Directions to Sawmill Pub:
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 Stop & Shop. The Sawmill Pub is about ¼ mile on the left side of road. Please park in the delineated 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 ½ mile, and turn left at the stoplight at Union Street. Go under Route 9, and turn left onto Harbor Drive. Park in the lot on your right after Harbor Park restaurant.

Trip Logistics:
The Sawmill Pub launch 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 lot adjacent to the restaurant. If you plan to return to the pub, again, be aware of the tides. The trip time from Sawmill Pub to Harbor Park is approximately 2 hours.

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 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.

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.

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.

Can You Find These Plants Known to the Mattabesset?

- Silver Maple
- Wild Rice
- River Bulrush
- Sweetflag
- Arrow-Arum

As you leave the pub 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

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For more information or to get involved with efforts to improve the river:
Middlesex County Soil & Water Conservation District, Inc.
deKoven House, 27 Washington St.
Middletown, CT 06457
860/346-3282
Mattabesset River Watershed Association
Box 7174
Berlin, CT 06037
860/828-0803

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.
The Mattabesset River

From its headwaters in the Hanging Hills of Meriden, the Mattabesset 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 Mattabesset’s largest tributary, the Coginchaug River, meets the Mattabesset about one mile before it enters the Connecticut River. Areas of Berlin, Cromwell, Guilford, Durham, Meriden, Middletown, Middletown, New Britain, Newington, Plainville, Rocky Hill and Southington are within the Mattabesset 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 Mattabesset and Coginchaug rivers. The Mattabesset 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 Mattabesset 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 sprung 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 Mattabesset 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 Mattabesset River has improved dramatically since 1968, when the establishment of the Mattabesset Sewer District curbed the discharge of raw sewage into the river. However, ongoing water quality monitoring shows that the Mattabesset and its tributaries still experience degradation due to nonpoint source pollution, or polluted runoff. Sources of polluted runoff include leaking sewer pipes, as well as failing septic systems and construction sites, agricultural fields and stormwater from nonpoint source pollution, or polluted runoff. Sources of polluted runoff include leaking sewer pipes, as well as failing septic systems and construction sites, agricultural fields and stormwater from urban areas.

A fairly common notion among local residents is that the Mattabesset River is a naturally “muddy” river due to the erode characteristics of the watershed soils. It is true that during rainstorms the Mattabesset often becomes turbid, or clouded with suspended sediment that colors the river reddish-brown. However, turbidity measurements indicate that the Mattabesset is not naturally turbid; rather, peaks in turbidity are a result of eroded sediment from unnatural 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 larval of aquatic organisms.

A Special Concern: Turbidity

Mattabesset is not naturally turbid. Rather, peaks in turbidity are a result of eroded sediment from unnatural areas of soil following heavy rains. Turbidity is a common problem in the Mattabesset and other rivers in New England. It is caused by runoff from urban areas, agricultural fields, and construction sites.

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Mattabesset River Canoe/Kayak Trail

Cromwell and the Launch Site

The town of Cromwell was originally part of a much larger settlement of the Mattabesset Indians. After several bloody encounters with the early European settlers, the great Indian chief Sowheag surrendered all the lands along the Mattabesset River to the settlers. A European settlement called Cromwell 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 swamps along the Mattabesset River had been cleared for lumber and agriculture.

The Sawmill Pub occupies the site on Sawmill Road, south of the Mattabesset River. That land was farmed by the Sawmill Pub, in an agreement with the Town of Cromwell. The CCWA has graciously allowed use of the property for public access to the river. In the summer, you will see the family vegetable garden behind the pub. Stop in and try their pizza—it’s delicious!

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 Mattabesset rivers. It is one of the most significant wetlands within the internationally recognized Connecticut River Estuary and Tidal 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 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 Mattabesset, including marsh wren, common yellow-throat, red wing blackbird, and swamp sparrow.

Coginchaug River

A large stand of wild rice lies at the mouth of the Coginchaug River where it meets the Mattabesset. In late summer and early fall the wild rice is thick with redwing-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, Middletown and Cromwell.

At one time the Coginchaug 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.

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

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