

Neck River

What to look for on the Neck River trail

Begin by walking west on a State Forest woods road. Almost immediately, the trail passes through the remnants of a red pine plantation. A few trees have survived the intense competition from hardwoods, but their small crowns suggest that their battle will be lost before long. (Indeed, most of these red pines are scheduled for harvest in 1999.) Soon, near a group of large rocks, the trail splits—one branch leads south, the other continues along the woods road. South, the trail forms a loop and rejoins the woods road 500 feet ahead (which then proceeds on to join the Blinshed Ridge Trail).

Follow the loop trail counterclockwise by proceeding straight west along the woods road. Through this section, the forest is primarily oak and hickory with understories dominated by blue beech, ironwood, American beech, dogwood and red maple. At one point, a group of grey birch reveals where a fire occurred sometime in the past. Gradually, the presence of white pines, both large and small, affirms that this area was planted earlier. These conifers impart a unique character to the forest, especially in winter.

In a grove of pines, just before reaching a stream crossing, the loop trail turns left and follows the stream to its junction with the Neck River. Straight ahead, the woods road trail continues west where, in 800 feet, it joins the Blinshed Ridge Trail.

(On the way to the Blinshed Ridge Trail, the woods road crosses the stream, bears right and then left near a large rock outcropping to the north. The broad spreading crowns of the trees by the outcrop reveal that these trees developed in the open without competition. This former “openness” is indicated also by the presence of red-cedar and black cherry trees which grew from seeds deposited in open fields by birds. The end of the outcrop marks the junction with the Blinshed Ridge Trail and its loop).

Take the Neck River Trail loop south (left) along the tributary stream. For some distance the trail will follow wetlands on the right delineated by skunk cabbage, false helebore and spicebush. Marsh marigolds (cowslips) line the margins of the flowing streams.

Near where the small stream meets the Neck River, the trail passes directly through what was an old charcoal pit. Charcoal is still evident in the soil and the remains of several grey birches also indicate that fire occurred here. Several other charcoal pits are scattered through this stand and are unusually well-defined by their raised shape and circumscribing ditch.

The trail passes through thickets of grey dogwood, young black birch and some wild azalea, high bush blueberry and witch-hazel—excellent cover for birds. The continued presence of conifers—white pine and then Norway spruce—indicates that most of this block of forest was planted. Conifers provide roosting and nesting cover for several bird species including blue jays, owls and grouse, and add a diversity unique to this part of Connecticut. A harvest was conducted in 1999 to remove trees that were suppressing growth of the conifers.

The river here is slow-moving—a few bouldery riffles provide cover for aquatic life and delightful water music. Where a large beech tree leans out over the river, the trail swings east (left) along the southern end of the loop near the State Forest border (indicated by yellow blazes, metal tags, and eventually by a barbed-wire fence and stonewall). The trail bears north again where the stonewall ends, then very shortly, splits to form a small loop. The path ahead (left branch) leads to the junction by the big rocks. If you take this “cross-over” branch, note the very large pines. Perhaps these are the parents of some of the understory trees. However, with some imagination, many of the small pines appear to be in rows, indicating that they probably were planted. Look also for a charcoal mound marked by an interpretive sign.

Going to the right around the small loop, pass some very large tulip-poplar and some yellow birch trees, and turn north along a stone wall. Continue by the edge of a wetland to the “cross-over” trail junction. Bear right, past a few red pine trees to the woods road junction near the large rocks, and then by turning right, return to the trailhead.

Permitted Activities:

The trails areas in the MLCT properties are for hiking only. Dogs are allowed, but must be leashed. Please pick up all animal waste. Contact the State Forest HQ for other activities allowed on their sites.



Photo by Emmeline Alaconis, SCRCOG

The Neck River Trail offers a remarkable variety of ecological settings including a lovely stretch along the Neck River, a forest rich in conifers including pines and spruce, and sections of oak-hickory forest more typical of our area. This is an excellent family walk, and for those wishing a more extensive hike, the trail joins the Blinshed Ridge Trail to the west.

Category: An easy walk along the Neck River and one of its tributaries

Start: At the trailhead on Opening Hill Road

Distance: From the Opening Hill Rd. trailhead west, around the outer loop trail and return: 1.1 miles. Add another 0.1 mile to the junction with the Blinshed Ridge Trail

Approximate Time: 1 hour

Parking: Parking Lot at the beginning of the trail

For more information about this walk contact:

Madison Land Conservation Trust
www.madisonlandtrust.org

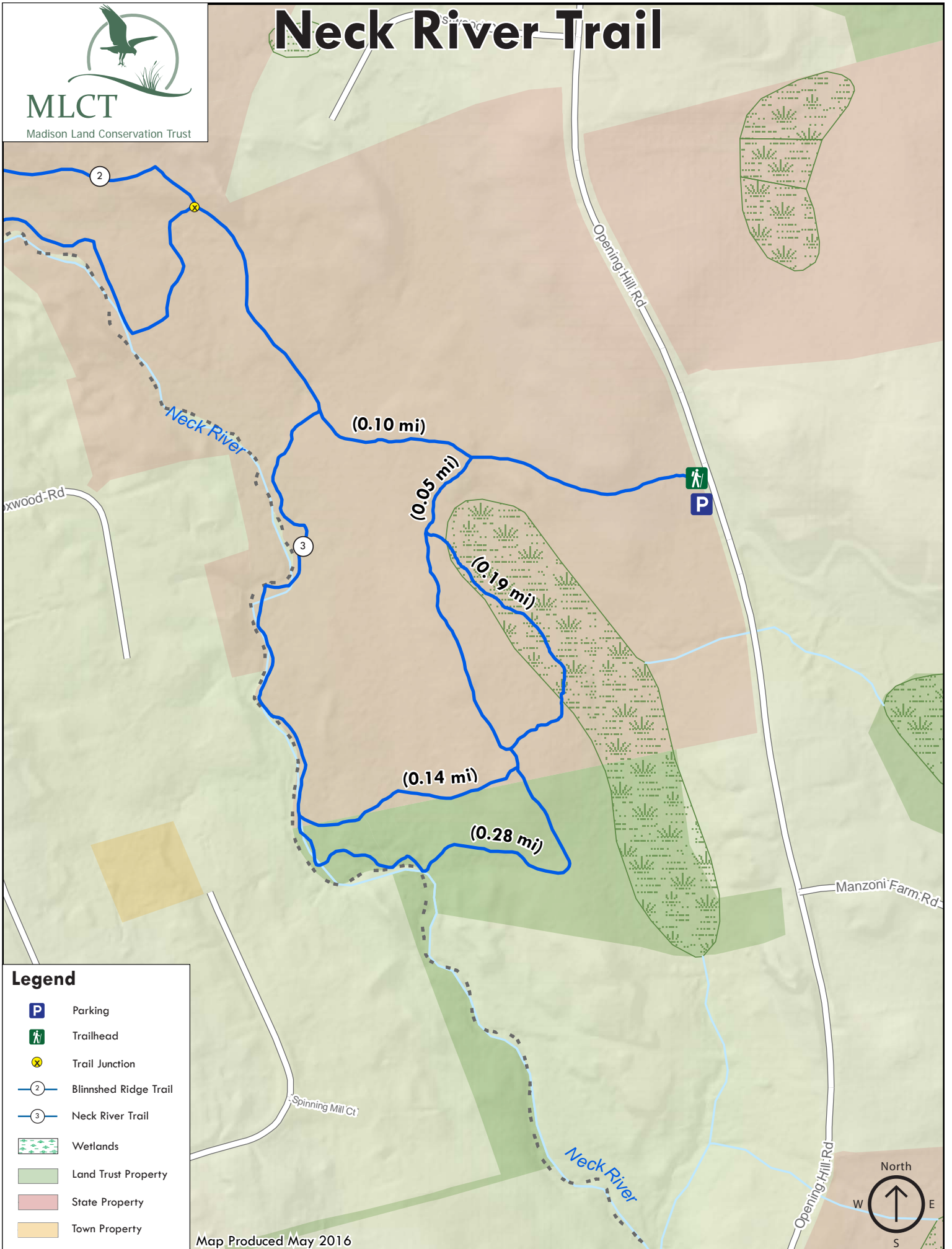




MLCT

Madison Land Conservation Trust

Neck River Trail



Legend

- Parking
- Trailhead
- Trail Junction
- Blinshed Ridge Trail
- Neck River Trail
- Wetlands
- Land Trust Property
- State Property
- Town Property

Map Produced May 2016