

# Rising Mercury Changes Outdoor Fun and Work

**Editor's Note:** In this *"Climate Change in Our Time & Town"* series, we look at different ways warming temperatures affect our lives, community, and environment.

Once upon a time in Connecticut, not so long ago, winters were different.

Like other seasons, winter brought its own bundle of outdoor activities — cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, ice skating, and ice fishing among them.

That's not how the story goes these days.

"Winter sports have disappeared," said Jim Ventres, East Haddam's Land Use Administrator since 1995. "I've got my snowshoes sitting in the corner looking rustic. ... There's no snow. There's no ice."

Ventres, who is a member of the Moodus Sportsmen's Club, remembers winters in the 1970s when 17 or more inches of ice on the town's lakes were inviting venues for the club's annual ice fishing derby. Ice was so thick it could support vehicles weighing as much as 3,000 pounds, he said. In recent winters, however, there haven't been enough days of freezing temperatures and ice to even hold the derby. The last event was in 2015, according to Ventres' records. This fall, club members told him not to plan for the derby in their 2024 calendar.

Warmer temperatures in Connecticut might not have wiped out the outdoor activities of other seasons, but the heavy rainstorms they cause — like those of last July — wreak havoc, undermining pastimes, outdoor work, and the ecology.

With more storms, rivers rise, often bringing debris from upstream, waste run-off, and changes in water chemistry that affect fish, fisherman, and pleasure-boaters.

Native fish of Long Island Sound are on the decline because of warmer water, affecting egg development, spawning habitat, and food species, according to the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) brochure 'Connecticut: Our Changing Climate.' Declining native species include flounder, striped bass, alewife, and shad.

Rivers feeding into the Sound are similarly affected.

"I usually fly fish on the Salmon River," said Alan Ponanski, an East Haddam Land Trust (EHLT) board member who has been fishing off and on for more than 30 years. "But there are certain times of the summer," he said, "when the water temperature is just too high. It can't support a trout population. And this is the Salmon River, where they're trying to bring (back) salmon."

Ralph Chappell oversees and maintains the trails of EHLT's preserves and is a board member of the nonprofit land trust. His volunteer work takes him outside frequently, often for hours at a time. "This summer's heat extremes impacted trail monitoring and stewardship activities," he said. "Some days it was just too hot and humid to be doing trail work."

Last year's warm winter, which was followed by lots of rain, then intense heat and, subsequently, cool air and more rain, helped to create an atmosphere that impacted insect life. Unusual weather conditions led many to be protective of their turf.

Chappell noticed and felt the change. More yellow-jacket activity could abruptly put an end to outdoor work or recreation.

Predictions for the coming months from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) foresee above-average temperatures in the Northeast. The effects of El Niño — a natural ocean and weather pattern arising from the tropical Pacific Ocean but reaching far around the globe — promise unseasonably warmer, drier weather for Connecticut. For the 2018-2019 season, which brought the last El Niño winter, Bradley International Airport recorded just under 22 inches of snow — nine inches fewer than normal.

Ventres doesn't count on getting out on ice this winter, at least not in East Haddam. In fact, he said, a friend who purchased new ice-fishing equipment a couple of years ago hasn't been able to use those "tip-ups."

"We joke about having a tag sale," Ventres said. "His tip-ups. That's what he'd be selling."

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*Sidebar*

### **'Connecticut: Our Changing Climate' Brochure Explains Our Weather**

Weather is what happens every day.

Climate, as explained in the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection brochure "Connecticut: Our Changing Climate," is the average of weather patterns analyzed in 30-year blocks.

In our state, there are expectations for four seasons in a year, each with specific temperature ranges. Since 1950, however, Connecticut has experienced changes that differ from normal expectations. Overall, this region now has warmer seasons. The average annual air temperature has gone up by 2.2 degrees Fahrenheit.

Small as that increase might sound, it can be the difference between freezing and not freezing, snow and rain. Wet and rainy winters often lead to drier summers, with high heat indexes and humidity.

Roots of climate change go back to the Industrial Revolution, starting in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century with the beginning of fossil-fuel burning to run factories. That has added large amounts of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, thickening the heat-trapping blanket that surrounds Earth.

As that blanket has thickened from carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases, temperatures have gone up and have created a different climate.

(For more info provided in this DEEP brochure, see: <https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/DEEP/education/kellogg/CT-Changing-Climate-Booklet.pdf>)

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