

2015

## Presumpscot River Paddling Map & Guide

Casco Bay Estuary Partnership

Presumpscot River Watershed Coalition

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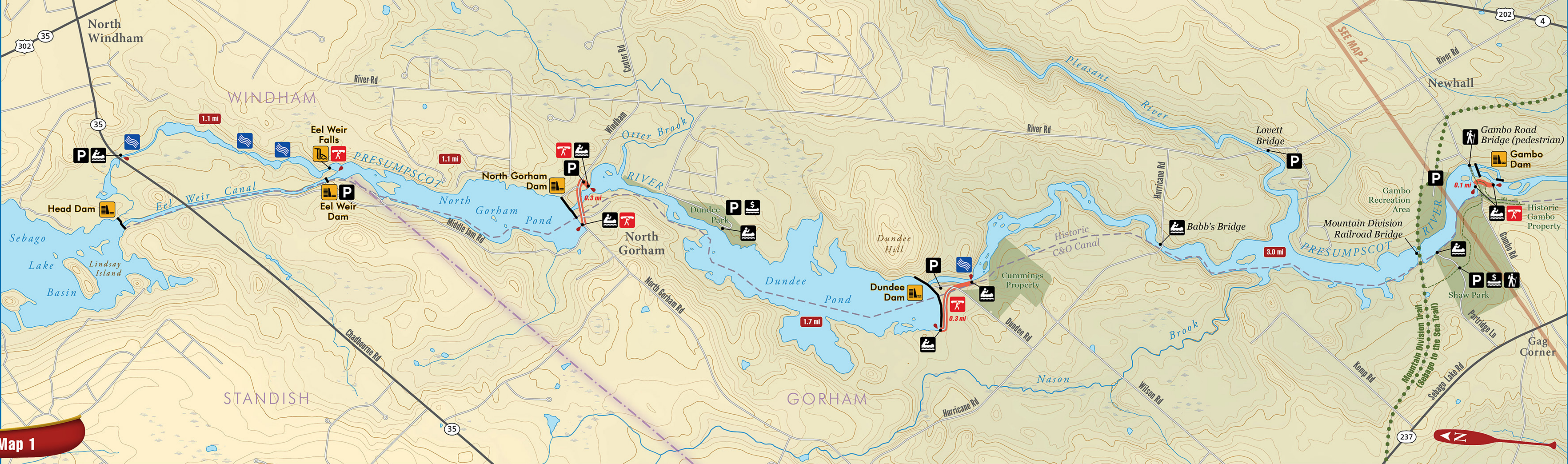
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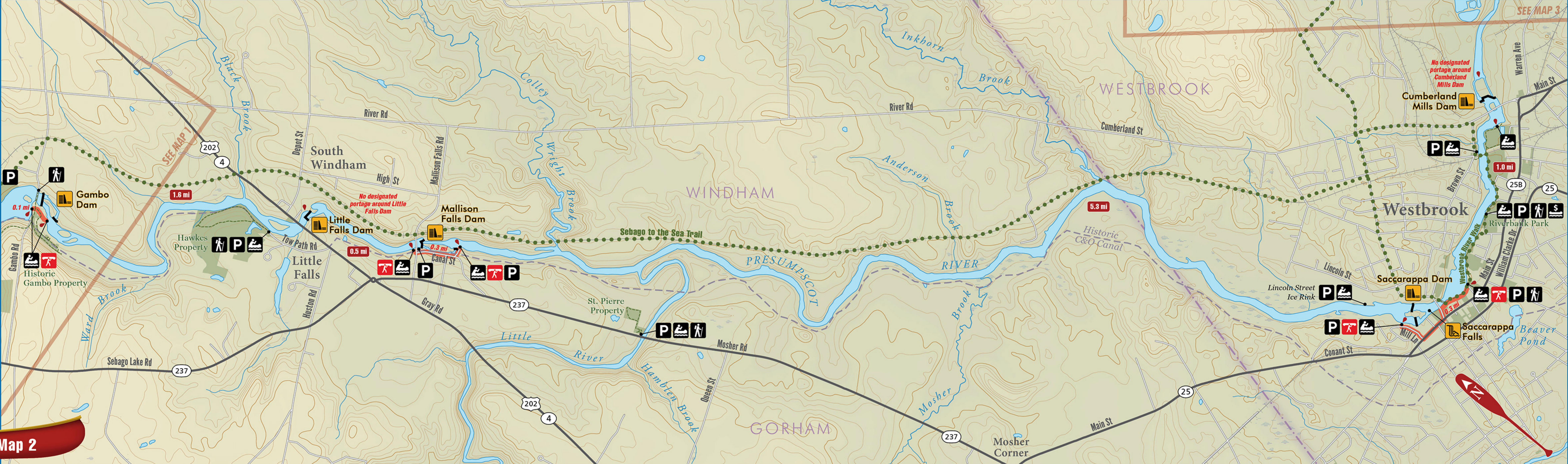
Casco Bay Estuary Partnership, & Presumpscot River Watershed Coalition. Presumpscot River Paddling Map & Guide [Map]. (2015). Retrieved from Casco Bay Estuary Partnership website:  
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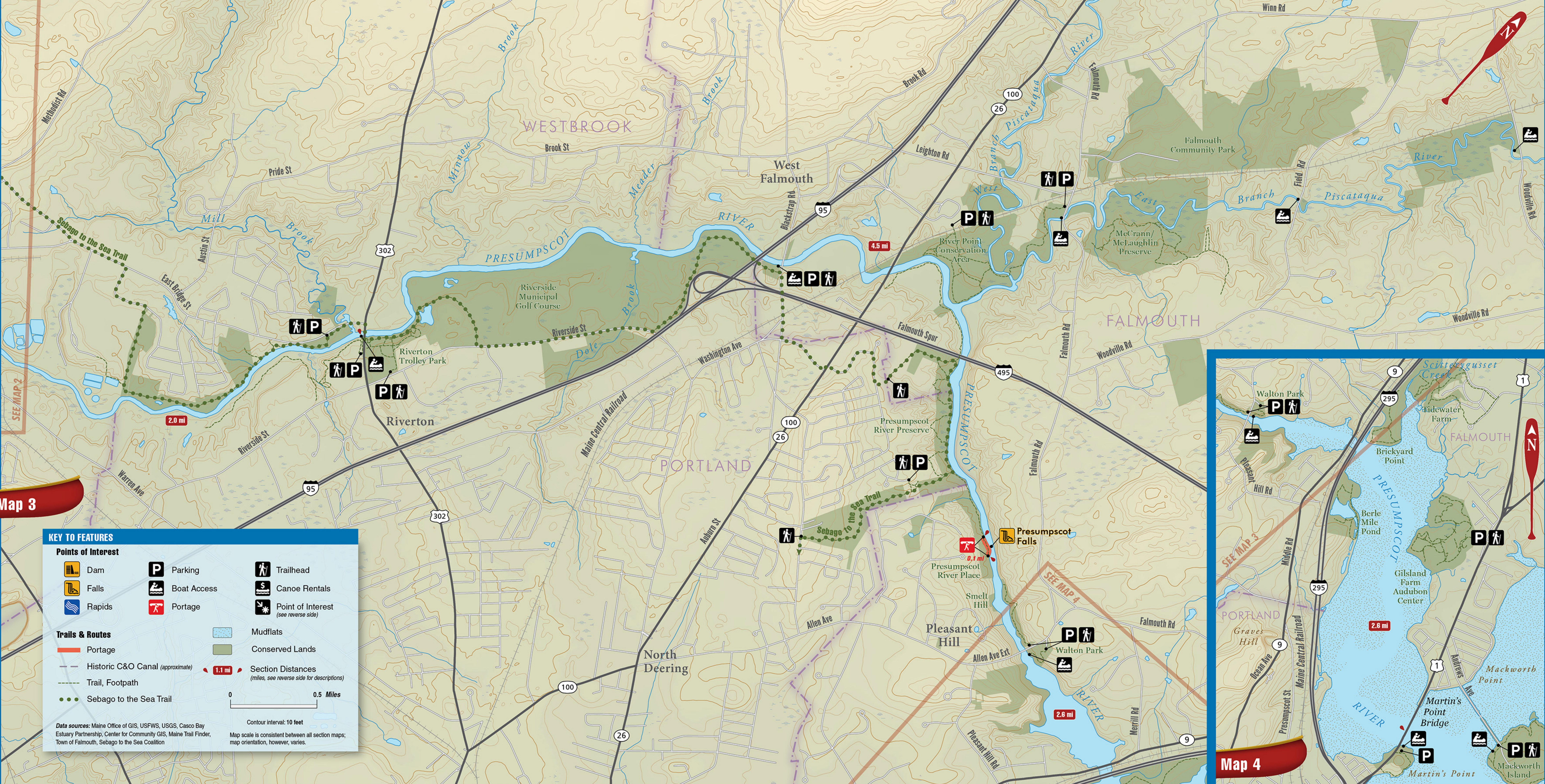




Map 1

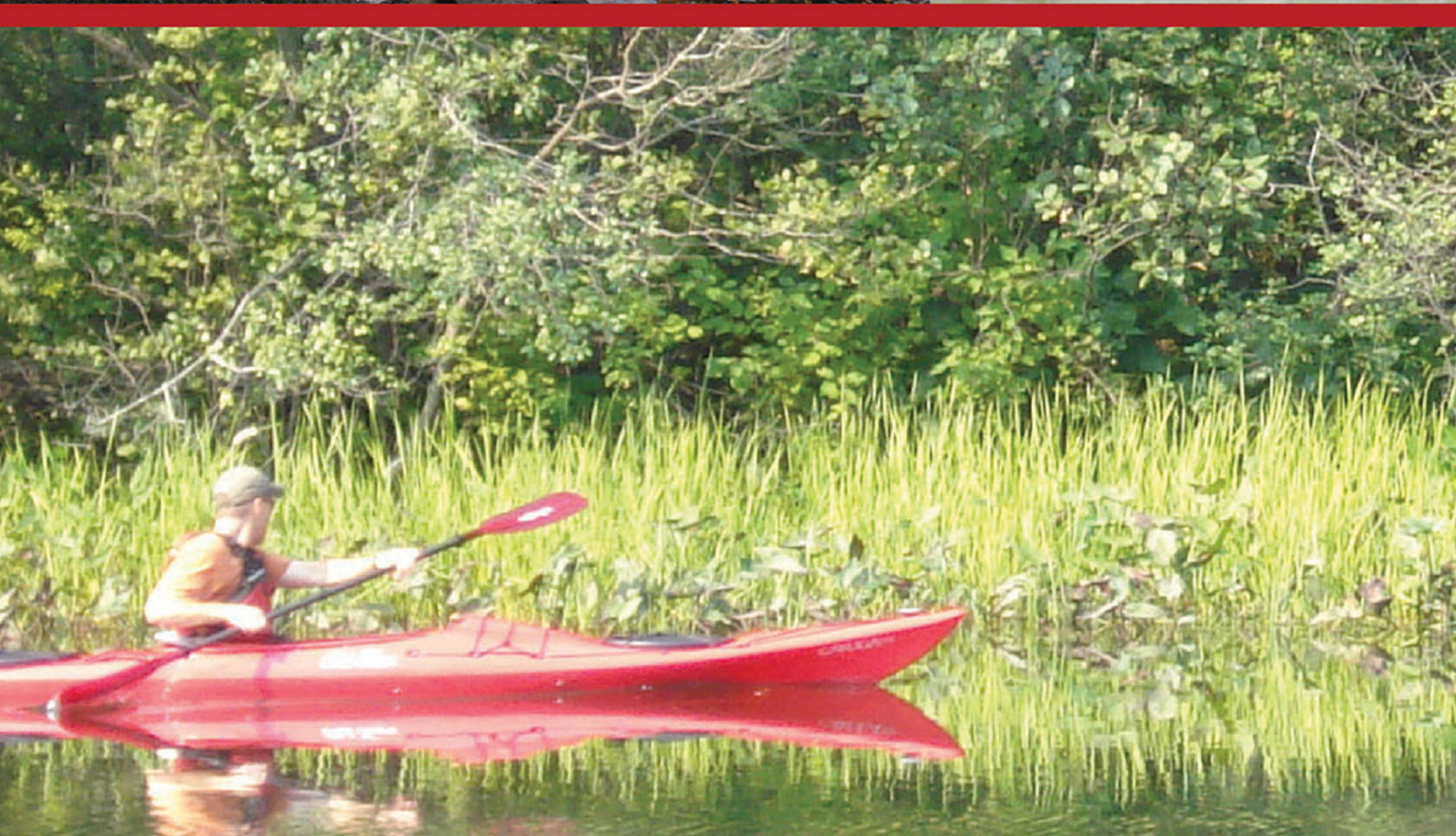


Map 2



Map 4



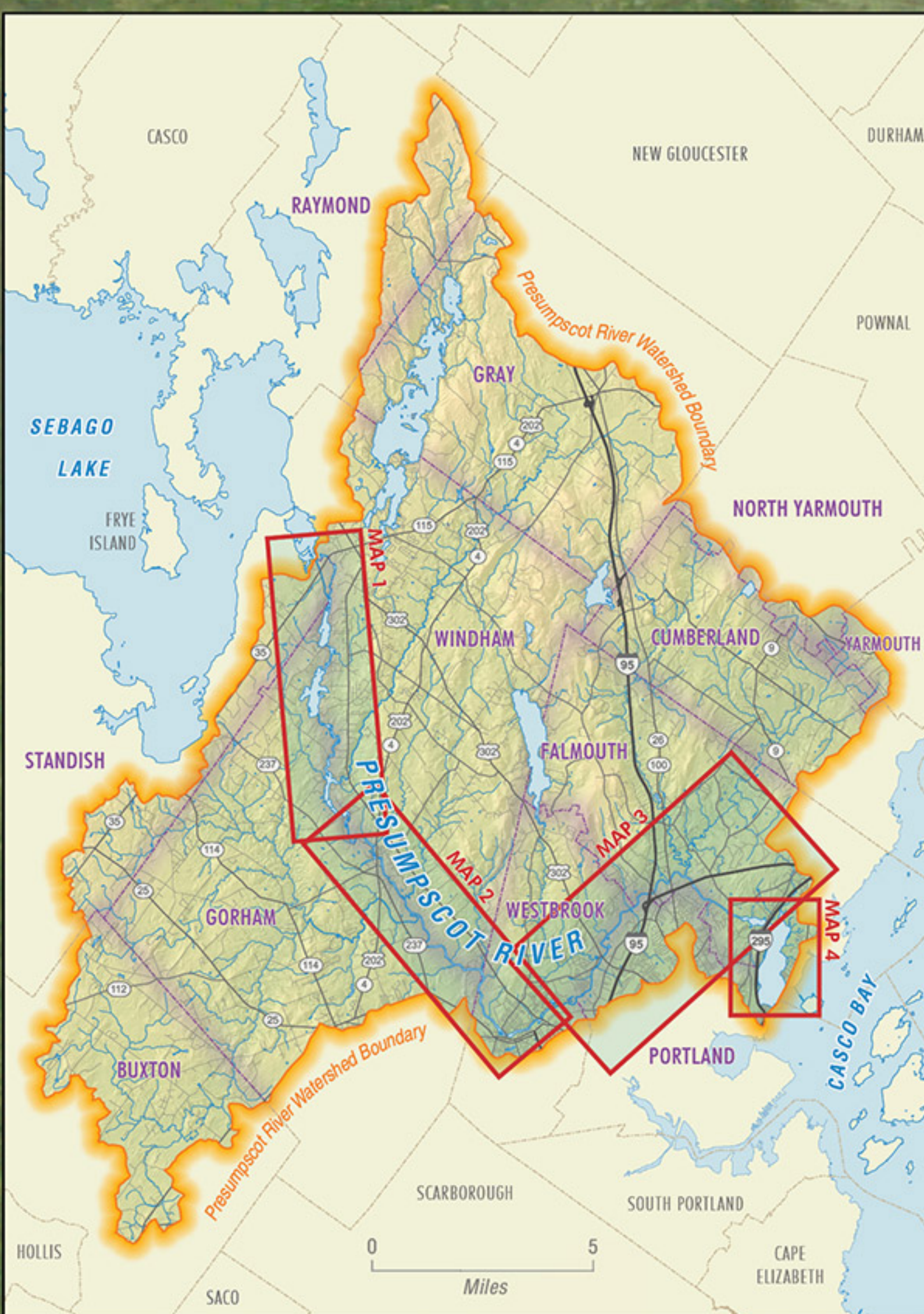


From source to sea, the Presumpscot River flows 25 miles between Sebago Lake and Casco Bay, dropping 270 feet in elevation. Although the main stem is relatively short (by Maine standards), the Presumpscot enjoys long and rich natural and cultural histories best experienced at water level.

The name “Presumpscot” was believed to have been shared by a local Abenaki village of the same name and translates as “river of many rough places.” Early colonial settlers referred to the river as being “a foot deep in fish.” With increased industrialization and mill development along its banks, the Presumpscot later came to be described as being “a foot deep in foam.”

Today, the Presumpscot is a river in recovery. The water is cleaner than it was 50 years ago and migratory fish, including alewife and shad, are returning by the tens of thousands. For the nearly 25% of Mainers living in the greater Portland region, the Presumpscot has become a favorite recreational playground for paddling, swimming, fishing, and shoreline hiking and snowshoeing.

Currently, nine dams are located along the Presumpscot creating flat water paddling conditions upstream and swifter water sections downstream. Choose a short section to explore for a day trip, or paddle and portage the entire route from origin to coastal estuary.



## Acknowledgments



**Funding:** Support for this project was generously provided by the Maine Outdoor Heritage Fund. This document has been partially funded by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency under Cooperative Agreement #CE 96185501 to the University of Southern Maine, Casco Bay Estuary Partnership.

**Cartography & Design:** Center for Community GIS

**Photographs:** Casco Bay Estuary Partnership, Center for Community GIS, Midwest Biodiversity Institute, and Ray Monahan

**Descriptive Content:** The Presumpscot River Watch's (PRW) *Guide to the Presumpscot River: Its History, Ecology, and Recreational Uses*, published in 1994 and co-authored by Amy MacDonald, Brian Butler, and Chris Ricardi, served as the primary source of information about the river and paddling routes. Some of the descriptions included in this guide were taken directly from PRW's *Guide*. Although the Presumpscot has in some ways changed significantly since its publication, the PRW *Guide* continues to provide an authoritative description of the river and in particular its history. Copies of this work can be found in many local libraries.

**Planning & Review:** Special thanks are due to those PRWC members and supporters that helped develop content for this guide.



# Presumpscot River Paddling Map & Guide



First Edition


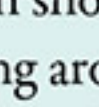
## River Safety & Etiquette


- Be river smart.** People have died while paddling and swimming on the Presumpscot River. Due to the multiple impoundments along the river, both built and natural hazards require careful attention and navigation. Heed warning signs and stay out of roped-off areas at all dams.
- Remember and wear personal flotation devices (PFDs).** Maine law requires children (10 years and under) to wear PFDs at all times. Adults must have one PFD per person readily available in the boat.
- Be mindful of additional hazards** on the river, including:
- Mapped hazards requiring careful navigation and advanced planning, including dams, waterfalls, and rapids.
  - Swift currents during high water and around hazards.
  - Strainers, including submerged trees, branches, and debris.
  - The potential for hypothermia, particularly during the spring runoff when waters are at their coldest.
  - Rapidly changing weather conditions, especially fast-moving thunderstorms bringing lightning and heavy winds.
  - Variable water flows related to dam releases and tides.
- Show respect for wildlife, land owners, and shorelines.**
- Give animals a wide berth and be mindful of noise levels.
  - Respect private property and ask permission before use. Information contained in this guide does not imply landowner permission.
  - Picnic and launch your boat on established surfaces.
  - Carry in. Carry out. Pack out trash left by others.
- Be considerate of others** recreating on the river.
- Park sensibly and avoid limiting river access for others.
  - Keep groups together and stay clear of people fishing.
- Be on the lookout for invasive plants.** Variable leaf milfoil has been documented in the upper main stem of the river. Before and after your trip, inspect boats, paddles, and trailers, and dispose of any plants that are discovered in the trash.



## Paddling and Portage Descriptions (Source to Sea)

**Route 35 to Eel Weir Falls**  
*1.1 miles; shallow, rocky and nearly dry during warm months*

*This stretch of river is not recommended for paddling under typical conditions* due to low water levels, multiple rapids, and the  Eel Weir Falls waterfall, which is located near the confluence with Eel Weir Canal. Adventurous paddlers attempting this reach should exercise caution and plan to  portage by bushwhacking around the falls. Parking is available on river left off of Route 35. A rough, rocky footpath leads to the river next to the bridge.

The current Eel Weir Canal is the northernmost section of the former  Cumberland & Oxford Canal and is the primary channel for directing water out of Sebago Lake Basin for hydropower. Completed in 1830, the C&O Canal was constructed to facilitate the shipment of goods between the Sebago Lake area and Portland. The canal became obsolete upon completion of the Mountain Division Railroad and closed in 1872. The canal and its adjoining towpath parallel the Presumpscot between Standish and Westbrook and can be viewed at several locations, both along the river bank and just under the water.

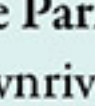
**North Gorham Pond (Eel Weir Falls to North Gorham Dam)**  
*1.1 miles; flat water*


Parking in the lot off Middle Jam Road and hand carry down an undeveloped trail to put in below Eel Weir Dam and Falls. Several islands can be explored. Continue down river, pass islands, and follow the right shoreline to the right side of North Gorham Dam.

**North Gorham Dam Portage**  
 *0.3 miles; over dirt, pavement, grass*

Haul out to the right side of the concrete wall. Hand carry downhill following Windham Hill Road as it crosses over and then follows the river. Put in at the designated site launch on the right bank.

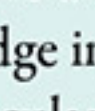
**Dundee Pond (North Gorham Dam to Dundee Dam)**  
*1.7 miles; swift and flat water*

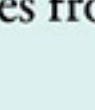
Put in below dam on right bank or at parking and launch site on Windham Center Road (left bank). Windham's  Dundee Park is about 0.7 miles from the put-in on the left. Immediately downriver, the river opens into Dundee Pond. There is a fee to pull out /put in at Dundee Park. Dundee Dam is another mile downstream.

**Dundee Dam Portage**  
 *0.3 miles; over dirt road and trail*


Approach the far right of the dam. Haul out on right bank and hand carry over a dirt road to Dundee Road. Follow signs to dirt trail and carry downhill to designated put-in.



**Dundee Dam to Gambo Dam**  
*3 miles; flat water with occasional riffles below dam*


Paddle through a series of small channels with vegetated islands. River narrows into a valley with old pines and steep banks, quickening before passing beneath  Babb's Bridge on Hurricane Road at 1.3 miles. The replica covered bridge, originally dating to 1740 and rebuilt after a fire in 1976, is the only remaining covered bridge in Cumberland County and is a popular scenic attraction particularly during the fall foliage season.

There is a put-in just upstream of Babb's Bridge on river left, with parking nearby on river right. Downstream, the water slows, and remains of the  C&O Canal are visible under water. Watch out for strainers, including stumps. Pass left of the island 0.3 miles from Babb's Bridge. The Pleasant River comes in from the left.

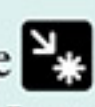


The  Mountain Division Railroad Bridge, which today provides pedestrian access over the Presumpscot, crosses 0.7 miles below the Pleasant River confluence. Prior to becoming part of the Mountain Division, this bridge was part of the Portland and Ogdensburg Railroad, originally intended to connect Portland with upstate New York and used by area residents to travel to destinations in the White Mountains and beyond.

The Town of Gorham's  Shaw Park, which provides canoe rentals during the summer, soon follows on river right, and provides access to a network of trails including the  Sea Trail to the Sea Trail.

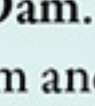
**Gambo Dam Portage**  
 *0.1 miles; over dirt road and trail*


Haul out before Gambo Road Bridge at the designated sandy slope along the right bank. Cross dirt path; carry past the kiosk down the trail to the left. Cross the metal bridge to designated put-in.

The portage crosses the  Historic Gambo Property, owned by Presumpscot Regional Land Trust (PRLT), which features granite foundations from the Oriental Powder Mills, developed in 1817, as well as sections of the C&O Canal and towpath. Also called the Gambo Powder Mill, it was the first commercial powder mill in Maine and the largest in the nation for many years, producing as much as 6,500 pounds per day of black gunpowder for Union forces during the Civil War. Canal boats shipped gunpowder to Portland, Boston, and other locations via the C&O Canal. Interpretive signs provide additional historical information.



**Gambo Dam to Route 202 Bridge**  
*1.6 miles; flat water, rocky and swift below dam*

Put in below Gambo Dam on right bank. The river is mostly undeveloped along this stretch, with the C&O Canal towpath visible along the right bank. Approximately 1.4 miles downstream, PRLT's  Hawkes Property and boat launch is on the right bank. *There is no shoreline access downstream of Hawkes Property.* About 700 feet farther downstream is the Route 202 bridge, and immediately past that, Little Falls Dam. Currently, there is no designated portage around Little Falls Dam and no designated put-in below the dam.

**Little Falls Dam Portage**  
 *No designated portage route*


**Little Falls Dam to Mallison Falls Dam**  
*0.5 miles (1 mile roundtrip); flat water*


The river can be paddled between Little Falls Dam and Mallison Falls Dam, but the only put-in for this reach is off of Mallison Falls Road. Put in at the designated site upstream of the road on the right bank and paddle upstream to explore this section of the river.


**Mallison Falls Dam Portage**  
 *0.3 miles; over dirt, pavement, grass*

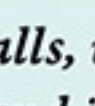
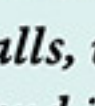
Haul out on right bank before Mallison Falls Road Bridge. Hand carry across the road, then down Canal Street to the designated put-in on the right bank.

**Mallison Falls Dam to Saccarappa Dam**  
*5.3 miles; flat water*

Put in below Mallison Falls Dam. Colley Wright Brook joins at 0.4 miles on the left, followed by  Little River at 0.8 miles on the right. Little River is worth exploring at least up to the Route 237 crossing. At 2.5 miles past Little River, Inkhorn Brook joins from the left. The haul out at Saccarappa Dam is 1.6 miles farther downstream on 700


right. The name Saccarappa originated with the local Abenaki tribe and has been translated to mean “falling toward the rising sun.” On the left bank adjacent to Saccarappa Dam lies the  Dana Warp Mills, which at one time were among the largest warp mills in the country producing cotton warps, yarn, and grain bags.

**Saccarappa Dam Portage**  
 *0.3 miles; over pavement and boardwalk trail*

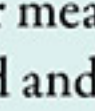
Follow the right riverbank to a dirt haul-out. Hand carry up a short hill, turn left down Mill Lane, then left onto Main Street, and left again back towards the river. Follow the right shoreline on the boardwalked  Westbrook River Trail, which is also part of the Sebago to the Sea Trail. Put in opportunistically off of this trail in Riverbank Park.  *Beware of Saccarappa Falls, which lies immediately downstream of Saccarappa Dam and is hidden from view by an island and bend in the river.*

**Saccarappa Falls to Cumberland Mills Dam**  
*1.0 miles; flat water*

Put in at Riverbank Park. Below Saccarappa Falls, the river turns sharply to the northeast. The impounded waters behind Cumberland Mills Dam are typically slow and flat, but exercise caution during high water, particularly near the dam. Haul out behind the ball fields on river right.

**Cumberland Mills Dam Portage**  
 *No designated portage route*


No designated portage exists. It is very difficult to portage this section, but it has been done a handful of times with creativity and advanced planning. The last opportunity to haul out before Cumberland Mills Dam is next to Fraser Field on river right. Past portages have involved hand carrying out to Main Street, crossing the busy Cumberland Street intersection (there are crosswalks), and carrying along Warren Avenue beyond the fenced mill facility to access the river through private property. The river narrows in this reach, and the banks are particularly steep, slippery, and vegetated.

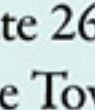
Although paddlers will be challenged to navigate around Cumberland Mills Dam, recent completion of a  fish ladder means that migratory fish have a much easier route, with shad and river herring able to swim into this reach of the river for the first time in centuries.

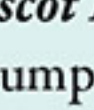


**Cumberland Mills Dam to Presumpscot Falls**  
*6.5 miles; moderate to swift*


Put in at the designated launch on the right bank south of Route 302. Under most conditions, the 2-mile paddle upstream from Route 302 to the Mill is easily achieved; watch for strainers at the bridge and at river bends.


Downstream of Route 302 to the right, is  Riverton Trolley Park, site of a popular casino and outdoor theater during the early 20th century. Downstream, the river passes beneath I-95 and then Blackstrap Road. There is a developed launch site upstream of Blackstrap Road on river right, with good off-road parking.

Continue, passing a railroad bridge and then Route 26/100; here the  River Point Conservation Area, owned by the Town of Falmouth, begins on the left. The property, at the confluence of the Presumpscot and Piscataqua Rivers, was used for thousands of years as a campsite by Native Americans travelling between Sebago Lake and Casco Bay. River Point affords excellent birding and connects to Falmouth's extensive trail network, which can be accessed by hauling out a short distance up the Piscataqua River.

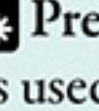
Pass the confluence with the Piscataqua River on the left, then pass below the Falmouth Spur Bridge. After this point, the water begins to accelerate toward  Presumpscot Falls. *Paddlers are advised to turn back unless they plan to portage around the falls to reach Presumpscot Estuary* (see below). The distance from Route 302 to Presumpscot Falls is roughly 4.5 miles.

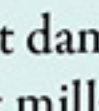



**Presumpscot Falls Portage**  
 *0.1 miles; over dirt trail*

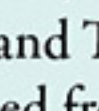
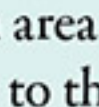
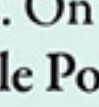

*Use extreme caution approaching  Presumpscot Falls.* The river narrows into a steep gorge immediately downstream of the portage, and drops several feet over a short distance at Presumpscot Falls, washing over large boulders, with large standing waves. Careless paddlers have been swept over the falls. Paddle slowly and stay close to the right bank while watching for strainers. Look for the portage sign, which appears just before you reach the haul out point and coincides with the loud roar of the falls. Paddle to the base of the stairs, which is the designated take-out. Climb a short hill, then carry along a footpath to the designated put-in a few hundred feet farther down the trail.

**Presumpscot Falls to Martin's Point Bridge (Route 1)**  
*2.6 miles; swift, slowing to flat water with strong tidal currents*

Put in at the designated site below  Presumpscot Falls, where the river becomes tidal. Various tribes used to congregate at this point each spring to catch salmon, shad, alewife, and smelt as they swam into fresh water to spawn.

Downstream on the right bank in 0.2 miles, a large re-vegetating clearing with rip-rap marks the former location of  Smelt Hill Dam, removed in 2002. Watch for dam remnants mid-channel. On this site in 1735, the first dam on the Presumpscot was built to power both saw and grist mills. Local Abenaki, the Rockamecock, led by Chief Polin, recognized the threat that dams here and at Mallison Falls posed to spawning migratory fish and demanded that a fishway be built. When the citizens of Falmouth refused in a town meeting vote, Chief Polin walked to Boston in 1739 and successfully convinced the Governor of Massachusetts to require construction of fishways at each existing and subsequent dam on the river. As a result of Chief Polin's actions, anomorous fish could travel the entire length of the Presumpscot to reach Sebago Lake as late as 1867.

Continue below Allen Avenue Extension Bridge.  Walton Park, which is reached in 0.3 miles and sits on the left bank of the river, provides a float during summer months and serves as a good haul out location, with a gradual sloping trail up the hill to ample parking. Beyond Walton Park, the river channel begins to widen, and at low- to mid-tides, extensive mudflats are exposed in the Presumpscot Estuary.

After passing below Route 9 and I-295, Skitterygusset Creek, which is named after the Aucosisco chief and is the site of the first sale of land to a settler in the region, comes in on the left.  Brickyard Point, owned by Portland Trails and about a mile from Walton Park, can only be accessed from the water during higher tides. Built in the 1820s, a brickyard utilized the abundant marine clay to produce bricks used in area buildings, some of which are still standing. Immediately to the east of Brickyard Point is Falmouth's  Tidewater Farm, which is also only accessible by boat during higher tides. On the east side of the estuary, Portland Trails'  Berle Mile Pond is around the bend on the right bank, opposite Maine Audubon's  Gisland Farm, which is evident by a large sand bluff. All four aforementioned properties feature trail systems.

The nearest designated haul out is at Portland's East End boat launch (not shown on map), but informal haul outs are available on the right bank past Martin's Point Bridge (Route 1)—where parking is available at the adjacent health care facility—and at a sandy beach on Mackworth Island, with limited parking.

## Paddling the Presumpscot's Tributaries

**Little River**  
*Moderate, fallen wood and variable water levels in lower reach*

Put in at Presumpscot Regional Land Trust's St. Pierre Property, off Mosher Road (Route 237), or from the parking area off Route 202. Follow a short footpath to the undeveloped put-in site.

Depending on water level, logjams, and strainers, it is sometimes possible to paddle upstream well past the Route 4/202 crossing, which is 0.8 miles upstream from St. Pierre. Under the right conditions, it may be possible to paddle further upstream to the confluence between Little River (coming in from the west) and Farm Brook (coming in from the north).

Heading downstream from St. Pierre, it is a gentle 0.7-mile paddle to the confluence with the Presumpscot. See the “Mallison Falls Dam to Saccarappa Dam” route description above for more information.

**Pleasant River**  
*Fast and challenging in high water, moderate during lower flows, variable water levels in lower reach*

Most paddlers access the Pleasant River either by paddling upstream from the Presumpscot, or by putting in at the River Road crossing in Windham. Paddlers have informally used River Road to launch for years, but it is not a designated launch site. Depending on water level, logjams, and strainers, it may be possible to paddle to within a few hundred feet of Pope Road, 2.3 miles upriver, where a set of natural falls requires portaging. Between Route 302 and Windham Center Road are 300 yards of rapids. Be on the lookout for cattle, and be prepared to navigate and carry around debris, natural falls, and shallow areas.

**East Branch Piscataqua River**  
*Moderate during higher flows, flat water in lower reach with variable water levels*

Access to the East Branch is available at several road crossings, including Falmouth Road, Field Road, and Woodville Road. Expect to encounter downed trees between Woodville Road and the Presumpscot. Be prepared to carry around debris and shallow areas. This section of river is not navigable during periods of low water. (The West Branch of the Piscataqua River is not navigable.



Users of this map and guide are reminded that they are responsible for their personal safety. With good judgment and proper equipment, the risks associated with paddling can be minimized. The river and its surrounding landscape are dynamic; be prepared for conditions to change.



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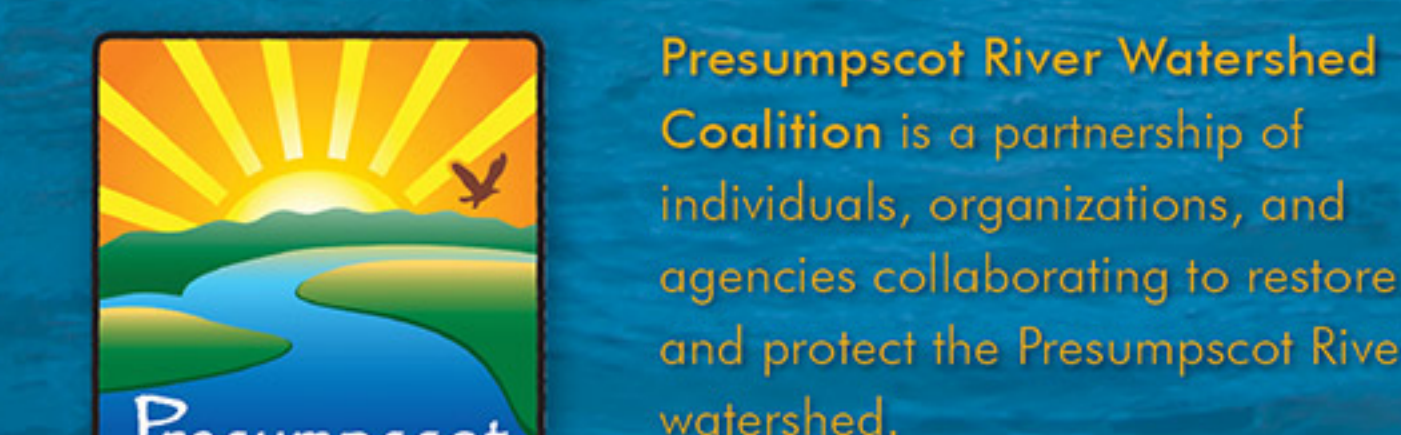
## Summary of Paddling Distances

Landmark	Distance from Previous	Total Paddling Distance
Route 35 Bridge and Put-in	0.0	0.0
Eel Weir Falls / Eel Weir Dam	1.1	1.1
North Gorham Dam (begin portage)	1.1	2.2
North Gorham Dam (end portage)	0.3	-
Dundee Park	0.7	2.9
Dundee Dam (begin portage)	1.0	3.9
Dundee Dam (end portage)	0.3	-
Babb's Bridge / Hurricane Road	1.3	5.2
Pleasant River	0.3	5.5
Mountain Division Railroad Bridge	0.7	6.2
Shaw Park	0.1	6.3
Gambo River Bridge / Gambo Dam (begin portage)	0.6	6.9
Gambo Dam (end portage)	0.1	-
Hawkes Property	1.4	8.3
Route 202 Bridge	0.1	8.4
Little Falls Dam (take out)	0.1	8.5
No designated portage around Little Falls Dam	-	-
Mallison Falls Dam (begin portage)	0.5	9.0
Mallison Falls Dam (end portage)	0.3	-
Colley Wright Brook	0.4	9.4
Little River	0.8	10.2
Inkhorn Brook	2.5	12.7
Saccarappa Dam and Falls (begin portage)	1.6	14.3
Saccarappa Dam and Falls (end portage)	0.3	-
Cumberland Mills Dam (take out)	1.0	15.3
No designated portage around Cumberland Mills Dam	-	-
Route 302 Bridge / Riverton Trolley Park	2.0	17.3
Blackstrap Road Bridge	2.3	19.6
Route 26 / 100 Bridge / Riverpoint Conservation Area	0.7	20.2
Piscataqua River	0.5	20.7
Falmouth Spur Bridge	0.2	20.9
Presumpscot Falls (begin portage)	0.8	21.7
Presumpscot Falls (end portage)	0.1	-
Smelt Hill Dam Site	0.2	21.9
Walton Park	0.3	22.1
Brickyard Point / Tidewater Farm	0.9	23.0
Berle Mill Pond / Gisland Farm	0.1	23.1
Martin's Point Bridge / Route 1	1.2	24.3



The Presumpscot River Watershed Coalition, with leadership and staff support provided by the Casco Bay Estuary Partnership, produced the *Presumpscot River Map & Guide* to encourage paddlers of all abilities to get out and explore one of southern Maine's hidden gems.

Connecting Sebago Lake to Casco Bay, the Presumpscot River flows 25 miles between source and sea. The river is spanned by nine dams, which create both swift and flat water paddling options. Designated portage trails around seven of the dams provide pathways for adventurous, long-distance paddlers to travel from the river's origin to its estuary.



**Casco Bay Estuary Partnership** is a catalyst for action with the goal of keeping Casco Bay and its nearly 1,000 square miles of watershed clean and healthy.