

Ash Creek Watershed and Estuary

How Ash Creek got its name isn't known for sure. Colonial maps show the creek as the Uncoway or Fairfield River. Later, the name Ash House Creek appears, perhaps because there was an ash house for making lye. Another source of the present-day name may be the British burning of the Town during the American Revolution that left the creek and the entire Town center covered with ashes.

Today, Ash Creek forms part of Fairfield's eastern boundary with the City of Bridgeport. Of the Town's four watersheds, this one is the most impacted by urban development. The creek originates in northeast Fairfield as the Rooster River, becomes Ash Creek south of the bridge at King's Highway East, and then downstream of the Post Road widens into the main part of the estuary before entering Long Island Sound. Although surrounded by development, the estuary contains significant tidal wetland areas. In recent years, much progress has been made through the efforts of the State of Connecticut, Town of Fairfield, City of Bridgeport, and neighborhood groups to improve the environmental quality of the creek.

The creek was particularly significant for the early development of Fairfield following the settlement of the Town in 1639. It was the Town's main harbor, as it provided a good supply of fish and shellfish. Its salt marshes provided pastures for horses and cattle. In the late 1800s, Fairfield began a program to eliminate mosquitoes and the resulting mosquito "ditches" can still be seen crisscrossing Ash Creek wetlands.

The banks of the creek are now lined with residential, commercial, industrial, and recreation-related development. The lower reaches, however, also help to form an estuarine environment with special ecological significance in the midst of an otherwise urban area. The estuary extends almost four miles inland from the mouth of the creek and includes the tributary Turney and Riverside creeks and their adjoining tidal wetlands. These wetland suffered from the past construction of flood control dikes and, like wetlands in the Pine Creek estuary, are now being restored through the Town's efforts to reintroduce tide water to the areas behind the dikes.

Five Ash Creek open space areas, including marsh restoration areas, are part of the Town's conservation system. Of the five, the Penfield Mills Open Space Area near the mouth of the creek and adjacent to the Town's South Benson Marina is the largest. Penfield Mills provides opportunities for walking, picnicking, and enjoyment of scenic views of Ash Creek and Long Island Sound. Its location provides an interesting glimpse into the early history of Fairfield.