

River Bend Conservation Area, Hatchville

River Bend Conservation Area, opened to the public in 2011, was acquired by The 300 Committee (T3C) Land Trust in 2007 from the former operators of River Bend Farm Kennels. The kennels operated until the fall of 2010; since then T3C has been working to open the trails and arrange to remove the fences and buildings. River Bend protects ¼ mile of river frontage and provides access to a varied and beautiful area with trails along the river. It is another link in the projected Coonamessett River Greenway which may someday provide a green corridor along the river.

The river runs from the area of Coonamessett Pond into the Great Pond estuary adjacent to Vineyard Sound. In a reversal of expectations, the river exists because of the unusual valley it lies in. That valley was cut by springs at the end of the glacial era. The valley is cut deeply enough into the ground that it intersects the groundwater table and allows ground water from our sole aquifer to seep into the valley and run seaward, forming the river.

Although this river was once well-known for fish, during the 1700s and 1800s the stream was first dammed for water power, and later, when steam replaced water as a source of power, it was ditched, diked, and converted to cranberry bogs all along its length. Several areas of cranberry bog were abandoned over the years, and have reverted to forested wetlands like the ones here at River Bend. And of the town bogs, Lower Bog and Flax Pond Bog have been taken out of cultivation and will be restored to conditions that are more conducive to fish such as the herring and sea-run brook trout that used to return every year in numbers, and we hope will soon again. Here at River Bend the shaded river bed suggests the environment that will help those fish return and prosper. Trails lead down to the river and provide pleasant access for a stroll to enjoy the cool running water.

The cranberry bogs were probably constructed in the late 1800s when many bogs were created in riverside wetlands in Falmouth. This phase of River Bend's history did not last long, however, as the bogs were abandoned sometime in the late 1950s, and no cranberry plants remain; cranberries often die out in abandoned bogs when the water level is no longer controlled for their benefit. Before cranberry cultivation and the mill pond that preceded it, these riverside wetlands may have been Atlantic White Cedar swamps, though if so, no cedars survive today, perhaps because there is no nearby source of seed. The former bogs today are shaded by maple, birch and oaks, with an understory of blueberry, sphagnum moss, ferns, and swamp azalea—all plants that tolerate, or even thrive with, wet feet. Outside the ditches that mark the perimeter of the old bogs, the riverside forest is a pleasant variety of oaks, pines and the occasional tupelo and sassafras.

The upland area is the most visible from the road. The grassy field with scattered trees was probably a pasture into the 1950s. The kennel buildings have all been removed; some were moved, others were disassembled and useable parts recycled. The area where the buildings one stood has been landscaped, providing a lovely view and an inviting place for a picnic. The ceramic silo was retained on the site and restored as an historical monument, representing the agricultural history of the River Bend land and this part of the Coonamessett River Corridor. Private funding for the silo restoration was raised by the Friends of the River Bend Silo and included an \$86,000 grant from the Falmouth Community Preservation Committee. Additional funds have been set aside for the silo's long-term maintenance.

River Bend is a lovely spot on a very busy road. Enjoy this conservation land and its access to the Coonamessett River. Use the QR code provided here to download the River Bend Conservation Area trail map.