

Mill River Watershed and Estuary

The Mill River is the Town's largest watercourse and one of Fairfield's most significant natural features. It flows over an eight-mile course winding through the center of the Town.

The watershed is relatively large, covering about 35 square miles within Fairfield and four other towns. Much of the northern part of the watershed is controlled for drinking water supply purposes. North of Fairfield, the river is impounded at the Easton Reservoir. Within Fairfield, Cricker Brook, an important tributary of the Mill River, was dammed to create the Hemlock Reservoir. Located to the west of Hoyden's Hill Open Space Area, this reservoir extends north into the Town of Easton. Further downstream, Lake Mohegan and Samp Mortar Lake are two other significant water storage areas that affect the flow of water in the river.

Water quality in the river upstream of the zone of tidal influence is given the highest classification ('A') by the State of Connecticut, which also lists the river as a major trout stream. The river is periodically stocked with trout and since it flows through a populated area and is easily accessible, it's popular with recreational fishermen. The river supports a variety of fish species in addition to brook, brown, and rainbow trout, and every niche of the river and its natural riparian areas are filled with fish, amphibians, reptiles, birds, and mammals.

High tides carry salt water over two miles upstream in the river from Long Island Sound to the remnants of the Perry's Mill dam. Southport Harbor, a center of boating activity and one of the most scenic and historic locations on the Connecticut coast, defines the lower, more tidally influenced segment of the Mill River's estuary. Tidal wetlands and intertidal flats in the Harbor provide valuable fish and wildlife habitat and have important water quality functions.

The Mill River, with its ecological and scenic qualities and its historic, educational, and recreational importance, is often described as the foundation of the Town's open space program. In a 1971 request to the State of Connecticut to obtain funds for open space acquisition, the Town described its open space program in the Mill River watershed as part of Fairfield's comprehensive plan of development.

Today, Town-owned open space areas along the River and in the watershed range in size from less than two acres to 170 acres.