 66 bridge in Columbia.

Street Address

Because there are rarely structures with specific addresses at launch sites, street addresses are approximate and derived from Google® Maps.

Latitude & Longitude

Called lat/long for short, these decimal coordinates are precise and function well on sites like Google® Maps, Google® Earth and Bing®. Copy the coordinates into the search window of Google® or a mapping website (yes, the first is a positive number and the second is negative) and it will display that location. Note: in this Paddle Guide we use decimal lat/longs. Coordinates can also be expressed in minutes and seconds, but that format doesn't work as well with online mapping sites.

Google® Earth

On The Last Green Valley website, you will find a link to detailed data and an interactive map for the [Willimantic River Water Trail](#). This map was created in Google Earth, a free online mapping program. You do not need to download Google Earth software to use this link, but to view more advanced features, such as a flyover of the Willimantic River, you will need to [download Google Earth](#).

Internet Address Links

Website addresses are embedded in Paddle Guide text wherever you see a word or phrase in blue and underlined. When viewing the Paddle Guide on a computer connected to the internet, you can go to a website by holding down the Control key and clicking on the word or phrase. If you are reading a paper copy, use the alphabetical, spelled-out listing of every website address in the Appendix to enter addresses manually.



GLOSSARY OF PADDLING TERMS

Boat Ramp: A public launch ramp that is available for power boats as well as canoes and kayaks. See also canoe launch.

Bony: An adjective paddlers use to describe rocky, scratchy conditions due to low water.

Bow and Stern: The front and back ends of a boat, respectively.

Canoe Launch: A less developed public launch site that is suitable for launching canoes and kayaks by hand. See also boat ramp.

Cubic Feet per Second, or "cfs": River flow is measured as the number of cubic feet of water flowing past a certain point each second; it's called cfs for short. River gauges provide online readings updated every 15 minutes, with graphs showing trends.

Eddy: A back-current along the edge of a river. Eddies are a good place to pull off to the side, out of the main current, to rest and re-group, or land. Be careful as you cross into an eddy as your boat may become less stable momentarily.

Flatwater: A section of river with little or no current, usually due to impounded water behind a dam.

Impoundment: A body of flatwater held behind a dam.

Lee: An adjective, meaning sheltered or away from the wind. By staying close to the lee shore, you'll be exposed to less wind and paddling will be easier.

Painter: A length of rope (known as a line) tied to the bow or stern.

PFD – Personal Flotation Device: The Coast Guard has shifted back to calling them life jackets. No matter the name, they only work if you wear them.

Portage: Derived from French, it means "to carry." A portage is the trail you walk to go around an obstruction (like a dam) or from one water body to another. It's also a verb that means to carry your boat and gear.

Quickwater: Stretches of river with enough current to carry the boat and create ripples, but not as steep or rough as rapids. Generally, you can navigate quickwater by following the main current. Also known as Class I whitewater (see below).

River Left and River Right: Refers to the river as you face downstream. As in, "Watch for the big rock on river left."

Rock Garden: A section of river with many partially submerged rocks. It's usually applied to areas with swift current where strong paddling skills are needed to dodge rocks.

Strainer: A fallen tree, partially submerged in the current, so the limbs and branches "strain" the water. People and boats pushed by current into a strainer put themselves and rescuers in extreme danger!

Sweep: An experienced paddler who remains the last boat in a group. He or she makes sure nobody is left behind and is ready to help with rescues.

USGS: Stands for the US Geological Survey. This agency and the US Army Corps of Engineers maintain a network of river gauges (sometimes spelled gages) to register water level and flow data online every 15 minutes. These readings are useful to decide whether the river flow is too low, too high or just right for your skills and equipment.

Whitewater: Stretches of river with enough flow and rocks to create breaking waves of water. On the standardized scale from I to V of whitewater difficulty, the Willimantic has Class I (also called quickwater) and a few Class II spots at higher water levels. (Adapted from www.AmericanWhitewater.org)

Class I: Fast moving water with riffles and small waves. There are few obstructions, all obvious and easily avoided with little training.

Class II: Straightforward rapids with wide, clear channels which are evident without scouting. Occasional maneuvering may be required, but rocks and medium-sized waves are easily avoided by trained paddlers.

Preparation Checklist

- Attach a whistle to each life jacket so paddlers can signal for help in an emergency.
- Bring a good map to track your progress and to find a road or assistance, if necessary.
- Bring an extra paddle for each boat, water bottles, food or energy snacks, hats, sunglasses, sunscreen and bug spray.
- Have a line (known as a painter) attached to the bow and stern of each boat.
- Hypothermia is a real threat, even on beautiful warm days, especially in the spring when river levels are often good for paddling. Dress for cold water and be prepared to spot the signs of hypothermia, including bad judgment by fellow paddlers. Take a complete change of dry clothes in a dry bag.
- Let friends or family know where you will put in and take out and when to expect your return.
- Take a cell phone in a waterproof bag for emergency calls (though you may not always be able to get a signal).
- Be sure everyone's paddling skills are up to the demands of the segment you wish to paddle. When in doubt, don't go out.
- Clean your boats when you travel between rivers or watersheds. You don't want to transport *Didymo* (also called rock snot) and invasive plants to choke your favorite paddling spots.
- Position the most experienced paddlers so they lead the way and bring up the rear. The leader out front watches for hazards and gives directions; the last paddler (known as the sweep) makes sure nobody is left behind.

Before You Go

Think ahead and prepare for a safe trip. A safe paddle outing begins before you leave home. It's up to you to make good decisions for yourself and your group. Learn how from the [American Canoe Association](#). Also, check out the [American Whitewater Safety Code](#).

Life Jacket!

Just wear it! Smart paddlers wear life jackets at all times. Connecticut state law requires that every person wear a Coast Guard-approved life jacket between October 1st and May 31st. From June 1st through September 30th, there must be a life jacket aboard for each person. See the [Connecticut Boater's Guide](#) for full information.

"In Massachusetts over the last 10 years, 85% of the victims who died in boating accidents did not use life jackets. The majority of these victims fell overboard or capsized and then drowned. Many of these deaths undoubtedly would have been prevented if a life jacket had been worn." MA Environmental Police

Use Stream Gauges to Judge Paddling Conditions Before You Go

Water levels rise and fall with rainfall, snowmelt and dam releases, sometimes dramatically. Please pay attention to changing conditions before and during every trip.

In the paddling conditions descriptions below, we suggest minimum thresholds for water flow so you don't end up walking more than paddling. Note that we intentionally do not recommend maximum levels because your safety depends entirely on your skill, equipment and judgment. This is true at any flow; what's safe and easy for a skilled paddler may be life-threatening to a less experienced paddler.



Before heading out, check the USGS online stream gauges. They measure both the river level and volume of water passing by every 15 minutes, 24/7. The sites also display recent trends and historic averages.

- [Online USGS gauge at Merrow Road bridge](#) (River Mile 10.8) When the online gauge reads 2.1 or more, you will have enough water to paddle above and below Eagleville Dam. Below 2.1, the river gets increasingly bony. There is also an old-fashioned stream gauge attached to the Merrow Road bridge. Note: A level of 2.1 on the "yardstick" equals a 2.1 reading on the online Merrow gauge.
- [Online USGS gauge in Coventry](#) (approximately River Mile 18.2, just above the Route 31 bridge) When the South Coventry gauge reads 4.2 feet or higher, the river above and below Eagleville Dam is deep enough to paddle. Below 4.2, the ride gets increasingly bony.
- [Google® Earth Display of Every Stream Gauge by State, Region or Nationwide](#) Note that you must download free software to use Google® Earth.
- [Google® Map of Every Stream Gauge by State, Region or Nationwide](#) This is available without a software download.

Let's Take Care of the River We Enjoy

As people enter and leave the water, launch sites tend to erode. As the footing gets muddy, the erosion gets worse and silt pollutes the river. To break this cycle, local officials and volunteers are lining up funding, materials and volunteers to stabilize launches. Email [The Last Green Valley](#) to receive monthly updates of upcoming water trail outings and clean-up events.

In the meantime, do your part right away:

- Carry out everything you carry in.
- Take an extra grocery bag to stash trash you find along the way.
- On a water trail, make every day a clean-up day.

Volunteer to Help Manage the Water Trail

Volunteers are the heartbeat of this trail. They prepare and update Paddle Guides and they help develop and maintain launches and kiosks. We need volunteers to help with occasional events and on-going projects. Email the [Willimantic River Alliance](#) or [The Last Green Valley](#) to volunteer. We'll contact you when there is work to do. Plus, join us for a water trail outing to enjoy the river and meet other paddlers.

About the Willimantic River Alliance (WRA)

The mission of the Alliance is to protect and preserve the Willimantic River through cooperative and educational activities that promote regional awareness, stewardship, and enjoyment of the river and its watershed.

[WRA](#) is a member-supported nonprofit organization and sponsors:

- regional forums to encourage cooperation among towns and local planning and conservation organizations;
- outings to promote discovery of the river's recreational and natural features; and
- publications and a web site to promote awareness of the river and its watershed.

Join the Alliance and become a volunteer - as a member you support our efforts to promote awareness and enjoyment of the Willimantic River and its watershed. Download the [Willimantic River Alliance](#) Membership Form.

About The Last Green Valley

The Last Green Valley is two things: it is the popular name given to the Willimantic and Shetucket Rivers Valley National Heritage Corridor

(designated by Congress in 1994) and it is the name of the nonprofit

organization which manages the National Heritage Corridor. [The Last Green Valley, Inc.](#) (TLGV) works to enhance the region's significant natural resources in the context of a vital economy and regional cultural identity.

By joining TLGV, you will support a local, sustainable economy. It is a member-supported nonprofit 501(c)3 organization. In partnership with watershed groups, paddlers, local, state and federal agencies, TLGV aims to create a water trail network on all navigable rivers that flow to the Thames.





Willimantic River Water Trail

Guide to River Access & Paddling Conditions

River Mile 0.0 in Stafford Springs



CAUTION: Do not use this guide as your only source of navigation information. Conditions on the river change constantly, sometimes drastically. It is your responsibility to be aware of changing conditions and the abilities of your group so your decisions lead to a safe trip.

Access: Commuter Lot on Route 32

Lat/Long: 41.945072°, -72.304525°

Located .4 mile south of Stafford Springs center on Route 32, look for the Stafford Springs sign. The paved commuter lot has about 15 spaces, including room for a trailer, but is available for paddlers during weekends only. There is a picnic table and a grassy area. The carry to the river is flat and only 25 feet from the parking lot. The put-in is easy and almost level, but once in the boat, you'll be in the current right away.

Paddling Conditions to Nye-Holman State Forest

This first reach of the river is tight and can be challenging with low-hanging branches. It is best run at medium to high water by more experienced paddlers, not newcomers to river paddling. Watch especially for the two-foot drop over an old low-head dam .8 of a mile downstream from the put-in. Pull off the river and scout the drop from river left.

Soon you pass under the Route 32 bridge. Farther along, the river has many easy turns, flanked by Route 32 South and forest. Like most of the Willimantic, this stretch is fairly narrow. This keeps you close to the natural beauty of the shoreline; paddle quietly and you may see wildlife.

Stay alert downstream, too, for downed trees which can create dangerous strainers. At high flows, there are few eddies to pull out of the current to rest and re-group.

At around River Mile 2.9, Roaring Brook enters on river left, adding volume to the Willimantic. For the next few miles, you are likely to pass fly fishermen just about year-round as this is a state-designated catch-and-release Trout Management Area.

Please be courteous and alert anglers that you are coming well in advance. Generally, it's best to paddle behind anglers so you don't disturb the water they are fishing, but watch out for back casts! If possible, ask for their preferences as you approach.

Remember, the river is cleaner thanks to years of effort by anglers. We enjoy the same river, though in different ways. Please give them the space they need to enjoy their sport.

The river takes a sharp right turn, then a "Rock Garden" lies just downstream. Watch for a large boulder and several smaller ones in the river. Once you pass under the highway through the right-hand culvert, the river becomes a bit more secluded and has more bends to navigate. You will continue to see fishermen as the Trout Management Area extends downstream to the Route 74 bridge.

River Mile 5.9

in Tolland



Access: Nye-Holman State Forest on Route 74

Lat/Long: 41.883264°, -72.306808°

The Nye-Holman State Forest (<http://www.stateparks.com/nyeholman.html>) access site is one of the most easily found access sites to the Willimantic River. The site can be reached from either Exit 69 or Exit 70 off I-84. The well-marked entrance to the State Forest is directly off Route 74, just west of the river on Plantation Road. The parking area has room to maneuver a truck with trailer. The river is visible as you enter, at least until vegetation closes in by late summer. The best access point is about 350 feet up the road at a small parking/picnic area opposite the grassy field. A narrow dirt path traverses a short slope down to the river's edge.

Paddling Conditions to Heron Cove Park

The river can be bony, with fewer turns and some quickwater stretches. The river follows South River Road in Tolland and there are a number of homes on river right.

River Mile 6.5

in Tolland



Access: Heron Cove Park on South River Road

Lat/Long: 41.877874°, -72.309214°

About half a mile downstream from Nye-Holman, Tolland's Heron Cove Park (http://www.willimanticriver.org/recreation/pg_park_heron-cove.html) is just about as easy to find. From Exit 69 off I-84 follow State Route 74 East .5 miles to the bottom of the hill just before the Route 74 bridge. Turn right onto South River Road. Follow South River Road .5 mile. Heron Cove Park is on the left opposite Woodhenge Drive. Follow the paved driveway to the left into a paved parking area by the soccer fields. The gravel drive to the canoe launch is at the end of the parking lot and is often closed off. Park in the lot and carry about 200 feet to the canoe launch sign and down a path to the launch platform on the river bank.

Paddling Conditions to Peck's Mill Landing

In the next two miles you will paddle through Class 2 rapids, under the Depot Road bridge and past an informal rock dam, mid-river boulders and possibly some standing waves created by water flowing over submerged rocks.

You may also begin to notice more wildlife as birds, ducks, geese and beavers abound. Most of the way, Route 32 is not far away, off to the left, and a number of roads are off to the right. Even so, there are moments when the only noise you'll hear is the blade of your paddle and the movement of your boat through the water. However, sometimes you may hear your boat scraping a rock!

Approach to Peck's Mill Landing

Watch for these landmarks: 150 yards downstream of Pulpit Rock (a large mid-stream boulder), there is a not-quite-so-large rock mid-stream, followed by 100 yards of quick water, followed by 50 yards of Class II whitewater. At the very bottom of the rapid, on river left, there is an eddy with room for two to three boats at a time (depending on water level). It is an easy eddy, but if paddlers are not alert at the bottom of the rapid, it's easy to miss and end up downstream of the landing.

River Mile 9.2 in Willington



Landing: Peck's Mill Landing (no access by road)

Lat/Long: 41.845601°, -72.308954°

Peck's Mill Landing (http://www.willimanticriver.org/recreation/pg_park_pecks-mill.html) is one of two landings without road access where the general public can land for a picnic and a rest. There are no facilities. Be aware that this is a tricky pull-out due to the currents. For an easier rest stop, go to the Taylor Preserve Landing, as described below.

Paddling Conditions to Merrow Meadow Park & Taylor Preserve Landing

As you pass under Route 195, the river narrows a bit and the water speed increases.

In a short distance the river will turn left, then right. In the left turn, debris can accumulate; stay to the right to avoid it. In the right turn, the current will push you to the left where large submerged rocks create some turbulence. Notice the remnant bridge abutments of the former Jones Crossing as you pass.

As you pass under the Merrow Road bridge, you have two options if you wish to take a break and stretch your legs. On river left is a difficult take-out for Merrow Meadow Park; on river right is an easy take-out for the Taylor Preserve.

However, if you wish to end your trip here, use Merrow Meadow Park as it is the only approved access site.

River Mile 10.8 in Coventry



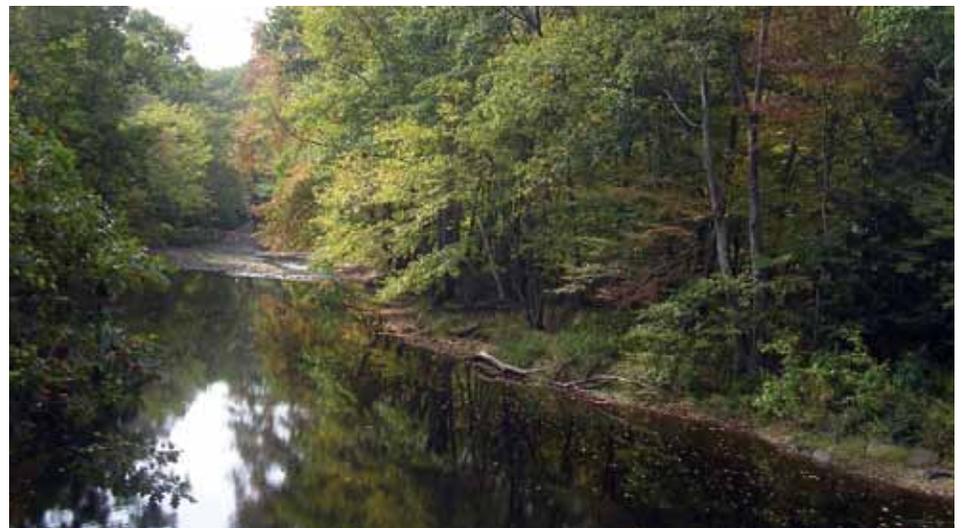
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Landing: Taylor Preserve Landing on Merrow Road

Lat/Long: 41.823431°, -72.313712°

The Taylor Preserve is directly across the river from Merrow Meadow Park. It's an easier place to land than either Peck's Mill or the park. Pull out on river right just after the Merrow Road bridge to enjoy this property of Joshua's Trust (<http://www.joshuaslandtrust.org/>). For now, this is not an official access site, but it is available to paddlers as a landing for rest stops and picnics.

See below for **Paddling Conditions to River Park.**



River Mile 10.8

in Mansfield



Access: Merrow Meadow Park on Merrow Road

Lat/Long: 41.824032°, -72.313119°

Take Route 32 South from I-84, Exit 70. Continue south on Route 32 at the intersection of Route 195. Continue .9 miles past Valley View Park to Merrow Road, turn right. Continue .3 mile on Merrow Road, over the railroad tracks to the park entrance on your left. It's a narrow and winding road, so please take it slowly!

Merrow Meadow Park has about 10 parking spaces and is excellent for family outings, with easy walking trails and connections to Spring Manor and the River View Trail in Coventry. The park is nicely designed and maintained.

The carry to the water is flat and less than 200 feet, but the actual put-in is awkward at best. Follow the stone-dust path to the bank of the river, where the put-in path turns sharply to the right and turns to dirt. Watch your step as you descend the narrow ramp and railroad-tie steps to the sharp left turn at the water's edge, right by the bridge. This is a two-person operation -- not for beginners, nor single paddlers. When current is flowing fast, this is a very tricky place to launch or land.

Before you put in, notice the stream gauge "yardstick" mounted on the bridge. A reading above 2.1 usually means there is sufficient flow for paddling. As it drops below 2.1, you can expect an increasingly scratchy ride. [Note: A level of 2.1 on the "yardstick" equals 2.1 on the online [Merrow](#) gauge.]

Paddling Conditions to River Park

You'll encounter two islands in this stretch. Approach the second island slowly. While the quickest route is on the left, it is narrow and can get blocked with trees, creating a dangerous strainer. The right side can be shallow. So, look carefully before the river divides, then decide which way to go.

Below this island, after a straight-away, beware of a sharp right turn where the current can range from mild to strong, pushing you to river left. This area has strong eddies and a number of bends. You will pass under Route 44 where the current begins to slow.

River Mile 13.7

in Mansfield



Access: River Park on Plains Road

Lat/Long: 41.797428°, -72.300799°

From the intersection with Route 44, go south on Stafford Road (Route 32) for .3 miles, then turn right onto Plains Road. River Park is .2 miles on the right. (http://www.mansfieldct.gov/filestorage/1904/5357/river_park.pdf). The parking lot has about ten spaces and a nicely landscaped circular drive. This is a newly developed area, just upstream of the point where the river becomes an impoundment behind the Eagleville Dam. Access for car-top carriers is excellent, the concrete ramp is smooth and wide and the gradual slope to the water's edge makes getting in and out of boats easy.

This is the best launch site on the river for novice paddlers and those unfamiliar with paddling in a current. The spacious and well-groomed launch site, plus the adjacent playing field, makes it an ideal site for outings with kids.



Padding Conditions to Eagleville Dam

Upstream from River Park, you will encounter some current. If you are comfortable paddling upriver, it's worth the extra effort to explore in this direction until the current gets the best of you.

Since the river becomes an impoundment downstream of the launch (due to Eagleville Dam), this is a good place to launch a loop trip with no worries about current. But, be aware that there can be wind on the lake! Eagleville Lake is a popular destination for paddlers and anglers.

River Mile 15.1 in Coventry on RIVER RIGHT

NOTE: The following descriptions of River Miles 15.1 can be confusing until you realize that there are two take-outs above the dam; one on river left and river right. To portage around the dam and paddle downstream, it's preferable to take out on river left in Mansfield. Both take-outs are described in case you end up on river right.

Access: Eagleville Lake Dam on Route 275 (upstream side)

Lat/Long: 41.784596°, -72.281600°

Take Route 275 from Route 31 in Coventry (1.7 miles) or Route 32 in Mansfield (.3 mile) to the river at Eagleville Dam (http://www.willimanticriver.org/recreation/pg_park_eagleville-lake.html). Here, you'll find an access point on each side of the river. The Coventry side has convenient, all-season parking and a grassy lawn; however, the water's edge is a slippery, steep bank of rock rip-rap. Scout it in advance to determine whether it's a good option for you and your group. This spot is very scenic and is among the most popular launches along the River as it provides access to Eagleville Lake, the largest flat water stretch on the river. Those only wishing to paddle the northern end of Eagleville Lake and upriver ought to use Mansfield's River Park instead. See above.

River Mile 15.1 in Mansfield on RIVER LEFT



Access & Portage: Eagleville Lake Dam on Route 275 (upstream side)

Lat/Long: 41.785139°, -72.280583°

Take Route 275 from Route 31 in Coventry (1.7 miles) or Route 32 in Mansfield (.3 mile) to the river at Eagleville Dam. Here, you'll find an access point on each side of the river.

Parking here is available for about 20 cars. This is the preferred landing for those seeking to portage the dam. It's among the most popular launches along the river as it provides access to Eagleville Lake, the largest flatwater segment on the river. The launch site is small, but provides easy lake access. It can be reached by a 100-foot carry around the dam's earthen embankment.

Those only wishing to paddle the northern end of Eagleville Lake and upriver may want to use Mansfield's River Park instead. The carry to the water is shorter and flat, the put-in is more gradual and you'll be protected from the wind. See above for a full description of River Park. This parking lot also serves as the primary access for the Eagleville Preserve Trail (<http://www.mansfieldct.gov/filestorage/1904/5357/eagleville.pdf>), just downstream on river left.

Padding Conditions on Eagleville Lake

There is no current on the lake, but it can be windy. Stay close to the lee shore for shelter from the wind. This is a popular destination for anglers, so please be courteous by steering clear of them.

River Mile 15.2

in Mansfield on RIVER LEFT



Access & Portage: Eagleville Preserve Trail on Route 275 (downstream side)

Lat/Long: 41.783823°, -72.280312°

Take Route 275 from Route 31 in Coventry (1.7 miles) or Route 32 in Mansfield (.3 mile) to the river at Eagleville Dam. Park in the lot by the dam on the Mansfield side and carry across Route 275 to launch on the downstream side of the bridge along Mansfield's Eagleville Preserve Trail (<http://www.mansfieldct.gov/filestorage/1904/5357/eagleville.pdf>) This is the place to put into (or back into) the river to paddle downstream to Route 66 in Columbia.

There are several places to put in along the trail, but the bank here is in poor shape. Paddlers need to put in over tree roots, large rocks and several steel barrels filled with concrete. As members of your group put in, consider paddling upstream to play in the current until your whole group is on the water.

Paddling Conditions to Route 66 Bridge

Water levels are less of a concern from here on thanks to a deeper river channel but can still be scratchy when the [USGS Online Stream Gauge](#) in Coventry reads lower than 4.2. The current ranges from slow to quick in the bends depending on water flow.

As you head downstream from the dam, watch for a narrow chute bending to the left. Stay on right side of the narrow channel. The current will push you toward woody debris on the right bank, but you'll want to steer clear.

There are five road bridges in this section of the river:

Coventry/Depot Street
Route 31
Cider Mill Road
Route 6 and
Route 66 (where you take out).

The river is narrow, wooded and flows along railroad tracks and farms. Watch for low branches, strainers in the river (fallen trees) and sand bars.



Caution: During high flows in this section, partly submerged barbed wire fences along flooded banks and fields become extremely dangerous strainers.

Downstream of the Route 31 bridge, stay right on the first bend to avoid a gravel bar on the left. Below here, watch for tricky currents. The channel is narrow with possible obstructions. The river takes many twists and turns before broadening out and passing through open land. Once the river passes under the twin bridges of Route 6 it continues with less current.

As you pass under the rusted railroad bridge in Columbia, look for the take-out on river right, just before the Route 66 bridge. The take-out is a weedy, gradual slope. Water is moving, but usually smooth in this stretch.



Caution: There is no public access to exit the river beyond this point. If you paddle past the Route 66 bridge, turn around at the power lines to avoid dangerous dams in downtown Willimantic.

River Mile 21.4 in Columbia



Take-out Access: Upstream Side of Route 66 Bridge

Lat/Long: 41.717607°, -72.244654°

The Willimantic River is the town line between Columbia and Windham/Willimantic. From Eagleville, at the intersection of Route 275 and Route 32, drive south on Route 32 for 5.6 miles, then turn sharp right on Route 66. Continue .6 of a mile to far side of the bridge over the river. You are in Columbia now. Across the street you'll see W.H. Rose Truck and Equipment dealer.

From downtown Willimantic, drive west on Route 66 about 1.5 miles to the river; parking is on the far side of the bridge, on the right.

There is off-road parking through the unmarked gap in the guard rail on the upstream side of the bridge; about six vehicles fit in this unpaved lot of a former rest area. About six cars fit on the road shoulder, too, next to the guard rail, from the bridge west to the kettle-hole pond.

This former rest area provides access to the river for fishermen as well as canoe and kayak paddlers, so be courteous to anglers. It is also the terminus of the Hop River State Park Trail for hikers and mountain bikers headed toward Bolton Notch on the abandoned rail bed.

The shoreline is nicely sloped to the water, but usually muddy where the ramp meets the water directly under the bridge. Please avoid the mud. Stirring it up erodes the bank and silts the water.



Acknowledgements

Water Trail Committee of the Willimantic River Alliance, including:

Larry Diamond

Jim Hayes—Willimantic River Yacht Club

Cynthia MacDonald

Paul Pribula

Meg Reich

Betty Robinson

Vicki Wetherell

Lois Bruinooge, Bill Reid and the Water Trail Steering Committee of The Last Green Valley

John Monroe—National Park Service Rivers & Trails Program

Bruce Hooke

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Larry Diamond

Jim Hayes

Cynthia MacDonald

John Monroe

Paul Pribula

Meg Reich

Vicki Wetherell

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Internet Addresses, or URLs, Embedded in Text

American Canoe Association: www.americancanoe.org

American Whitewater: www.AmericanWhitewater.org

American Whitewater Safety Code: www.americanwhitewater.org/content/Wiki/safety:start

Appalachian Mountain Club: www.outdoors.org

Collinsville Canoe & Kayak: www.cckstore.com

Connecticut Boater's Guide at www.ct.gov/dep

Eastern Mountain Sports Schools: www.emskayak.com

Google® Earth: <http://www.google.com/earth/index.html>

LL Bean Kayaking Courses: www.llbean.com/outdoorsOnline/odp/courses/kayakingcourses/index.html

National Park Service – Rivers & Trails Program: www.nps.gov/rtca

National Recreation Trails: <http://www.americantrails.org/nationalrecreationtrails/>

The Last Green Valley: www.tlgv.org

The Last Green Valley Calendar: www.tlgv.org/resources/calendar.html

The Last Green Valley Interactive Map: www.tlgv.org/preserve/watershedprojects/water-trail-earth-map.html

Willimantic River Alliance: www.WillimanticRiver.org

Willimantic River Alliance Paddle Resources: <http://www.willimanticriver.org/recreation/paddling.html>

Stream Gauges

Google® Earth Display of Every Stream Gauge by State, Region or Nationwide:
http://waterwatch.usgs.gov/new/index.php?id=real&sid=w__kml

Google® Map of Every Stream Gauge by State, Region or Nationwide:
http://waterwatch.usgs.gov/new/index.php?id=real&sid=w__gmap

USGS Online Stream Gauge – Merrow Meadow: http://waterdata.usgs.gov/ct/nwis/uv?site_no=01119382

USGS Online Stream Gauge - Coventry (approximately River Mile 18.2, just above the Route 31 bridge):
http://waterdata.usgs.gov/ct/nwis/uv?ddcd=05&format=gif&period=7&site_no=01119500

