

Stillwater Basin Trail



Parking and Trail Location

There is ample parking near the trailhead on Griffin Road, except during large sports events. The *Stillwater Basin Trail* is located primarily on DCR land along the Stillwater River and the arm of the Wachusett Reservoir, called the Stillwater Basin. The trailhead is opposite the ball fields on Griffin Road, which can be reached from Muddy Pond Road.

Unique Features

The trail offers a lovely view out over the Stillwater River and the opportunity to walk along the shoreline of a secluded arm of the Wachusett Reservoir. A

section of the trail follows a hill crest, while other parts meander through younger forest along hilly trails and through majestic mature forest on a wide, level path in the vicinity of the turn-around point at Bean Road.

Length and Difficulty

The round trip distance is roughly 3.5 miles, and the trail has a number of shorter hills, some of which are moderately steep. The elevation along the trail ranges from 381 ft to 511 ft. The difficulty is rated *moderate*.

Allowed and Prohibited Trail Activities

Passive recreational activities allowed on the trail: Hiking, snow shoeing, and cross-country skiing. Fishing in the Basin is allowed with certain restrictions. Check with the DCR for more details. Mountain biking, horseback riding-motorized vehicles and pets are prohibited. No bodily contact with the water is allowed.

Trail Description

The trailhead is located at backside of the overflow parking area, where the trail starts with a relatively steep, but short climb, to the ridge line. Overall, the trail roughly parallels the Stillwater River with a turn-around point at Bean Road. The outgoing path and the return path are not identical, as the outgoing route is slightly longer and provides at one point a view out over the Stillwater River.

0.03 miles: The trail reaches the ridge line, where it turns left and follows a narrow ridge trail

0.16 miles: The trail reaches a small log cabin-like shed (private property). Follow the trail past the shed to the beginning of a grassy area and then to a wide path to the right

0.22 miles: A short side trail takes the hiker to a view point over the Muddy Pond, a former peat bog is a popular site for Worcester County birdwatchers.

0.37 mile: The trail route to be followed leaves the grassy area at roughly a 60 degree angle, going into the woods and slightly downhill

0.43 miles: The main trail turns to the left, while a side trail continues more or less straight

0.58 miles: The trail has a significant downhill part

0.67 miles: The main trail makes a sharp turn to the left, while following the side path to the right brings the hiker to a view over the Stillwater River

0.83 miles: The trail reaches a junction with a trail coming in from the left (this is the route that will be taken on the return trip)

0.97 miles: A fairly steep downhill part begins

1.22 miles: A wide path to the right begins here that leads to an arm of the Wachusett Reservoir

1.28 miles: Make a left turn to walk along the Wachusett Reservoir to Waushacum Brook

1.44 miles: The Waushacum Brook enters the Wachusett Reservoir. Return to the main trail

1.65 miles: Back to the main trail; continue by taking the trail to the right

2.00 miles: The trail reaches the yellow gate at Bean Street. Turn around point

2.49 miles: Relatively steep uphill section of the trail.

2.78 miles: Trail junction with the outbound route; follow the trail to the right

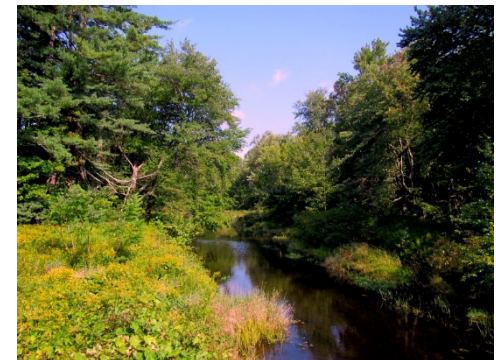
3.09 miles: The trail rejoins the outbound route

3.30 miles: The trail is back to the log cabin

3.47 miles: Back at the trailhead

Stillwater River

The Stillwater River is part of the Nashua River watershed. It begins in Princeton, in the watershed generally known as the Upper Worcester Plateau, or the Monadnock Upland. From here, the Stillwater flows 8.1 miles (13.0 km) through Sterling before entering the Stillwater Basin and the Thomas Basin at the Wachusett Reservoir.



Wachusett Reservoir

The 4,135-acre Wachusett Reservoir was built between 1897 and 1908 by damming the South Branch of the Nashua River. It is the second largest body of water in Massachusetts and is part of the water supply system for metropolitan Boston. It has an aggregate capacity of 65 billion U.S. gallons (240 million m³) and an area of almost 7 square miles (18.2 km²).

The reservoir is fed naturally by the Nashua, Quinapoxet, and Stillwater rivers. For water supply purposes, the Quabbin Aqueduct carries a very large volume of water from the Quabbin Reservoir to Wachusett, which can alter shoreline levels.



Flora and Fauna

Much of the land here is forested with mixed hardwoods and groves of white pines with some broad mowed grassy paths. Look for forest dwelling warblers, woodpeckers and chickadees. Listen for thrushes in the woods and see butterflies and other pollinators in the more open grassy areas. Woodcock are active in the spring in the open areas overlooking Muddy Pond. In the Stillwater Basin waters, various

water oriented birds such as mergansers, loons, ring-neck ducks, Canada geese, eagles and others can be seen depending on the time of year. Sharp eyed hikers may be lucky to see an otter coursing through the water. Laurel patches provide evergreen cover in winter, low bush blueberries, wild cherries, birches and oaks provide fruit, seeds and acorns for a variety of wildlife. Look carefully for narrow game trails trod by resident deer, rabbits, foxes, and coyotes. Indian pipes with their ghostly white stems can be seen pushing up the leaf litter in summer. Wintergreen and partridge-berry, small evergreen plants with bright red berries can also be seen along portions of the trail.

Environmental and Water Protection Considerations

There is a delicate balance between access and watershed protection, given that the reservoir is a significant source of pure drinking water for 2.5 million residents of 47 communities around Boston. The public already has far greater access to watershed area of the Wachusett Reservoir than is the case with the majority of public water supplies.

Specifically, DCR permits only passive recreational activities on established trails, such as hiking, snow shoeing and cross-country skiing. Trail users should be mindful of their role as stewards and protectors of the watershed lands.



Open Space Implementation Committee (OSIC)

Sterling's OSIC was established in 2003 as a permanent town committee, to broaden awareness of and enhance access to significant open space, cultural and recreational resources.

STILLWATER BASIN TRAIL

