



# Connecticut's Farmington River

## Trophy Trout in the Litchfield Hills

Story by Jack Gagnon

Photos by Bradley Krehel

When fly fishermen travel, tailwater fisheries often top their destination list. Many dam-controlled flows are famous because they maximize habitat for trout as well as the insects they feed on. Tailwaters like Utah's Green River and Montana's Big Horn are meccas for big river trout fishing; access usually requires a float trip in an outfitter's drift boat. But if you prefer fly fishing smaller water, where you walk in and wade at your own pace, consider

Connecticut's Farmington River. It is an outstanding tailwater you can fish every month of the year.

Progressive management by the Connecticut DEP (Department of Environmental Protection), coupled with the dedicated efforts of the Farmington River Angler's Association, has created the Farmington River Trophy Trout Area. Releases from the bottom of Hogback Dam in Colebrook keep the upper river cold, even during the summer. Abundant

aquatic insect life and trout with excellent growth rates have combined to turn the Farmington into a blue-ribbon fishery. It is heavily stocked with large trout and many become larger holdovers. Rainbow trout and brook trout are included, but brown trout, the hardest of the three species to catch, predominate.

The trophy trout area begins at the Goodwin Dam in Hartland, extending 15 miles downstream to the Route 177 bridge in Unionville. The Farmington



A warm April afternoon, emerging mayflies, and rising trout: Fly fishing nirvana after a long New England winter.

From the third Saturday in April to August 31, the daily creel limit is two fish, minimum length 12 inches. To protect holdover fish, trout fishing is catch-and-release only from September 1 to the third Saturday in April. The lower TMA is bigger water than the upper river. The pools are deeper and the wading is more demanding. If you fish it after August, when the no-kill regulations are in effect, you'll have all the solitude you desire. You will also be fishing over trout that get less angling pressure than those in the upper TMA.

The trophy trout area can be fished by any method, as long as you use barbless hooks. Fly fishing is the most effective approach since Farmington trout feast on dense hatches of mayflies, caddis, stoneflies and terrestrials. Spinfishing and baitfishing are legal but aren't very popular here.

The TMAs remain temperate enough to support year-round fly fishing. Don Butler, who works at UpCountry Sportfishing in New Hartford, has a unique claim to fame: He has taken a Farmington River trout on a dry fly every month of the year for over seven years. Fall fishing is outstanding. There are hatches of tiny (#26, #28) olive *Baetis* mayflies most afternoons from mid-October right into December, and you'll usually have your chosen stretch of river to yourself.

If you fish the Farmington in late



River has two specially regulated TMAs (Trout Management Areas) located within the trophy trout area:

### Upper TMA

This catch-and-release section begins approximately one mile upstream of the Route 318 bridge in Barkhamsted, continuing downstream three and a half miles to the Route 219 bridge in New

Hartford. It is open year-round. Only barbless hooks are allowed. One-third of the TMA's trout population are holdovers; 18-inch fish and larger are common. Years ago, a Connecticut DEP employee told me that I wouldn't believe the number of holdover trout, 20 inches or more, that turn up here in electro-shock surveys. And now they stock more large fish.

### Lower TMA

This section, also open year-round, begins below the Lower Collinsville Dam and continues downstream four miles to the Route 4 bridge.

**Brook trout and rainbow trout are included, but brown trout are the predominant species in the Farmington River Trophy Trout Area.**



April or early May, you may witness a “blanket hatch” of Hendricksons (*Ephemerella Subvaria*). There can be so many mayflies in and on the water, getting a trout to notice your imitation is impossible until the peak of the emergence passes. It’s a problem most fly fishermen would love to encounter.

Due to the upstream cold water releases, hatches begin in the lower river first. If you’re so inclined, you can follow a hatch upstream as the river warms. In 2006, the Farmington supported Hendrickson hatches that began on the lower river around Unionville in mid-April. Three weeks later, Hendricksons were emerging in the upper TMA, and the hatch still had a week to go.

The Farmington is a popular local destination when early season “hatch fever” hits; sharing pools is the order of the day. When I fished there last spring, higher water on the nearby Housatonic, another great Connecticut trout river,

pushed more anglers onto the Farmington. On the positive side, though I’d never seen it more crowded, the fishing was still excellent.

In August 1994, Congress added 14 miles of the Farmington River to the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. The designation protects the river from new projects such as dams and hydroelectric facilities. It should remain a topnotch trout fishery in the years to come.

**Equipment:**

An 8- to 9-foot rod for a 5- or 6-weight line is a good arbitrary choice. A floating line, along with a sink tip, will cover all the conditions. If you have lighter outfits that you prefer to fish, bring them but pack the bigger set-up for streamers, weighted nymphs and windy days.

**Directions to New Hartford:**

If you’re flying into Connecticut, you will arrive via Bradley International Airport

(BDL) in Windsor Locks. From the airport, take CT-20 W toward East Granby/Granby. Go nine miles, turn left onto Barkhamsted Road/CT-219. (*Don’t miss the turn onto 219, or it is a long ride.*) Follow CT-219 10 miles to intersect Route 44, then proceed into New Hartford center. Your best bet for current fishing information is to start at one of the fly shops listed below. They are both in New Hartford, on the river, on Route 44.

**Angling Websites:**

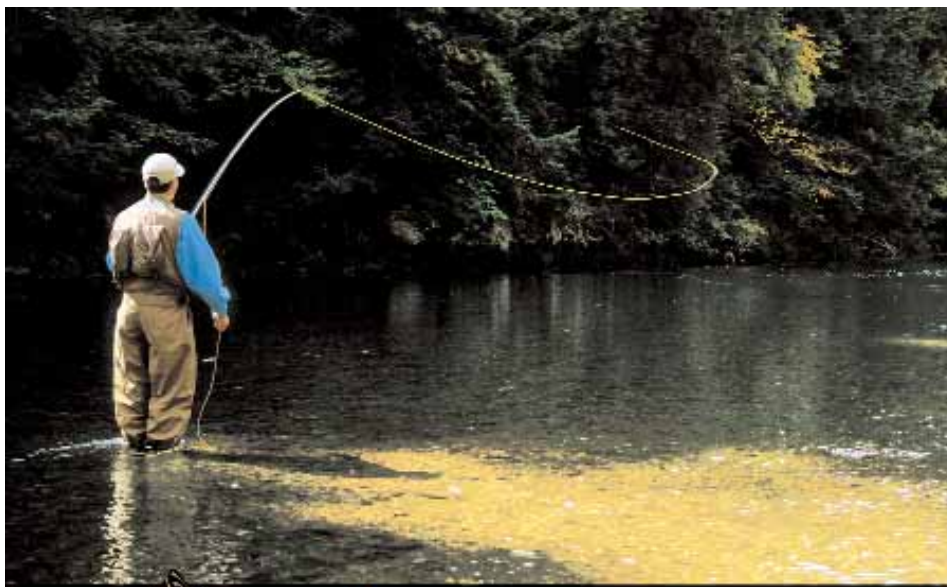
*Farmington River Anglers Association:*  
<http://www.fraa.org/fraa/fraa.htm>  
Provides a map of the entire trophy trout area.

*Classic and Custom Fly Shop:*  
<http://www.classicandcustomflyshop.com>

*UpCountry Sportfishing:*  
<http://www.farmingtonriver.com/>  
The fly shop websites offer links for

**Insect hatches move upstream as the river warms. In 2006, the Hendrickson hatch lasted over three weeks until it peaked above the upper TMA.**






**THE ALBEMARLE ANGLER**  
(charlottesville, virginia)

**Barracks Road Shopping Center**  
(434) 977-6882  
[www.albemarleangler.com](http://www.albemarleangler.com)

**GUIDED TRIPS**  
**ORVIS FLY FISHING SCHOOLS**  
**ORVIS BARBOUR SIMMS FITZSON**

weather, river conditions, hatches, guide services and local businesses that serve visiting anglers.



**Lodging:**

If you want to sleep under the stars and cook a trout over a fire, there are campsites on the banks of the Farmington River at the American Legion State Forest—Austin F. Hawes Memorial Campground in Pleasant Valley. Reservations are *strongly recommended*. The toll free number is 877-668-2267.

If you prefer to be pampered, The Mayflower Inn and Spa ([mayflowerinn.com](http://mayflowerinn.com)) in nearby Washington, Connecticut, and The Boulders Inn on Lake Waramaug in New Preston ([bouldersinn.com](http://bouldersinn.com)) both offer exquisite lodging and fine dining. Both were featured in the June 2006 issue of *Yankee Magazine* as two of Connecticut's best inns.

Northwest Connecticut has an abundance of other choices for modest accommodations including hotels, motels and bed-and-breakfasts. One of the many websites for information is [www.litchfieldhills.com/app/lodging](http://www.litchfieldhills.com/app/lodging)

THE WILLIAMSBURG WINERY, celebrating its 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, is pleased to announce

*Wedmore Place*  
A Country Hotel  
At The Williamsburg Winery

**OPENING MARCH 31, 2007**

Wedmore Place consists of 28 individually styled rooms themed after different European provinces in a luxurious and relaxing atmosphere. Wedmore Place is located in the vineyards of The Williamsburg Winery, just 3 miles from Colonial Williamsburg.



Wedmore Place at The Williamsburg Winery  
5800 Wessex Hundred • Williamsburg, Virginia 23185 • 866 WEDMORE  
[www.wedmoreplace.com](http://www.wedmoreplace.com) • [www.williamsburgwinery.com](http://www.williamsburgwinery.com)

Jack Gagnon is a monthly columnist and part-time editor for the *Northwoods Sporting Journal* in West Enfield, Maine. He has written for a number of outdoor publications including *Fly Fisherman*, *Trout*, *American Angler* and *Gray's Sporting Journal*. He has been fly fishing for over 35 years.