



# Hike, Paddle, Cast!

## The Forest Society's Top 17 Fishing Holes

By Paul Doscher

### [Ashuelot Headwaters \(Online Guide\)](#)

If you like to hike and fish along the way, take a hike to Long Pond or Sand Pond on the Ashuelot Headwaters Forest in Lempster. This is a pleasant woodland walk, with a choice of either pond as a destination. Long Pond is managed by N.H. Fish and Game as a rainbow trout fishery, and Sand Pond is a cold and warm water (bass, etc.) fishery. At Sand Pond there is a public boat launch where you can put in your canoe or kayak and paddle north across the pond to the undeveloped shore of the Ashuelot Headwaters Forest and its large granite outcrops. The woodland trail also leads to these impressive rocks.

**E**very angler has his or her favorite places to fish in New Hampshire, but it's always fun to seek out a new favorite. And if that new favorite is close to hiking trails, diverse forests or picnic spots to explore on conserved land, so much the better.

Many Forest Society properties offer access to a range of fisheries, supporting native cold-water species (trout and salmon) and our native and introduced warm-water species (bass, sunfish, perch and pickerel). Forest Society properties are most often conserved, either through gifts by generous donors or purchase with public and charitable funds, for multiple purposes. All provide important protection for watershed lands that contribute to water quality. Some directly protect streams and ponds that provide opportunities for people to get outdoors and enjoy some time fishing with kids and friends.

Before heading out fishing, it's important to visit the N.H. Fish and Game Department website. Fishing licenses can be purchased there, and you can find out about free fishing classes and bi-weekly fishing reports. You'll also find the rules regarding when and how you can take and keep fish. For those targeting trout, there is a link to a page that lists the ponds, lakes and streams that are stocked with trout, and when they were stocked.

A note about directions: The properties in this list with **(Online Guide)** next to them are featured on the Online Guide to Forest Society properties at [forestsociety.org](http://forestsociety.org). There, you'll find more information, maps, directions and photos. For those properties not marked with **(Online Guide)**, a good N.H. gazetteer and/or online mapping tools (throw in a compass while you're at it) will help get you there with the information provided.



Connecticut River

### The Merrimack River Outdoor Education and Conservation Area, Concord (Online Guide)

With half a mile of frontage on the Merrimack River, the Merrimack River Outdoor Education and Conservation Area, near the Forest Society's Conservation Center headquarters, has long been a destination for local anglers. The Merrimack hosts good populations of bass and other warm water species, and in some places (not here) hosts trout as well. From the parking area off Portsmouth Street, a pleasant walk along the trail leads to the river, but you'll need to keep walking past the first sandy river bank you come to. This shoreline is steep and unstable. Don't fish there, as it's unsafe and it's where bank swallows nest in the sandy cliffs. Bank swallows are uncommon in New Hampshire, and it's best not to disturb them. Additionally, the sandy bottom along that section of the property isn't good fish habitat. Keep walking along the riverbank to where the river splits into a side channel. This is a more productive area for fishing, as are the backwaters and side channels on the forested loop trail back to the parking area. While you're there, notice the silver maple floodplain forest habitat and the many bird species that call this special place home.

### Coolidge Tree Farm, Sandwich

Roger Coolidge protected his property on Squam Lake first with a conservation easement and later, after his death, his trust donated the land to the Forest Society. He managed it as a Tree Farm, one of the earliest in New Hampshire. It has 3/4 mile of frontage on Otter Cove of Squam Lake, but no trail along the shoreline, so if you go, expect a 'bushwacking' walk along the water. There is also 1/3 mile of frontage on Kusumpe Pond, including a place you can launch a canoe or kayak from Coolidge Farm Road. To get to Coolidge Farm Road, follow NH-113 to take Mill Bridge Road, then from Mill Bridge Road turn right onto Coolidge Farm Road.

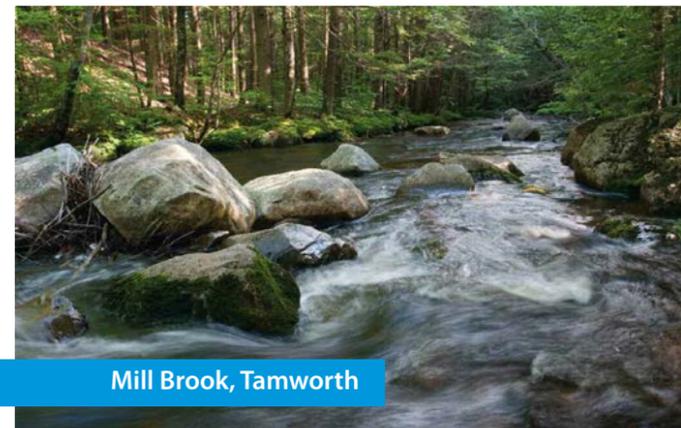
### Creek Farm, Portsmouth (Online Guide)

One of the most entertaining ways to fish for striped bass in the salt water is from a kayak. There's no guarantee you'll hook into a large fish, but if you do, a mini-version of what is called the "Nantucket Sleigh Ride" is lots of fun. A larger striper can pull you around the salt creeks and inland bays near Creek Farm for a few minutes of fun and laughs.

Creek Farm has extensive frontage on Sagamore Creek, a salt creek that flows in and out with the tides. You can access a lot of interesting water from the kayak and canoe launch at Creek Farm (carry your boat from the public parking area the 200 yards to the launch.) If the fishing is slow, there is still lots to see either paddling "upstream" to the salt marshes at the Urban Forestry Center, or "downstream" toward the Wentworth by the Sea hotel, or Leaches and Pest Islands. If you go at mid-tide, you can paddle under the Rye/New Castle Bridge and take a break on the bayside beaches of Odiorne State Park.

### Dana Forest, Dalton (Online Guide)

At the Dana Forest, you'll find a 2 1/2-mile walk through a spruce and fir forest to the site of a former gold mine. You'll also find access to the Johns River and a chance to see if you can catch a trout. Access to the river is via an old railroad bed. The railroad bed runs to the north off of the town roadway just east of the spot on Ridge Road where one gets to the Dana Forest entrance marked by a Forest Society sign. (Parking is allowed on the side of Ridge Road, but it is not allowed on Lower Ox Team Road, which is private.) Follow the railroad bed to a snowmobile bridge over Johns River, where Forest Society property begins and runs downstream.



Mill Brook, Tamworth



Heald Pond, Wilton

### Grafton Pond, Grafton (Online Guide)

This is one of the Forest Society's larger reservations, and thanks to the donors and other local conservationists, most of the pond frontage is protected. Launch your canoe or kayak at the public landing, and explore the bays and islands. This is warm-water fish habitat, and you'll enjoy casting for bass and other warm water species around the rocks and fallen trees. Loons nest here, and rarely does one go to Grafton Pond during the summer without seeing or hearing these spectacular birds.

### Heald Tract, Wilton (Online Guide)

Heald Pond (King Brook Reservoir) is actually a flood control reservoir constructed in the mid-twentieth century as part of a regional effort to reduce flooding in the Souhegan River watershed including the town of Milford. This beautiful, quiet pond is nearly entirely encompassed by the Heald Tract of the Forest Society. Fishing is welcome; expect to find warm-water species. One important caveat: No boats are allowed on Heald Pond—it's shore fishing only. This property offers more than 1,000 conserved acres, about five miles of trails and another pond—Castor Pond—to explore, so be sure to bring a picnic lunch!

### McCabe Forest, Antrim (Online Guide)

From the parking area on Route 202, the trail loops easterly toward the Contoocook River and two portions of the trail run along the banks of the river. This is slow moving water, home to warm water fish. It's a beautiful walk, and if you stroll the whole 2-miles of looping trails, you'll wind through upland pine-oak-hemlock forests, fields, old orchards, and a silver maple floodplain forest. Because of the wide variety of habitats, wildlife observation opportunities are excellent. Be forewarned that in the warm seasons, the wetlands and marshes on the McCabe Forest are known for breeding healthy populations of fish food...mosquitoes, and go prepared with your favorite insect repellent.

### East Concord Conservation Lands, Concord

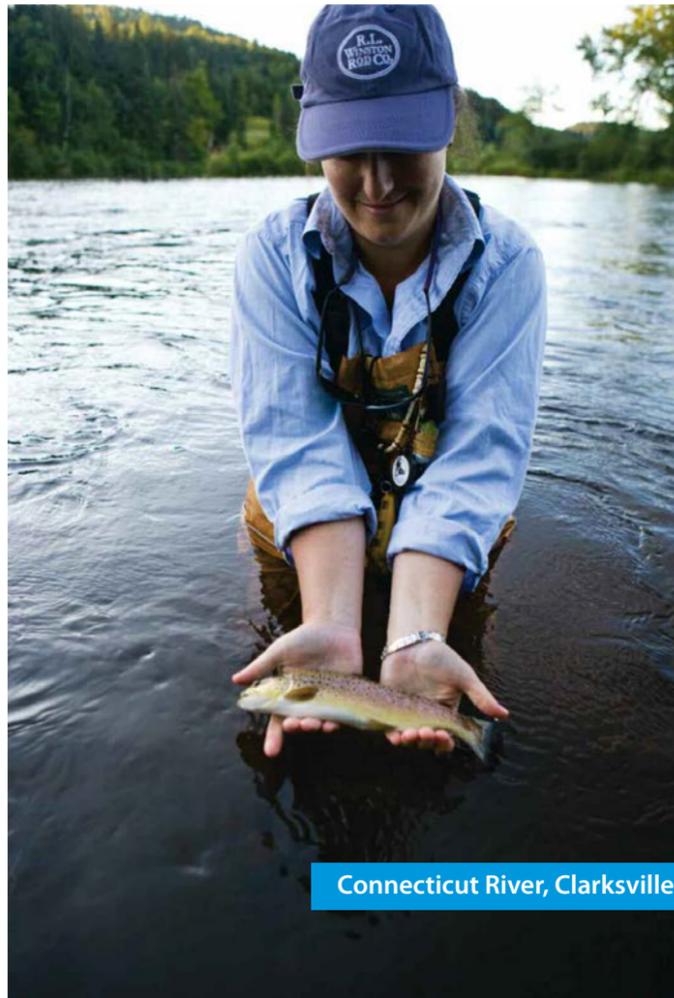
This property, formerly owned by Goldstar Sod Farms, is accessed by a gravel road (gated) off Locke Road in East Concord (I-93, Exit 16). Walk alongside scenic wetlands toward the west, passing a large field, and then down a pathway to the Merrimack River. This property, now owned by the City of Concord, and protected by a conservation easement held by the Forest Society, was purchased with funds from the City, the federal government and the N.H. Land and Community Heritage Investment Program (LCHIP). It offers extensive frontage on the river. You can fish from the shore, or launch a small boat at one of the downstream boat launch sites and target some of the reportedly 'lunker' bass that swim here. Just upstream a bit toward Sewall's Falls is an island in the river, and above that is an area of rapids that can sometimes host trout. Just a bit farther upstream, N.H. Fish and Game's Sewall's Falls Wildlife Management Area offers more good fishing spots, but you'll have to get back in your car and drive to get there.

### David Wilson Land, Sharon

The diminutive Gridley River flows out of the Tophet Swamp, through the David Wilson Land and onward into the Contoocook River in Peterborough. As it flows through the David Wilson land it passes through marshes and past an old mill pond dam. This is a place where you are unlikely to see many anglers, as it is accessible only in the dry months on Swamp Road, a Class VI town road not maintained for winter travel. Warm water fish are found in the open areas, and in the shaded, faster flowing sections, you may find an occasional trout. Besides the road through the middle of it, there are no other walking trails on this out-of-the-way property, but if you live nearby, it would be a fun place to walk the dog and fish or paddle in this little stream. From the junction of Rtes. 202, 137 & 124 in Jaffrey, take Rt. 124 approx. 4 miles. Look for signs and Swamp Road on the north side of Rt. 124.

### Wilkins-Campbell Forest, Deering

This is a lovely property with a long, fishable shoreline on Deering Lake. There is limited on-road parking at the gate, which is about a half-mile up Wolf Hill Road (get there via Old County Road). There are a few nice open spots at the end of the trail where fishing is easy. Deering Lake is managed for bass and rainbow trout. Waterside 'grazing' for wild blueberries in season is one of the side benefits of a visit to this property. Because of the limited parking, a good way to enjoy this property is to access it by canoe or kayak and use it as an ideal picnic spot. You'll find



Connecticut River, Clarksville

the town boat launch alongside the dam at the southerly end of Deering Lake. There may be a small launching parking fee to use this site at some times of year. Once your boat is in the water, paddle along the south shore toward the west. You will come to a long section of undeveloped shoreline. Look for the Forest Society sign visible from the water.

#### Washburn Family Forest, Clarksville (Online Guide)

This 2,100 acre property has more than six miles of frontage on the upper Connecticut River, one of New Hampshire's premier trout streams. Most people see and fish the river from the Route 3 side, where access is easy (and the Forest Society owns three small parcels just upstream of the "green bridge" on Route 3), but if you are game for a day of hiking on the trails, you can access a



Christine Lake, Stark

number of nice fishing spots. The easiest access to the trails for fishing is to park at the Pittsburg covered bridge, walk over the bridge and then immediately turn right. The Forest Society has a trail right-of-way along the river, and you can walk for some distance while hearing or seeing the river to your right.

If you have a mountain bike, you can ride it on the gravel roads. Follow the streamside road westerly for a mile or two and you will see a road that goes downhill from an open area (former gravel pit) and it will take you to the confluence of the Connecticut River and Indian Stream. (See the trail map on the Forest Society web site) The best part about fishing at the Washburn Forest is that you are in "trout country." Stop in at one of the local stores or fly fishing shops and get more advice on where to fish in the area.

#### Kauffmann Forest, Christine Lake, Stark (Online Guide)

Thanks to the vision and determination of John Kauffmann, the entire watershed of Christine Lake (a 175-acre lake) is now conservation land. The shoreline is owned by the Percy Summer Club, a private landowner that donated a conservation easement on its land to ensure its permanent protection. A public road takes you to the small public boat launch owned by the state. You can launch small boats (under 10 HP) and fish for brown and brook trout. This was a typical cold-water fishery until very recently when someone illegally put small-mouth bass into the Lake. It is illegal to move live fish from one body of water to another, and unfortunately, less thoughtful people have moved their favorite fish into places they don't belong, like Christine Lake. But the trout are still here, although in reduced numbers from past decades. The Kauffmann Forest itself does not touch Christine Lake, so please be respectful of the private landowners and follow the rules posted at the boat launch.

#### Lamprey River Forest, Epping

Not long after Congress designated the Lamprey River as part of the National Wild and Scenic River system, the Forest Society acquired the Lamprey River Forest from Gail Chase of Barrington. The property has a small parking area and a nice woods road trail that leads to the banks of the river. The Lamprey River along here has a steady current and is popular in the spring with canoeists and kayakers. It is stocked with trout by N.H. Fish and Game, but also hosts both smallmouth and largemouth bass. The parking area is off Prescott Road in Epping. From Rte. 27 (Pleasant Street), take Blake Road to Prescott and look for the Forest Society sign.

To see more about Lamprey River recreation, including a tour guide and map that includes the Forest Society's Lamprey River Forest, visit the Lamprey River Advisory Council's website at [www.zlampreyriver.org](http://www.zlampreyriver.org).

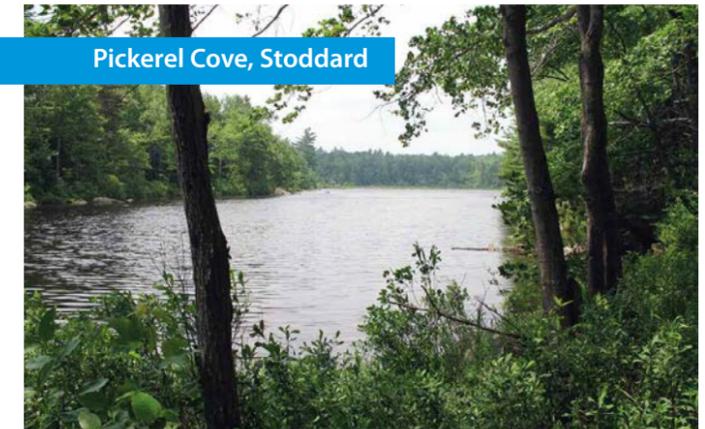
#### Pickerel Cove, Stoddard

Pickerel Cove is aptly named. This is a shallow water cove off the eastern shoreline of Highland Lake. Its shallow, warm waters are ideal pickerel habitat. It can be accessed by canoe or kayak from a put-in spot just north of the Highland Lake Marina (Shedd Road) on the eastern shore of Highland Lake. Near the marina is a foot path to Pickerel Cove that you can carry a kayak or canoe over to get to the water. To find the path walk up Powerline Road a bit and look for the trail on the right, just beyond the second house.

Pickerel Cove was once slated for a major condominium development, including dredging of the cove. Local opposition and an economic recession doomed the development plan, and the Forest Society and local citizens raised sufficient funds to acquire the property and add it to the adjoining 3,400 acre Peirce Reservation. We suspect the pickerel are pretty thankful.

#### Taves Reservation, Roxbury

Most people drive by the Taves Reservation on NH Route 9 and never know it's there. This 673-acre reservation has more than a half mile of frontage on the highway, and all of that encompasses a fast flowing portion of Otter Brook right alongside the highway. With the exception of one house on the east side of the road, the Forest Society's land is just north of the Granite Gorge Ski Area. There are a couple of places to stop along the highway, but be careful. This is a very well-travelled road. N.H. Fish and Game sometimes stocks Otter Brook with trout in the spring.



Pickerel Cove, Stoddard

#### Victor's Woods, Danbury/Alexandria

The Forest Society received a gift of most of Victor's Woods from an anonymous donor, with some of the land having frontage on the north side of the Smith River. Later, with help from the Anadromous Fish Restoration Program at National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the Forest Society acquired an additional tract on the south side of the river. This is an area that was formerly used for stocking of Atlantic salmon fry, as part of the Merrimack River salmon restoration program. Unfortunately, the program didn't meet the restoration goals, and in 2013, it was discontinued by the US Fish and Wildlife Service. But this area is still stocked with trout by N.H. Fish and Game and access is excellent along the old Smith River Road, just east of its junction with Murray Hill Road and Route 104 (closed in winter).

A Note about fishing rules on Forest Society lands: Please check the *N.H. Fishing Digest*, published annually by N.H. Fish and Game (also on its website). Some of the waters on land protected by the Forest Society are subject to special rules. Beyond following the rules, please remember "catch and release" fishing, especially for eastern brook trout in waters that are not stocked. Eastern Brook Trout is a 'species of concern' in part because of loss of habitat and the impacts of climate change. This species is a good indicator of pristine cold and clean waters. ♪

*Paul Doscher recently retired as the Forest Society's vice president of land protection and is an active member and former trustee of Trout Unlimited.*