

# MASTER PLAN OF THE WINOOSKI VALLEY PARK DISTRICT:

AN OVERVIEW OF GOALS, MANAGEMENT  
ACTIVITIES, AND POLICIES

2012



**WINOOSKI VALLEY PARK DISTRICT**

**Serving Burlington • Colchester • Essex • Jericho**

**South Burlington • Williston • Winooski**

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# SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

## **HISTORY**

The Winooski Valley Park District is a non-profit organization that maintains the largest system of urban natural areas in Vermont. It includes 16 parks, over 1,600 acres of natural areas, 22 miles of trails, and over 12 miles of shoreline on lakes and rivers. The WVPD was created in 1972 through a cooperative agreement of its member communities. The original group of five member communities has grown to seven member communities: Burlington, Colchester, Essex, Jericho, South Burlington, Williston, and Winooski. Each community designates a representative to serve on the WVPD Board of Trustees. The trustees provide policy direction and serve as the primary liaison between the member communities and the WVPD staff. The permanent staff includes the Executive Director, Assistant to the Director, and Parks Manager. A seasonal maintenance crew provides maintenance of the parks, and an AmeriCorps member provides environmental education.

## **MISSION STATEMENT**

The Winooski Valley Park District's mission is to plan, acquire, and manage lands and waters within the boundaries of its member municipalities in the Winooski River Valley for purposes of conservation, preservation of natural areas, establishment of parks, and resource-based education and recreation.

## **FIVE YEAR GOALS**

- 1) To maintain parks in a way that compliments their natural features and provides appropriate access to natural environments near where people live and work
- 2) To protect important natural areas, especially those that provide habitat and wildlife corridors
- 3) To provide educational programs and activities for member towns, increase community involvement in the stewardship of parks, and support other educational and outreach programs which further the WVPD's mission
- 4) To plan for the acquisition and conservation of natural resources of significance in the Winooski River Basin through cooperative efforts with the state, member towns, the Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission, other organizations, and grantors
- 5) To encourage appropriate organizational and/or individual use of various park facilities to provide greater awareness of the parks and to supplement member town support

## **SPECIAL FEATURES**

The Winooski Valley Park District's parks enhance the scenic beauty of its seven member towns and offer opportunities for outdoor recreation close to where people live and work. The WVPD's parks offer nature trails, scenic overlooks, picnic facilities, cross-country skiing trails, canoe and kayak launches, fishing access, and public garden plots. In addition, the WVPD protects a wide variety of habitats, including over 60% of the 57 natural communities which exist in the Winooski River watershed. The WVPD also provides protection for very rare ecological communities and is home to numerous threatened and endangered flora and fauna species.



The Winooski Valley Park District's "Colchester Pond"

# SECTION 2: ACTIVITIES

## PARK MANAGEMENT

**The WVPD’s parks provide residents with the opportunity to experience natural environments with minimal human disturbance. Parks are open all year from dawn to dusk with no admission fees. Park management provides a variety of services that ensure responsible stewardship of the WVPD’s parks. Each park’s unique natural and cultural characteristics are carefully evaluated, and management is designed to protect those critical and distinct characteristics.**

WVPD parks are managed under the following guidelines:

- 1) Ensure the protection of natural and cultural resources
- 2) Provide a safe and enjoyable recreational experience
- 3) Allow only land uses which maintain environmental integrity

Park management responsibilities include:

- Maintaining trails
- Posting park boundaries
- Developing appropriate access to the parks
- Building, installing, and maintaining signs and informational boards
- Building and maintaining park benches, picnic tables, and the picnic shelter
- Creating places of respite
- Providing resource inventory, research, and protection
- Managing viewsheds
- Working with volunteers
- Maintaining positive relationships with member towns
- Maintaining positive relationships with neighbors
- Removing graffiti and garbage
- Establishing agreements with partners

By state statute, the WVPD does not possess the power to police its properties. It relies on local and state officials to gain compliance to regulations that the WVPD has established for its land holdings.

Informal partnerships have been successfully formed with “good neighbors” at many WVPD parks. These people notify the WVPD’s staff of problems and provide helpful suggestions. These partnerships help to increase the sense of pride and support that neighbors feel toward the parks. The relationships have also allowed the WVPD to provide effective management of increased holdings without requiring additional staff.

When specialized resource management is required, the WVPD forms partnerships with state agencies and other organizations which possess the required expertise. For example, Derway Island is managed in cooperation with the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department. As with the “good neighbor” partnerships, these cooperative efforts increase the WVPD’s ability to manage large and diverse holdings with a small staff.

Future goals include increasing public involvement in the stewardship of parks and developing successful control strategies for invasive species that threaten the parks’ natural ecosystems. In addition, the WVPD hopes to continue its partnership with the University of Vermont whose students have offered academic studies and management plans to help guide efficient and responsible management decisions.



The informational board at the Winooski Valley Park District’s “Ethan Allen Homestead”

## **EDUCATION AND OUTREACH**

**Education and outreach efforts help introduce member town residents to the WVPD's parks and programs. Cooperative efforts with local schools, conservation organizations, outdoor recreation groups, and others provide a cost-effective method of achieving educational objectives while greatly expanding the diversity of WVPD's uses. The WVPD also serves as a catalyst organization, promoting and encouraging educational opportunities which further its mission.**

WVPD education and outreach efforts are developed using the following guidelines:

- 1) Relates to conservation
- 2) Increases awareness of the WVPD
- 3) Does not compete with local parks and recreation departments
- 4) Does not unduly inhibit other park uses
- 5) Encourages self-directed learning through signage and educational booklets

Education and outreach efforts include:

- Providing educational programs and events, such as birding or snowshoe hikes, for visitors of all ages
- Providing environmental education for children in accordance with state education standards
- Encouraging volunteerism in the parks through events like Green Up Day and invasive species removals
- Periodically updating interpretive literature, brochures, and maps to provide visitors with educational opportunities
- Maintaining a website, using social media, and making use of free public service announcements

Conservation Field Day is one of the WVPD's biggest educational events. Each year, hundreds of fifth graders from the WVPD's member towns visit the Ethan Allen Homestead to attend workshops led by local environmental professionals.

Self-guided interpretive brochures for hikes at various parks provide visitors with educational information. There are currently several brochures produced by the Park District that educate visitors about various aspects of the parks, including a wildflower guide, a guide to reptiles and amphibians, and the Greenways brochure. Continuing to produce these types of materials and maintaining a presence with children will help to introduce community members to their natural environment and increase support for the WVPD and its mission.



Children learn how to use binoculars at Conservation Field Day

## PLANNING AND LAND ACQUISITION

**The purpose of planning is to determine how the WVPD can carry out its mission in an effective, efficient, and sustainable manner. Planning for resource conservation and acquisition will be accomplished through cooperative efforts with member communities, regional organizations, state agencies, and local institutions of higher education. This requires a significant investment of time by the WVPD staff and trustees to ensure that all potential costs and benefits are taken into consideration before making a final decision.**

For example, the WVPD has been involved in a number of collaborative planning efforts which have advanced its mission. Regional projects that the WVPD has assisted with include the Chittenden Greenways Project, the Lower Winooski Basin Study, and the Regional Wildlife Habitat and Corridors Project. The WVPD also prepared “Where the Wild Things Are” reports for Burlington, South Burlington, and Williston to provide information about wildlife and corridors in those towns. Recent planning activities include a “Flora and Fauna Database” of all the WVPD parks, participation in the ECOS Project, and a Mayes Landing management plan created by students at the University of Vermont.

An ongoing responsibility of the WVPD staff and trustees is to review plans and permit applications of public and private projects and operations which may directly affect assets, programs, and the WVPD’s mission. In addition, there have been a growing number of proposals for new uses for WVPD lands in recent years. Some recent proposals have included beekeeping, Frisbee golf, mountain biking, organic farming, and providing rental space to a school. All proposals are reviewed to ensure that they are consistent with the WVPD’s mission.



## **FACILITIES DEVELOPMENT**

**The WVPD's facilities include a picnic shelter, community gardens, the Hill-Brownell Education Center, Ethan Allen's historic home, and two caretaker houses. Rental fees are used to further the WVPD's mission and to help reduce costs to the member towns.**

Facilities are developed under the following guidelines:

- 1) Relates to the WVPD's mission
- 2) Minimally impacts natural communities
- 3) Benefits member town residents
- 4) Helps to supplement the member town's annual financial support

In 1975, the WVPD discovered that Ethan Allen's historic home was located on its property. Recognizing that the preservation of cultural heritage is important, but that running a museum did not fall directly under its mission of conservation, the WVPD created a sister organization. The Ethan Allen Homestead Museum now provides tours and educational programs May-October and hosts several annual events including "Winters Eve." The WVPD and the Ethan Allen Homestead Museum have teamed up to offer a joint field trip experience for classes to learn about "The Ethan Allen Homestead: Then and Now."

The WVPD also has a picnic shelter and classrooms at the Ethan Allen Homestead which are used for educational activities and are available for rent. Rental fees help to supplement member town contributions. One classroom has been rented by the Association of Africans Living in Vermont and provides a meeting space for the "New Farms for New Americans" participants who farm the lower fields at the Ethan Allen Homestead.

The WVPD also hosts community gardens at both the Ethan Allen Homestead and Macrae Farm Park. Farmers assist the WVPD in maintaining trails at several parks in exchange for the use of cropland at the Colchester Pond Natural Area, Ethan Allen Homestead, Macrae Farm Park, and Muddy Brook Park.

The WVPD has two caretaker houses, which are rented at a reduced rate in exchange for daily monitoring of the parks. The houses are located at the Colchester Pond Natural Area and the Ethan Allen Homestead.

In the future, the WVPD may consider renovating the barn at the Colchester Pond Natural Area so that it can be used as a classroom, as an office, as a canoe/kayak rental site, or as a rental space for special events.

## PARTNERSHIPS

**The WVPD expands its services to the public through partnerships with community organizations.**

Partnerships are formed based in the following guidelines:

- 1) Relates to the WVPD's mission
- 2) Minimally impacts natural communities
- 3) Benefits member town residents

Current partnerships include:

- Agricultural Partners: Provide trail maintenance in exchange for cropland
- Association of Africans Living in Vermont: Provide educational farming programs for New Americans
- Caretakers: Provide security and surveillance parks in exchange for reduced rent
- Community Gardens: Provide gardening opportunities at the WVPD's parks
- The Ethan Allen Homestead Museum: Provide educational opportunities for the public regarding Ethan Allen's significance, Vermont history, and 18<sup>th</sup> century living
- Gatetenders: Provide daily opening and closing of the park gates
- Visiting Nurses Association: Provide gardening opportunities for families and children



Participants in the New Farms for New Americans Program

## SECTION 3: REFERENCE

### ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

**The WVPD provides a unique service to its member communities through its ability to acquire, conserve, and manage important natural areas.**

The Winooski Valley Park District was created as a public entity through a cooperative agreement between its member communities, and therefore, is reliant on public support. The WVPD will maintain this public status through continued and strengthened organizational ties to member communities and regional organizations. The WVPD is also recognized as a 501(c)(3) organization by the Internal Revenue Service.

The WVPD's member communities each designate a representative to serve on the WVPD's Board of Trustees. The Trustees provide policy direction and serve as the primary liaison between the WVPD staff and the member communities.

The WVPD's permanent staff includes the Executive Director, Assistant to the Director, and Parks Manager. An AmeriCorps member has served as the Environmental Educator and the WVPD hopes that opportunity will exist in future years. The WVPD also has a seasonal maintenance crew, two resident caretakers, and several gatetenders. Together, the staff coordinates hundreds of volunteers each year.

The WVPD will remain open to including other member communities.

### FINANCIAL DEVELOPMENT

**The WVPD is a public entity, created by and for its member communities. As such, the WVPD relies on municipal financial support in combination with other fundraising efforts.**

Much of the WVPD's operating budget comes from its seven municipal members in the form of dues, based on relative population and equalized property tax grand list. In addition, the WVPD's staff members endeavor to bring in grants, rental revenue, and other funds to help supplement member town support.

The WVPD takes on a serious challenge of continually acquiring new land, growing in acreage, while keeping its staff small. The WVPD will continue to limit capital expenditures, rely on a strong commitment from volunteers, and manage existing facilities with low maintenance designs. Grants will continue to be pursued for acquisitions, development, protection efforts, and environmental education.

## SUSTAINABILITY

**The Winooski Valley Park District uses the following guidelines to promote a sustainable future for the organization:**

- The WVPD’s mission is to provide youth – our future leaders – with education and exposure to natural areas. The development of new natural areas is done with a quality educational experience in mind.
- The WVPD’s policy of keeping parks free and open to the public assures that they are used by all types of people. This is the best way for park users to feel ownership.
- The WVPD solicits donations, discounts, and grants, and promotes long-term volunteerism for support.
- The WVPD is proactive in the perpetual protection of wildlife corridors and maximizes outright ownership of parks.
- The WVPD practices energy efficiency and reduces costs by purchasing used furniture and maintaining tools and equipment in good condition.
- The WVPD hires staff and interns with diverse skills and encourages their professional development by allowing them to participate in seminars and trainings.



A flower blooms in the Winooski Valley Park District’s community gardens

# SECTION 4: APPENDICES

## APPENDIX 1. Land Acquisition Assessment Methodology

**The WVPD receives both solicited and unsolicited requests for land acquisition and resource protection efforts. These requests come from private individuals, member towns, state agencies, and others. The WVPD’s “Land Acquisition Assessment Methodology” helps staff to quickly and effectively determine whether an acquisition would be feasible and would support the WVPD’s mission. Projects which are deemed appropriate for further action will be formally presented to the WVPD’s Board of Trustees for consideration.**

### Part 1. Background Information

- Document source of request
- Document landowner requests
- Gather baseline information
  - Parcel location
  - Parcel size
  - Current use
  - Access

### Part 2. Conservation Priority

- Priority 1
  - Riparian land
  - Significant natural area
  - Rare, threatened, or endangered habitat
- Priority 2
  - Public recreation or education site
  - Greenway
- Priority 3
  - Resource-rich land (forested or agricultural)
  - Scenic land

### Part 3. Evaluation

- Critical for protection
- Quality or potential for restoration
- Concurs with the WVPD’s mission
- Uniqueness

### Part 4. Management Potential

- Connectivity to wildlife corridors and habitat
- Impacts of neighboring land uses and abuses
- Can be adequately protected via acquisition or easement
- Site vulnerability to development
- Water quality
- Cost to restore parcel
- Management feasibility
- Long-term value

Part 5. Review by Board of Trustees

- Public benefit
- Funding feasibility
- Cost commensurate with value
- Local politics
- Displacement of historic uses
- Potential for other land owner/manager



A moose cools off at the Winooski Valley Park District's "Delta Park"

## **APPENDIX 2. Description of the Winooski Valley Park District's Parks**

### **Colchester Pond Natural Area**

Colchester Pond is a 693 acre park which contains a wide variety of habitats and natural communities. A beautiful 2.5 mile walking trail circles the pond. It is the perfect spot for hiking, birding, fishing, canoeing, kayaking, or having a picnic. The park is also home to bear, beavers, a wide variety of birds, bobcat, coyote, deer, moose, turtles, and many other species.

### **Delta Park**

Delta Park is a 55 acre park at the mouth of the Winooski River. It includes natural sandy beaches and also hosts a section of the Burlington Bike Path. It is a wonderful place to enjoy Lake Champlain and observe wildlife. It is known for spectacular birding.

### **Derway Island Nature Preserve**

Derway Island Nature Preserve is a 148 acre nature preserve along the Winooski River. It is an important rest area for waterfowl during their migration. It includes two large ponds and mostly consists of floodplain forest.

### **Donohue Sea Caves**

Donohue Sea Caves is a 15 acre park, featuring ancient limestone dolomite caves carved by the Champlain Sea over 10,000 years ago. Much of the park is covered by a pond and marsh, and it is a popular ice skating spot during the winter. The park is also visited by a wide variety of wildlife, including many bird species.

### **Essex Overlook Park**

Essex Overlook Park is a small 5 acre park and is the perfect location for a picnic. It contains many large trees which provide shade over picnic tables, and provides wonderful views of the Green Mountains and the river valley.

### **Ethan Allen Homestead**

The Ethan Allen Homestead is a 284 acre park. It hosts the Winooski Valley Park District's headquarters, the Ethan Allen Homestead Museum and the Allen family's restored 1787 farmhouse, community and educational gardens, a picnic shelter, an elevated boardwalk through wetlands, and numerous hiking trails. It is a lovely area for birding, hiking, cross country skiing, and kayaking. The park is often visited by birds, coyote, deer, muskrat, raccoon, red fox, river otter, and squirrels.

### **Heineberg Wetlands**

Heineberg Wetlands contain 12 acres of various wetland types, including Cattail Marsh, Alder Swamp, and Buttonbush Swamp. The Heineberg Wetlands are not suitable for recreation, but provide a wonderful space for wildlife.

**Macrae Farm**

Macrae Farm is a 288 acre park which contains floodplains, meadows, and upland hardwood forests. It is a nice location for hiking, canoeing, kayaking, and cross country skiing. It also hosts community gardens.

**Mayes Landing**

Mayes Landing is a quiet spot near the mouth of the Winooski River, just off the Burlington Bike Path. It is a small park, but is lovely for picnics and fishing.

**Muddy Brook Natural Area**

Muddy Brook Park is a 28 acre park featuring several diverse ecosystems and a 1.75 mile trail along the river.

**Old Mill Park**

Old Mill Park is a 12 acre park containing a beautiful Northern Hardwood Forest along the Browns River. It is home to many birds, deer, fisher, muskrat, raccoon, squirrels, and other species.

**Salmon Hole - Riverwalk Park**

Salmon Hole lies at the bottom of the Winooski River Falls along the Burlington-Winooski border. It is a very popular fishing spot and is well known for its walleye, pike, and trout. The Riverwalk Trail begins at Salmon Hole and provides a peaceful walk to Intervale Road.

**Valley Ridge**

Valley Ridge is an 18 acre natural area that serves as an important wildlife corridor. Valley Ridge is not suitable for recreation, but provides a wonderful space for flora and fauna.

**Winooski Gorge**

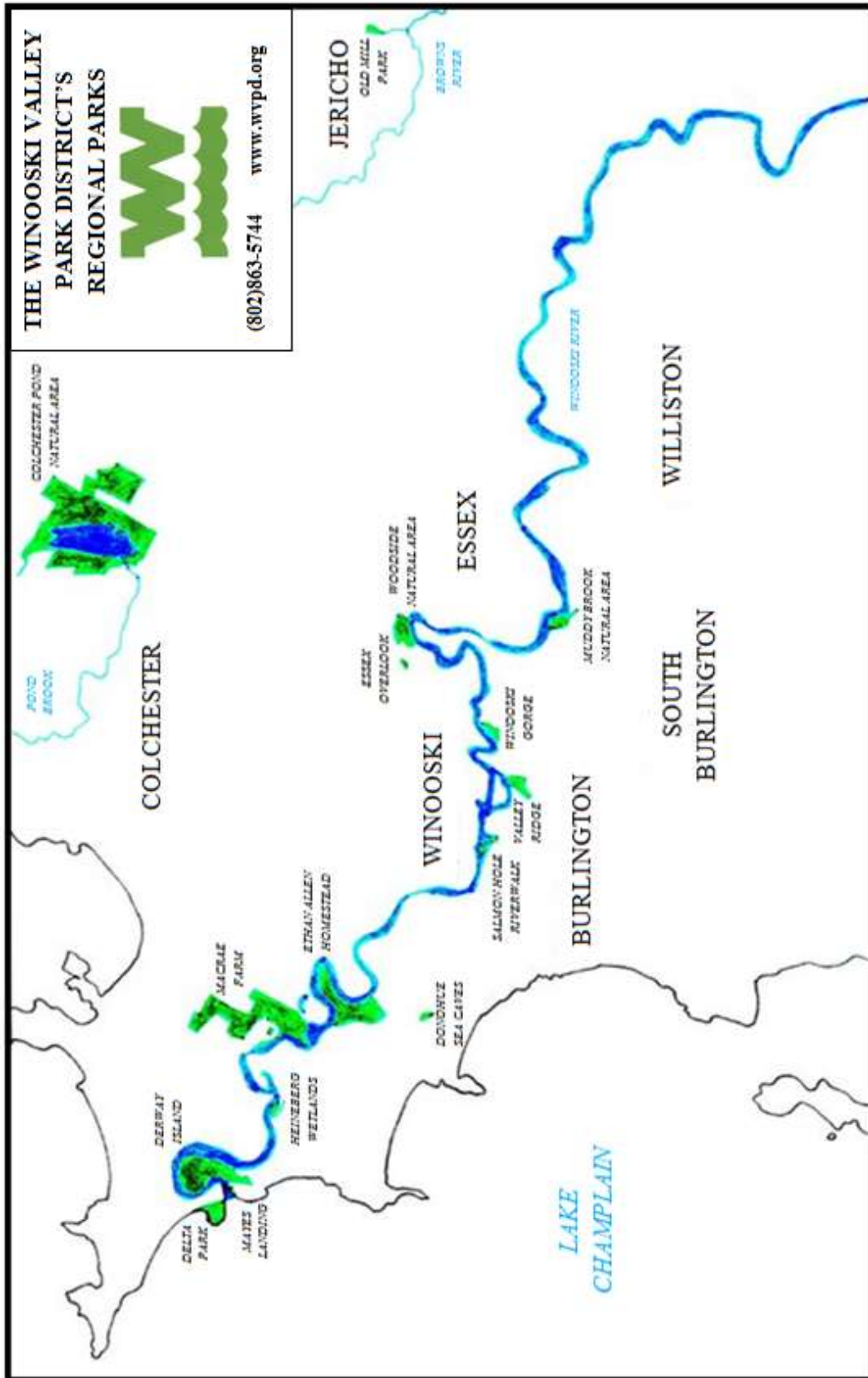
Winooski Gorge is an 11 acre natural area featuring two sites which overlook a deep river gorge and a Limestone Bluff Cedar-Pine Forest.

**Woodside Natural Area**

Woodside Natural Area is a 55 acre park which contains a large pond, cattail marsh, and beaver meadow. A one mile hike takes visitors on a tour of the river and loops past the beaver pond. This park is known for its great birding, and is also home to many other species including coyote, deer, muskrat, raccoons, and squirrels.



APPENDIX 3. Maps of the Winooski Valley Park District's Parks



# DELTA PARK

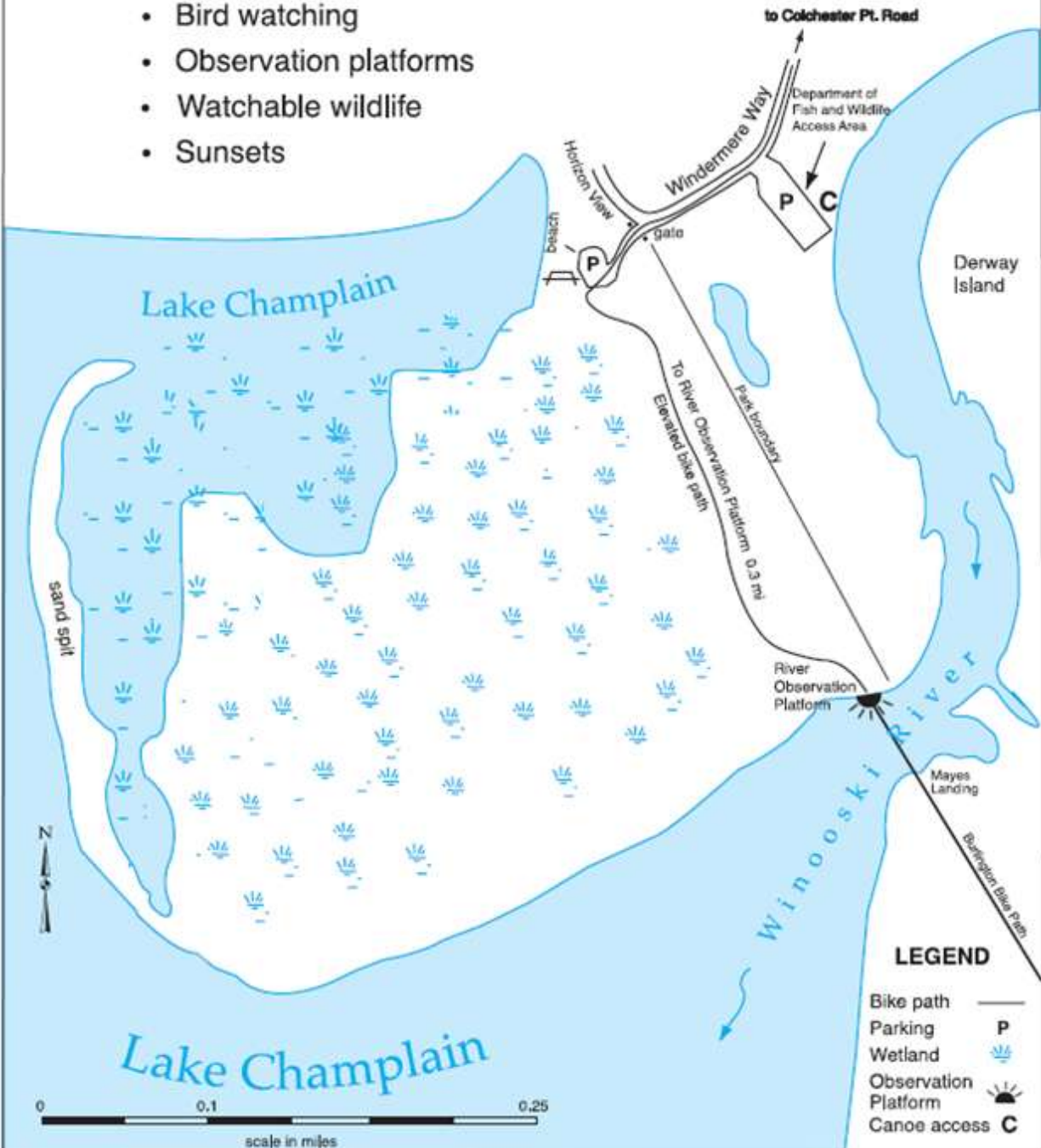
## Directions:

Take Rt. 127 north to Colchester.  
Turn left onto Porters Point Road.

Turn left onto Colchester Pt. Road  
left again onto Windemere Way  
which leads to Delta Park.

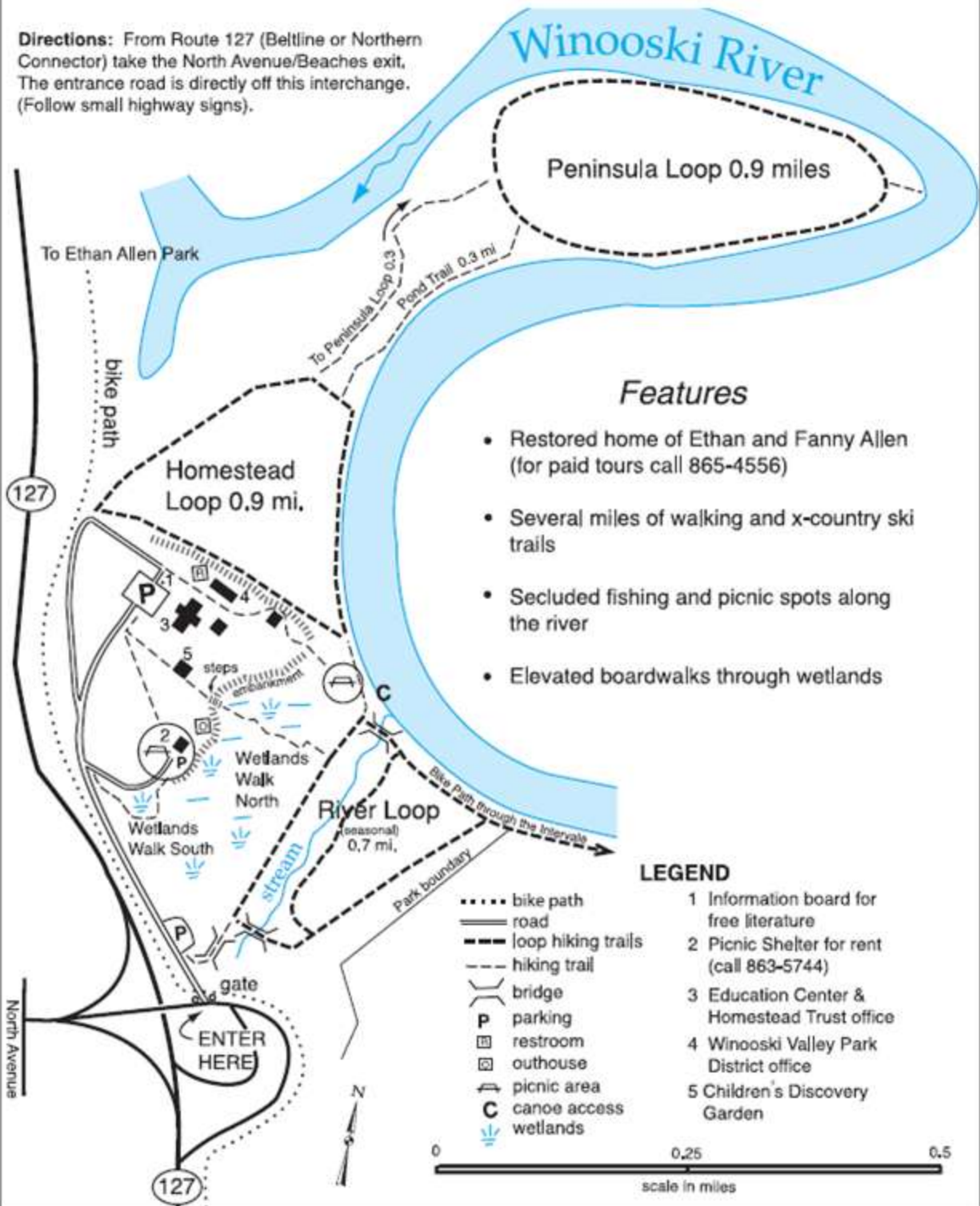
## Features

- Bird watching
- Observation platforms
- Watchable wildlife
- Sunsets



# ETHAN ALLEN HOMESTEAD

**Directions:** From Route 127 (Beltline or Northern Connector) take the North Avenue/Beaches exit. The entrance road is directly off this interchange. (Follow small highway signs).



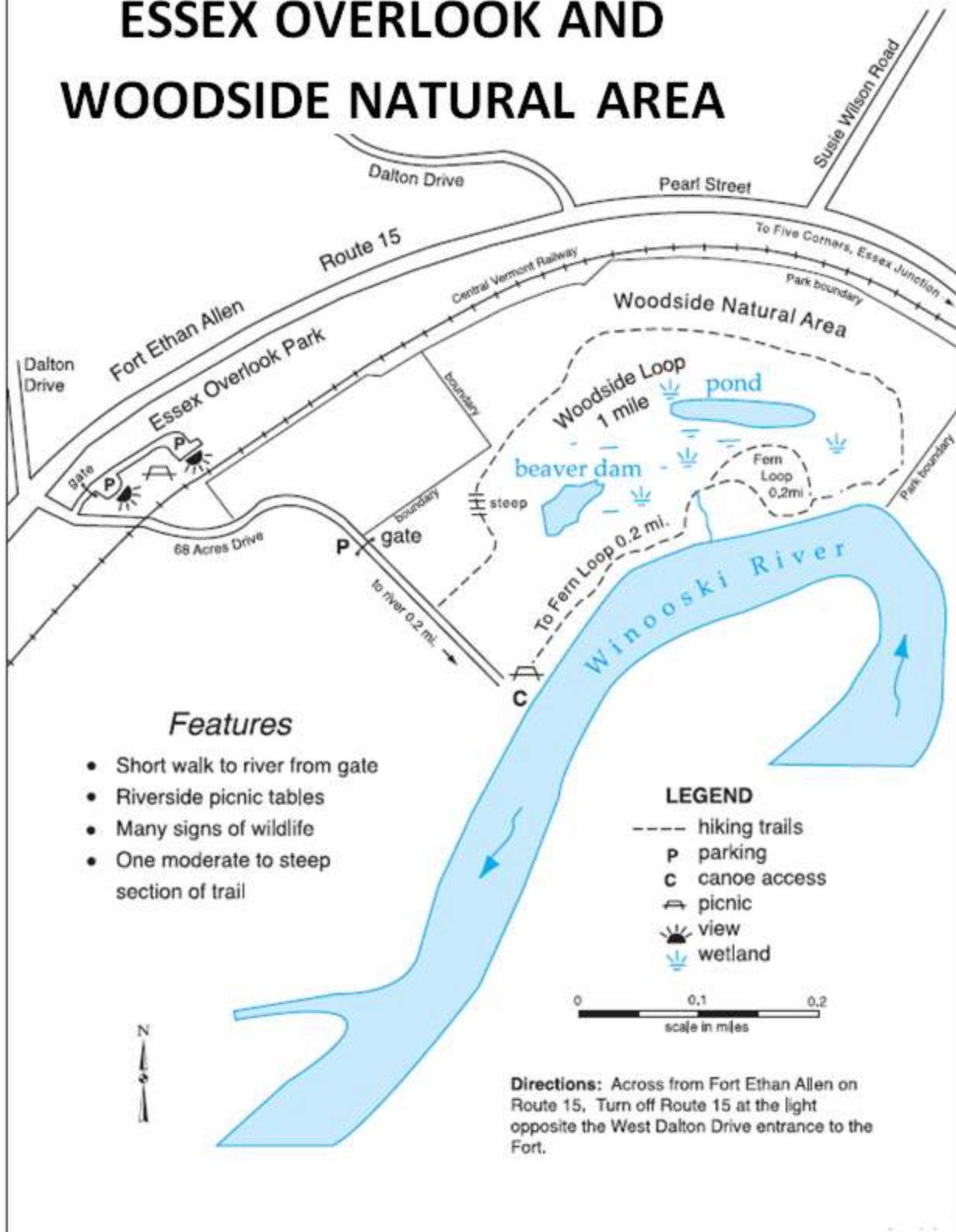
## Features

- Restored home of Ethan and Fanny Allen (for paid tours call 865-4556)
- Several miles of walking and x-country ski trails
- Secluded fishing and picnic spots along the river
- Elevated boardwalks through wetlands

## LEGEND

- |         |                    |   |   |
|---------|--------------------|---|---|
| .....   | bike path          | 1 | Information board for free literature     |
| ———     | road               | 2 | Picnic Shelter for rent (call 863-5744)   |
| - - - - | loop hiking trails | 3 | Education Center & Homestead Trust office |
| - . - . | hiking trail       | 4 | Winooski Valley Park District office      |
| — / —   | bridge             | 5 | Children's Discovery Garden               |
| P       | parking            |   |   |
| ⊠       | restroom           |   |   |
| ⊞       | outhouse           |   |   |
| ⌒       | picnic area        |   |   |
| C       | canoe access       |   |   |
| ~       | wetlands           |   |   |

# ESSEX OVERLOOK AND WOODSIDE NATURAL AREA



## Features

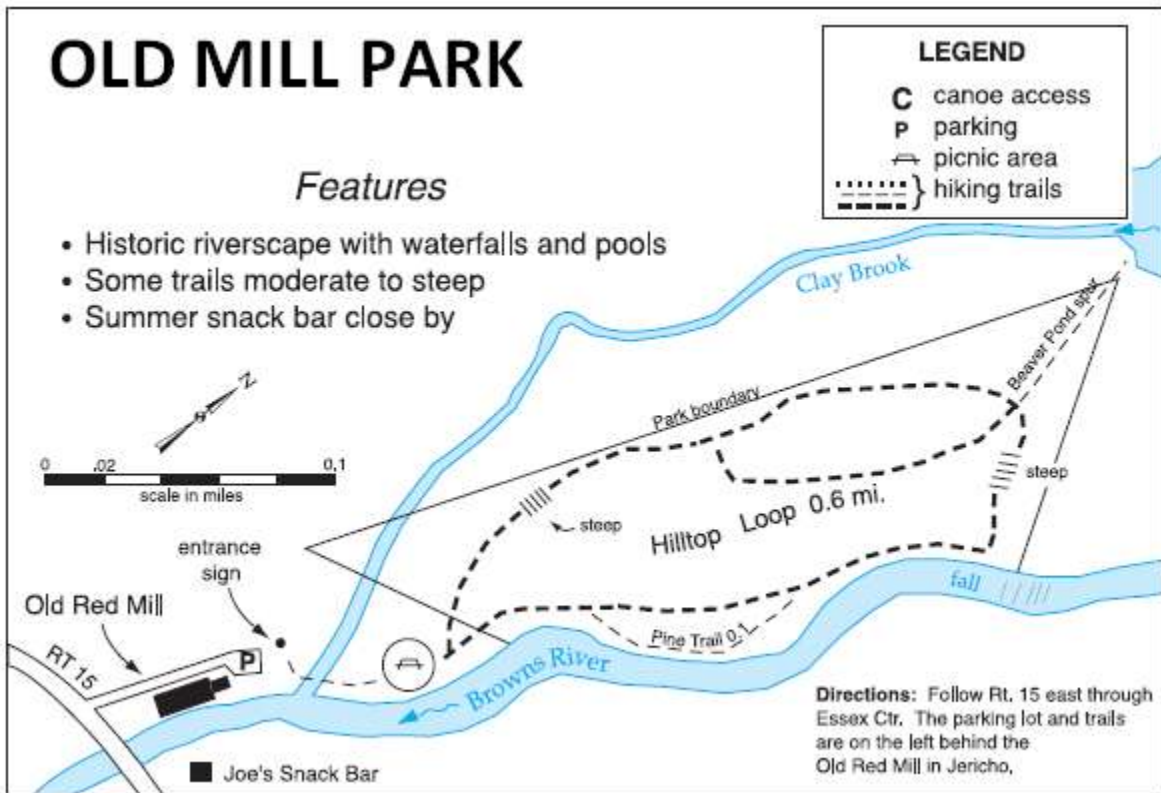
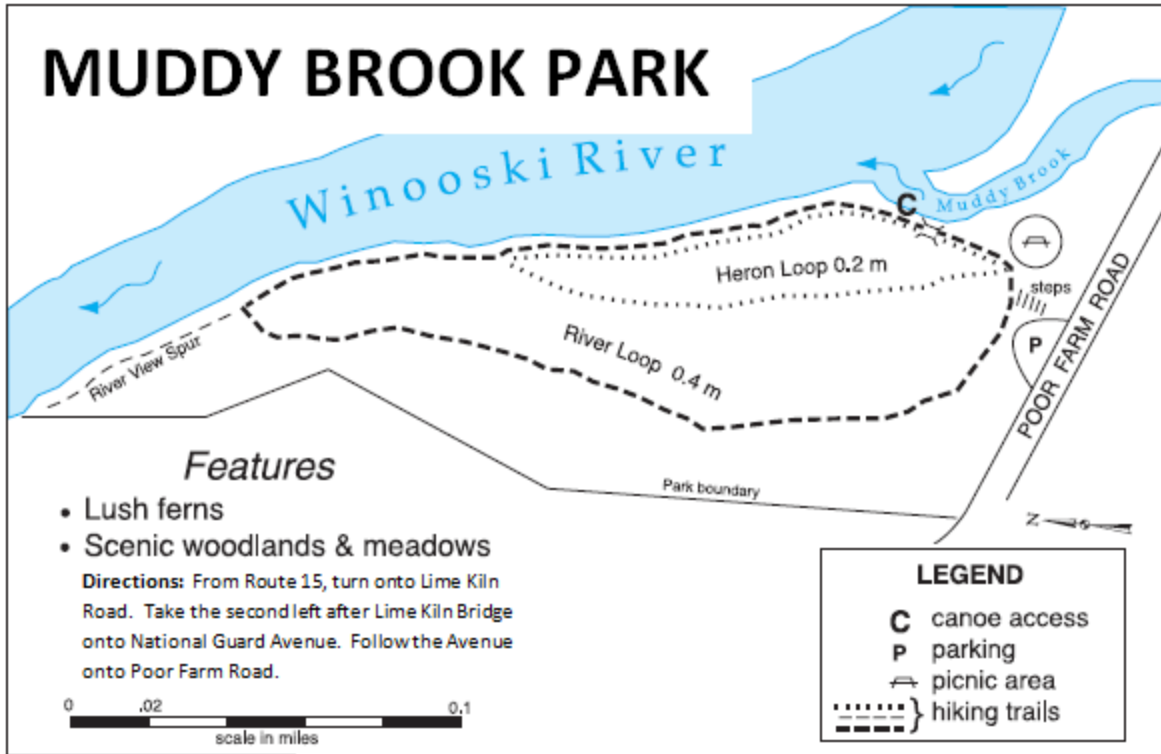
- Short walk to river from gate
- Riverside picnic tables
- Many signs of wildlife
- One moderate to steep section of trail

## LEGEND

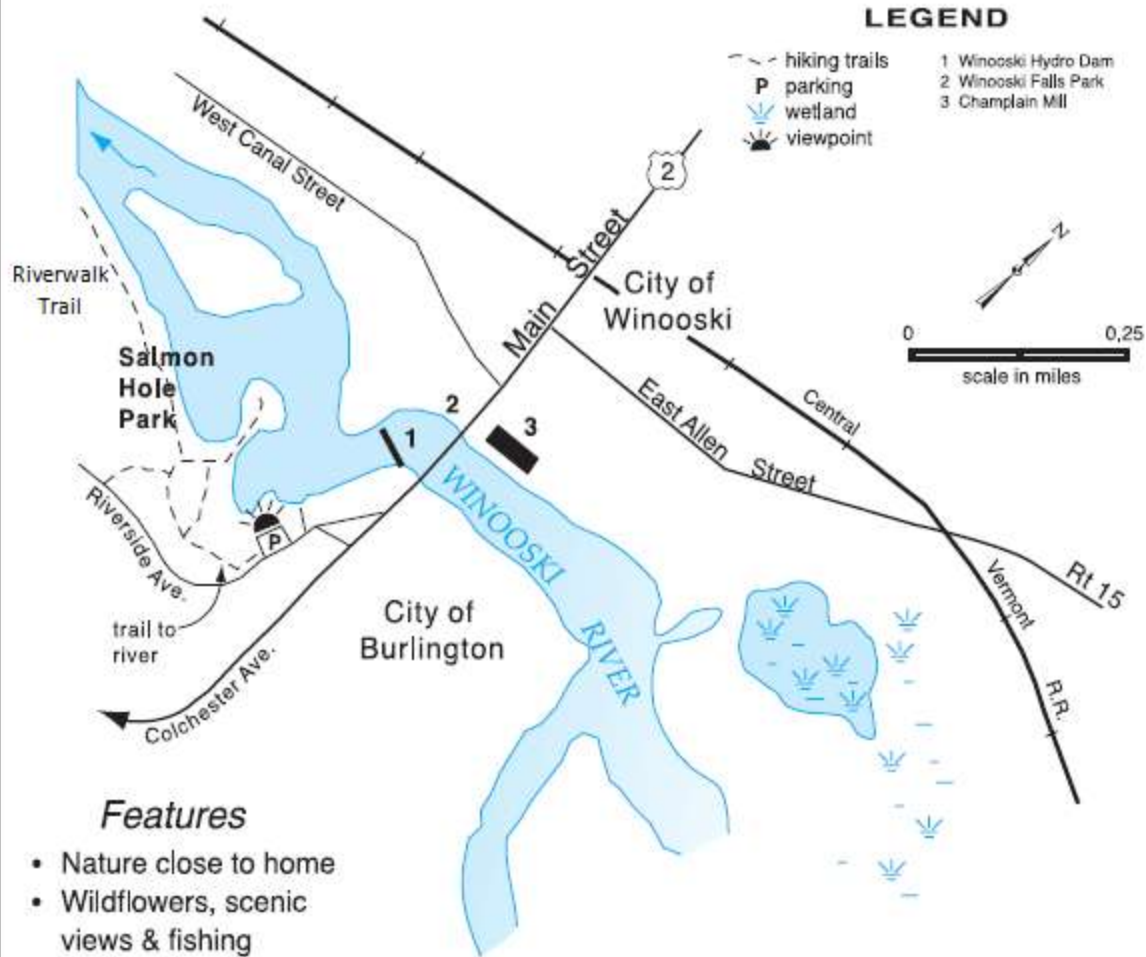
- hiking trails
- P parking
- C canoe access
- picnic
- view
- wetland

0 0.1 0.2  
scale in miles

**Directions:** Across from Fort Ethan Allen on Route 15. Turn off Route 15 at the light opposite the West Dalton Drive entrance to the Fort.



# SALMON HOLE PARK



## Features

- Nature close to home
- Wildflowers, scenic views & fishing
- On bus line
- Nearby restaurants

## Directions:

**Salmon Hole** The parking lot is located on Riverside Avenue (Routes 2 & 7) in Burlington, a few hundred feet from the Winooski Bridge.