

Preserves & Trail Guide



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Essex Land Trust

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Preserves & Trail Guide



The accreditation seal is awarded to land trusts meeting the highest national standards for excellence and conservation permanence.

Introduction

This 2019 edition of the Essex Land Trust *Preserves & Trail Guide* is an updated version of our original 2008 *Trail Guide*. It includes new properties acquired since then. Significantly, new maps have been created for all properties as has a new Town of Essex Open Space map. All trails, significant stone walls, access points and points of interest have been mapped out via GPS location, thereby updating any changes and ensuring greater accuracy.

Our location in the Lower Connecticut River Estuary is recognized by The Nature Conservancy as one of the “Last Great Places” in the Western Hemisphere and by the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands as a unique wetland of international importance. Additionally, the Connecticut River has been designated an American Heritage River due to its historic and cultural significance to the nation; one of just fourteen rivers receiving the designation nationwide. As residents of this area, we have a responsibility to protect this vital habitat.

We hope that this new pocket-size Trail Guide will encourage you to enjoy the results of 50 years of hard work and dedication that hundreds of Essex Land Trust members and volunteers have put into acquiring 650 acres while assisting the Town of Essex’s Conservation Commission in maintaining additional acreage for a total of 23 open space properties. Some preserves such as Thatchbed Island and the marshlands of the Great Meadow are largely inaccessible. They have no trails and are set aside as wildlife habitat. As part of its Mission, the Essex Land Trust also has an annual program of free events open to the public including guided walks, canoe/kayak tours, and educational lectures held throughout the year.

The Essex Land Trust is a non-profit, all-volunteer organization that acquires and maintains open space in Essex. It cooperates with town and state governments and adjacent communities, but it relies on the generosity of those who donate land, money, or their time to keep a reasonable balance of open space and development in our community. We urge you to join us in the pleasure we get from experiencing nature and in contributing to the clean air, clean water, and the preservation of open space for ourselves and those who will come after us.



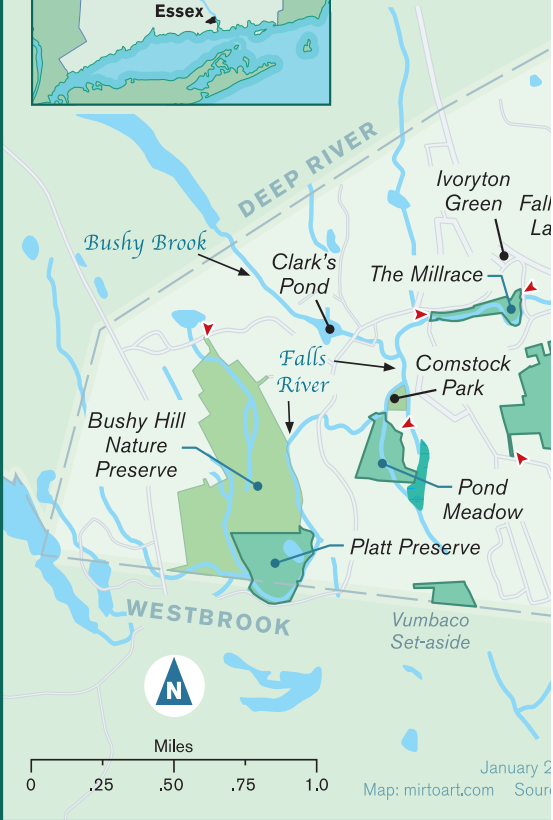
Essex Open Space Properties

Essex, CT

Open Space in Essex amounts to approximately 1,100 acres, 16% of the Town's surface area. The Essex Land Trust manages 900 acres with the remainder maintained by the Town of Essex and The Nature Conservancy.



-  - Essex Land Trust Preserves
-  - Other Protected Properties
-  - Property Access Point





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Source: Essex Land Trust

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Bushy Hill & Platt Preserves

The Town of Essex consists of three villages: Essex, Centerbrook and Ivoryton, each part of the whole yet uniquely different. First settled in 1664, Essex is located half way between New York City and Boston, and a short commute to the capitol city of Hartford. Our villages were settled around the Falls River, which flows eastwardly from the hills of Ivoryton, through Centerbrook, along Essex Village down to the sparkling Connecticut River. A few short miles from Long Island Sound, Essex is well-known for its boating community, beautiful landscapes, majestic trees and gardens, and fascinating architecture.

Essex has a land area of 10.4 square miles with a population of approximately 6,700. Total open space, not including several parks and recreational fields, reaches 1,100 acres, or 16% of the Town's land area. In addition to land owned by the Land Trust and the Town of Essex, The Nature Conservancy owns 93 acres located in both the Towns of Essex and Old Saybrook. Worth highlighting is the 968-acre forest, known as The Preserve, which lies primarily in Old Saybrook but which can be accessed from two locations in Essex as well.



"In the woods, too, a man casts off his years, as the snake his slough, and at what period soever of life is always a child. In the woods is perpetual youth."

— Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Nature*

Description

Bushy Hill Nature Preserve is comprised of 107 acres of forested land owned by the Town of Essex. The 30-acre Platt Property, belonging to the Essex Land Trust, adjoins the preserve at its southern boundary. The terrain is mostly hilly, with ledge outcroppings, a network of lively streams and several wetland areas.

History

Much of the land in both the preserve and the land trust property was used for farming beginning in the mid 1800s. The large "wolf" tree on the blue trail, an ancient white oak standing by the trail, once provided shade to grazing animals, and a man-made pond was used for watering livestock. Look for traces of old logging roads crisscrossing the property. The original 107-acre tract of land was purchased in 1974 by the Town of Essex from Adelaide M. Warner with the help of state and federal funding.

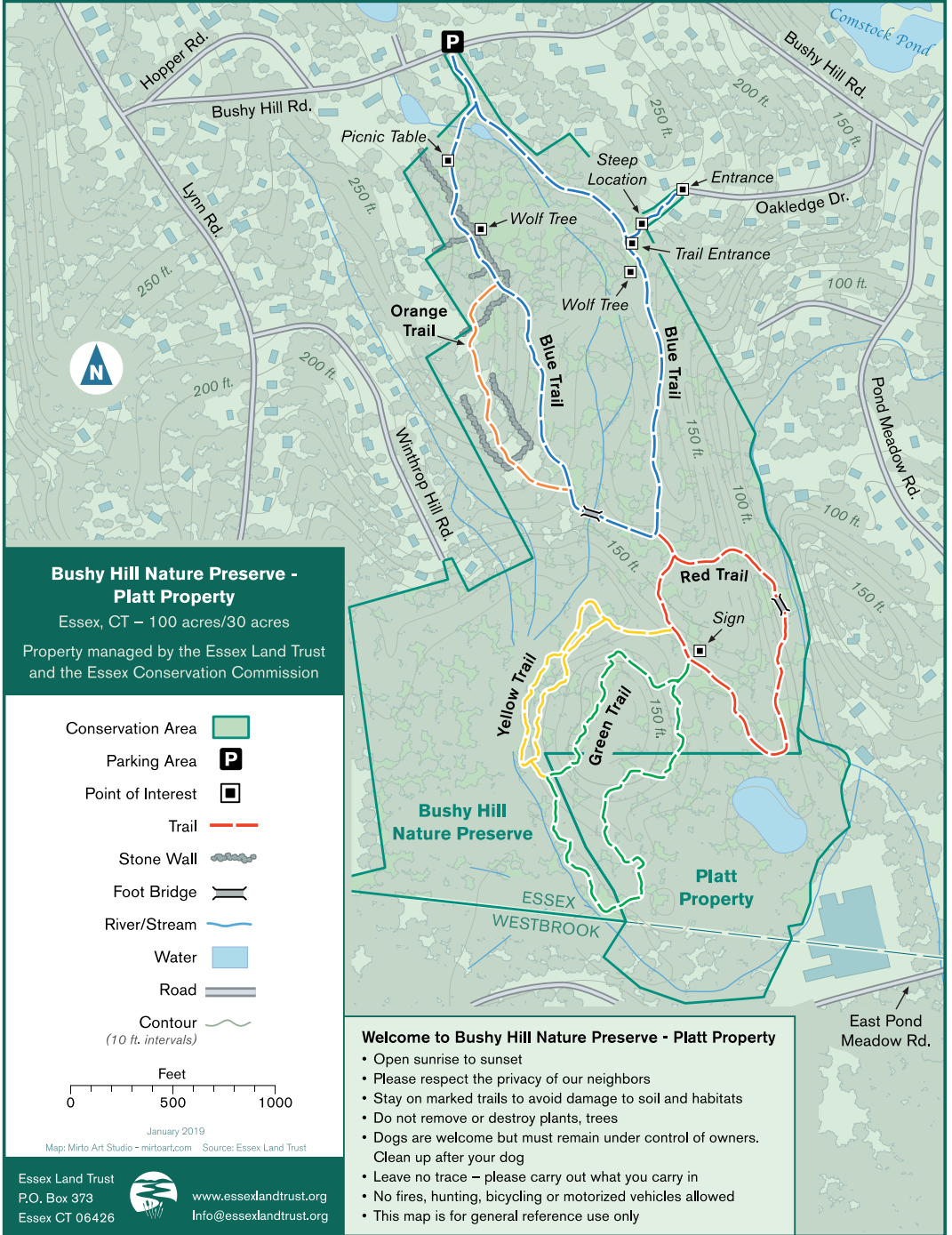
Flora and Fauna

The forest canopy consists of oak, hickory, birch, beech and ash trees. Red maples dominate wet regions and younger forest areas are full of red cedar, dogwood and black cherry. Mature forest includes oak, beech and ash. The wet understory features spicebush, sweet pepper bush, cinnamon fern, skunk cabbage, false hellebore and cardinal flowers. Dry understory consists of mountain laurel, various ferns and wildflowers including violets, Solomon's seal, rattlesnake plantain, partridgeberry, lady's slipper, Indian pipes and wintergreen. Fungi appear in late summer.

The properties abound with wildlife: white-tailed deer, fox, raccoon and squirrels may be seen, along with a host of birds, including woodpeckers, crows, hawks and owls. Springtime brings warblers, sparrows, thrushes, vireos, and flycatchers.

Location

In Ivoryton – Bushy Hill Road and Oak Ledge Drive.



Canfield-Meadow Woods

Bushy Hill & Platt Nature Preserves



"I like exploring. I like not knowing when and where I'll end up. That way I get easily diverted and find the new, the unexpected."

– Bernd Heinrich, *The Trees in My Forest*

Description

Shared by Deep River and Essex, Canfield-Meadow Woods Nature Preserve is made up of more than 300 acres of hilly, forested land with a wide variety of terrain. Sixteen trails wind through mixed old and new growth forest, and the preserve's many rocky outcroppings are a highlight. The preserve is managed by the Deep River Conservation Commission, the Essex Conservation Commission and the Essex Land Trust.

History

Much of the property is former farm land and the old fields are still delineated by a network of stone walls and roads. The remains of an old stone quarry can be found in the Deep River section. Most of the original land was acquired through donations by Mr. and Mrs. Earl Canfield in 1968 and The Nature Conservancy in 1985.

Flora and Fauna

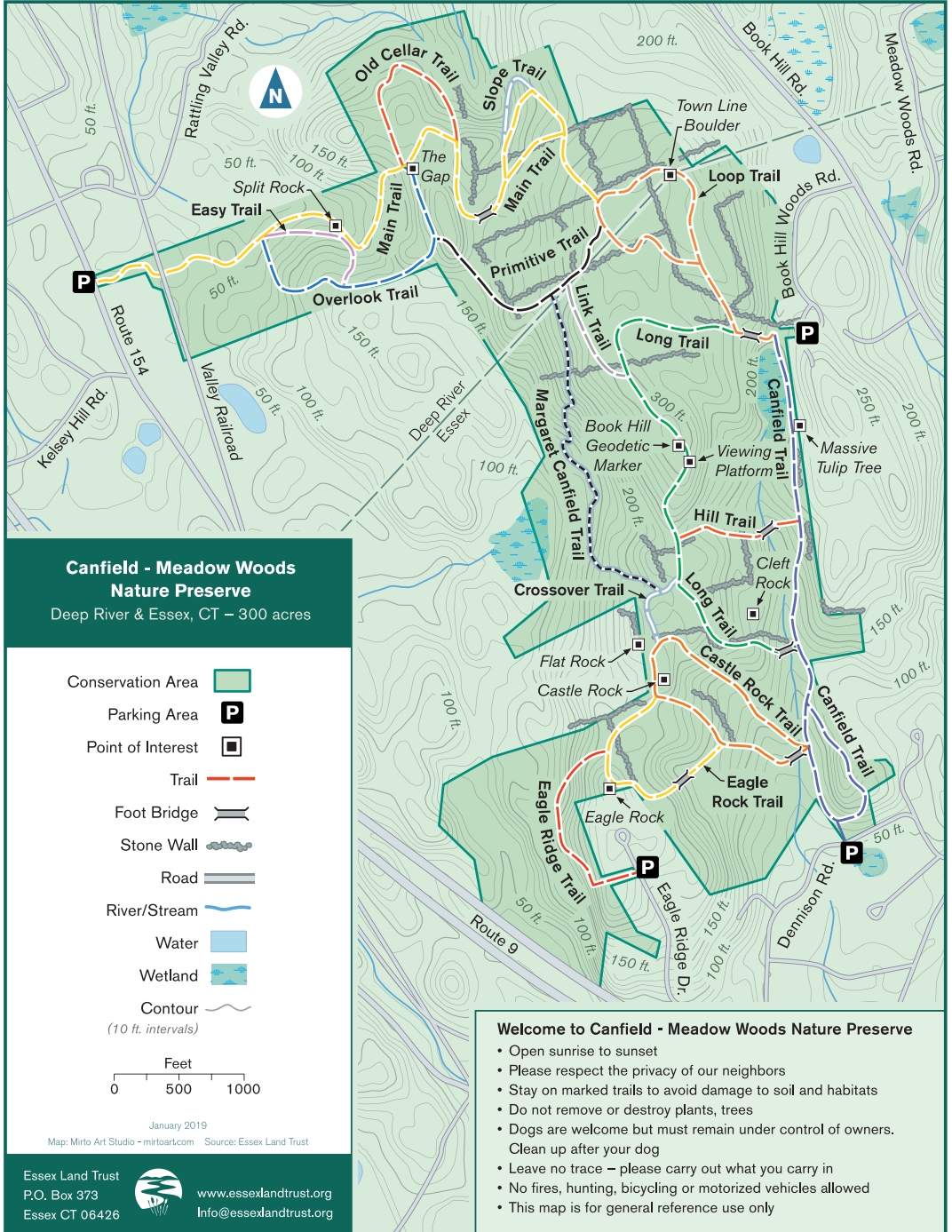
The older forest is filled with oak, hickory, hemlock, birch, beech, tulip and ash trees. The preserve abounds with white-tailed deer and grey fox as well as flocks of wild turkey. A population of small rodents attracts hawks and owls. Home to a variety of birds, common species seen here include cardinals, woodpeckers, thrushes, vireos and flycatchers.

Viewing Platform

A viewing platform, located at 300-foot elevation, was built and installed as a memorial in 2013. On clear days, it offers view of the Lower Connecticut River reaching out into Long Island Sound.

Location

In Essex – Book Hill Woods Road, Dennison Road and Eagle Ridge Drive. In Deep River – Route 154.



Cross Lots

Canfield/Meadow Woods



"It is our task in our time and in our generation to hand down undiminished to those that come after us, as was handed down to us by those who went before, the natural wealth and beauty which is ours."

– President John F. Kennedy

Description

Granite pillars mark the main entrance to Cross Lots, Essex's "downtown" open space. The former farm dates back to 1840 and today consists of open hilltop, wooded groves and rolling meadows along with finely-coursed stone walls topped with monolithic capstones. Cross Lots is maintained as open field bordered by hedgerow, a vanishing habitat that was once common in Connecticut. The fields are mowed each year in the Spring.

History

A post-and-beam barn at the West Avenue parking lot is all that remains of the farm. The main house, which was demolished, was on the hilltop. Horses and cows grazed in surrounding pastures. The 15-acre homestead was bequeathed to the Essex Land Trust by Harriet Cheney Downing, who grew up there. Downing's father, George L. Cheney, was head of Pratt, Read and Company of Deep River, maker of ivory products.

Flora and Fauna

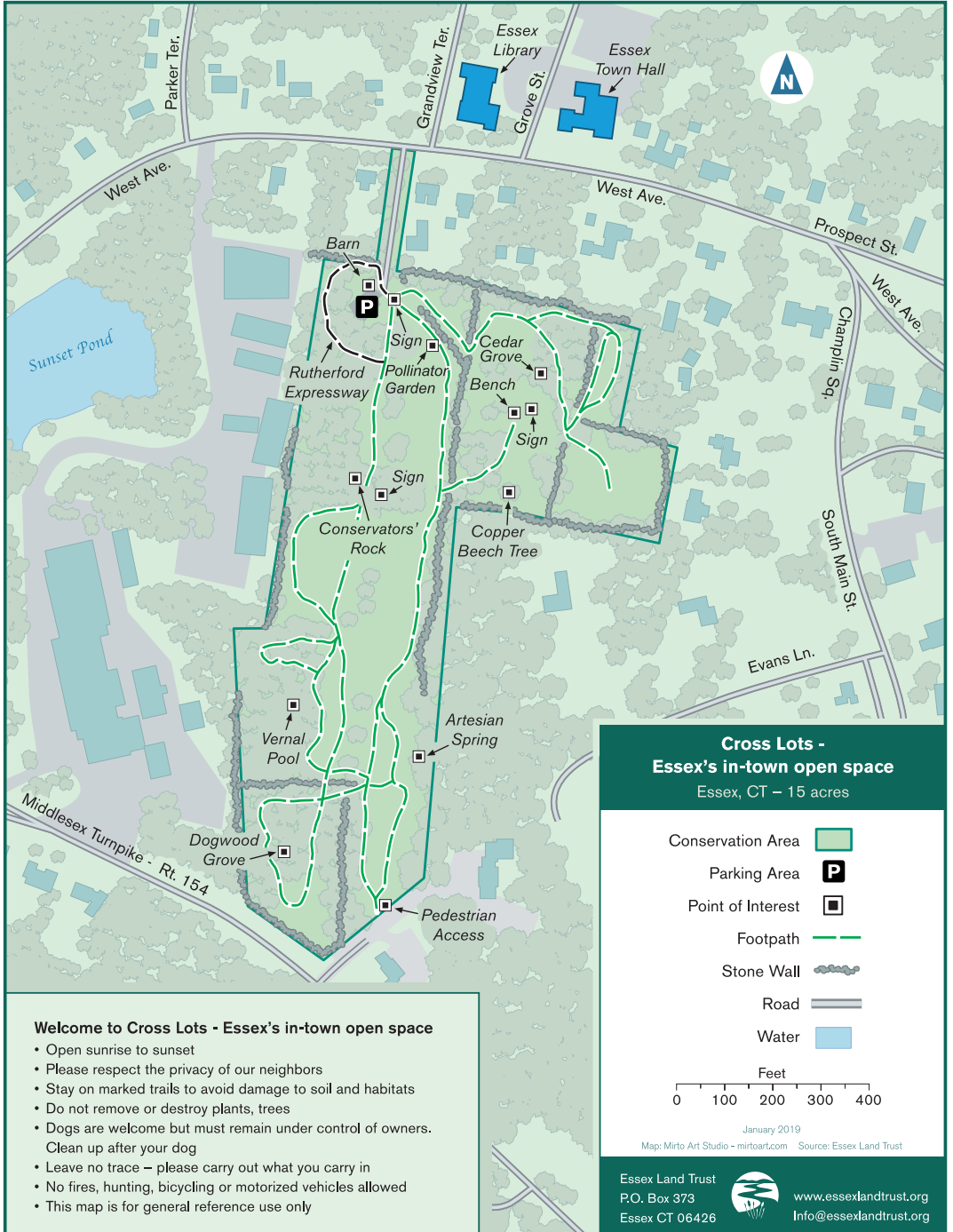
Cross Lots' stone walls, grasses such as bluestem and shrubs such as goldenrod provide food and cover for insects, songbirds and small mammals. The dogwood grove is a spectacular sight in spring, and the trees provide food for wintering birds. Silver maples and evergreens dominate the upper reaches, while red maple and winterberry border the wooded wetland.

Pollinator Garden

Located on the field that is beside the stone wall rising from the parking lot, there are approximately 800 plants comprising 22 different varieties of perennials and shrubs known to benefit native bees, birds and butterflies.

Location

In Essex – entrance at 40 West Avenue, diagonally across from the Essex Public Library.



Welcome to Cross Lots - Essex's in-town open space

- Open sunrise to sunset
- Please respect the privacy of our neighbors
- Stay on marked trails to avoid damage to soil and habitats
- Do not remove or destroy plants, trees
- Dogs are welcome but must remain under control of owners. Clean up after your dog
- Leave no trace – please carry out what you carry in
- No fires, hunting, bicycling or motorized vehicles allowed
- This map is for general reference use only

Falls River Preserves

Cross Lots



"Conservation means harmony between men and land. When land does well for its owner, and the owner does well by his land, when both end up better, by reason of their partnerships, we have conservation"

– Aldo Leopold, *Round River*

Description

Four properties are included: Falls River Preserve, a 40-acre peninsula of forest and ledge projecting into Mill Pond on the Falls River; Falls River Landing, a waterfront park, allowing access by canoe or kayak; Jean's Island, a seven-acre preserve on Mill Pond only accessible by canoe or kayak; and Stanley Park, a pocket park located on Main Street Centerbrook. The lowlands walk is easy for all ages. More challenging trails cross over ledges of 800-million-year-old metamorphic schist forming the peninsula's spine.

History

The Falls River has been dammed here since 1701. The resulting water power has been harnessed to run a gristmill, a sawmill and an iron works over the years. The land was used for logging and as a sheep pasture as recently as the 1930s. The Falls River Preserve was acquired over several years beginning in 1998 with significant support from the State of Connecticut, the Town of Essex and more than 300 individual donations. Jean's Island was once open pasture, cattle were walked to the island across an exposed strip of land that has since disappeared. The Essex Land Trust acquired the island from Jean Leuchtenburg in 2005.

Flora and Fauna

The entire area is an important stopover for warblers, vireos, blackbirds and other migrating songbirds and is the year-round home of chickadees, titmice, cardinals, nuthatches and woodpeckers. Waterfowl include swans, wood duck and mallards, while egrets, cormorants and osprey drop in from Long Island Sound and the Connecticut River.

Mill Pond

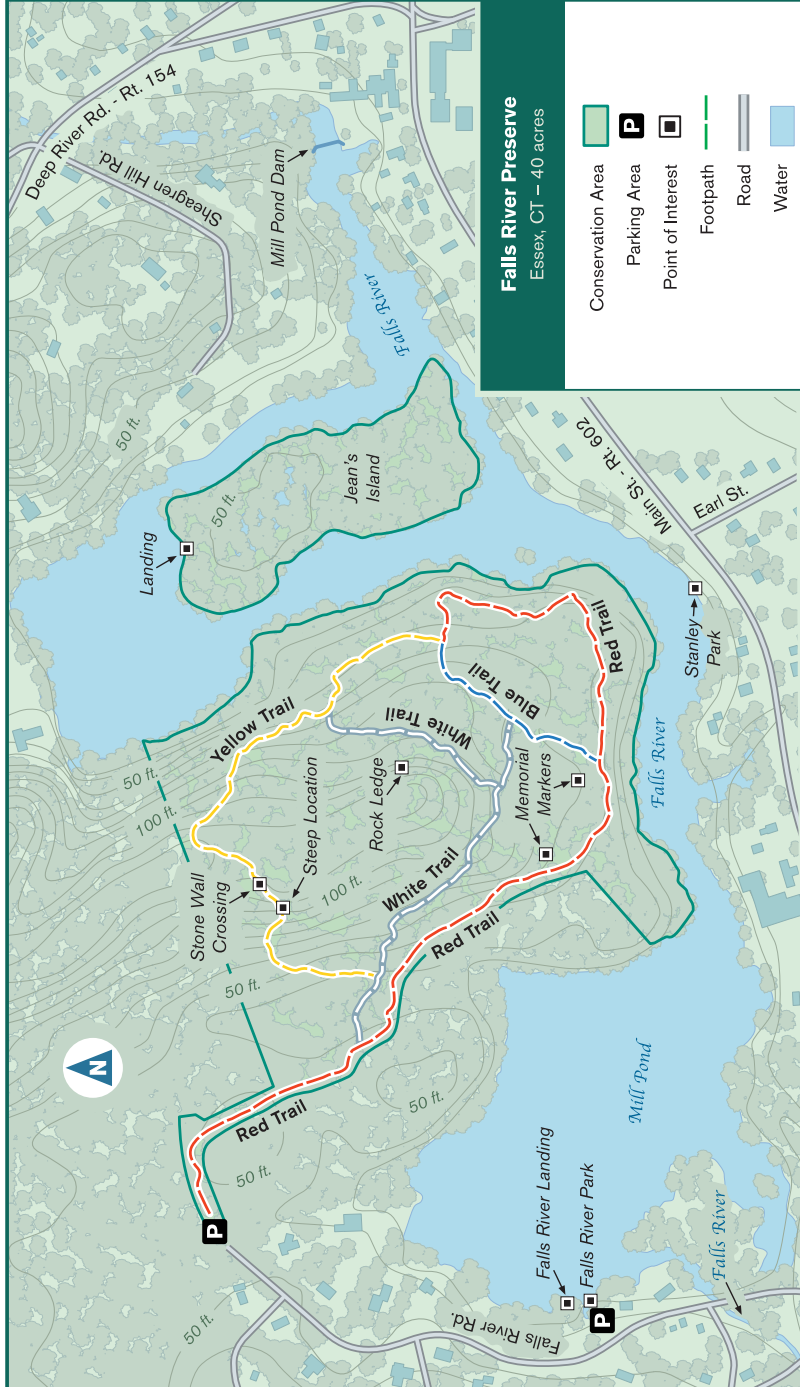
Bass, perch, sunfish and catfish populate the pond. A Friends Association cares for the Mill Pond ensuring that invasive plants such as fanwort and milfoil are kept under control.

Other Uses

Canoeing/kayaking, fishing, and ice skating in winter.

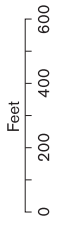
Location

In Ivoryton – at the end of Falls River Drive, off Main Street, Ivoryton.



Falls River Preserve Essex, CT – 40 acres

- Conservation Area
- Parking Area
- Point of Interest
- Footpath
- Road
- Water
- Contour
(10 ft. intervals)



Welcome to Falls River Preserve

- Open sunrise to sunset
- Please respect the privacy of our neighbors
- Stay on marked trails to avoid damage to soil and habitats
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Map: Miro Art Studio - miroart.com Source: Essex Land Trust
January 2019



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Fern Ledge

Falls River Preserves



"20 years from now you will be more disappointed by the things you didn't do than the ones you did do. So, throw off the bowlines. Sail away from the safe harbor. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover"

– Mark Twain, *Autobiography*

Description

With its steep terrain and high ledge overlooking a working farmer's field, Fern Ledge has a unique place among Essex preserves. Trails wind through woodlands and among old stone walls, offering glimpses of Birch Millpond below. In winter, it affords distant, sweeping views of the surrounding countryside. Note that the trails leading up to the ledge are steep.

History

The property sits astride the Essex-Westbrook town line. The 13-acre parcel had lain idle for many years when it was purchased in 2005 from the estate of August Neidlinger and Catherine Doane.

Flora and Fauna

The trail crosses one of the small streams feeding Birch Millpond, vital habitat for turtles, salamanders and frogs along with ferns, jack-in-the-pulpit and skunk cabbage. Rare plants include dwarf ginseng, may apple and wild leek. Look for a beaver dam in the pond. The upper reaches at Fern Ledge are home to maple trees, oaks and birch along with mammals such as fox and deer.

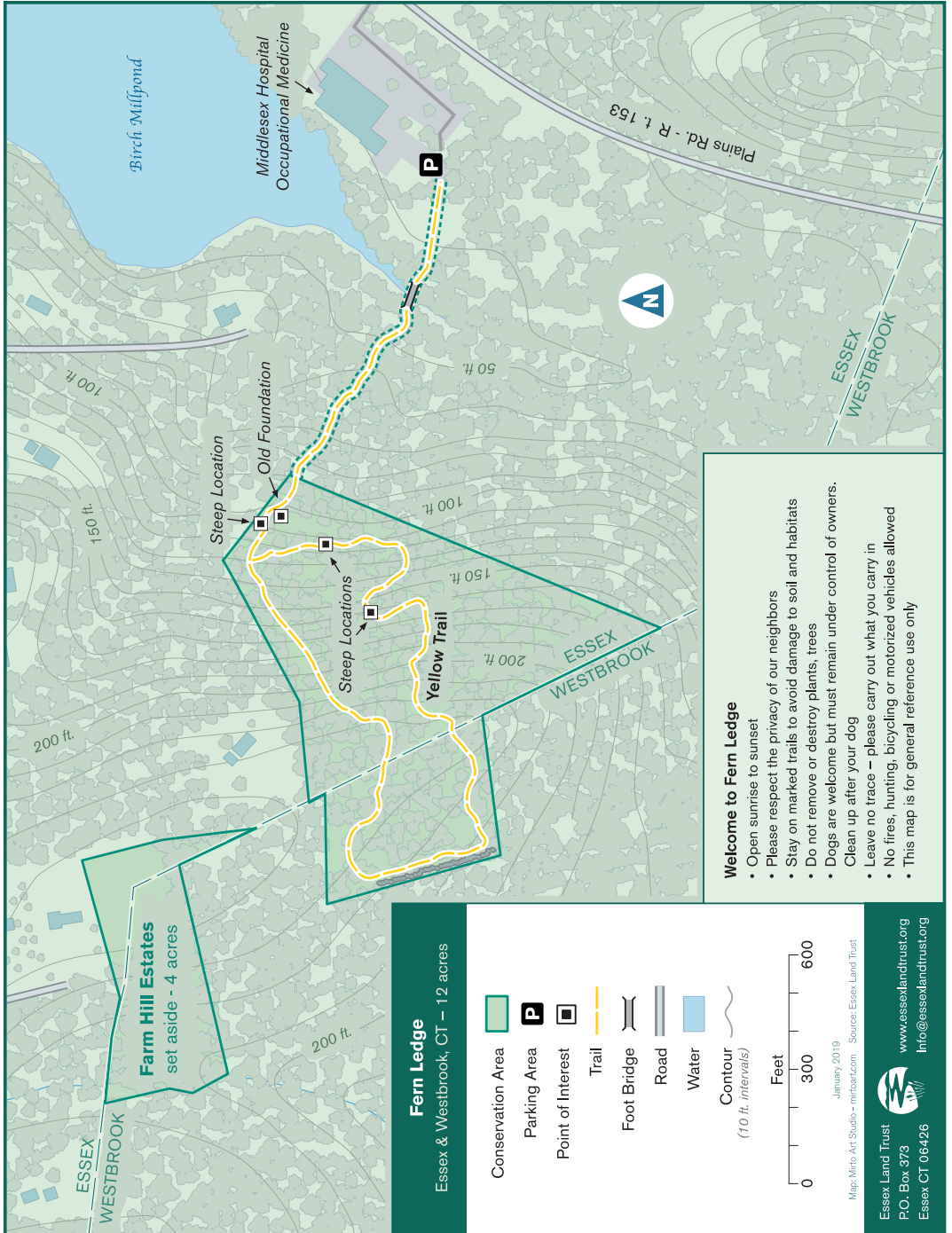
Farm Hill Estates

This 4-acre plot in Ivoryton and Westbrook deeded to the Land Trust when a housing development was established along Carol Drive. It is not linked to Fern Ledge and has no trails.

Location

In Essex – alongside the Middlesex Hospital Occupational Medicine facility, off Route 153.





- Welcome to Fern Ledge**
- Open sunrise to sunset
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Fern Ledge
 Essex & Westbrook, CT – 12 acres

- Conservation Area
- Parking Area
- Point of Interest
- Trail
- Foot Bridge
- Road
- Water
- Contour (10 ft. intervals)



January 2019
 Map: Mito Art Studio - mitoart.com Source: Essex Land Trust

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Heron Pond

Fern Ledge



"A sense of place, to me, is being in touch with the natural world, finding health and balance and renewal in nature and seasons. If we are in a place that we love, where we are comfortable, where we have invested ourselves, so much the better." – Jo Northrop, Country Matters

Description

With two lively watercourses flowing down separate valleys with a ridge in between, Heron Pond is a stream follower's delight. The 29-acre preserve's easy-walking terrain is crisscrossed by five trails reaching from high ground and rocky outcroppings to sandy streambeds. There are four stream crossings that use simple wooden beams to let the hiker reach the far side. Even during spring thaws, the trails remain dry as long as streams are not dammed with falling debris. Make sure you check out the interesting six trunk red oak tree cluster on the yellow trail.

History

Heron Pond, once the homestead of John Clark Pratt and later, his son, Ralph, was acquired through the private development of surrounding property and opened in 2007. Traces of old road beds hint at the land's early uses, which included logging and the pasturing of farm animals.

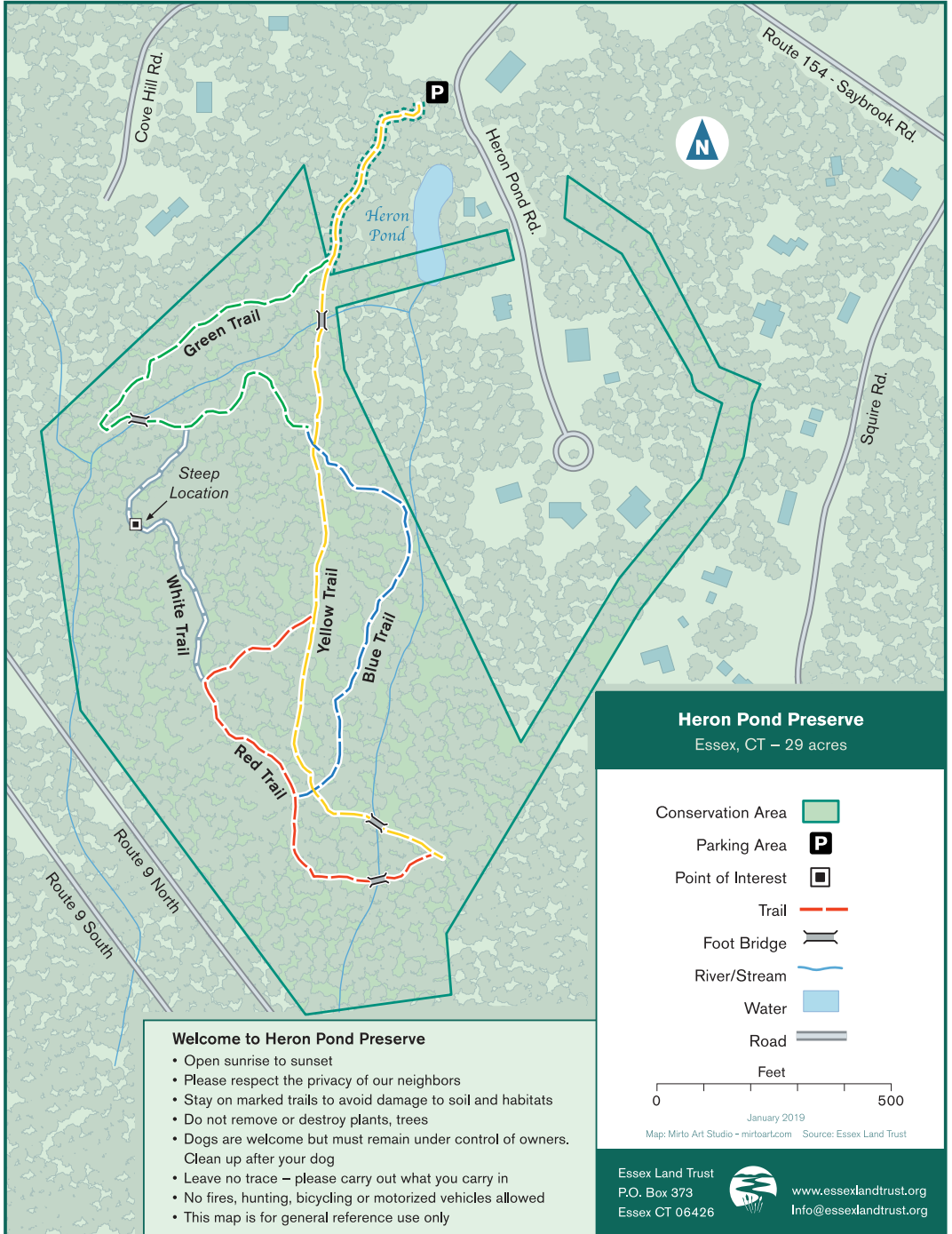
Flora and Fauna

The new-growth forest canopy has kept undergrowth to a minimum, giving Heron Pond an open feel. A prominent grove of evergreens and birch surround the pond, which is partly on private property. Larger maple, beech and oak trees appear on higher ground among the eroded rock ledges. In mid-summer there are many types of mushrooms along the various trails. Look for ferns and mountain laurel — and don't be surprised to see or hear barred owls throughout the year.

Location

in Essex – on Heron Pond Road, off Route 154.





James Glen, Doanes' Woods & Woodja Hill

Heron Pond



"An interest in nature leads you into a kind of enchanted labyrinth. You wander from corridor to corridor; one interest leads to another interest; one discovery to another discovery. It matters little where you begin."

– Edwin Way Teale, *Circle of the Seasons*

Description

These three properties combine to make 40 contiguous acres that include an open meadow, upland forest, forested wetland and a beaver pond. Woodja Hill connects through a right of way with Lyon's Meadow and Millstone Hill, Deep River Land Trust parcels, thereby creating a 50-acre greenway. The properties sit on a ridge overlooking the Connecticut River and include the headwaters of three small watersheds draining to three distinct portions of the Connecticut River. There is an unusual crook in the stone wall on the valley floor of Woodja Hill where, old timers say, a natural spring supplied water and the property line was "adjusted" to ensure the livestock had access.

History

The Doane family holdings date back to Israel Doane in the 1700s. The current generation of the Doane family is the seventh generation on the property, which was a homestead farm for many years. An old farm road and stone walls still wind through the property. The James Glen section belonged to Essex physician, Dr. Raymond James. The Woodja Hill section was acquired in 2018 with financial support from the Town of Essex and the State of Connecticut.

Flora and Fauna

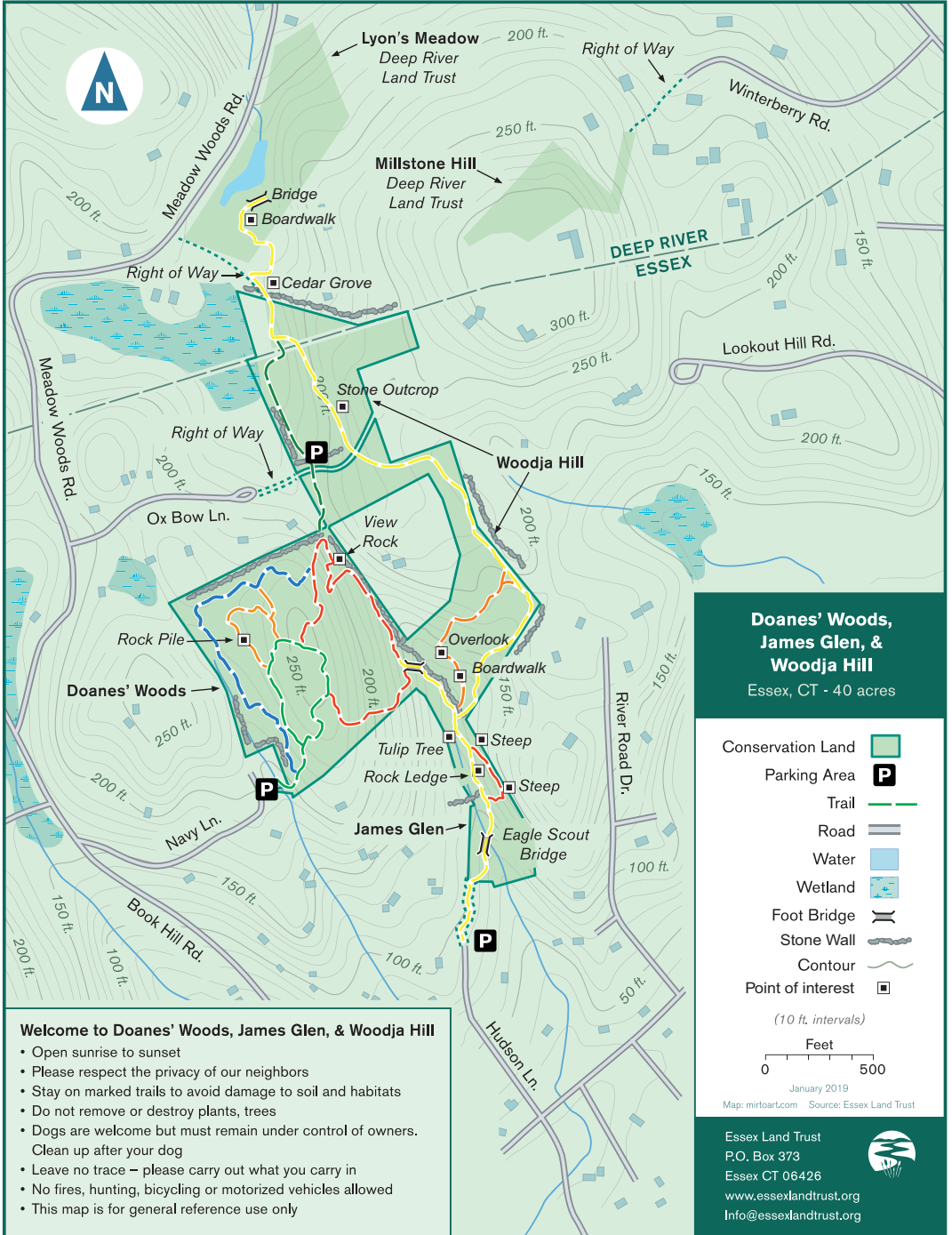
Several types of upland and wetland habitats promote vegetation for wildlife food and for migratory/movement corridors. Tree varieties abound along with other plants and in the understory. The meadow includes bluestem bunch grass, and blueberry bushes along with eastern red cedar. The forested area provides habitat for red-shouldered hawks, owls, woodpeckers, as well as for deer, fox, and coyote. The open area habitat supports numerous birds and small mammals, as well as hunting grounds for birds of prey and larger mammals. There has been regular presence of the eastern box turtle while the valley floor wetlands harbor amphibians, including frogs and salamanders.

Eagle Scout Bridge

Taking advantage of stone abutments from an earlier time, Michael Ryan, along with members of Scout Troop 12, erected a 14-foot bridge in 2017 spanning a brook that creates a valley running down the length of the James Glen property.

Location

In Essex – on Hudson Lane, off River Road, at end of Navy Lane off of Book Hill Road, and at the end of Oxbow Lane, off of Meadow Woods Road.



Welcome to Doanes' Woods, James Glen, & Woodja Hill

- Open sunrise to sunset
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Johnson Farm Preserve

James Glen, Doanes' Woods & Woodja Hill



"I just wanted this land to be around for the next generation of kids."

– Murwin Johnson

Description

Johnson Farm is a 49-acre preserve in the heart of Ivoryton characterized by mixed hardwood forests, open fields and early successional ecosystems. Acquired in 2015 from Murwin Johnson's widow, Polly, its large open fields, once home to Murwin Johnson's flock of sheep, are now part of a trail system that includes a newly developed woodland trail through the deciduous forest located on the east side of the property. An intermittent stream runs through the northern boundary of the property which also includes a vernal pool. The farm is a wonderful reminder of Connecticut's farming heritage. The property's elevation ranges from 90 ft to 250 ft., which provides spectacular views northeast to the Connecticut River Valley.

History

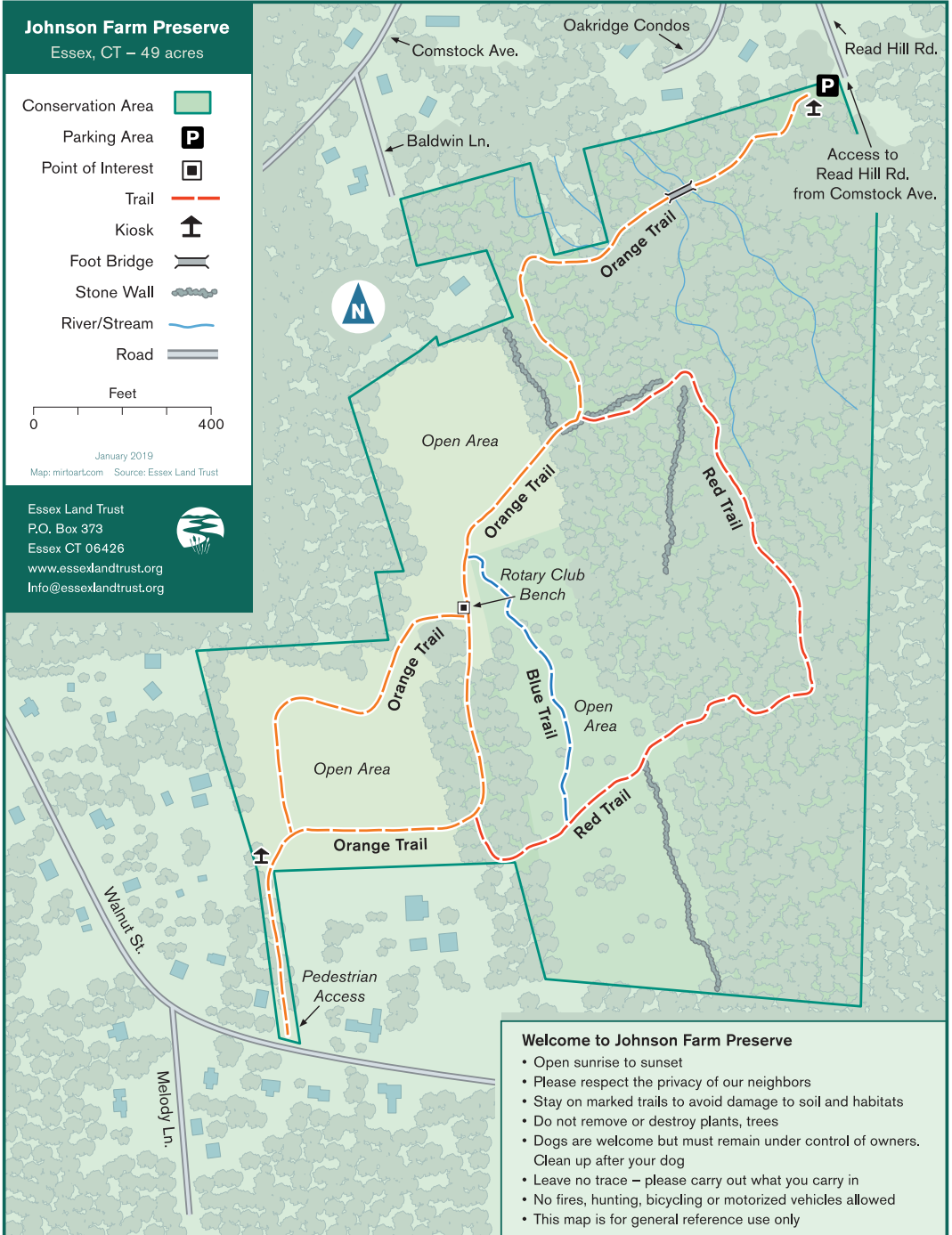
Soon after World War II, Axel and Mabel Johnson purchased an approximately 140-acre woodlot which included assorted pastures. The lot was eventually split between their two sons Murwin and Hanford, with Murwin receiving 50 acres, based on the value of the acreage. In addition, Murwin, his brother Hanford, and sister Sandra each received 3-acre building lots. Murwin Johnson considered himself a "hobby farmer" since his main occupation for over 30 years was as an inspector for the Dairy Division of the Connecticut Department of Agriculture. Starting out raising chickens and selling their eggs, his primary hobby over many years soon became raising sheep. Typically, he managed 35-40 sheep annually, one year as many as 75. His sheep were Border Leicester, known for quality wool fleece.

Flora and Fauna

The farm hosts a large variety of trees. Given its varied habitat and flora, many different species of birds can be found across the seasons: Carolina wren, brown thrasher, eastern bluebird, eastern towhee, American goldfinch, wild turkey, mockingbird, grey catbird, song sparrow, multiple woodpecker species and, along forest edges, red-tailed hawks and great horned owls. Similarly, diverse mammal residents include eastern chipmunk, gray squirrel, white-tailed deer, cottontail rabbit, raccoon, coyote and fox.

Location

In Ivoryton – parking at end of Read Hill Road, off of Comstock Avenue. Pedestrian access only on Walnut Street (no parking).



The Millrace

Johnson Farm Preserve



"This is the spot – how mildly does the sun shine in between the faded leaves! The air in the habitual silence of this wood is more than silent."

– William Wordsworth, *Travelling*

Description

The Millrace is a six-acre historic park on the Falls River in Ivoryton. Named for the still visible millrace, or water channel, it carried water downstream from the ivory factory mill wheel. The half-mile trail crosses the river and the millrace on wooden foot bridges. Historic markers along the way trace Ivoryton's history as a producer of ivory goods.

History

The Millrace's western end was once a pond created by an 1847 industrial dam. For years the ivory factory flooded the wetlands east of the dam for public ice skating. The dam burst in a 1982 flood that roared through Ivoryton leaving the remains of the millrace still visible at the Ivory Street entrance. The Millrace was made possible through the generosity of Herb and Sherry Clark and Moeller Instruments. It was opened in May, 2008.

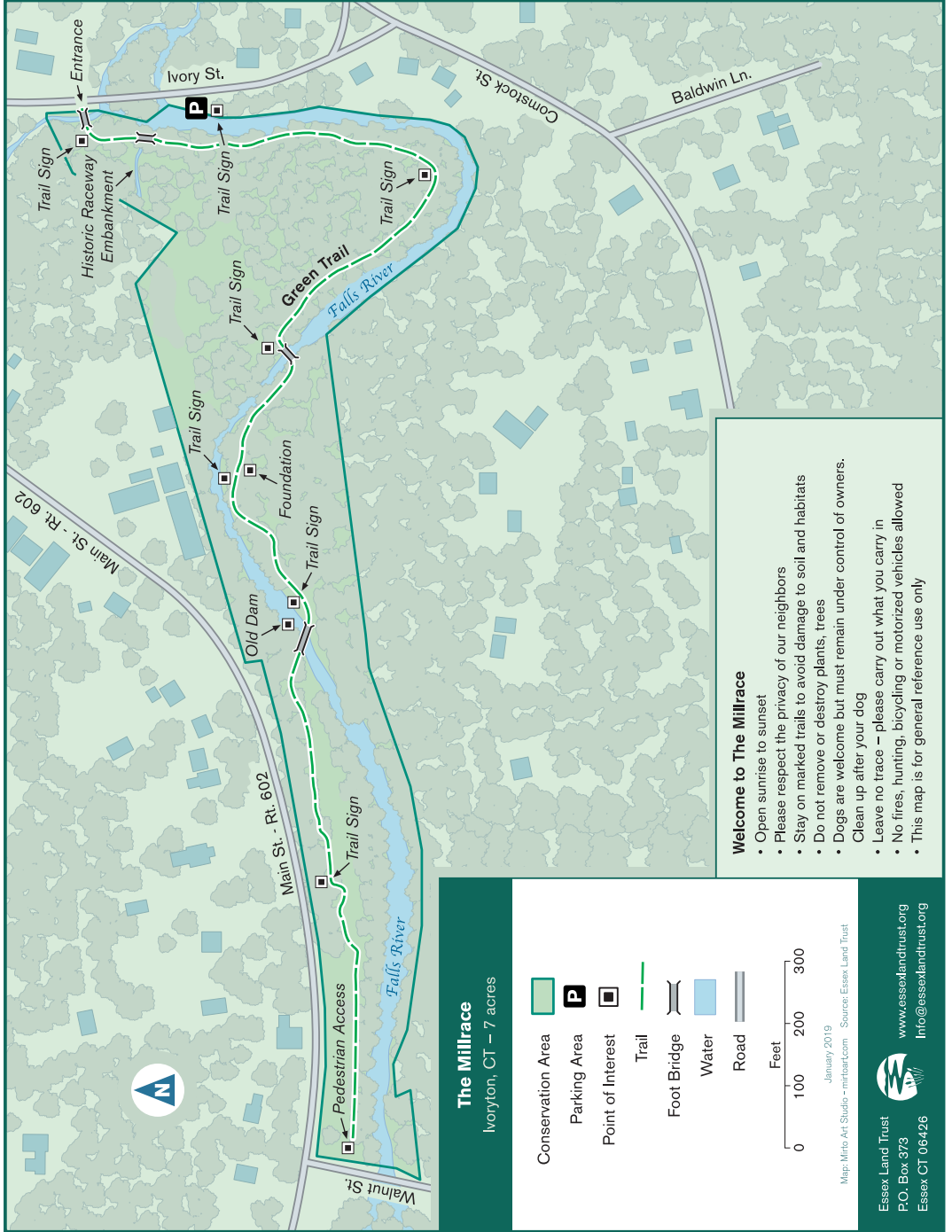
Flora and Fauna

Wetland areas produce vibrant vernal pools in the spring, home to small amphibians and a host of plants. The young growth forest surrounds a few older maples and wild raspberry bushes attract wildlife from rabbits to coyotes. In spring, The Millrace is alive with the sound of songbirds and its stream is populated with brown trout, large-mouth bass, and pickerel among other species.

Location

In Ivoryton – entrances on Ivory and Walnut Streets.





The Millrace

Ivoryton, CT – 7 acres

- Conservation Area
- Parking Area
- Point of Interest
- Trail
- Foot Bridge
- Water
- Road



Map: Mirro Art Studio - mirroart.com Source: Essex Land Trust
 January 2019

Welcome to The Millrace

- Open sunrise to sunset
- Please respect the privacy of our neighbors
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Osage Trails

The Millrace



"If we use up all the green grass and ponds and the coves, there'll be nothing left for the future."

– Elizabeth "Diz" Callender

Description

Osage Trails is an eight-acre waterfront park with a sweeping lawn, a waterside meadow and a patch of forest where the Falls River forms Falls River Cove. The easy, well-marked loop trail winds through woods and wetlands close to the water as well as along higher ground inland. The Falls River estuary, including Falls River Cove and Essex's North Cove support a burgeoning list of wildlife and vegetation.

Osage Trails was donated to the Essex Land Trust in 1998 by Elizabeth "Diz" Callender. Born in 1915, Diz grew up on North Main Street in an Essex that is wonderful to imagine — one where trolleys ran, groceries were delivered by horse and wagon and roads were still unpaved. She often went for walks with her mother through River View Cemetery and along the cove to Foxboro Point.

History

A stone bulkhead extending into the cove and a fieldstone building foundation on the loop trail are some of the remains of the Williams' shipbuilding yard. Across the cove from Osage Trails there was a bustling shipyard producing ocean going sailing ships for trade with the West Indies as well as for privateers, which is why the British included it in their April 4, 1814 attack on Essex. One of the ships destroyed at the time was the *Osage*, thereby giving the property its name. A "stone water fence" is visible at low tide; it was used in the ship building period to store lumber that was brought down the Connecticut River from forests further north.

Flora and Fauna

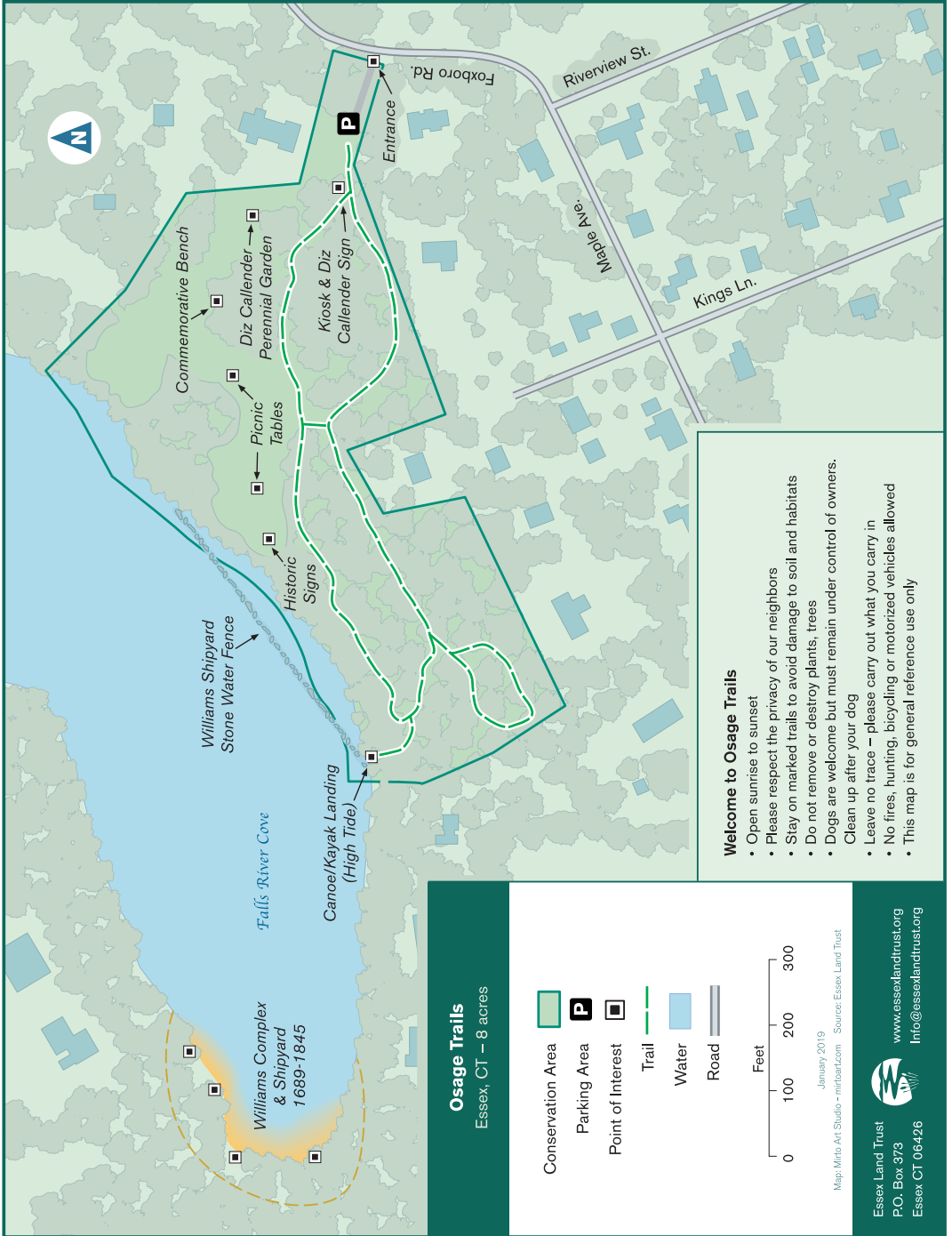
Cedar tree stands are scattered among the maples and oaks in the young forest. The cove waters attract osprey from the nearby Connecticut River and is home to double-crested cormorants along with wading birds such as herons, egrets and several species of ducks.

Other uses

The park is kayak-accessible only at high tide and the open lawn and meadow are ideal for picnicking. Two historic signs tell the story of the Williams Complex and Shipyard and of the British raid on Essex in 1814.

Location

In Essex – take Maple Avenue off North Main Street onto Foxboro Point.



Pond Meadow

Osage Trails



"If we can somehow retain places where we can always sense the mystery of the unknown, our lives will be richer."

– Sigurd F. Olson, *Mystery and the Unknown*

Description

Pond Meadow is an 18-acre parcel of upland forest with a sizable wetland crossing its length. Starting at a 30 ft. bridge spanning a drainage brook that flows from the fire pond to the Falls River, the looping trail proceeds along 450-feet of wooden bog walk, which allows hikers to explore part of the forest heretofore impossible to access. The wooden bridge was built in 2015 by Eagle Scout Dan Ryan, a member of Scout Troop 12.

History

The property was once managed as a series of brush pastures surrounding a wetland. By 1965, the southern and northern pastures appear to have been abandoned, and a mixed hardwood forest began to grow into these areas. There is an unverified story about the area that once in the early 20th century a circus came to town and somehow an elephant got away and was finally apprehended when it was mired in the muck of the wetland.

Flora and Fauna

At least 33 different types of trees have been identified, many of which have identification labels attached to them. Trees found along the trails and the area surrounding the wetland include tulip poplar, American elm, sassafras, beech, birch, ash and four species of oak. Along upland drainages, spicebush, skunk cabbage, and marsh marigold are common. A number of the hardwood trees have been aged at over 100 years old. The understory is composed of witch hazel, highbush blueberry, and azalea. There is a rare American chestnut on the southern end near the old logging road.

Multiple oak trees are an energy resource for a wide range of wildlife, including blue jay, wild turkey, eastern chipmunk, gray squirrels, white-tailed deer, and weevils. Birds that nest in deciduous forested swamps include wood ducks, barred owls, downy woodpeckers, tufted titmice, red-eyed vireos, and many warblers. Mallards and black ducks have also been spotted in this area of the Falls River. Mammals seen here include fox, coyote, raccoon, skunk, opossum and fisher cat.


Location

In Ivoryton – on Park Road, off of Walnut Street.



Pond Meadow

Ivoryton, CT – 18 acres

Conservation Area 

Parking Area 


Point of Interest 

Kiosk 

Trail 

Foot Bridge 

Boardwalk 

River/Stream 

Road 

Feet

0 100 200 300

January 2019

Map: Mirto Art Studio - mirtoart.com Source: Essex Land Trust

Essex Land Trust

P.O. Box 373

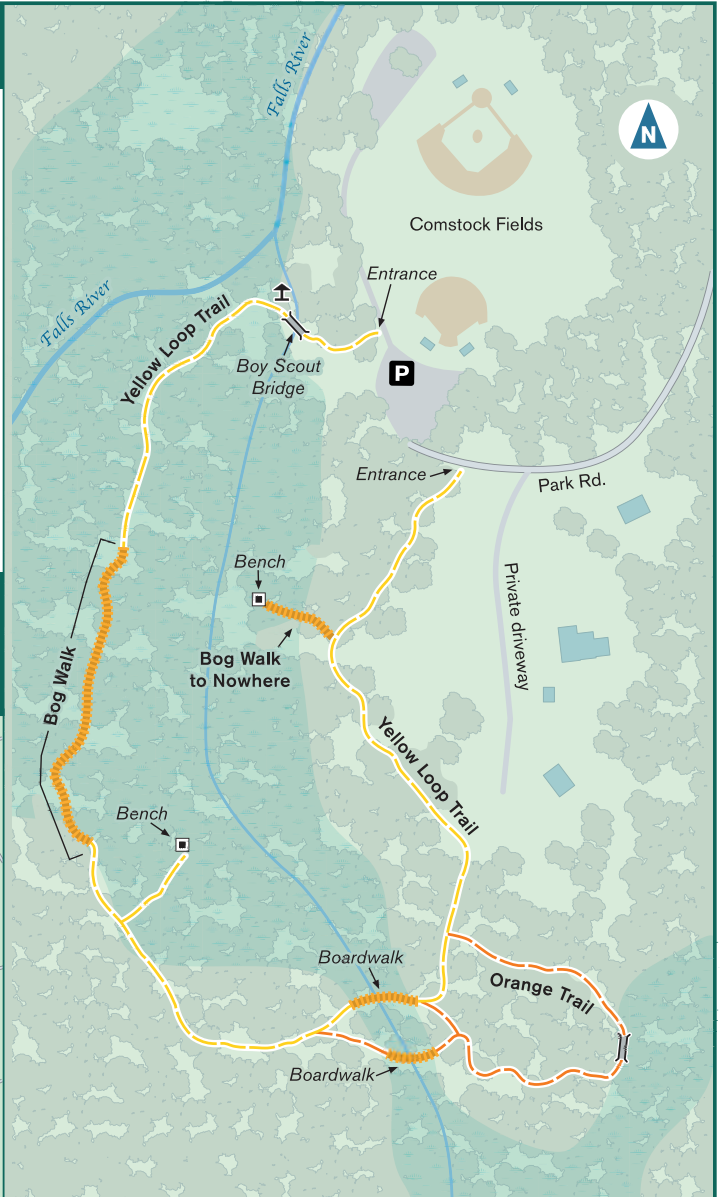
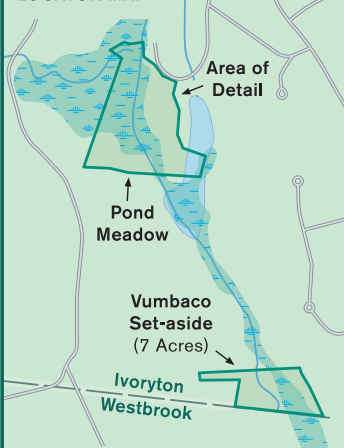
Essex CT 06426

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LOCATOR MAP



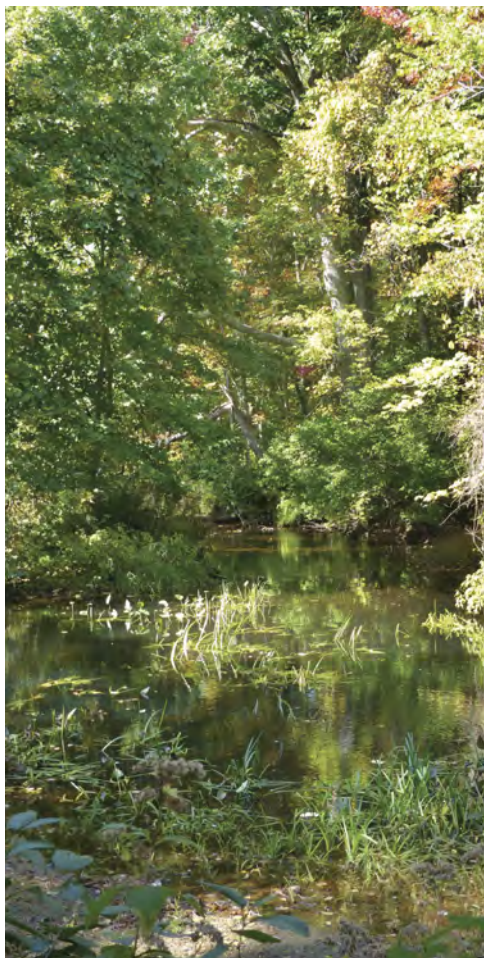
Welcome to Pond Meadow

- Open sunrise to sunset
- Please respect the privacy of our neighbors
- Stay on marked trails to avoid damage to soil and habitats
- Do not remove or destroy plants, trees

- Dogs are welcome but must remain under control of owners. Clean up after your dog
- Leave no trace – please carry out what you carry in
- No fires, hunting, bicycling or motorized vehicles allowed
- This map is for general reference use only

The Preserve – Essex, Old Saybrook & Westbrook

Pond Meadow



Description

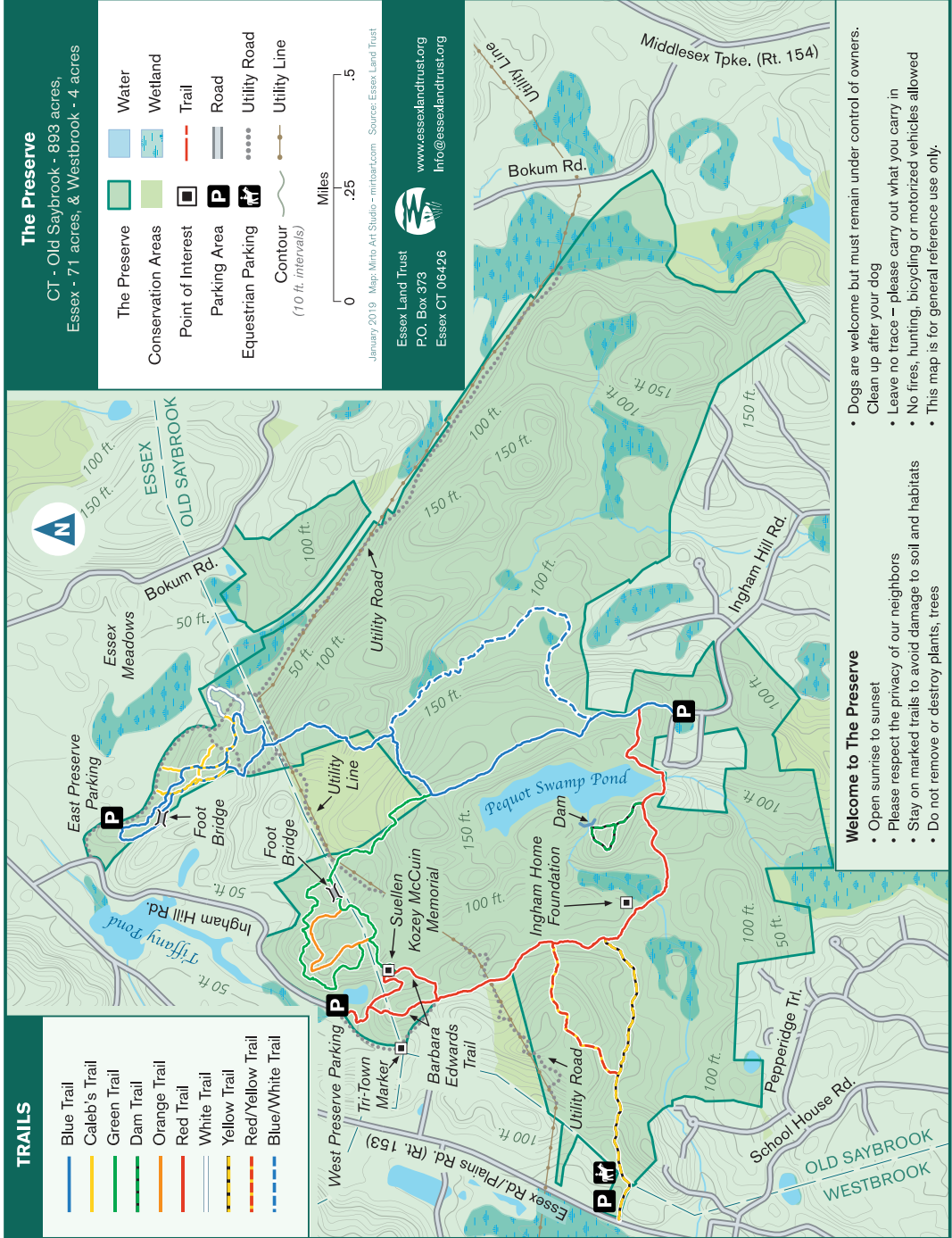
The Preserve is an intact coastal hardwood forest covering 968 acres and is considered the largest remaining contiguous coastal forest between New York and Boston. For perspective, it is 128 acres larger than New York City's Central Park. The principal non-forested areas include Pequot Swamp Pond, a utility right of way of open field and scrub/shrub vegetation, abandoned logging roads and exposed bedrock. Well-used hiking trails and abandoned logging roads are indicative of frequent recreational use. Stonewalls throughout the site show that the land was previously cleared and likely used as pasture until the early 20th century.

The most striking physical characteristics of the site are the ridgelines and slopes that cut through the property. These ridges are bedrock-derived and are overlain with variable depths of glacial till. Throughout the site, slopes vary from very steep to nearly flat; the underlying bedrock dictates the topography. Site elevations range from approximately 48 feet to 200 feet above sea level. The Preserve is primarily within the headwaters of the Oyster and Patchogue Rivers. A small portion of the north end of the site drains through the Mud River to the Falls River that flows to the estuarine waters of the lower Connecticut River.

The site's wetlands are typically connected by a network of intermittent watercourses that are the primary means of exporting biomass to downstream locations. There are 120 acres of wetlands on the site including 38 vernal pools, covering nearly 20 acres, which may be unparalleled in the State Connecticut.

History

Native Americans from the Western Nehantic and the Hammonasset tribes once had hunting-and-gathering camps near the streams and marshes that run through these oak-dominated forests. An archaeological survey tentatively identified at least five different possible hunting sites for investigation. According to local historians, it was the Pequots who originally sold the land in the 1600s to the Ingham family. The highland woods in those days carried the name Pequot Hill, and the largest water feature is still known as Pequot Swamp. From 1710 when Joseph Ingham was given land until 1904, family members harvested timber, farmed, built houses, and lived on or near this property.



The Preserve

CT - Old Saybrook - 893 acres,
Essex - 71 acres, & Westbrook - 4 acres

- The Preserve
- Conservation Areas
- Water
- Wetland
- Trail
- Road
- Parking Area
- Equestrian Parking
- Utility Road
- Utility Line



January 2019 Maps: Mirto Art Studio - mirtoart.com Source: Essex Land Trust
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TRAILS

- Blue Trail
- Caleb's Trail
- Green Trail
- Dam Trail
- Orange Trail
- Red Trail
- White Trail
- Red/Yellow Trail
- Blue/White Trail

Welcome to The Preserve

- Open sunrise to sunset
- Please respect the privacy of our neighbors
- Stay on marked trails to avoid damage to soil and habitats
- Do not remove or destroy plants, trees

Dogs are welcome but must remain under control of owners.

- Clean up after your dog
- Leave no trace – please carry out what you carry in
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The Preserve – Essex Section

The Preserve – Essex, Old Saybrook & Westbrook



History (cont'd.)

There is an old narrow road, first laid out in 1736 and called the Back Highway, that winds its way through the forest and becomes a furrowed rocky path leading to Pequot Swamp. It's a thoroughfare that is past its prime and eventually disappears in the underbrush only to re-emerge some distance beyond, headed toward Essex. Along the way, stone walls enclose the wooded hillside where once there were farms and fields. Archaeologists have uncovered quartz for making stone tools and evidence of food resources associated with seasonal fishing and hunting near the wetlands.

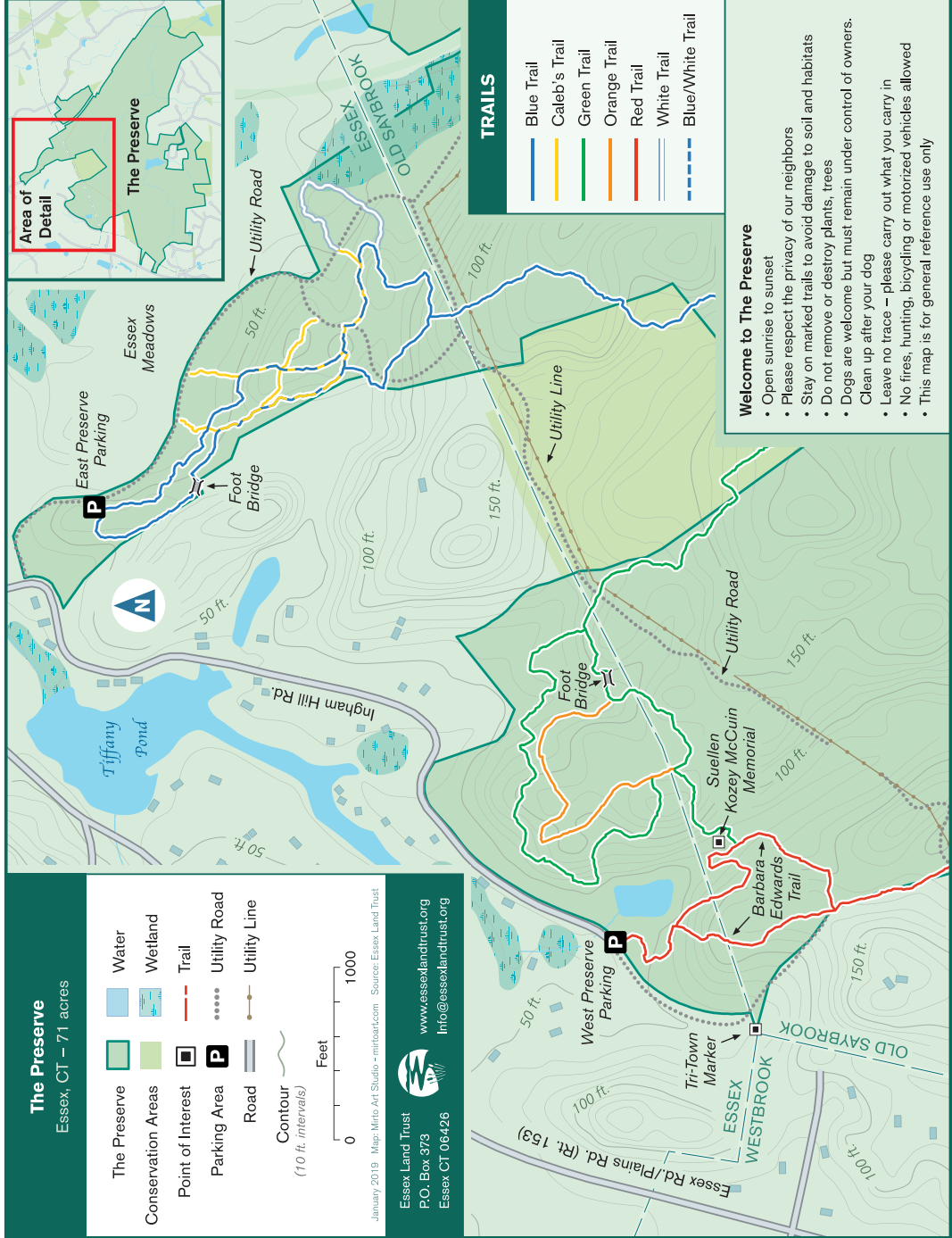
The Preserve was acquired in 2015 for a total of \$9.9 million. The Trust for Public Land led the initiative which involved financial support from The State of Connecticut, the Towns of Old Saybrook and Essex and numerous donations, both large and small, from more than 700 individuals and institutions.

Flora and Fauna

Six plant communities exist: coastal hardwood forest, wooded swamp, Atlantic white cedar swamp, shrub/scrub swamp, wet meadow/emergent marsh, open field. An additional habitat type, vernal pools, occurs within the mixed hardwood forest and wooded swamp vegetation communities. Hardwoods include red, white and black oak, hickories, especially mockernut, black cherry, sassafras and hemlock. Other species found include red maple, tulip poplar and black gum.

A total of fourteen species of amphibians and eleven species of reptiles have been identified in The Preserve among which are wood frog, spotted salamander, northern dusky salamander, red spotted newt, and gray treefrog. Additionally, over twenty mammal species, (including bobcat and the state-listed red bat) have been identified.

Fifty-seven species of birds have been identified during the breeding season, many of which are typical for an "intact forest interior habitat." The north-south orientation of this corridor, combined with the oak-dominance of the woodlands, makes this an extremely important flyway for many species of Neotropical migrant birds during both spring and fall migrations. Because most of these bird species are nocturnal migrants, they depend upon a clear view of the stars for navigation afforded by undeveloped land.



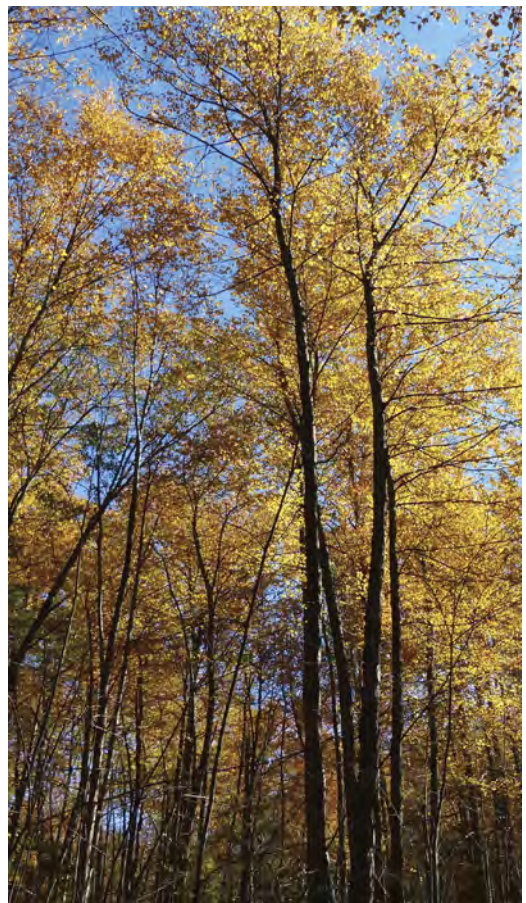
The Preserve – East Section with Essex Meadows

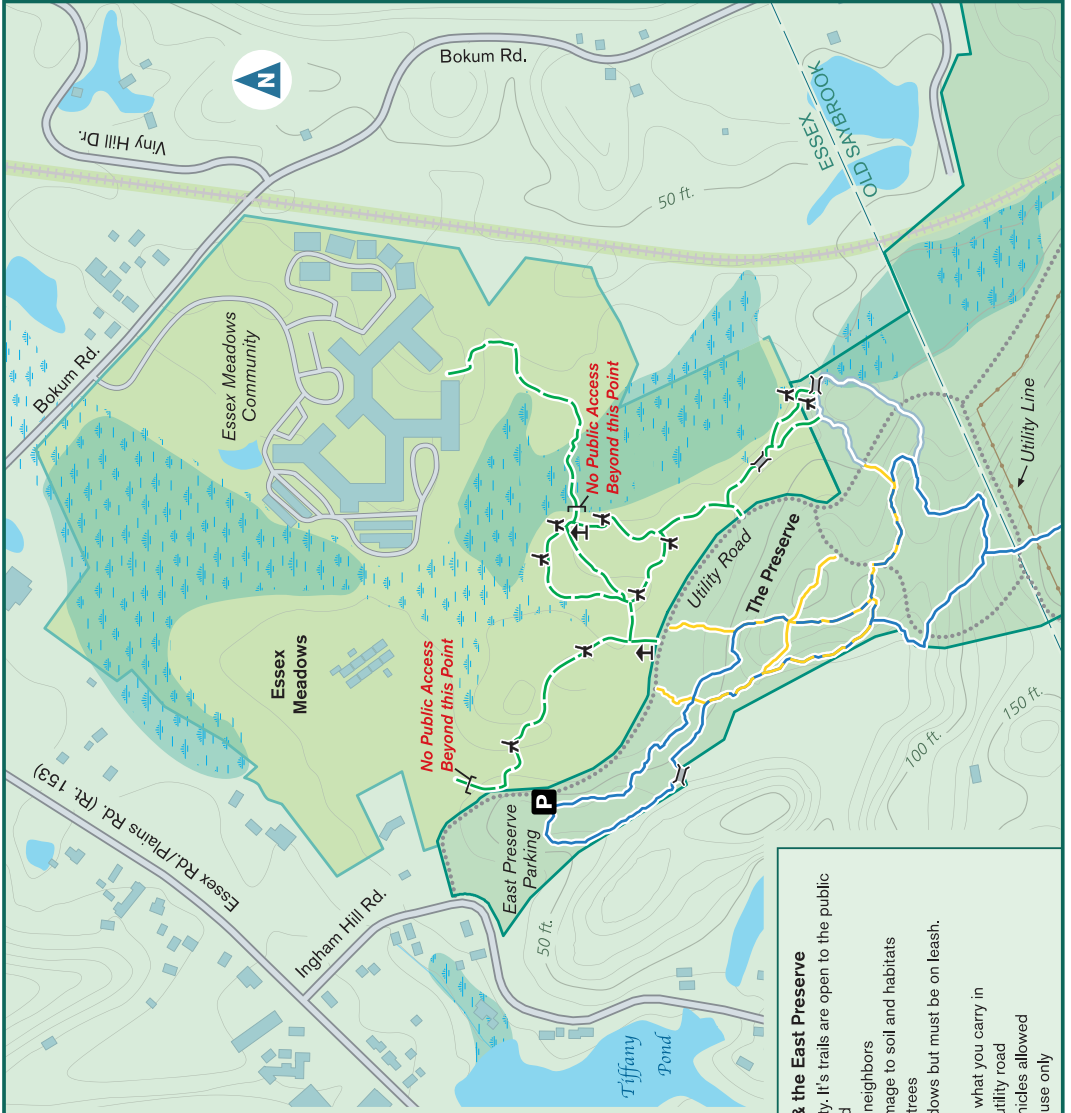
The Preserve – Essex Section



The East section of The Preserve is owned by the Essex Land Trust and represents 37 acres. In addition to connecting to substantial acreage in Old Saybrook, the East section abuts the 104-acre Essex Meadows property, a life care community of expansive natural beauty which includes a small golf course. Public access to Essex Meadows grounds is welcomed from the East section of The Preserve. Trails are marked and signs indicate where public access is restricted.

Essex Meadows' culture is steeped in warmth and hospitality, always putting residents' happiness first. Not surprisingly, satisfaction surveys show overwhelmingly positive scores – consistently in the high 90th percentile. These results are a testament to the good life and respect residents experience every moment of every day.





Essex Meadows & the East Preserve
Essex, CT

- The Preserve
- Essex Meadows
- Parking Area
- Trail
- Road
- Utility Road
- Water
- Wetland
- Bench
- Kiosk
- Foot Bridge
- Utility Line

Feet
0 500

December 2018
Map: mitchellr.com Source: Essex Land Trust

Essex Land Trust
P.O. Box 373
Essex CT 06426
www.essexlandtrust.org
info@essexlandtrust.org

- Welcome to Essex Meadows & the East Preserve**
- Essex Meadows is private property. It's trails are open to the public except where access is prohibited
 - Please respect the privacy of our neighbors
 - Stay on marked trails to avoid damage to soil and habitats
 - Do not remove or destroy plants, trees
 - Dogs are welcome at Essex Meadows but must be on leash. Clean up after your dog
 - Leave no trace – please carry out what you carry in
 - Bicycles are allowed only on the utility road
 - No fires, hunting, or motorized vehicles allowed
 - This map is for general reference use only

Tiley Pratt Pond

The Preserve – East Section with Essex Meadows



"I do not understand how anyone can live without some small place of enchantment to turn to."

– Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, *Cross Creek*

Description

Tiley Pratt Pond Preserve is an eight-acre, wooded gem hidden away not far from the center of Essex, off Laurel Road. The single loop trail starts high up on a series of rocky ledges, then descends steeply through the woods to the pond. There, it continues along the water's edge, offering open views of the water, before climbing back to the heights.

History

Tiley Pratt Pond is formed by a dam built in 1845 to serve a small factory making ivory products. Later, it was home to the Tiley, Pratt Co., which made bicycle spokes, button hooks and, for a brief period, produced a limited number of automobiles under the Tiley nameplate. The preserve was acquired in 2000 from the son of Henry Kreis, the famous sculptor, who grew up on the property and later built his studio there.

Flora and Fauna

Waterfowl value the shallow pond, which is home to herons, egrets, geese and ducks. It is a mixed hardwood forest sloping down to the river consisting of beech, red oak and white oak, sugar maple, red cedar, white spruce and hemlock. The new growth forest contains young maple and oak trees. Mountain Laurel grows throughout the understory.

Fishway

Located at the north end of Tiley Pratt Pond, a fishway was installed in 2014 by The Nature Conservancy with support from the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environment and the Essex Land Trust. Intended to reestablish spawning habitat for native anadromous alewife, blue-backed herring) and catadromous species (American eel), the fishway opens more than two miles of new habitat for migrating fish. The design consists of an entryway to calm and slow the dam overflow with a series of ascending pools or a ladder where the pools are created by small rock dams placed across the water flow. The migrating fish are able to move up from pool to pool against the flow, until they reach the top. The fishway can best be seen from Dennison Road where the Falls River crosses under the road.









Location

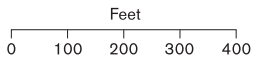
In Essex – on unmarked Kreis Lane off Laurel Road; look for Essex Land Trust markers.



Tiley-Pratt Pond

Essex, CT – 9 acres

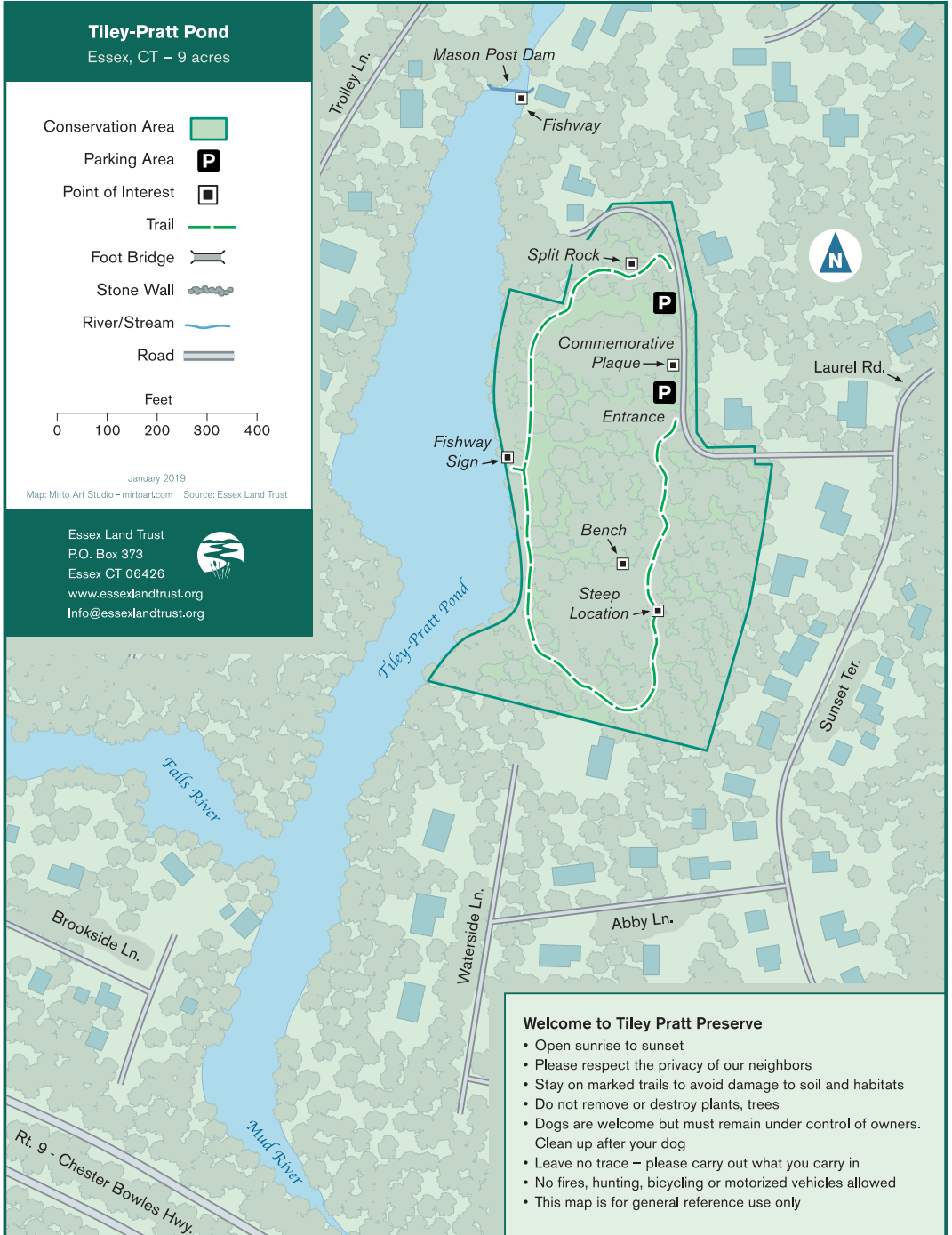
- Conservation Area 
- Parking Area 
- Point of Interest 
- Trail 
- Foot Bridge 
- Stone Wall 
- River/Stream 
- Road 



January 2019

Map: Mirfo Art Studio - mirfoart.com Source: Essex Land Trust

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 Essex CT 06426
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Welcome to Tiley Pratt Preserve

- Open sunrise to sunset
- Please respect the privacy of our neighbors
- Stay on marked trails to avoid damage to soil and habitats
- Do not remove or destroy plants, trees
- Dogs are welcome but must remain under control of owners.
Clean up after your dog
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Turtle Creek

Tiley Pratt Pond



"In the end, our society will be defined not only by what we create but by what we refuse to destroy."

– John C. Sawhill, former President & CEO of the Nature Conservancy

Description

River access and easy trails mark Turtle Creek, the 93-acre tidal estuary straddling the Essex and Old Saybrook line. The creek winds northward through extensive wetlands to a narrow strip of beach along the Connecticut River. Higher ground to the west borders South Cove in Essex.

History

Turtle Creek goes back a long way — Native Americans drew water from the spring off the main trail. Later known as Hayden Point after the property's owner, Uriah Hayden, builder of the war ship Oliver Cromwell, it was used as grazing land. The pond was created for ice production. The bulk of the preserve was donated to The Nature Conservancy by Dorothy S. Bowles, wife of former Connecticut Governor and U.S. Secretary of State Chester Bowles.

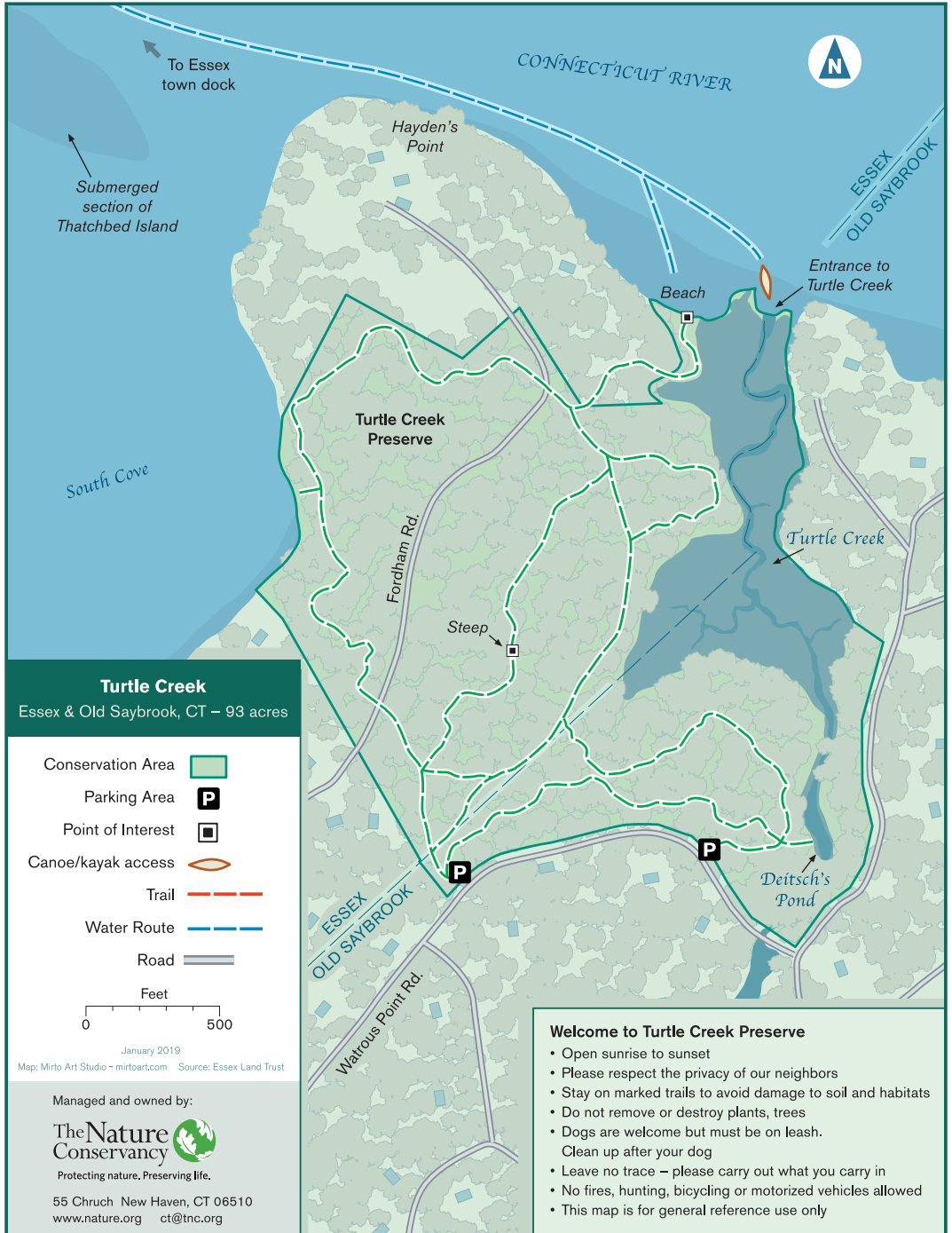
Flora and Fauna

Animal life includes turtles and other amphibians in the old ice pond. Bald eagles and osprey frequent the river and cove, which is also home to ducks, swans and wading birds. The wetlands abound with plant life, including jewelweed and lady's slipper orchids. Oak, birch and beech trees and mountain laurel dominate the higher ground.

Location

In Essex/Old Saybrook – on Watrous Point Road, off Route 154.





Viney Hill Brook Park/ Preserve

Turtle Creek



"We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect."

– Aldo Leopold, *A Sand Country Almanac*

Description

This 104-acre property belonging to the Town of Essex is dedicated to active and passive recreation. The beach, swimming area, picnic grounds and Paw Park account for 30 acres and are managed by the Essex Parks and Recreation Commission. The remaining 74 acres are left for hiking, nature watching and quiet enjoyment being under the care of the Essex Conservation Commission. Viney Hill Brook Park is bottom land, sandy and rocky, atop the Mud River aquifer. Its conservation value is enhanced by the crystal-clear water in the streams and ponds, which percolate and recharge the aquifer.

History

Beginning in the 1950s, the area was mined for sand and gravel by Stanley Wollock for whom a pond is named. Wollock developed several area properties including Ferry Point Marina in Old Saybrook. Before that it was wooded, although there are signs that it was cleared from time to time for farming. The land was acquired by the Town of Essex in 2001.

Flora and Fauna

Recent studies have identified 22 tree, 25 shrub and 25 wildflower species due to the variety of soil and moisture conditions in the park. Generally, the woodlands range in age from 80-100 years. Commonly found mammals include fox, white-tailed deer, raccoon, opossum, white-footed and deer mice, otter and a thriving beaver population. Preserve highlights include a turtle nesting area, several vernal pools and wetland areas. Numerous resident and migrating bird species are found throughout the year, notably warblers, vireos, flycatchers, hawks and owls.

Location

In Essex – Cedar Grove Terrace, passive recreation entrance; Hillside Drive, active and passive recreation entrance.

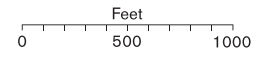


Viney Hill Brook

Essex, CT – 104 acres

- Conservation Area ■ Water ■
- Point of Interest Wetland ■
- Parking Area P Trail —
- Road Kiosk ↑

- Orange - Broad Walk
- Red - Turtle Trail
- Blue - Quarry Pond Trail
- Green - Wollock's Pond Loop
- White - Upland Woods Trail
- Purple - Forest Glade Trail



January 2019
Map: Mirtto Art Studio - mirttoart.com Source: Essex Land Trust

Viney Hill Brook is a Town of Essex Property managed by the Essex Conservation Commission and the Essex Parks & Recreation Commission.

Essex Town Hall • www.essexct.gov
29 West Avenue Essex, CT 06426

- Welcome to Viney Hill Brook**
- Open sunrise to sunset
 - Please respect the privacy of our neighbors
 - Stay on marked trails to avoid damage to soil and habitats
 - Do not remove or destroy plants, trees

- Dogs are welcome but must be on leash.
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Windswept Ridge

Viney Hill Brook/Park Preserve



"The value of exploration to the individual is in the thrill of adventure and in the fact that exploration is perhaps the greatest aesthetic experience a human being can know."

– Robert Marshall, *Letter to Melville B. Grosvenor, March 1, 1935*

Description

Heavily forested and strewn with rocks and boulders exposed by erosion, Windswept Ridge is a moderately steep 47-acre preserve descending to bottom land along Route 153. Some trail sections are rough and can be wet, but the walk can be a rewarding one. Its extensive trails allow for exploration along an old logging road next to a small stream and wetland as well as hiking up several loop trails which at certain times of the year offer distant southeast views.

History

The property once belonged to the prominent Bull and Bushnell families. It overlooks the Mud River valley farmland once known as "Scotch Plains." This section of Essex was very desirable to the early settlers and remains the primary reason Centerbrook was the focal point of Essex up to the Revolutionary War. The old name of Bushnell Meadows indicates the ridge area was used as an animal grazing area.

Flora and Fauna

Heavy canopy, damp soil and pockets of wetland characterize Windswept Ridge. Look for wonderful green fern "meadows" in patches of clearing. The young growth forest includes maple and beech trees along with birch, oak and cottonwood. Some of the highlights are: a seven-trunk tulip poplar tree, a cliff wall and a hanging glacial boulder. Small mammals, including squirrels, chipmunks and rabbits, attract predators such as fox, hawks and owls.

Location

Three access points – In Ivoryton: on Windermere Way, off of Mares Hill Road/ Windswept Ridge Road; and Windsor Lane, off of Main Street/Edgewood Avenue. In Essex – behind Essex Financial Services facility, off of Route 153.



North Cove & Great Meadow

Windswept Ridge



"I believe the world is incomprehensibly beautiful – an endless prospect of magic and wonder."

– Ansel Adams, June 1961

Description

North Cove is a 230-acre body of tidal water between the Falls River and the Connecticut River. The cove is formed in part by Great Meadow, a 200-acre "pendant bar" or levee along the Connecticut River. Parts of Great Meadow are often under water especially in spring and it has no public access.

History

North Cove was noted for ship building, and the nearby Williams Complex and Shipyard in Falls River Cove turned out sloops and schooners for the commercial trade in the 19th century. Empty now, Great Meadow was also a beehive of activity. Cattle were grazed, salt hay was harvested and duck hunting blinds once lined the shore. The bar was also a base for the local fishing industry and its lucrative seasonal shad run.

Flora and Fauna

Great Meadow is topped by cattails and other reeds. Wild rice and bulrush grow at the water's edge. Rare plants include horned pond weed and tidewater arrowhead. Over the years, the Land Trust has made efforts to limit the presence of invasive phragmites in order to promote diversity of plants and animals. Resulting from this effort has been the discovery of the largest stand of native phragmites in Connecticut. Native phragmites has always been a rare, non-invasive species that grows in mixed wetland plant communities. This area is a well-known habitat for eagles, osprey and two species of rail. During spring/summer months northern harriers are common sights while in winter months rough-legged hawks can also be spotted.

Location







Canoe/kayak water access at the landing off of Bushnell Street.

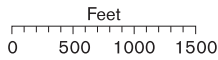




North Cove & Great Meadow

Essex, CT – 91 acres

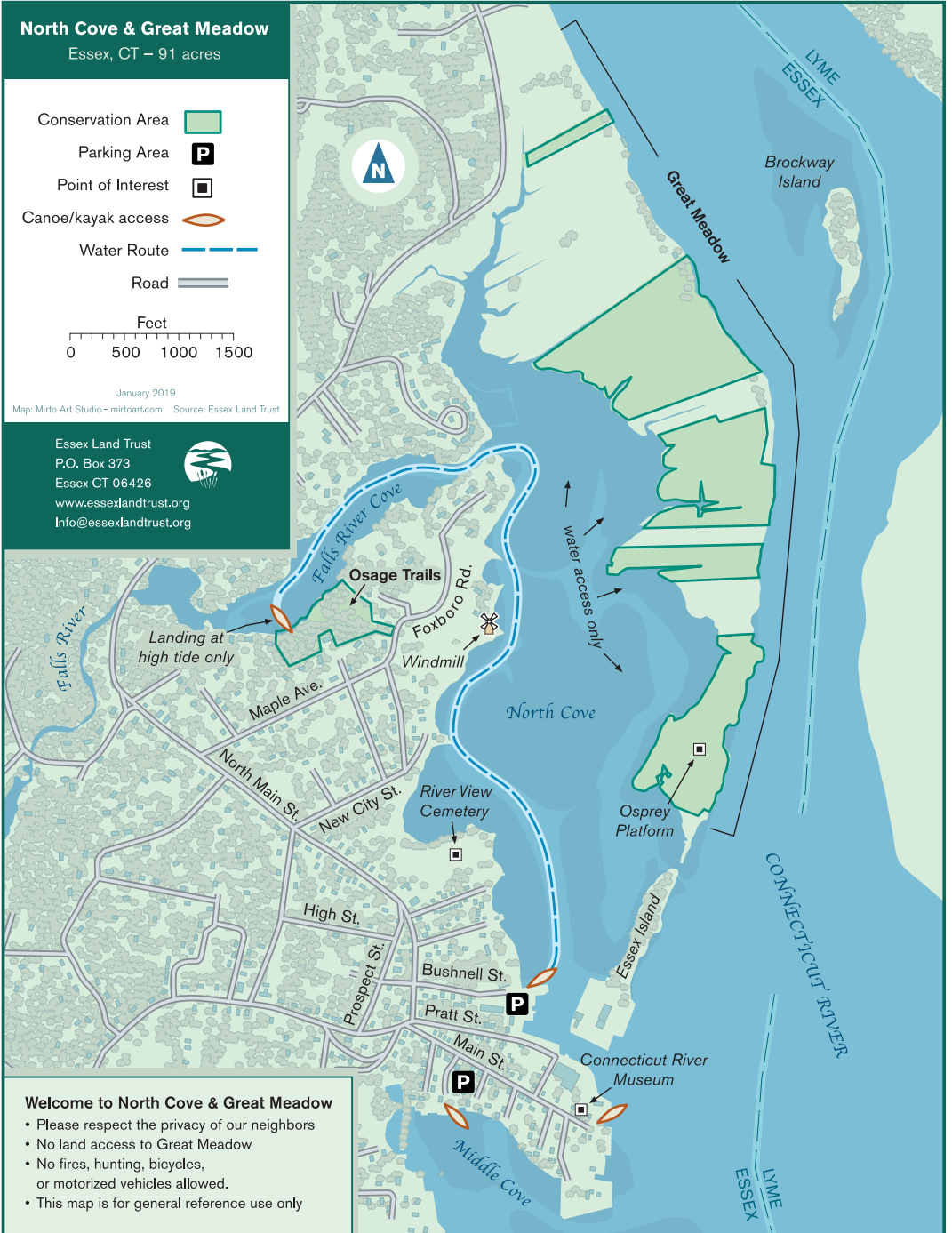
- Conservation Area 
- Parking Area 
- Point of Interest 
- Canoe/kayak access 
- Water Route 
- Road 



January 2019

Map: Mirto Art Studio - mirtoart.com Source: Essex Land Trust

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 Essex CT 06426
www.essexlandtrust.org
Info@essexlandtrust.org



Welcome to North Cove & Great Meadow

- Please respect the privacy of our neighbors
- No land access to Great Meadow
- No fires, hunting, bicycles, or motorized vehicles allowed.
- This map is for general reference use only

South Cove & Thatchbed Island

North Cove & Great Meadow



*“Fish in unruffled lakes
The swarming colors wear
Swans in winter air
A white perfection have”*

– W. H. Auden, *Fish in Unruffled Lakes*

Description

South Cove is an environmentally significant, 135-acre, shallow-water estuary in Essex Harbor with its own island. Thatchbed Island is an 8-acre brackish, vegetated wetland on the Connecticut River separating Middle Cove and South Cove. Although there is no public access to the island, the cove is popular with paddlers. Look for two osprey platforms and one osprey tree nest on Thatchbed Island.

History

Essex’s coves were busy shipbuilding locations through most of the 19th century. The trend towards steel-hulled vessels and the gradual silting of the coves ended that era. The Mack Yard, on Middle Cove, launched its last major vessel in 1870.

Flora and Fauna

The Connecticut River tidelands are one of The Nature Conservancy’s “Last Great Places” in the Western Hemisphere. South Cove is recognized as an important stop for migratory birds; island vegetation provides habitat, nesting and feeding for numerous waterfowl. The cove is also a nursery for freshwater fish and estuarine-dependent saltwater species.

Location

Three locations to launch watercraft – from Essex Town Park behind Post Office, town landing at the foot of Main Street by the Connecticut River Museum, or from the town landing off of Bushnell Street.





Credits

This Trail Guide is an updated version of the 2008 Essex Land Trust Trail Guide. Although Jim Denham has led this project, a number of individuals participated in the original version, upon which this edition is based. Contributions were made by Paul Greenberg, Bill Grover, Haines Design, Steve Knauth, Al Macgregor, Don Malcarne and Phil Miller.

A special note of thanks to property steward Myron Stacks who GPS recorded every trail, most stone walls and points of interest. The improved accuracy of the maps is due to his considerable effort in visiting all properties.

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Mirto Art Studio 
technical illustration & design services

Mirto Art Studio – www.mirtoart.com

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Celebrating 50 Essex Land Trust

Essex Land Trust

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www.essexlandtrust.org

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The accreditation seal is awarded to land trusts meeting the highest national standards for excellence and conservation permanence.
