



## BEST WATER FEATURES

### WHERE TO GO FOR H<sub>2</sub>O: **5 PEACEFUL PONDS AND RELAXING RIVERS**

By Carrie Deegan

**S**cience has proven that just being nearby water induces relaxation and improves mental well-being. Listening to a babbling brook or gazing out at a peaceful pond can automatically switch your mind from “busy mode” to a mildly meditative state and invoke feelings of wonder that put you in a better mood. Hiking to water is a great way to regulate stress and rest your mind while you exercise. Come along and check out these five relaxing reservations.

The sun rises over the Forest Society's  
Merrimack River Outdoor Education  
& Conservation Area in Concord.

## 1. DAME FOREST AND THE CY AND BOBBIE SWEET TRAIL

If you're looking for a hike that taps into some aquatic Zen, try the Cy and Bobbie Sweet Trail in Durham. The trail travels 4 miles from Longmarsh Road to the tidal marshes of the Great Bay estuary. The northern portion of the trail, which meanders through the Forest Society's Dame Forest, is particularly well endowed with freshwater and wetland habitats. Just beyond the trailhead, hikers will encounter beautiful Colby Marsh at the headwaters of Crommet Creek. Thank the local beaver family for creating and maintaining the sizeable pond here. Look for their lodge across the pond when you reach the bridge and a sign marking a right turn onto the Sweet Trail. The next quarter-mile of trail winds through wetland and marsh habitats along the creek before entering into a hemlock forest in the southern end of Dame Forest. Look for turtles and green frogs basking in the sun, kingfishers hunting small fish from above, and dragonflies alighting on shoreline sedges. This is a perfect location to take a moment out of your hectic day to slow everything down and appreciate nature's aquatic bounty. For a 2-mile round-trip hike, you can turn around at Dame Road or for an 8-mile round-trip adventure, follow the Sweet Trail until it terminates at spectacular Great Bay.

**PARKING:** Longmarsh Road, Durham

**WHEN TO VISIT:** Year-round, daily, sunrise to sunset

**ADMISSION FEE:** Free

**INFO:** [forestsociety.org/dameforest](http://forestsociety.org/dameforest)

## 2. WASHBURN FOREST

The 2,100-acre Washburn Forest is an immense place to explore, including more than 6 miles of frontage on the upper Connecticut River. The easiest place to access the river, and its tremendous trout fishing [see page 25], is from a parking area and trailhead on the east side of Route 3 in Clarksville. From the parking lot, a trail parallels the river for 0.3 miles before connecting to the larger network of woods roads on the property's interior.

**PARKING:** Route 3, Clarksville

**WHEN TO VISIT:** Spring-Fall (trailhead unplowed in winter)

**ADMISSION FEE:** Free

**INFO:** [forestsociety.org/washburnforest](http://forestsociety.org/washburnforest)

## 3. HEALD TRACT

The Heald Tract in Wilton has more than 5 miles of hiking trails, several of which pass by beautiful ponds, babbling streams, and wetlands. Try the 1.6-mile round-trip Heald Pond Trail, which skirts along the northern shoreline of Heald Pond (aka King Brook Reservoir) and offers easy walking and plenty of places to stop and look for ducks and herons or to fish for bass or pan fish. The pond is



**An elevated boardwalk provides interesting views of a beaver dam on the Sweet Trail in Durham.**

often blanketed in a carpet of blooming waterlilies in summer, making for stunning photographs. Boating is not permitted on the pond; however, many other reservations offer paddling opportunities [see page 32].

**PARKING:** Heald Road, Wilton

**WHEN TO VISIT:** Spring-Fall (trailhead unplowed in winter)

**ADMISSION FEE:** Free

**INFO:** [forestsociety.org/healdtract](http://forestsociety.org/healdtract)

## 4. MCCABE FOREST

Exploring McCabe Forest's 2-mile trail system involves getting up close and personal with the Contookcook River as it slowly meanders northeast where it eventually joins the Merrimack River. Some of the trails pass through floodplain forest directly adjacent to the river, where routine spring flooding supports beautiful, arching silver maple trees overhead and large ostrich ferns on the forest floor.

**PARKING:** Route 202, Antrim

**WHEN TO VISIT:** Spring-Fall (trailhead unplowed in winter)

**ADMISSION FEE:** Free

**INFO:** [forestsociety.org/mccabeforest](http://forestsociety.org/mccabeforest)

## 5. MERRIMACK RIVER OUTDOOR EDUCATION & CONSERVATION AREA

This well-traveled property in Concord is a perfect option if you want to explore freshwater habitats. An easy 1.5-mile loop trail passes through a pine plantation before reaching the mighty Merrimack River. The river's sandy banks are picturesque, but they also provide nest burrows for dozens of bank swallows, which you can see zipping over the river during the summer months. Continuing along the loop brings you through an uncommon silver maple floodplain forest along the outlet of Mill Brook.

**PARKING:** Portsmouth Street, Concord

**WHEN TO VISIT:** Year-round, daily, sunrise to sunset

**ADMISSION FEE:** Suggested donation: \$3/hiker; \$4/hiker and dog

**INFO:** [forestsociety.org/conservationcenter](http://forestsociety.org/conservationcenter); [forestsociety.org/forest-explorer](http://forestsociety.org/forest-explorer)

### Leave No Trace

Wetlands, ponds, lakes, and rivers are sensitive natural habitats, so it's even more important that you pack out all your trash and dog waste in these areas.