

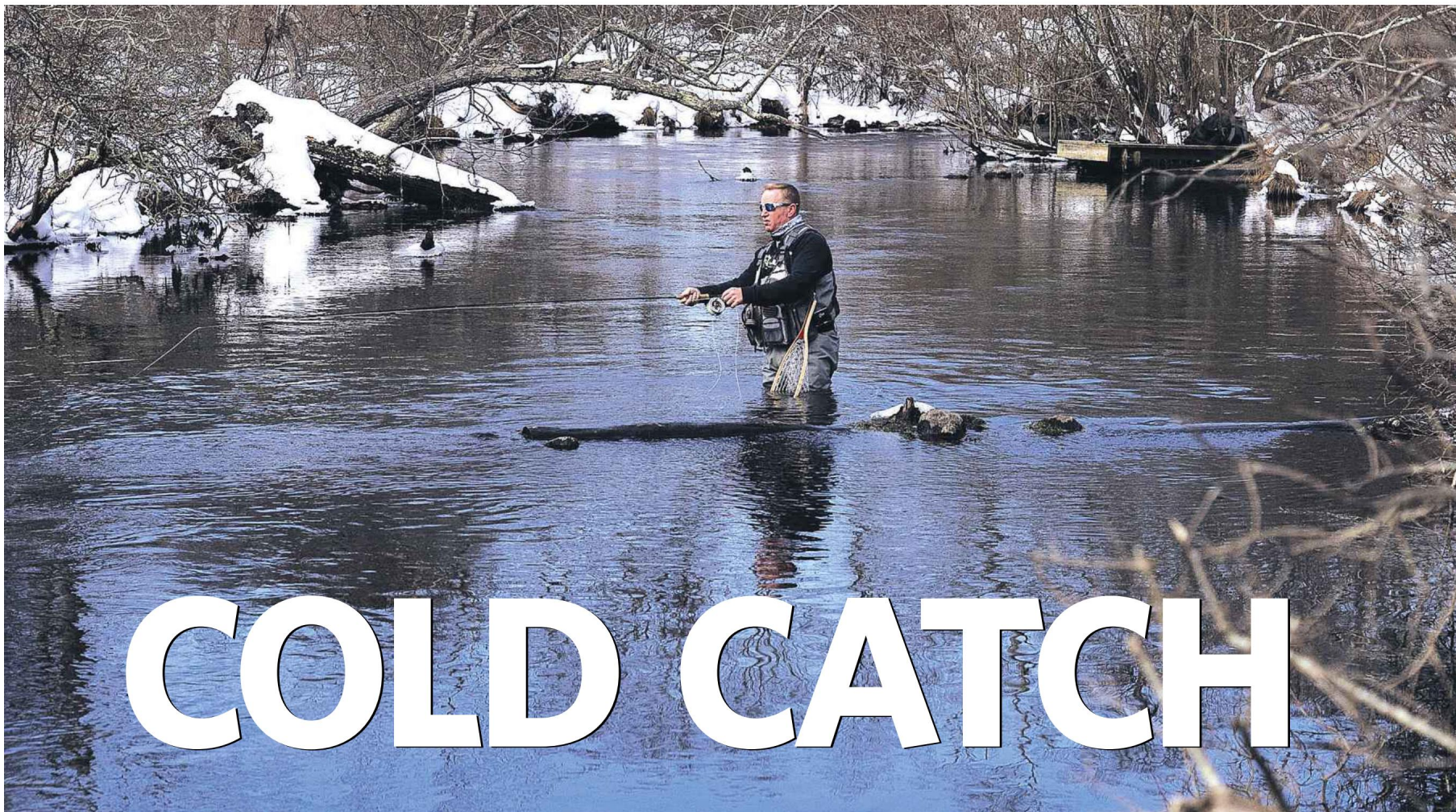
exploreLI



A **LINE** in winter

IT MIGHT BE COLD, BUT YOU CAN STILL FISH ON AND OFF LI **B2**

GO WILD Where to spot animals in their habitats on LI [newsday.com/lifestyle](https://www.newsday.com/lifestyle)



COLD CATCH

Gaige Simon, of Northport, on a winter fishing trip at Connetquot River State Park Preserve in Oakdale.

Three chilly ways to enjoy winter fishing on Long Island and beyond

BY TOM SCHLICHTER
Special to Newsday

Only days since a winter storm dumped as much as 24 inches of snow across Long Island, Gaige Simon, a 51-year-old charter captain from Northport, can't wait to go fishing.

"I'm headed to Connetquot River State Park to fly-fish for trout tomorrow," he says. "It's a world-class fishery even in the winter. Last week, I caught a 26-inch rainbow trout there — my biggest trout ever."

While it's hard to compare local winter fishing possibilities to the abundance of summertime options, those in need of a fishing fix can find opportunities to feel a tug at the end of their line right through the colder months here on Long Island. Here are three of your best prospects.

A JEWEL FOR TROUT

Connetquot River State Park Preserve in Oakdale offers your quickest route to

a bragging-sized fish during the winter months. A jewel of a river that cuts a four-mile swath through the 3,743-acre preserve, the "Conny" is stocked with both rainbow and brook trout raised in its very own hatchery. The catch here is that it's pay-to-play, fly-fishing only, with reservations recommended. Based on a first-come, first-served basis among those with reservations, anglers each choose an assigned beat on the river for four-hour fishing sessions.

"You don't have to be an expert fly-caster to connect here — but it helps," says Simon, who has fished the river regularly for two years. "A six- to eight-weight flyrod and reel combo, weight-forward floating fly line, small landing net and selection of flies including, Black Ants, Micro Spawn, Copper John, Midge, Scud and Woolly Bugger patterns is what you need to succeed." A pair of waders will allow you to cover a lot more water than fishing from the limited shoreline access.

HEAD OFFSHORE

Offshore wreck fishing and long-range tilefish trips are winter traditions for Long Island's most serious saltwater fans. For a fee, open boats power out to ocean wrecks in search of a variety of species, including ling, porgy, pollock and codfish in 80 to 300 feet of water. Extended tilefish adventures, meanwhile, target far off deep-water canyons with depths of 400 to 800 feet — and quarry that can top 30 pounds.

Standard codfish gear serves for these wreck trips. Think stout boat rods, 40- to 50-pound-test braided lines, 8- to 12-ounce sinkers, and high-low bottom rigs with a size 5/0 or 6/0 sproat-style hook on top and, perhaps, a smaller hook on the bottom to target porgy, ling, etc. Bring your own gear or rent a rod and reel from the boat. Clam baits are provided at no charge.

Tilefish trips typically run 24 to 48 hours and electric reels are suggested for hauling your catch from several-hundred feet of water. These should be available to rent. As with wreck trips, free bait is provided but anglers must pay for the 12- to 16-ounce sinkers if they don't bring their own.

"The best tip I can offer for winter

offshore fishing is to avoid sailing on the warmest days," says Capt. Neil Delaney, skipper of the Captree open boat Laura Lee. "Nobody likes to be cold but warm days tend to be windy and rougher on the water."

HIT THE PONDS FOR TROUT AND PANFISH

Sometimes the simplest option is the best. If you're just itching for some bites and don't really care what kind of fish you catch, mixed-bag action with trout and panfish can be a ton of fun on local lakes and ponds. A lightweight, four- to six-pound-test spinning outfit to cast a weighted float positioned two feet above a 1/16-ounce jig head tipped with Mini-Trout Magnets or Berkley Alive! Waxies Micro Baits is all you need to hook up with yellow perch, bluegill, pumpkinseed and stocked rainbow trout, according to Bobby Turtarello at Causeway Bait and Tackle in Wantagh.

Whether fishing from shore or boat, simply toss your offering out and allow the wind to move your float gently across the surface so your lure dances gently through the water. Strikes are often light this time of year, registering as a slight twitch



DEBBIE EGAN-CHIN

Gaige Simon, right, and Steven Campbell, of Farmingdale, on their way to the Connetquot River for a day of fly fishing for trout in Oakdale.

Bundle Up

Keep in mind that winter fishing is a true cold weather sport, and even mild 40-degree temperatures can feel frigid after an hour or two or around the water. Be sure to dress in layers, bring along waterproof gloves and a warm hat, boots and, if heading offshore, appropriate foul weather gear.

CONNETQUOT RIVER STATE PARK PRESERVE, Oakdale

INFO parks.ny.gov/parks/8; 631-581-1005

WINTER HOURS Open 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesday through Sunday. Reservations recommended.

COST \$25 per person for a four-hour fly-fishing session

SUPPLIES AND GEAR River Bay Outfitters, Baldwin (riverbayoutfitters.com), Camp-Site Sport Shop, Huntington Station (shopcampsitesportshop.com/); J&J Sports, Patchogue, (jjsportsfishing.com); White Water Outfitters, Hampton Bays (whitewateroutfitters.com).

LICENSE New York State freshwater fishing license required: dec.ny.gov/permits/6091.html

LAURA LEE FLEET, Captree

INFO captree.com; 631-661-1867

TRIPS Weather permitting, sails for winter wreck fishing trips on weekends for porgies, pollock, weakfish, ling and cod. Check website schedule for sailing dates and times.

COST \$175 per person; rod and reel rentals available if needed. License not required.

CAPTAIN LOU FLEET, Freeport

INFO captloufleet.com; 516-623-5823

TRIPS Per calendar schedule, sails offshore wreck trips for porgy, pollock, hake, weakfish and cod, 24-, 36- and 48-hour tilefish trips. Check schedule for sailing dates and times.

COST \$175 per person for wreck trips. Tilefish trips range from \$325 to \$595 based on trip duration. Rental rods, conventional reels and electric reels available if needed. License not required.

■ Winter Panfish and Trout Hot Spots

Most Long Island lakes and ponds hold panfish. Some of the better winter choices include Twin Ponds, Wantagh; Massapequa Reservoir; Oyster Bay Mill Pond; Kahlers Pond, East Moriches; Artist Lake, Middle Island; Forge Pond, Riverhead; and Upper Lake, Yaphank. For a listing of Long Island waters stocked with trout, visit: dec.ny.gov/outdoor/23286.html.

■ Freshwater Fishing Regulations

View NYS DEC freshwater fishing regulations at <https://www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/7917.html>. With few exceptions, a New York State freshwater fishing license is required for fishing in any of New York's freshwater environs. Available at dec.ny.gov/permits/6091.html.

of the float or change in its drift direction. Choose a nice warm afternoon to set out and bring the kids if you don't mind planning a short outing.

Be aware that should you choose

to use a kayak, canoe, johnboat, rowboat (or any vessel under 21 feet in length in freshwater or saltwater), NYS law requires life jackets to be worn and fully fastened while underway between Nov. 1 and May 1.

ON THE COVER Steven Campbell, of Farmingdale, holds a rainbow trout he caught at Connetquot River State Park Preserve.

FACES OF LONG ISLAND



“Climbing took me all over the world. It took me to Europe. I packed up my bags and spent a whole summer climbing in Céüse, France.”

BETHPAGE

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