

Norwalk River

Ridgefield, Redding, Wilton & Norwalk

Fast Facts

Length: 24 miles

Width: 10-20 feet

Depth: 2-3 feet

Access: Excellent - Many town parks and open spaces

Stocking: 8,000 trout annually

Special Regulations:

Class 3 Wild Trout
Management Area
from Ridgefield south
to Route 106 in Wilton

About the River

Of all the rivers in Fairfield County, the 24-mile long Norwalk River is unique in one aspect - the significant amount of public angling access.

Unlike most other streams in Fairfield County, there is limited private residential property along the Norwalk River. The vast majority of the river runs through town-owned land, state land or through non-posted commercial property.

Fed by the Great Swamp in Ridgefield, the Norwalk River flows west for a short distance before crossing Route 35. From this point on, the river flows south along Route 7 through Redding, Wilton and Norwalk before enter-

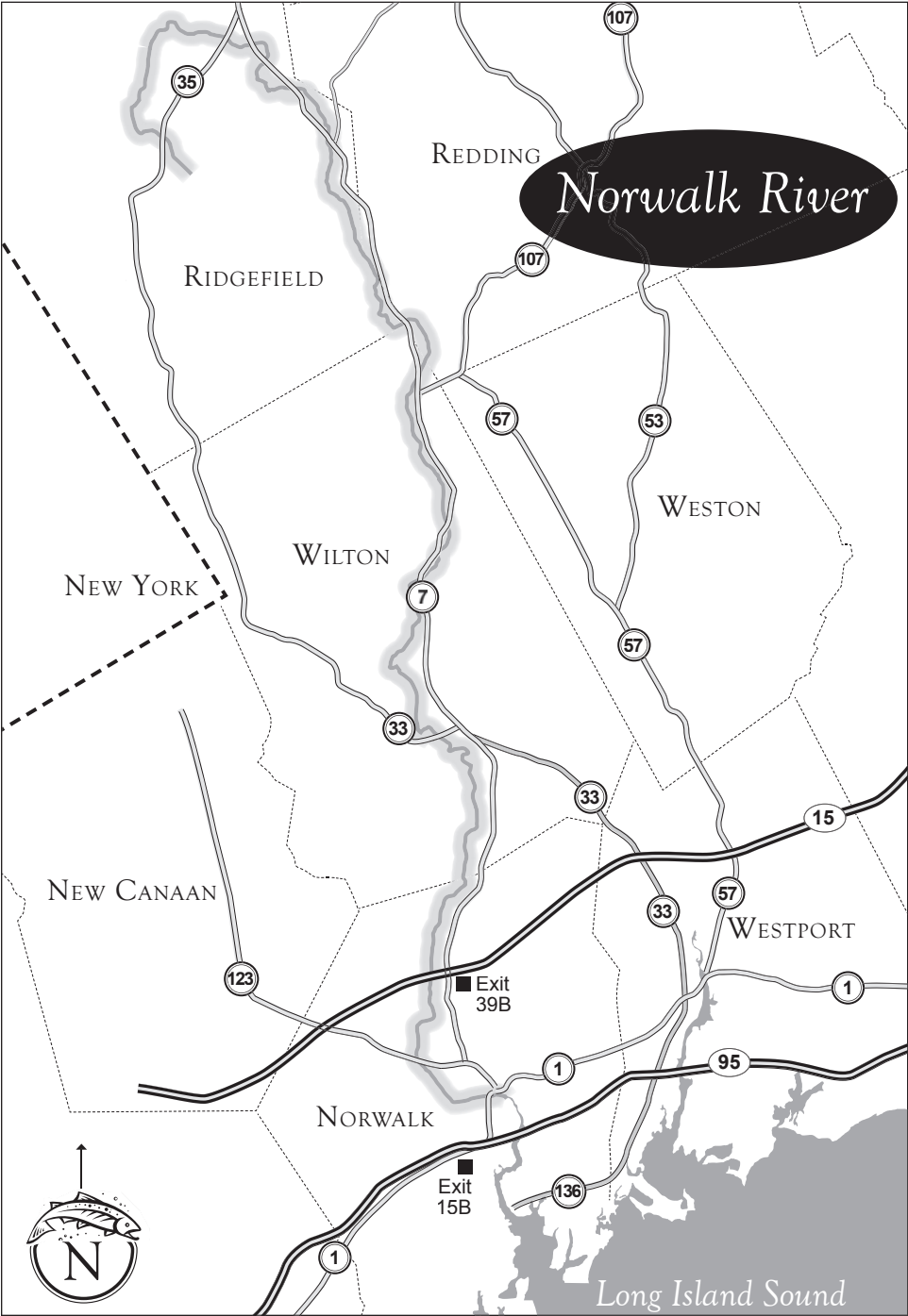
ing Long Island Sound.

At times the river is just a few feet off the heavily traveled highway, while in other locations its path carves through more scenic stretches. Crisscrossed by many town roads, with parking pull-offs at nearly every bridge crossing, the Norwalk River offers unparalleled public access for fishing.

Despite the significant level of public access, the Norwalk River is not the easiest river to fish successfully.

While large, deep pools are prominent in the most heavily fished and easily accessed stretches of stream, the remaining lengths, particularly

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Anglers willing to walk a good distance from some of the easier access spots on the Norwalk River will be treated to scenic sections of stream that appear out of place in lower Fairfield County.

those in the upstream stretches offer tight casting conditions.

A medium size stream, the Norwalk River is most often 10 to 20 feet wide, with some stretches as tight as five to seven feet and others as wide as 30 feet.

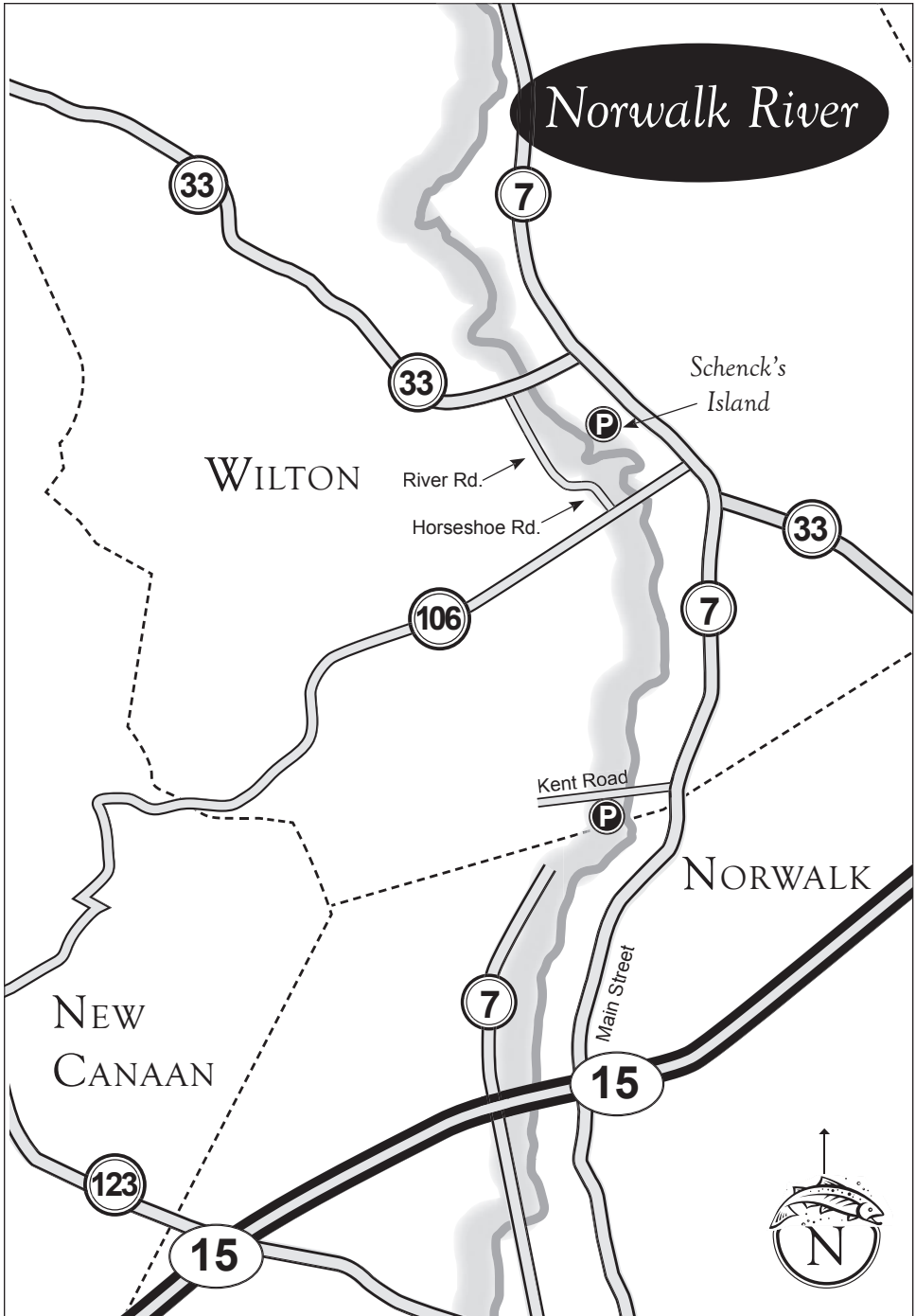
Plenty of stream side vegetation along the river's banks can often confound anglers attempting to make a delicate cast into a pool or pocket sure to hold a trout.

Trout Population

Recognizing its value as a recreational fishing stream, the Norwalk River is heavily stocked by the state, with approximately 8,000 adult-size trout released each year over a roughly 13-mile stretch. While most of these fish range from nine to 12 inches in size, the state also stocks a small number of trophy and broodstock trout - some as large as 10 pounds - into the Norwalk River each spring.

Along with the stocked fish, however, the Norwalk River is also home to a stable population of wildlly spawning brook trout and brown trout. Typically these wild fish range in size from four to eight inches, with only

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Even in the center of downtown Wilton, the Norwalk River offers decent scenery and excellent access. Here, on the far side of the river is the town's shopping district, while a 17-acre open space meadow borders the river's other bank.

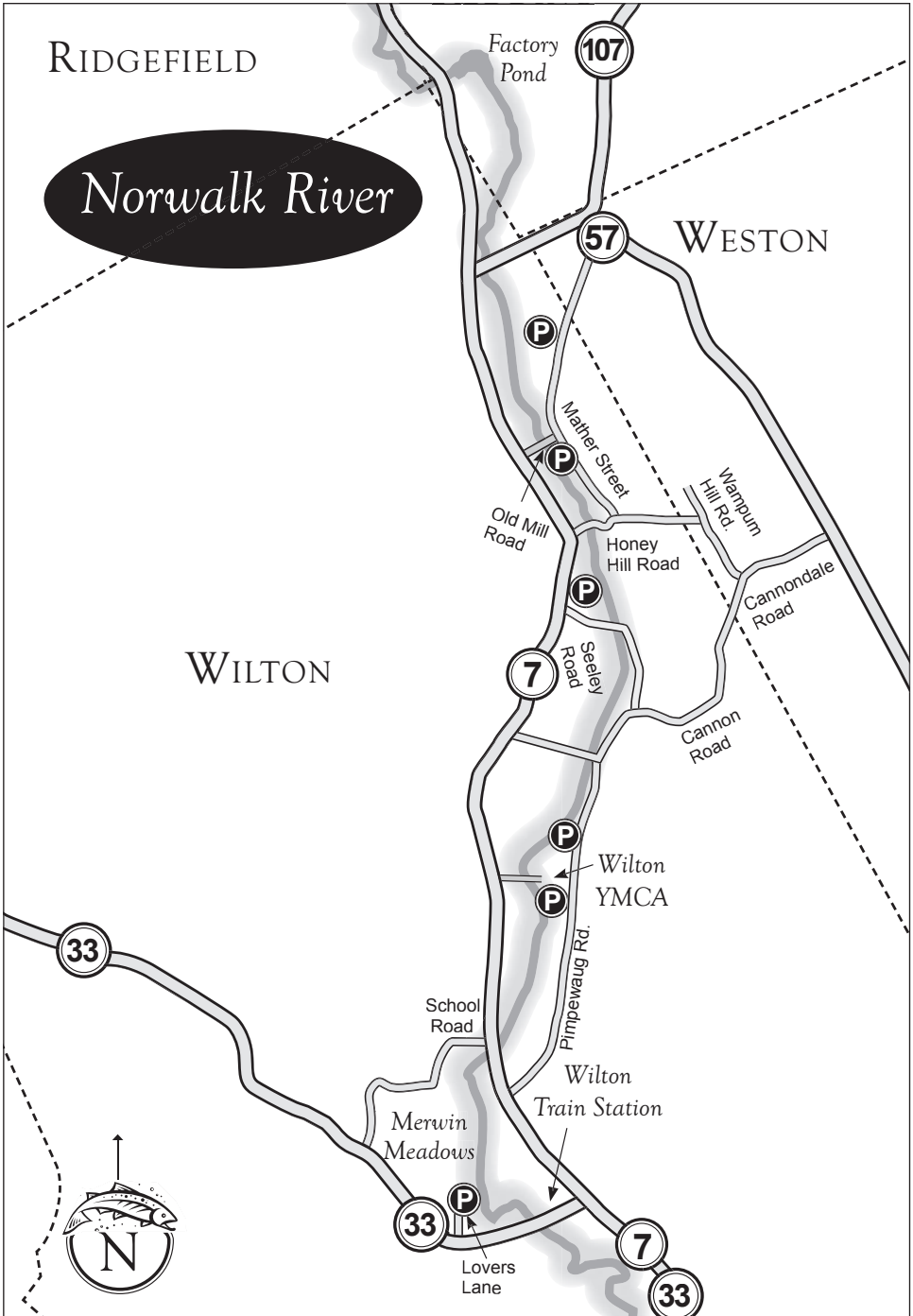
a handful surviving three or more years and reaching sizes in excess of 12 inches. It is estimated that only 10-20% of the juvenile wild brown trout survive their first year in the river.

That being said, in some years state officials surveying the trout population have found wild brown trout in excess of 20 inches living quite happily in the Norwalk River.

In dry years, summer drought significantly reduces the survival of wild trout in the river. When summers remain wet and cool, however, the following fall and spring can produce incredible fishing for larger wild fish.

In addition to stocking adult fish for the heavy "put-and-take" fishing pressure on the river, the state also stocks roughly 20,000 juvenile brown trout of one to two inches in length into the Norwalk River each year. These stockings of survivor strain brown trout help augment the wild population and ensure wild spawning continues to take place in the river.

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Regulations

The vast majority of the fishable sections of the Norwalk River are protected with special regulations designed to protect the wild brown trout population.

Designated as a Class 3 Wild Trout Management Area, from its headwaters in Ridgefield downstream through the Wolfpit Road bridge in Wilton, anglers must release unharmed any trout under nine inches in length. A daily creel limit of five trout over nine inches in length is allowed.

The remaining downstream section of the Norwalk River provides a daily creel limit of five trout of any size.

The Norwalk River is open to fishing from Opening Day (the third Saturday in April) through February. Fishing in March or the first three weeks of April is prohibited.

Access

The vast majority of fishing pressure, and the best fishing on the Norwalk River takes place in Wilton.

In the southern sections of the river in Norwalk, stocking of trout is limited to a few locations, with more limited angler access.

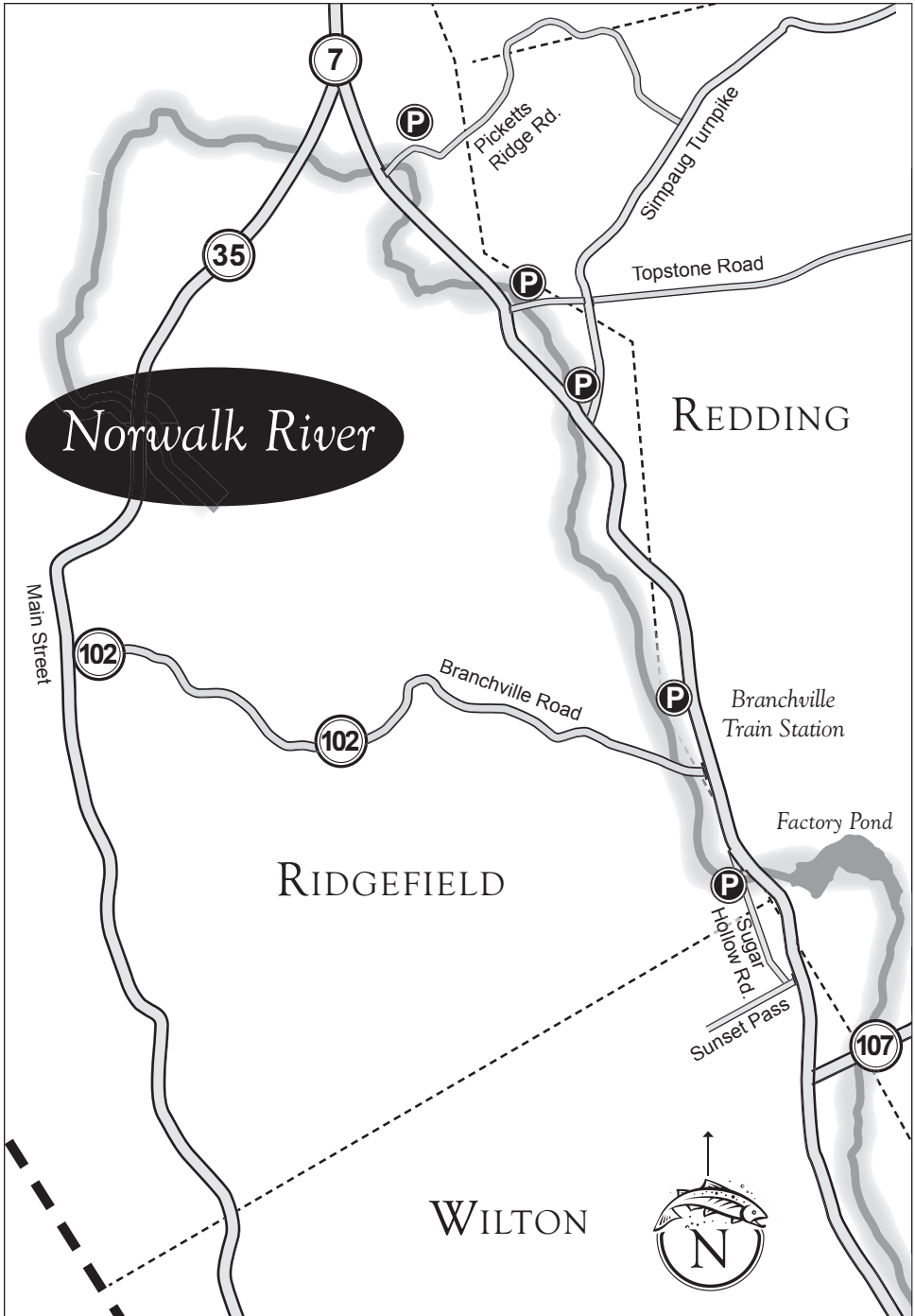
Starting in the south end of Wilton, the first large section of access is available off Kent Road, with parking in the undeveloped lot west of the bridge. Here anglers can access the upstream and downstream sides of the bridge, fishing several deep pools and pocket water.

A long stretch of commercial property along Route 7 up to the Route 33 intersection limits public access in this lower stretch.

Just south of Wolfpit Road, anglers can park in the commuter parking lot off Route 7, which almost always has plenty of parking available. Immediately south of the parking lot is a large, deep pool which was once the town's summer swimming hole. This parking lot offers walking access both upstream and down through a number of other decent pools as well.

Heading north into Wilton Center off River Road, the next large section of river runs through the 17-acre Schenck's Island open space owned jointly by the town of Wilton and the Wilton Land Trust. This stretch of stream offers a number of decent pools as it runs north from the railroad bridge to the Schenck's Island parking lot, which is accessed over a small

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A better than average stocked brown trout from the Norwalk river. On small, soft-action rods and light line, these trout put up a great fight.

bridge immediately across from the Stop & Shop shopping center. This lot offers parking for up to 10 vehicles, but can become crowded with dog walkers and other visitors.

Continuing upstream, anglers can access the next large stretch of the Norwalk River by either parking in the Wilton Train Station lot off Route 7, or crossing the river on Ridgefield Road (Route 33) and taking the first right onto Lovers Lane.

At the end of Lovers Lane is a large parking lot for the town-owned Merwin Meadows swimming pond and soccer field. The river runs through the park and can be accessed along a walking path through the park from the Ridgefield Road bridge all the way upstream to School Road.

This roughly one mile long stretch of river includes several popular pools including sections in the immediate vicinity of the parking lot, at

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Several dams pose a threat to the Norwalk River's wild trout by blocking access to spawning areas upstream and causing the river's temperature to rise in the heat of the summer. Applications with state agencies are currently in place to remove this particular dam north of Merwin Meadows Park

the base of the Dana Dam north of the parking area and at the far northern reaches of the walking trail near School Road.

North of Merwin Meadows, the next significant access to the Norwalk River is at the Wilton YMCA on the east side of Route 7 across from Wilton High School. Here there is a large parking lot often filled to capacity during swim meets or Little League baseball games, but otherwise offering plenty of parking. The river in this stretch is slow and deep and because of its easy access is one of the most heavily fished stretches on the entire river.

Just north of the YMCA, on Pimpewaug Road, there is a gravel pull-off next to the railroad trestle over the river in the Cannondale Village section of town. Another very popular fishing location, the pool below the trestle is quite deep and holds trout year round.

Continuing upstream, anglers can gain access to a short section of river running through Wilton Land Trust property off Seeley Road. There is room for 2 or 3 cars at most on the gravel pull-offs on either side of the



Wild brown trout in the Norwalk River continue to spawn and survive despite the many pressures from development and pollution.

railroad tracks.

Approximately 500 feet up Route 7, the Honey Hill Road bridge offers a pull-off for one vehicle.

The next angler access is off Old Mill Road approximately one mile up Route 7. Here a town-owned ball field and gravel lot offers plenty of parking, except on game days, and many anglers also park on a pull-off along the side of the road. The deep pool at the bridge itself is heavily fished, but anglers also have access to a long, linear park that runs upstream and downstream from the bridge.

Entering the Georgetown section of Wilton - where the towns of Wilton, Redding, Weston and Ridgefield meet - anglers next have access to a shorter section of stream at a series of pull-offs along Sugar Hollow Road.

The Branchville Train Station in Ridgefield offers plenty of parking along the Norwalk River just south of the intersection of Route 7 and route 102 in Ridgefield. Here the river is narrow and heavily overgrown with vegetation.

Just up Route 7, anglers can also pull off on the west side of the highway to access the Norwalk River at a bridge that crosses a small pond

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Native brook trout are a rare and special treat on the Norwalk River

section of the stream.

Continuing north on Route 7, there are several pieces of commercial and residential property, with the next major access coming at the intersection with Simpaug Turnpike. Here, anglers have access to the river, as well as the large, deep Walpole Pond surrounded by an open space used as a nature study area by local school children.

Further north on Route 7, a pull-off just north of Topstone Road provides parking for three to four vehicles and access to a stretch of river running through a meadow and swampy area at the edge of Topstone Park.

The final public access area to the Norwalk River is a small pull-off on Picketts Ridge Road offering access to a short stretch of stream running through a small parcel of open space.

Fishing in these far upstream reaches is quite challenging as the river is narrow, well-overgrown and brambly and quite deep in some places.