

**Writing the Land:
The Connecticut River**

EXAMPLE

**WRITING THE LAND:
THE CONNECTICUT RIVER**

PROLOGUE: POETRY, ROCKS: A GEOLOGICAL GUIDE TO
THE CONNECTICUT RIVER VALLEY
by Professor Richard Little

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WILDLIFE REFUGE**

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The Connecticut River: Looking South from Mount Sugarloaf
by Marty Espinola

Connecticut River Watershed Maps (throughout)

Sources: ESRI, HERE, Garmin, Intermp, Inprement P Corp., GEBCO, USGS, FAO, NPS, NRCAN, GeoBase, IGN, Kadaster NL, Ordnance Survey, ESRI Japan, METI, ESRI China (Hong Kong), swisstopo, © OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS User Community. Locations by Kathy O'Donnell, Rachel Cliche, and Lis McLoughlin.

Poetry, Rocks: A Geological Guide to the Connecticut River Valley
by Professor Richard Little

This volume's talented authors and diverse locations highlight the wonder of the Connecticut Valley environment and history in words and phrases, yet all is based on a hidden geologic history under mountains and underfoot. There are essential connections between natural and human history and deeper earth history. I am not a poet but a geologist, trained to look back into ancient time and space as recorded in rocks and landscapes. I see evidence of immense natural forces of plate tectonics, glaciations, lakes, and, of course, the river – past and present.

The magnificence of the Connecticut River Valley is not in the height of gorges or the drama of waterfalls, but in the subtle significance of being the largest river in New England with four states in its 400 mile southerly transit from Green and White Mountain headwaters to the sea. It has shaped and been shaped by human history and even more so by geologic forces. Outcropping bedrock records the birth and death of the Pangea Supercontinent. For example, the northerly uplands of Pondicherry in New Hampshire, and Nulhegan Basin in Vermont reveal remote, forest-dominated mountain landscapes underlain by ancient igneous and metamorphic rock. These deep crustal rocks, called “exotic terranes,” originated from lands far from ancient North America and merged with our continent due to plate tectonic movements that propelled them (slowly, of course) from distant latitudes in Paleozoic Era time. Mountains were made and then eroded, their pieces washed into several seas long before the Atlantic. Mountains have permanence only on a human time scale.

*Mountains with a permanence
steady and still
reminding me I am not
and will leave here
as they still stand, strong yet changed
overlooking the land*

—from “Remembering Pondicherry” by Brittany Mailhot, Chapter II

The river valley widens dramatically at the northern border of Massachusetts through central Connecticut. Entering Massachusetts, the river has an expansive floodplain and terraced valley with a dramatic, cliffed, central ridge of basalt. Like the Hudson, our river also has Palisades. This landscape change is due to Mesozoic, “Dinosaur Era” events as Pangea stretched, split, and died as she gave birth to the many separate continents of today.

Stretching stresses create rift-faulted valleys. The break-up of Pangea produced a rift valley here, similar to Death Valley. The whole Jurassic East Coast was stretching and cracking and probably looked like today's Southwest “Basin and Range” landscape.

The Connecticut Valley region's Jurassic rift valley filled with sand, gravel, and mud eroded from adjacent uplands. Those sediments are now sedimentary rock layers such as those seen along the river in Massachusetts and Connecticut. Sedimentary rocks are more easily eroded than the crystalline metamorphic rocks and granite that dominate the northerly watershed in Vermont and New Hampshire.

In Massachusetts and Connecticut those same hard rocks compose the westerly and easterly highlands of the Connecticut River's tributaries. A satellite view easily reveals how the sedimentary rock valley of Massachusetts and Connecticut is topographically flatter and wider with the meandering river dominating the landscape. A less-steep river gradient allows meandering rather than the straight fast flow of the deeper narrow valley in NH and VT. In a satellite view you can even see the prominent ridgeline of the dipping lava layer, described next, that protrudes on the landscape.

*The winding turns and curling riverbends
are a reminder of how life can lead us
in many directions. Life is full of
obstacles we must overcome,
like the power of the river's current*

— from “The Long Tidal River of Life” by Charles Hill, Chapter V

PART I: THE SILVIO O.
CONTE NATIONAL FISH
AND WILDLIFE REFUGE



The Connecticut River in Hadley, Massachusetts by Jennifer Lapis

SILVIO O. CONTE NATIONAL FISH AND WILDLIFE REFUGE PONDICHERRY DIVISION

PONDICHERRY: A CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIP

New Hampshire



The Pondicherry Division is managed by the refuge staff that are based out of the Conte Refuge office in Brunswick, VT, where a Visitor Center is open year-round. Four trailheads serve Pondicherry, with the most popular located at 289 Airport Road in Whitefield, NH.

-Poets: Brittany Mailhot and Rodger Martin
-Photos: David Govatski

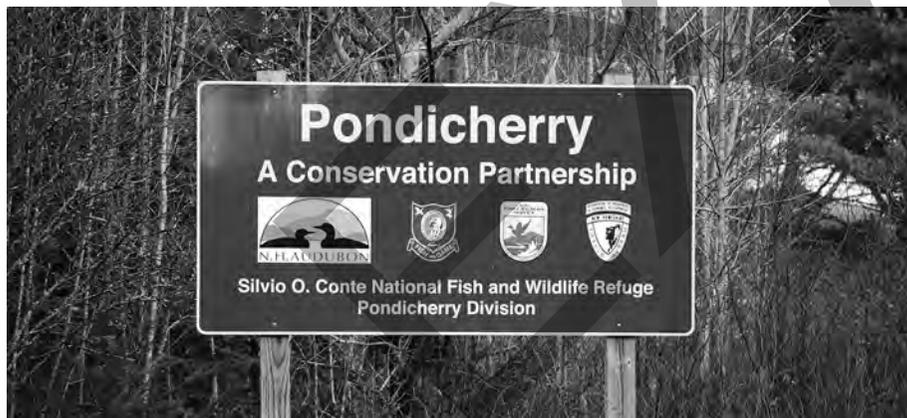


Pondicherry Division of the Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge

The Pondicherry Division (Pondicherry) is part of the Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge. Pondicherry is in the northern White Mountain region of New Hampshire in the towns of Jefferson, Whitefield, and Carroll, surrounded by the high peaks of the White Mountains. This Division was established in 2000, when the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service acquired 670 acres of wetlands and forested habitats supporting numerous breeding and migratory birds.

This area, including Cherry and Little Cherry Ponds and the surrounding wetlands and swamps, has long been known for its high-quality habitat and rich, diverse assemblage of wildlife species, particularly birds.

The Refuge now manages over 6,500 acres, primarily boreal spruce-fir forest interspersed with shrub swamps. Pondicherry is a conservation partnership with the New Hampshire Fish and Game Department, at Cherry and Little Cherry Ponds; New Hampshire Audubon, which owns approximately 166 acres around Cherry and Little Cherry Ponds; and the New Hampshire Trails Bureau, responsible for the state rail trail that bisects the Refuge. Friends of Pondicherry, a volunteer organization, helps maintain trails, removes invasive plants, and offers environmental education programs. Together, the Refuge and its partners strive to conserve important ecological attributes and give visitors a memorable experience.



Photos:

- (opposite) Pondicherry Sign at Waumbek Junction
- (above) The Loon Ranger (biologist) checking on her loon family
- (below) Moose at Pondicherry

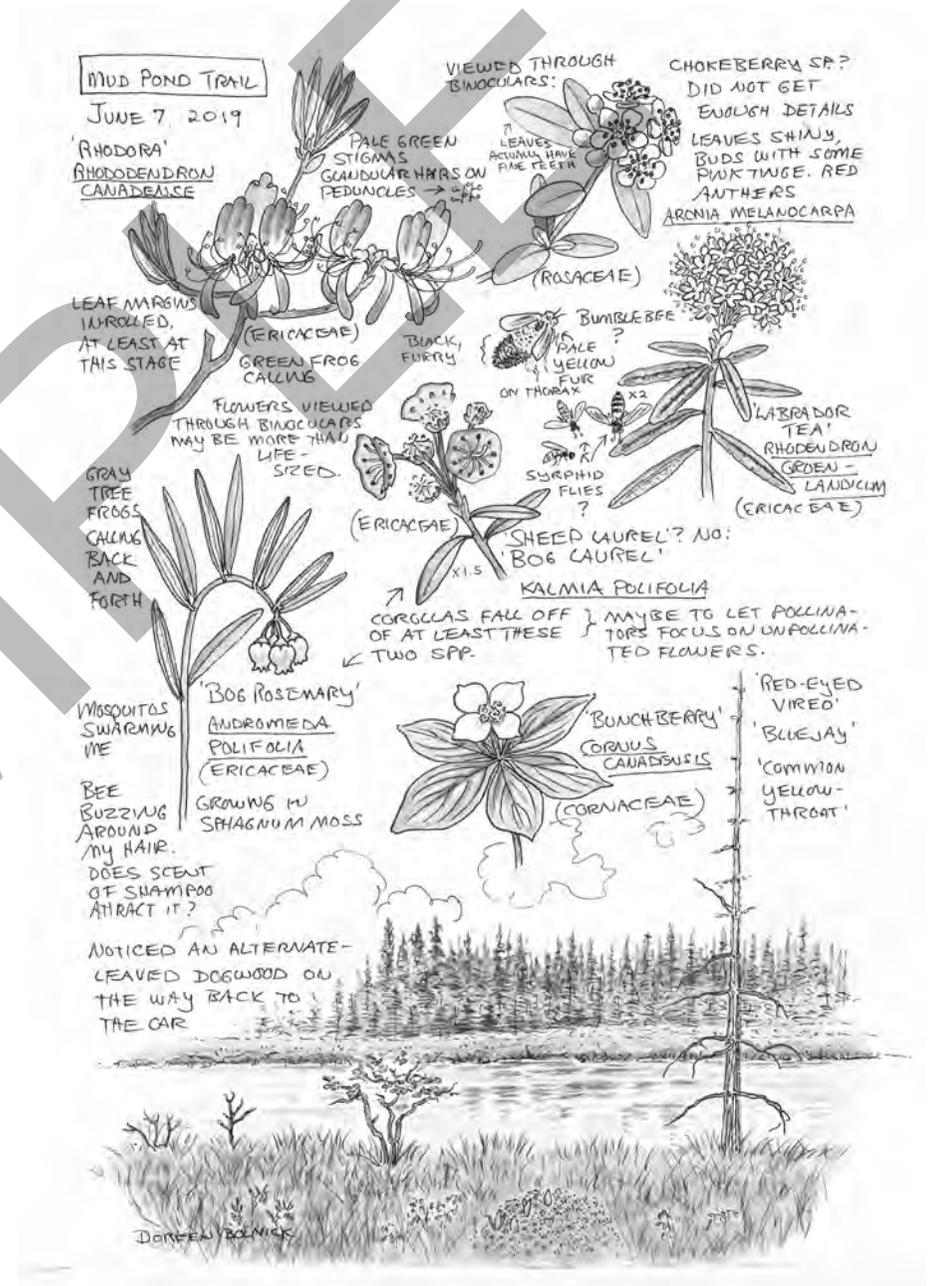


The Refuge manages habitats to support a variety of species. Grassland habitat management supports native pollinators and provides roosting and feeding areas for American woodcock. Removal of non-native plant species is a high priority in grassland, wetland, and forested habitats. Division staff also coordinate with partners and universities to develop and implement research projects that inform the management of refuge habitats and other lands in the northern forest region.

The Refuge is open to the public for various recreational and educational activities. Visitor opportunities include hiking, bicycling, cross country skiing, hunting, fishing and snowmobiling. An accessible trail with a 950-foot-long boardwalk provides access to a fen called Mud Pond. The long-distance Cohos Trail utilizes five different trails at Pondicherry. The Cross New Hampshire Adventure Trail is another long-distance trail open for walking, horseback riding, and bicycling, and utilizes four miles of rail trail through the heart of the Refuge. Parts of Pondicherry are open to hunting, and fishing is allowed on Cherry and Little Cherry Ponds. Birding remains one of the most popular activities, especially from May to October.



Photo: On the Johns River



Mud Pond Nature Journal Drawing by Doreen Bolnick

The Dragonfly
by Brittany Mailhot

Dragonfly waved her lovely
lace-knitted wings
overlooking
Cherry Pond
today.

Gratitude filled our silence
Her inner world
dancing with thoughts
in my own.
Thankful.

Are these the mountains of her
childhood too?
Had they shaped her
journey through
this world?

She sailed to the blueberries
sweet and ripe with
connection to
land, this land.
Presence.

I left, thanked her for her time,
journeying on
and down trail, she
greeted me
again.

Buzzing with joy, gratitude
Pondicherry-
her home, my home.
To new friends,
to Life.

Pondicherry
by Rodger Martin

Jupiter saddled the Blood Moon last night
for its icy ride through the wild, cold sky,
and with it the ambient rush of river
white as the moon and almost as constant.

This night, like atoms of a cesium clock,
like a resting heartbeat, accuracies
lay in the rhythms. Orion approved, looked
for the bull, alert to all contingencies,
and so it went until eclipsed by the light.

With the dawn sun, the woolly bears shuffle
confidently along wood-framed paths. Their sleek,
brown hairs erect as they hunch their way
unconcerned with shadow or yesterday
To the whatever that betters any what if.



Photo: In autumn, the tamarack turns golden; the Presidential Range of the White Mountains is in the background

**Fort River Birding and Nature Trail,
located at the Fort River Division, Hadley, Massachusetts**

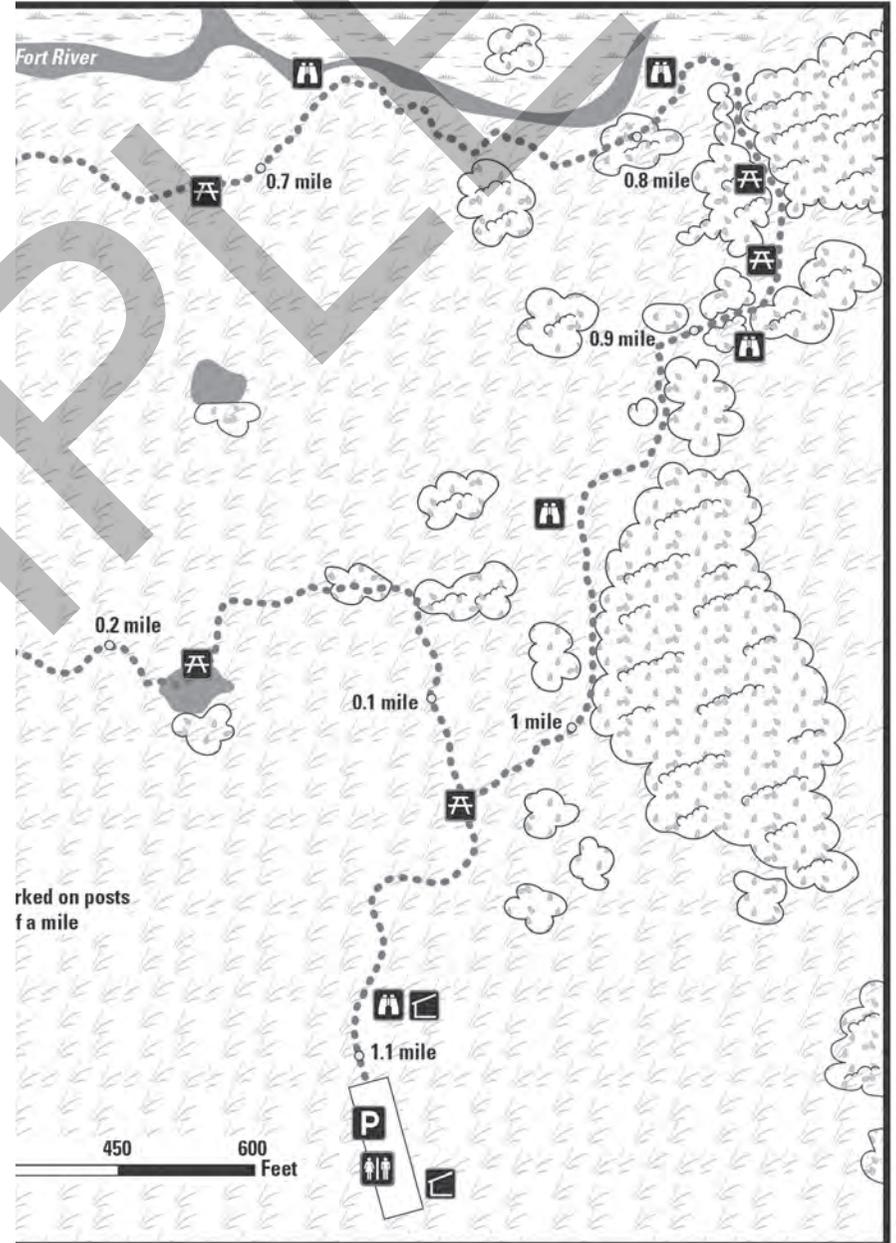
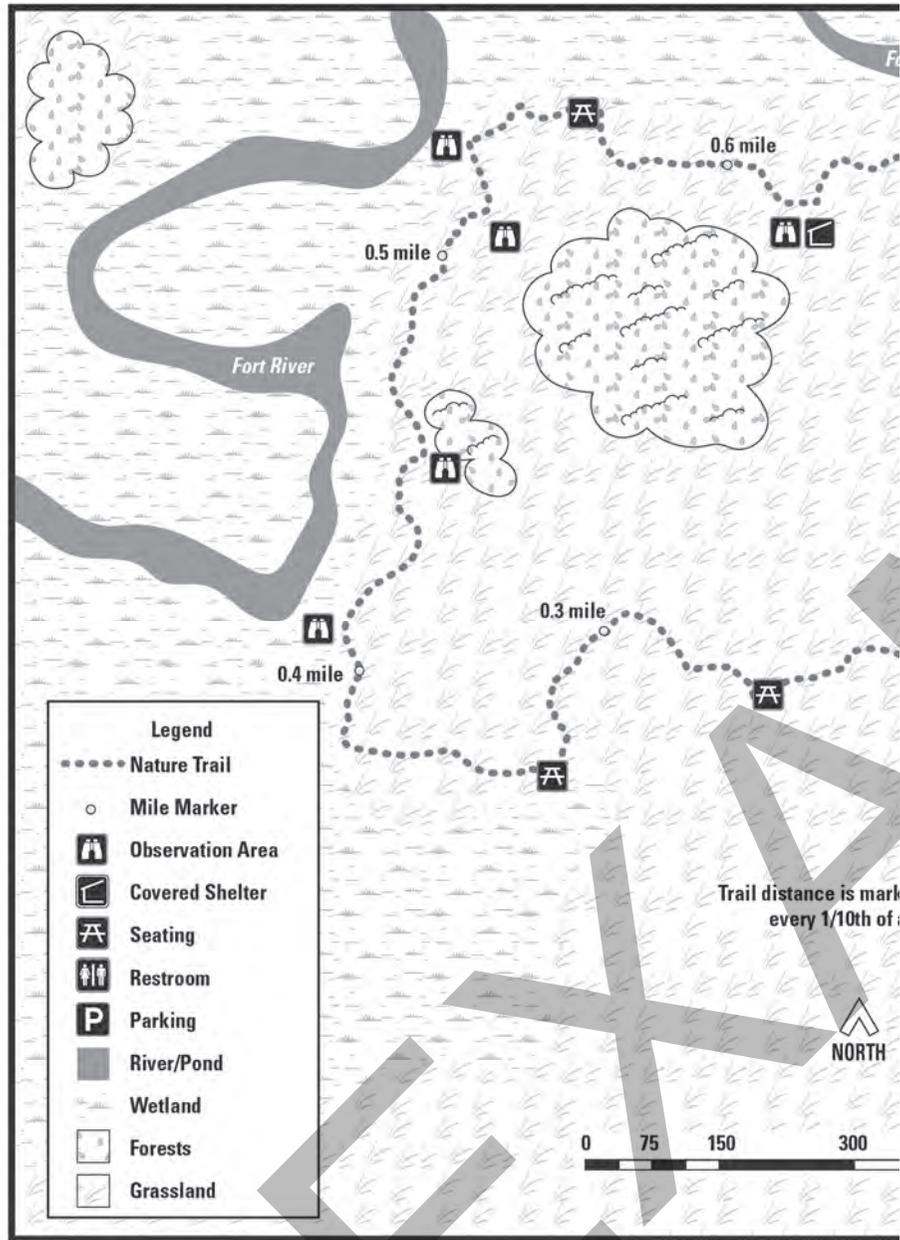
Established in 2005, the Fort River Division is named after the major body of water flowing through it: the Fort River. This river is located in the eastern portion of the Pioneer Valley, drains a 35,830-acre watershed, is the longest free-flowing tributary to the Connecticut River in Massachusetts, and ranks near the top among all New England rivers for overall freshwater mussel diversity. There are a variety of habitat types found within this division, including hardwood forest, floodplain forest, and grasslands.

The Fort River Division also maintains a one-mile long, fully-accessible natural trail that winds through picturesque landscapes, offering excellent opportunities for watching birds and wildlife, or enjoying a peaceful walk alongside the Fort River. A walk through the trail provides visitors with an immersive experience, listening to the sounds of birds chirping and flowing water, viewing the changes of the seasons, and breathing in the smells of fresh rain on the forest floor. The trail is open to the public from sun-up to sun down, year round. This division is open to the public for hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, environmental education, and interpretation. The Fort River Birding and Nature Trail is located at 69 Moody Bridge Road, Hadley, MA 01035.



Photos: (opposite) Fort River Path by USFWS
(above) Bridge at Fort River in Fall by Trish Crapo
(below) Fort River Walkway by USFWS







(above and below) Fort River Forest in Summer by Trish Crapo



A Black Birch Freed from Bittersweet at Fort River by Trish Crapo

Impressions at Fort River
by Trish Crapo

—Hadley, Massachusetts, fall 2022 through summer 2023

i.

Yellow light through yellow leaves
and white breast of a hawk circling.
Flash against flash, and the wind
shuffling through, releasing a sudden
confetti, each leaf drifted from the sky
accepted—a tiny skiff—on the river’s
bright surface.

ii.

Brown vines woven through the last green leaves.
November about to give way like these trees
tumbled into one another,
bound by bittersweet—and beyond,
low mountains crouched just as they were four decades ago
when I stared at them from my dorm window, Florida girl lost
in her new landscape.

iii.

Ice locks the undulations of water
around the trunks of trees. Some direction
water wanted to go last night,
or last week.

Eye of a lone birch stares
through me.

I’m too deep
into winter to
remember
spring.

iv.

April too hot and green
still withheld, barely trembling
in the highest branches.

Pale buds flickering
at the grey twigs’ tips.

Woodpecker knocking.

v.

A little before 4 p.m. the train goes by.
Small planes burrow through clouds.

On the drive here, cement platforms
for storage units being laid on top
of six feet of Connecticut River loam.

vi.

Little stream dried down to damp,
lush with algae. What I remembered
as broad ponds, now meadow.

How astonishing, this small piece of earth
remaking itself!

vii.

Late May, full-on green, the air thick
with dandelion pantomiming snow (though—
that is just me, inventing).

The wild blackberries and the waist-high grasses
are real. Poison ivy gleaming red along the trail,
piccolo trillings of birdsong, veils of delicate gnats
real. Everything stitched through
with mosquitoes’ long insistence.

viii.

Brown river mottled with tree shadows,
surface shivered with currents, pocked
by the hunger of fish.

Ducking under an olive branch,
I litter the path with yellow flowers,
celebrating—
what?

ix.

Entering an extravagance of green
shivering all around me, I channel Lorca,
whisper, *Green, how I want you green.*
Leaves sparkling emerald. Even as I have
so much, I can never have enough.
Summer's promise expanding on this afternoon
langorous with walking.

x.

If I was a tree, toppling.
If I fell like that, unencumbered.
If you caught me.
If we stood like that for a hundred years,
you holding me while I died.

xi.

Vines twined around vines, looped
around branches, wound around
trunks. One lucky black birch
in a small clearing spirals,
carrying the absence
of its strangler.

We say, *native*,
We say, *invasive*.

But what is our role here?

Do we save one species
from another?

Can we save any of them
from ourselves?



The Holyoke Range Seen from the Fort River Trail by Trish Crapo