

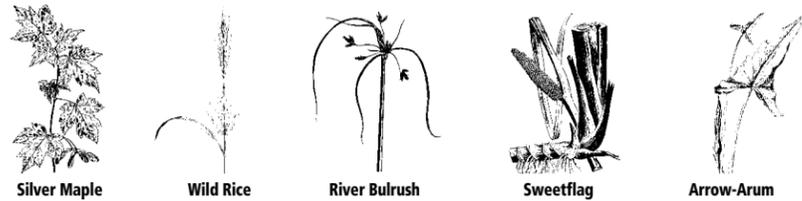
## 5 Arrigoni Bridge

When completed in 1938, the Arrigoni Bridge was the largest and most expensive bridge in Connecticut, built at a cost of \$3.5 million. Its 600-foot arches are the longest of any bridge in the state. The bridge, named for the state legislator who promoted the project, received the American Institute of Steel Construction's 1st Prize in the large bridge category in 1938.

## 6 Harbor Park in Middletown

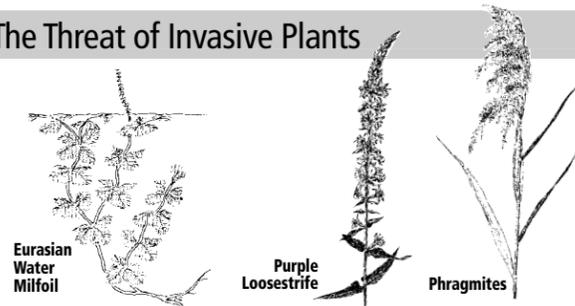
Harbor Park is the site of the former Middletown Yacht Club. Built in 1906, it was for the first part of this century a destination point for residents gathering for picnics, boating and boat races. When using the public dock at Harbor Park, please yield to the Wesleyan crew teams departing and arriving at the dock.

### Can You Find These Plants Known to the Mattabesset?



As you leave the launch site you enter a typical floodplain forest dominated by silver maple trees. Continuing downstream the floodplain forest opens up to expose the great tidal marsh area known as Cromwell Meadows. Look for large stands of river bulrush (the largest growth in Connecticut), sweetflag, arrow-arum and wild rice.

### The Threat of Invasive Plants



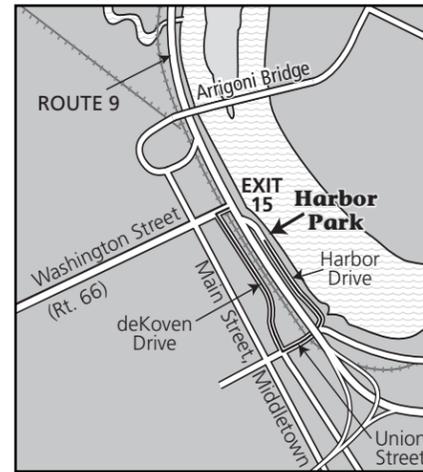
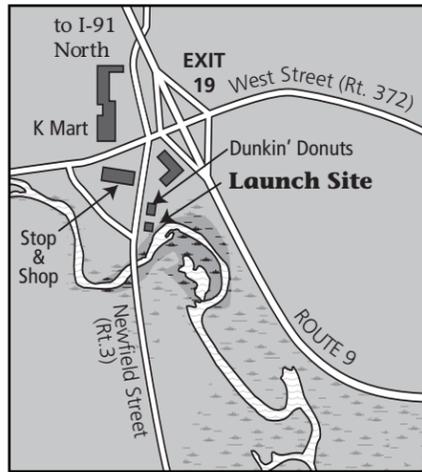
#### Special Concern: Water Chestnut

Water chestnut, another aquatic plant, is not yet here but is spreading down the Connecticut River. This aggressive plant is a major concern—please report any sightings immediately to the DEP at 860/424-3034.

Invasive plants, both native and exotic, are also found in this area. They pose a threat because they often replace plant species that provide food sources and habitat for native wildlife, thus reducing biological diversity. Look for the attractive purple flower stalks of purple loosestrife, and the tall reedy stands of phragmites, which out-compete wetland flora. Also, the aquatic plant Eurasian water milfoil is spreading fast in the upper portion of the river—cleaning your boat after each use will help stop this plant.

### Safety and Other Reminders:

- Children 11 years and under are required by State law to wear a personal flotation device (PFD) at all times while on a vessel, although PFD usage is encouraged strongly for both children and adults. There must always be one PFD in the vessel for each person. Canoeists/kayakers must wear their PFD during cold weather months from October through May.
- Be aware that the river and associated wetlands are used by waterfowl hunters from mid-October through December.
- When traveling on the Connecticut River, watch out for large boat traffic, strong currents and tides.
- Please be mindful that the canoe/kayak trail area is home to several species of endangered or threatened birds. To minimize disturbance to nesting and foraging birds, small creeks and marsh edges should be avoided.



### Trip Logistics:

The launch site area is very muddy at low tide, so it is best to begin your trip during high tide. If you plan to take out at Harbor Park, you can leave a car at the city park in the lot adjacent to the restaurant. If you plan to return to the launch site, again, be aware of the tides. The trip time from the launch site to Harbor Park is approximately 2 hours.

### Directions to the Launch Site:

Take Route 9 to exit 19 (Route 372/West Street). Turn west onto West Street and left onto Route 3 at the stoplight right before the Stop & Shop. The launch site is about 1/4 mile on the left side of road behind the Dunkin' Donuts. Access is through the Dunkin' Donuts driveway, or the next driveway on your left (when constructed). Please park in the designated parking spaces.

### Directions to Harbor Park:

Take Route 9 to exit 15 (Route 66/Washington Street). Take an immediate left onto deKoven Drive, which parallels Route 9. Travel about 1/2 mile, and turn left at the stoplight at Union Street. Go under Route 9, and turn left onto Harbor Drive. Park in the Harbor Park city lot.

For more information or to get involved with efforts to improve the river:

Connecticut River Coastal Conservation District, Inc.  
deKoven House, 27 Washington Street  
Middletown, CT 06457  
860 / 346-3282  
www.conservect.org/ctrivercoastal

Mattabesset River Watershed Association  
Box 7174  
Berlin, CT 06037

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CONNECTICUT  
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Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection

Town of Cromwell,  
Connecticut

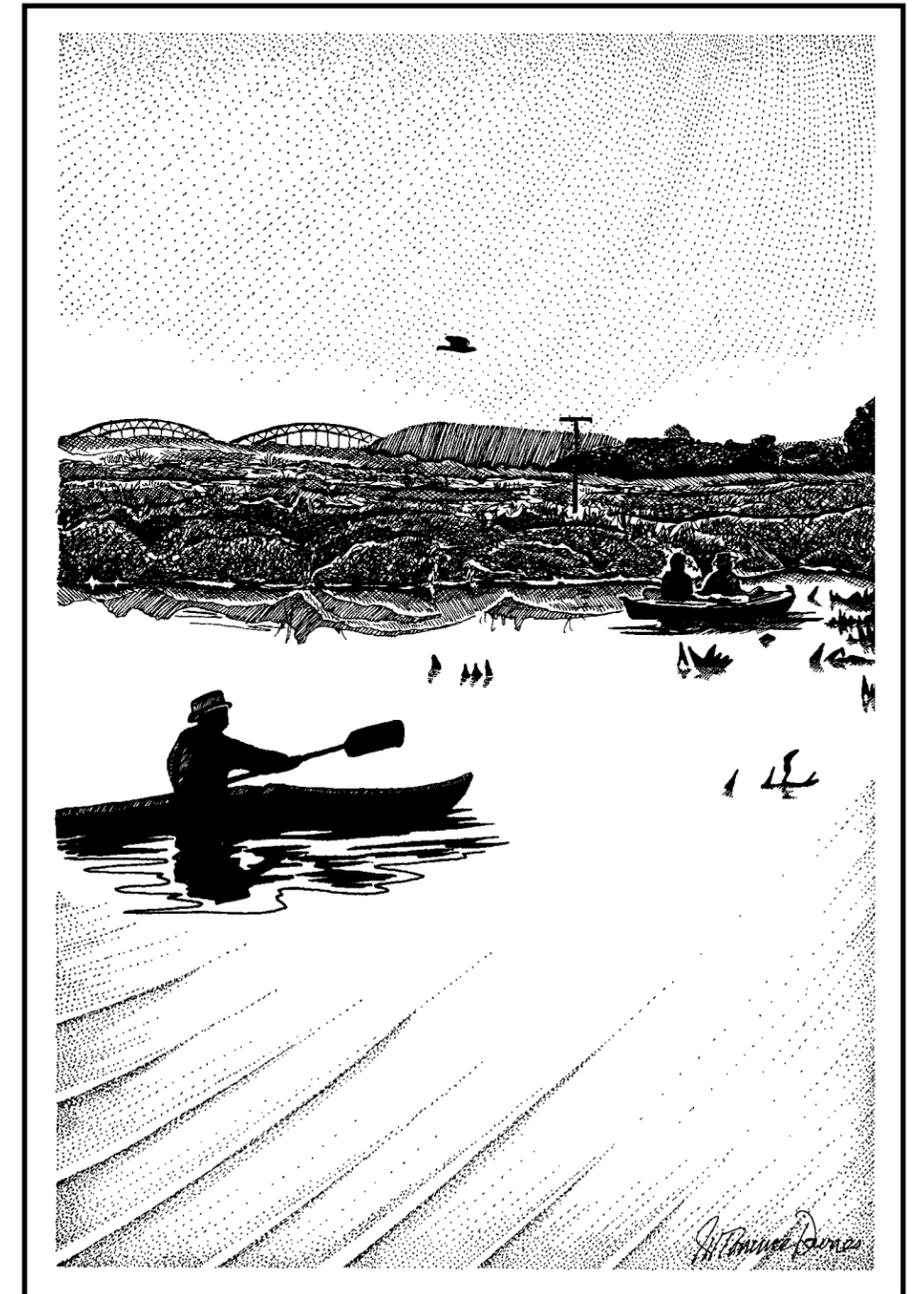
Middlesex County  
Community  
Foundation

Thanks also to present owner Paul Furtado, Mattabesset Realty LLC, and past owners, the Cusanos, for granting access to the launch site.

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Illustration—Eurasian Water Milfoil: Annie Chappel  
Graphic Artist: Pat Rasch

June 2007

# Mattabesset River Canoe/Kayak Trail



24 Shunpike Road  
Cromwell, Connecticut

## The Mattabeset River

From its headwaters in the Hanging Hills of Meriden, the Mattabeset River flows approximately 18 miles as it makes its way to the Connecticut River just north of the Arrigoni Bridge at the Middletown/Cromwell line. The Mattabeset's largest tributary, the Coginchaug River, meets the Mattabeset about one mile before it enters the Connecticut River. Areas of Berlin, Cromwell, Guilford, Durham, Meriden, Middlefield, Middletown, New Britain, Newington, Plainville, Rocky Hill and Southington are within the Mattabeset watershed, which encompasses approximately 110 square miles.

Beginning about 10,000 years ago, as the last glacial ice retreated from New England, Native American populations settled Connecticut and the areas along the Mattabeset and Coginchaug rivers. The Mattabesek and Wangunk tribes inhabited this area, and were nicknamed the "River Indians" due to their reliance on the rivers for subsistence.

Once Europeans began to settle Connecticut, land use along the Mattabeset River changed. Agriculture was the dominant land use through the Revolutionary War era. However, the availability of more fertile lands farther west led to the mass abandonment of farms and great migration of farmers during the 1800s. Those who stayed worked in the many factories springing up along the rivers and streams, and manufacturing became a major economic force.

The change in land use practices over the past century from farming to business and industry took a toll on the Mattabeset River. Industrial wastes and raw sewage from the growing population contributed to a severe decline of water quality and loss of aquatic life in the river.

Water quality in the Mattabeset River has improved dramatically since 1968, when the establishment of the Mattabeset Sewer District curbed the discharge of raw sewage into the river. However, ongoing water quality monitoring shows that the Mattabeset and its tributaries still experience degradation due to nonpoint source pollution, or polluted runoff. Sources of polluted runoff include rainwater running over driveways, roads, construction sites, agricultural fields and lawns carrying with it a variety of pollutants, as well as failing septic systems and leaking sewer pipes.

Currently, many people are working to improve the Mattabeset River. In 2000 a group of watershed stakeholders adopted a plan to restore the river to fishable and swimmable conditions, which is now being implemented. The Connecticut River Watch Program conducts ongoing water quality monitoring activities with the help of citizen volunteers, and the Mattabeset River Watershed Association works as an advocate for the river.

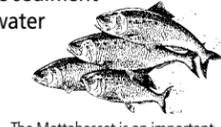


Great blue herons stalk prey in the shallows.

### Special Concern: Turbidity

A fairly common notion among local residents is that the Mattabeset River is a naturally "muddy" river due to the erosive characteristics of soils in the watershed. It is true that during rainstorms the Mattabeset often becomes turbid, or clouded with suspended sediment that colors the river reddish-brown. However, turbidity measurements indicate that the Mattabeset is not naturally turbid. Rather, peaks in turbidity are a result of erosion from unnaturally exposed areas of soil following heavy rains.

High turbidity is dangerous to fish. It reduces sunlight penetration in the water, impairing sight-feeding fish, and clogs fish gills, eventually leading to suffocation. When the sediment settles out of the water onto the riverbed, it can smother the eggs and larvae of aquatic organisms.



The Mattabeset is an important nursery for American shad.

## 1 Cromwell and the Launch Site

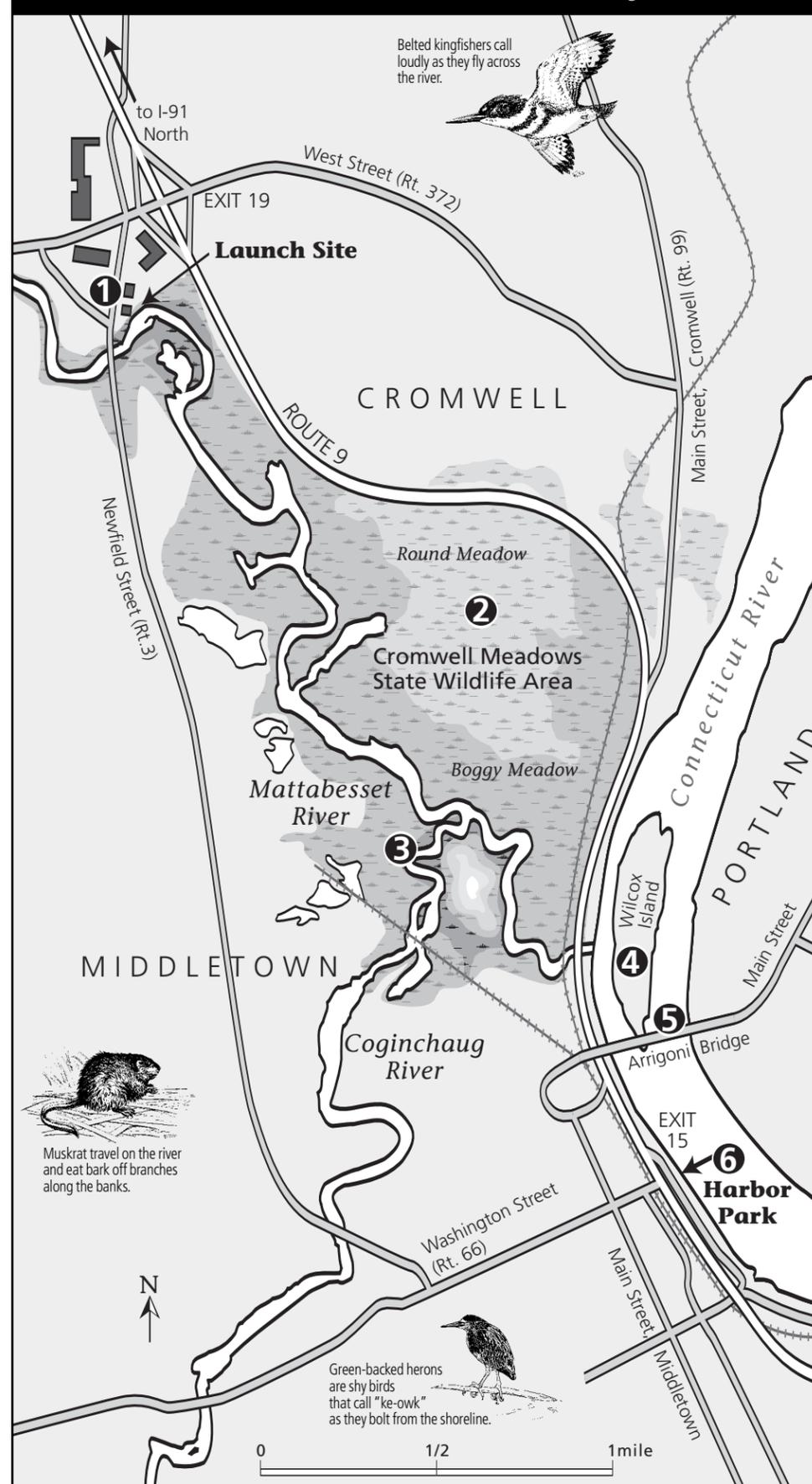
The Town of Cromwell was originally part of a much larger settlement of the Mattabesek Indians. After several bloody encounters with the early European settlers, the great Indian chief Sowheag surrendered all the lands along the Mattabeset River to the settlers. A European settlement called Mattabesek was established in 1651, incorporating the present towns of Middletown, Cromwell, Middlefield, Portland, East Hampton, and a portion of Berlin.

By the late 1700s Cromwell had become a self-sufficient Colonial village with a bustling riverport. During the 1800s the thick virgin forests, natural meadows, and swamplands the early settlers



White-breasted nuthatches hunt insects on tree trunks.

# Mattabeset River Canoe/Kayak Trail



Belted kingfishers call loudly as they fly across the river.



to I-91 North

EXIT 19

Launch Site

CROMWELL

Round Meadow

2

Cromwell Meadows State Wildlife Area

Boggy Meadow

3

Mattabeset River

Coginchaug River

4

Wilcox Island

5

Arrigoni Bridge

6 Harbor Park

EXIT 15

Green-backed herons are shy birds that call "ke-owk" as they bolt from the shoreline.



Muskrat travel on the river and eat bark off branches along the banks.



0 1/2 1 mile

acquired from the Native Americans were replaced by farms, manufacturing mills, foundries, sawmills and quarrying operations. Streams were dammed to supply water for milling and manufacturing, and forests were cleared for lumber and agriculture.

The launch is located at the site of the former "Sawmill Pub," named for an old sawmill that used water from the Mattabeset River to run its mill. The pub is now gone, and plans are to build a new commercial building in its place. We are grateful to past and present owners, who have granted permission for ongoing access through agreements with the Town of Cromwell.



Red-tailed hawks build large stick nests along the Mattabeset.

## 2 Cromwell Meadows

Cromwell Meadows, also known as Round and Boggy Meadows, is a large freshwater tidal wetland located at the confluence of the Coginchaug and Mattabeset rivers. It is one of 20 significant wetlands within the internationally recognized Connecticut River Estuary and Tidal River Wetlands Complex, and a key conservation area of The Nature Conservancy in the lower Connecticut River, one of the 40 "last great places in the Western Hemisphere." A significant portion of the meadows is owned by the State of Connecticut as a wildlife management area.

Due to its rare species, fisheries, wetlands, water birds and unusual habitat, Cromwell Meadows is designated a high priority Special Focus Area within the Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge. The large wetland area provides habitat for migrating wood ducks, black ducks, teal, and nesting wood ducks. It hosts several species of fish-eating birds including great blue heron, green-backed heron, osprey, belted kingfisher, ring-billed gull and the double crested cormorant. Many species of wetland and marsh birds can be seen in the Mattabeset, including marsh wren, common yellow-throat, red-winged blackbird, and swamp sparrow.



Blueback herring migrate from the Atlantic Ocean into the Meadows in late spring.

Cromwell Meadows is also an important nursery for anadromous fish species (fish that migrate from the ocean to freshwater or tidal streams to spawn), including alewife, blueback herring, American shad, and sea lamprey. These fish species depend on the Mattabeset for reproduction, and travel upstream from the Connecticut River as far as StanChem Pond in East Berlin—the first obstacle to fish migration on the River.

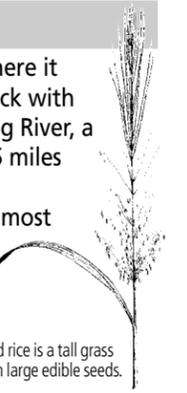


Watch for ospreys fishing and nesting on the platforms in Cromwell Meadows, erected by the Mattabeset River Watershed Association in 1998.

## 3 Coginchaug River

A large stand of wild rice lies at the mouth of the Coginchaug River where it meets the Mattabeset. In late summer and early fall the wild rice is thick with red-winged blackbirds feeding on the nutritious grains. The Coginchaug River, a north flowing river, begins in North Guilford and flows a distance of 15 miles through the towns of Durham, Middlefield and Middletown.

At one time the Coginchaug watershed was considered to have the most prolific trout streams in the lower Connecticut River Valley. Today degraded water quality and obstructions from dams and culverts have reduced the trout population significantly, although the Department of Environmental Protection stocks the river with adult brook, brown and rainbow trout.



Wild rice is a tall grass with large edible seeds.

## 4 Connecticut River and Wilcox Island

Wilcox Island stands before you as you enter the Connecticut River. Although today the island is used only by the occasional boater or fisherman, during the 18th and 19th centuries it was an active park, with a footbridge from Middletown affording easy access. In June of 1880 the Middletown Press advertised a Sunday prize fight between a resident of Portland and a bruiser from Waterbury, while at the other end of the island residents could enjoy a picnic and dance to music furnished by a "wheezy accordion."

### CT River Statistics

410 miles long  
11,260 square mile watershed  
70% of freshwater input to Long Island Sound

Continued on back