

SALT PONDS COALITION: NINIGRET POND



LEVEL	Beginner/Intermediate (wind)
START/END	US Fish & Wildlife Grassy Point Launch
RIVER MILES	Approximately 4.5 mile loop
TIME	Approximately 2 hours for the loop
DESCRIPTION	Flat Water
SCENERY	Coastal woodland, salt marsh, birds and islands
ACCESS	Ninigret Park, off Route 1 in Charlestown, RI

WILDLIFE REFUGE TO FORT NECK AND THE OLD BREACHWAY

US Fish and Wildlife installed a convenient kayak launch at the ★ Grassy Point parking area in the Ninigret Wildlife Refuge, open free of charge year-round, and even has bathrooms! From the launch, loop left around the point and head northeast along the shore toward Horseshoe Point ② about 600 yards away. After rounding Horseshoe Point, pass through a break into the small Horseshoe Cove. A few hundred feet to the north and then west is the entrance to larger Tommy Cod Cove. Exit Tommy Cod Cove through the passage to the north.

Head northeast and then north up into the Fort Neck/ Cross Mills section of the pond, toward ③ Ocean House Marina. In the northwest corner of this cove, freshwater enters from Narragansett tribal lands and School House pond via King Tom pond. To the right (northeast), Cross Mills brook flows in – a passage where fish such as herring and perch swim upstream to spawn ④. Just south of the docks is a floating platform – part of Ninigret Oyster Farm ⑤.

Paddle south along the eastern shore, by several small rocky islands and a protected bird habitat area ⑥. Continue south and cross deeper water, being alert for boating traffic. In shallower water near the southern shore, look for thick beds of eelgrass ⑦. Work in 2006 restored fourteen acres of this vital habitat. Continue due south into the former breachway ⑧. This scenic, shallow, and protected area, teeming with life, ends at the back of the beach. At high tide, explore secret passages through the marsh grass; at low tide you may run out of water, even in the main channel.

From the old breachway, angle to the northwest and then west to cross the pond back to the launch. If you want to extend your trip there are scenic coves and islands just to the west of the old breachway on the south side of the pond. If you choose to head east and explore the current breachway, use extra caution ⑨! The water is deep in the channel, there can be many motorboats, and paddling against the very strong current (either direction) can be difficult.

MAP LEGEND

★ WATER ACCESS	● POINTS OF INTEREST	P PARKING
■ WATER	--- WATER TRAIL ROUTE	— ROADS
◇ CAUTION	■ CONSERVATION LAND	



NINIGRET POND

Ninigret Pond is in the town of Charlestown and is the largest of the southern RI salt ponds. Much of the shoreline is kept in its natural state by state and federal agencies. Windsurfing, kayaking, fishing and swimming are popular activities. Resources support both commercial and recreational fishing, including bluefish and striped bass.



SOUTHERN RHODE ISLAND SALT PONDS

Ninigret Pond, also known as Charlestown Pond, is the largest of the salt ponds. This is a coastal lagoon fed primarily by several small streams. A great barrier beach separates the pond from the ocean, all of which is held in conservation trust. Charlestown Breachway connects the pond with the ocean.

Ninigret Pond has long been known for its succulent oysters and rich quahaug resources. Migration of ocean species of finfish has made flyfishing from kayaks a major attraction.

Ninigret Pond is teaming with history. Fort Ninigret at the head of the pond was a trading post settled by the Portuguese in the 1700s. Cross Mills Brook supported a grist mill and large migratory fish run. Much of the pond area hosted the summer settlements of the Narragansett tribe. During the 1800's and early 1900's the area was primarily farmland.

During WWII the Charlestown Auxiliary Landing Base operated on 600 acres. Many Naval pilots got their training there, including President George H.W. Bush. During the base's inactivity in the 60's, runways were opened up for drag racing. By the 1970's the base was surplus. During the Nixon years, they almost built a nuclear power plant there. Fortunately, a strong contingent of residents along with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service successfully acquired the land for a National Wildlife Refuge and a town park.

After WWII the area began to be developed residentially, first with small summer cottages and today with high-end properties at either end of the pond. Much of the adjacent

property along the mid and south pond is held in trust by the government and a variety of non-profit land trusts.

Ninigret Pond is a kayaker's paradise. Most of it is shallow and unobstructed. The trip described is just one of unlimited possibilities for kayaking. Kayaking from the Ninigret Conservation Area along East Beach will provide a gentle paddle around the western basin of the pond. A short trip from the USFWS launch going west will allow you to explore Foster Cove. Kayak rentals are available along Charlestown Beach Road.

DIRECTIONS

Ninigret National Wildlife Refuge is in the town of Charlestown and is open to the public year-round. Drop off kayaks at the launch beach via an access road from the parking area, which has restroom facilities. Parking is a couple of hundred feet from the launch; handicap spots are closer.

From Route 1 north, exit onto Route 1A (Old Post Road) about ½ mile past the Willows Motel.

From Route 1 south, make a (legal) U-turn on Route 1 about 250 yards south of Prosser Trail, or continue ¾ of a mile to the Bend Road exit on the right to cross over to the northbound lane at a light. Once on Route 1 north, exit onto Route 1A (Old Post Road).

Once on Rt. 1A/Old Post Rd, drive about ¼ mile and take a right into Ninigret Park. Follow the serpentine access road for one mile to the parking area at the end.

ALWAYS WEAR YOUR LIFE JACKET AND CARRY A WHISTLE OR OTHER SOUND PRODUCING DEVICE, PREFERABLY ATTACHED TO YOUR LIFE JACKET. PADDLERS SHOULD CHECK WATER LEVEL AND TIDES, WEATHER, AND WATERWAY CONDITIONS PRIOR TO EVERY TRIP. REMOVE WHAT YOU BRING, CLEAN UP MORE IF YOU CAN. PLEASE RESPECT PRIVATE PROPERTY. REPORT ANY PROBLEMS YOU ENCOUNTER TO CHARLESTOWN HARBOR MASTER AT 401-641-3083 AND LOCAL AUTHORITIES IF APPROPRIATE.



Salt Ponds Coalition (SPC), incorporated as a 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation in 1985, is the oldest continuously operating volunteer marine water-quality monitoring program in the nation. SPC conducts public outreach programs and works to focus legislative and regulatory attention on protecting our valuable salt pond resources for the benefit of wildlife and people. www.saltpondscoalition.org

The Narragansett Bay Estuary Program (NBEP) protects and preserves Narragansett Bay and its watershed through partnerships that conserve and restore natural resources, enhance water quality and promote community involvement. NBEP supports the RI Blueways Alliance which is dedicated to creating a comprehensive water trail network to link Rhode Island's rivers, lakes and ponds to Narragansett Bay and to the rivers in Massachusetts that flow into the bay. The trail will be used to promote safety, conservation, recreation and economic development. www.ExploreRI.org



Watershed organizations throughout the Narragansett Bay watershed showcase paddling opportunities on downloadable paddle maps. The full list of maps is available at ExploreRI.org.

