

Fishing the

“LOWER LEFT”



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FOR AMPLE ACCESS, FINE SCENERY AND
A DIVERSITY OF FISH, TRY FLY-FISHING
SOUTHWESTERN NEW HAMPSHIRE | BY
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It's a busy night on the "Little Pond," as we call it. A beaver glides by, giving my float tube a curious glance. He seems skeptical of my fly line in the air, and his slapping tail demonstrates his concern. In the woods behind the shallow cove, a barred owl lets the world know it's there. A wood duck whizzes past. The splashing sound behind me tells me that my wife Kris is into yet another fish, not long after she released the last one. With all this action going on, there is one thing missing – other anglers. Having fished this spot several times this season, we have yet to see another craft on the water and only one shore angler has made an appearance.

One might think that we're fly fishing on one of the fine ponds in New Hampshire's White Mountains, or that maybe we bounced along a two-track road in the North Country to a hidden waterway. Actually, we are fishing in the southwest corner of the Granite State. The counties of Sullivan and Cheshire hold some quality rivers, streams and still-waters where the angler can find good fishing on the fly rod for both warmwater and coldwater species.

Two-story Fisheries

I'm surprised that so many fly anglers limit themselves to coldwater species. Bass and pumpkinseed, along with pickerel and yellow perch, provide great sport on the long rod, and they can easily be found in our state's "lower left," amid the scenic New Hampshire backdrop of mixed farmland and wooded hills.

I'm reminded of an evening on Stone Pond in Marlow, when an angler paddling toward the ramp saw us fly casting from float tubes and called over, "This pond doesn't get stocked with trout." I thanked him for the information and replied that we were fishing for bass. His delayed response of, "Oh...okay," showed his surprise. Upon his leaving, we had the pond to ourselves for the evening and caught our share of largemouth bass and yellow perch.

Within the mix of warmwater species in this part of the state, rock bass are well represented. These prolific panfish are disliked by some anglers because of their aggressiveness toward bait and lures. Despite their bad reputation, they take flies readily and offer the new fly fisher a chance to practice their skills on willing prey. Shore-bound and small craft anglers can get into these fish easily by fishing Gunnison Pond in Goshen, and could be rewarded with largemouth bass, as well.

If a mixed bag of fish species interests you, as it does us, you will find several ponds in southwestern New Hampshire with quality two-story fisheries. We often fish Long Pond in the town of Lempster, where trout are stocked, but where bass are our fish of choice. We are seldom disappointed. It's far from remote, but the angling pressure is often very light. Putting a top-water fly along the wooded areas of the shoreline will keep you busy. Should you find the fish uncooperative, the loons that call the pond home provide endless wildlife-watching entertainment.

In Croydon, you'll find another Long Pond, also called Coniston Lake, where brook and rainbow trout are stocked. If you stay on the water after sunset on a July evening, you may witness a hatch of *Hexagenia limbata* mayflies, also known simply as "Hex" to the fly fisher. These huge mayflies are a sight to see, trying to lift their

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heavy bodies off the water before getting eaten. We have seen the water boiling with white perch gobbling up as many as they can during the brief window of opportunity. If you're there at the right time, casting on the surface with a large mayfly-style dry fly or emerger can bring you a strike from these silver fighters on almost every cast. That is, if you don't mind casting with bats buzzing by your float tube. The Hex hatch sounds the dinner bell for them, as well.

Pillsbury State Park is home to several warmwater ponds, some of them connected by waterways and others a short portage away, that can make for a great day of kayak fishing. Fishing there after Labor Day, you will find yourself mostly alone, with some brilliant foliage to keep you company. For fish, you will find the typical mix of warmwater species or "green fish," as some people call them.

Scenic Rivers

Some beautiful rivers flow through this corner of the state, and observant anglers will find themselves sharing the waterways with a host of wildlife. Take a moment from watching for the next strike, and you may see mink looking for their next meal or foxes prowling the banks. Common mergansers raise their young here in the summer; in September, nighthawks are seen passing through on their way

south, making fantastic aerial maneuvers while chasing insects. You may catch a glimpse of deer and turkey in the fields and woodlands along the banks. I can even recall seeing a bear cross the Sugar River not far from where I was casting. You may not see many people when fishing these rivers, but you're never alone.

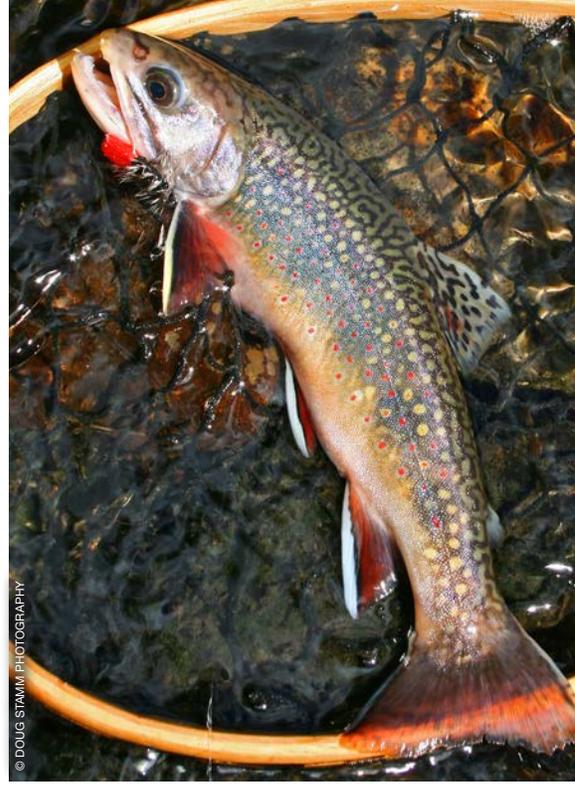
The Ashuelot River flows for 63 miles from Pillsbury State Park to the town of Hinsdale, where it joins the Connecticut River. Along Route 10, the trout angler should find ample access to the river and enough room to have uncrowded fishing conditions. As the river gets closer to the Connecticut, smallmouth bass can be caught, as well – no doubt a gift from the big river. When planning a trip to the area, you may also want to try the South Branch of the Ashuelot, where brook and brown trout can be found.

The Cold River is a 22-mile fast-flowing river that also ends up in the Connecticut. Access is plentiful, and fishing pressure is light. The structure of the river is small pools and pockets with invitingly clear water. Take a few minutes to turn over some rocks, and you will find a vast supply of trout food in the form of caddisflies and mayflies; crayfish are plentiful, as well.

The Sugar River flows from Lake Sunapee to meet the Connecticut in Claremont. Feeding this popular fishery are its North and South

The ponds of southwestern New Hampshire offer exciting action for anglers going after warmwater species like largemouth bass. Below, the author shows off a nice fly-rod catch. The sight of loons in flight and a dramatic sunset top off a memorable day of fishing the "Lower Left."





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The fast-flowing Ashuelot River features miles of scenic beauty. Brookies (above) are a popular target for anglers. A few of the author's favorite flies (left to right): Hoppulator, Sugar River Shiner, Madison River Stopper and (below) the author's own creation, the Big Head Caddis.

RESOURCES FOR ANGLERS

Finding southwestern N.H. trout ponds is as simple as looking at the stocking list found on the New Hampshire Fish and Game website, fishnh.com. You'll find trout stocking locations, fishing reports and depth maps for local ponds. A good guide for getting around the area is the trusty *DeLorme Atlas and Gazetteer*. Also recommended are two publications by Paul VanderWende: *Field Guide to New Hampshire Trout Ponds* and *Field Guide to New Hampshire Trout Streams* (see fieldguidesnh.com).

branches. The North Branch starts in Grantham, where Stocker and Sawyer brooks meet, and joins the main stem in Newport. Within its course, it both feeds and drains Spectacle Pond, which is heavily fished for warmwater species. The South Branch flows from Goshen to Newport for 6.6 miles, moving at a slower pace than its northern sibling. As spring turns to summer, the South Branch can see low water conditions, but in turn can be fishable when other local rivers are running too high.

Fly Patterns

The local fish will take the same flies as fish anywhere, but as with any angling location, there are a few local standout patterns. Newport fly fisher and fellow Let's Go Fishing instructor, Walt Ryan, has managed to keep his fly boxes tightly closed in my presence. His own fly, the Sugar River Shiner, was developed to imitate the local bait fish. My own Big Head Caddis has proven itself in the Sugar

River drainage, as well. Grasshopper flies are productive in the area, given the abundant fields and grassy banks, and not just on the trout streams. A 'hopper-style fly along a grassy bank on a pond will bring the bass and pumpkinseeds to the surface in a hurry. The local pick-erel can be caught on both topwater and subsurface flies and seem to like the brighter colors such as white, yellow and bright green.

Tying these beautiful flies helps me get through our long snowy winter. Now that spring has arrived, the splashing bass and zig zagging panfish of Little Pond are calling. The ice has melted, the green has sprouted, and I'm back happily fishing the quiet waters of the "Lower Left."



Jim Riccardi owns and operates Sugar River Fly Fishing in Newport, N.H., with his wife Kris. They are longtime volunteer instructors for the Let's Go Fishing and Becoming an Outdoors-Woman programs.

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