

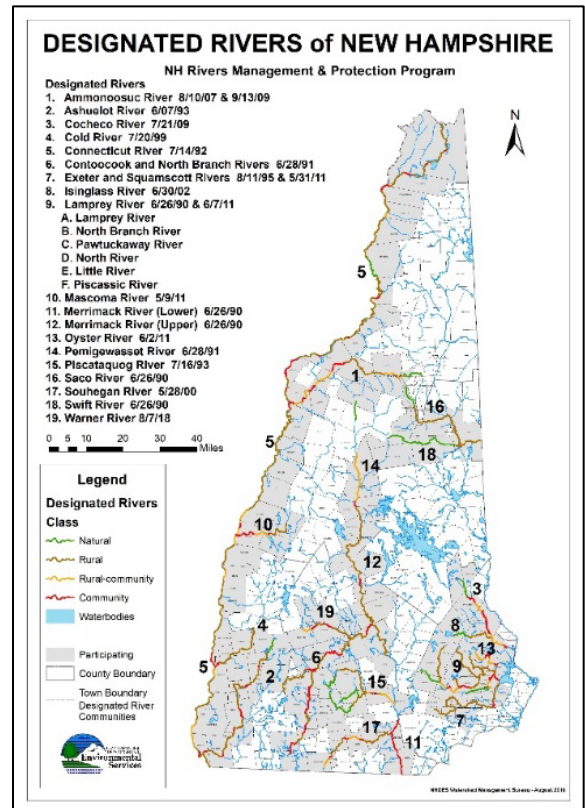
New Hampshire Rivers Management and Protection Program



Rivers Management Advisory Committee Biennial Report: Fiscal Years 2020-2021

The purpose of the Rivers Management and Protection Program (Rivers Program), established in 1988 through RSA 483, is to protect certain New Hampshire rivers nominated by their communities, called designated rivers, for their outstanding natural and cultural resources. The program is administered by the New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services (NHDES) and uses a unique state and local, two-tier approach to manage and protect rivers through the advisement of the statewide New Hampshire Rivers Management Advisory Committee (RMAC) and the local river management advisory committees (LACs).

As of June 30, 2021, 19 rivers or river segments were designated under RSA 483 totaling approximately 1,010 river miles and representing 130 communities, unincorporated places, and state parks. These 19 rivers had approximately 200 volunteers in 22 LACs overseeing their management (the Connecticut River has five local subcommittees due to its length).



During the July 1, 2019 to June 30, 2021 biennium, one full-time instream flow position was added, for a total of four full-time and two part-time positions in the Rivers Program. Joe Schmidl was hired as the new Instream Flow Specialist. One full-time and two part-time positions were vacated during the 2020 hiring freeze. The biennium ended with three full-time staff in the Rivers Program.

The Rivers Program remains primarily a volunteer-based program, and many of its achievements are the result of the work of the volunteer members of the RMAC and the LACs. Department staff support remains essential to assure that volunteer efforts are maximized. The Governor and Executive Council-appointed RMAC is composed of 17 members representing various business, conservation, public service, and state agency interests. LAC members are nominated by their municipalities, appointed by the RMAC, and represent local government, business, conservation, recreation, agriculture, and riparian landowner interests. During this biennium, the RMAC convened seven regular business meetings, one joint meeting with the Lakes Management Advisory Committee (LMAC), three Policy and Legislation Subcommittee meetings, and six meetings of the Water Quality Indicators Joint RMAC-LMAC Subcommittee. The COVID-19 pandemic reduced the number of meetings held during the second half of the biennium. RMAC representatives spent approximately 366 hours supporting river protection efforts valued at \$10,325.¹ During this same period, LAC volunteers spent a total of approximately 11,641 hours valued at \$319,336.¹ The total of all Rivers Program volunteer hours is valued at approximately \$329,661 for fiscal years 2020 and 2021.

¹ Calculated using the [Independent Sector](#) 2019 New Hampshire volunteer rate of \$26.23 an hour and the 2020 rate of \$28.84 an hour.

Local River Management Advisory Committee Activities

LACs are the voice of the river in the municipalities through which the river flows, provide a forum for discussion of river management, and are valuable conduits for educating community members about river protection. LAC members review and comment on permit applications, sample water, and host events to promote stewardship of their rivers.

Consultant Prompts Establishing the Combined Saco-Swift Rivers

LAC: A consultant requested contact information for the Saco River LAC. On learning that no LAC remained, he worked with community members to launch the Saco-Swift Rivers LAC on August 28, 2019. The LAC combines the former Saco and Swift LACs into one revitalized organization. The group has formed strong partnerships with the Saco Headwaters Alliance, municipalities, and conservation groups along the corridor.



Warner River LAC Corridor Management Plan Approved, Three Plan Updates Funded: River corridor management plans are required by RSA 483 and help LACs assess river resources, identify threats, and develop action plans for addressing threats and protecting the river. The **Warner River LAC** completed its management plan in 2020 with grant support from NHDES and the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation. As part of plan preparation, the LAC conducted a public opinion survey and talked with river users at the Warner Fall Foliage Festival. The **Ashuelot and Exeter-Squamscott LACs** each partnered with their local regional planning commissions to obtain 604(b) water quality planning grants from NHDES to update their management plans; work to update those plans will occur in the next biennium. Hart's Location **received a state revolving fund (SRF) loan** to fund a river corridor management plan for the **Saco and Swift Rivers LAC**. This is the first time SRF funds have been awarded to support preparation of an LAC's management plan. As of the end of the biennium, five additional LACs, the **Cocheco, Lower Merrimack, Upper Merrimack, Pemigewasset, and Souhegan**, were in discussions on how to fund new plans or plan updates as required by RSA 483.

Valuable River Frontage Protected: The **Lamprey River Advisory Committee**, which receives federal funds due to its inclusion in the national Wild and Scenic Rivers System, helped permanently protect two properties. In 2019, a 113.5-acre parcel in Epping with over a mile of river frontage was protected. In 2020, LRAC contributed funds to transfer the 10-acre Lord property in Durham to The Nature Conservancy, adding 0.3 miles of protected frontage and augmenting the 235-acre Lamprey River Preserve. To date, the Lamprey River Advisory Committee has supported the protection of 3,743 acres along the river. The LAC has also collaborated with municipal conservation commissions to prioritize areas for future conservation. The **Ammonoosuc River LAC** supported land conservation by issuing letters of support for efforts by the Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests to protect a 1.8 mile stretch of river that provides important habitat for trout and other cold-water fisheries.



High School Seniors Recognized by the Cold River LAC: With financial support from a generous community member, the Cold River LAC created two awards for high school seniors. One recognizes

seniors who have worked on the river and its tributaries with the LAC. These students receive a certificate and a copy of Ken Burn's documentary on the National Parks. The other award is a \$500 scholarship in support of a graduating senior receiving additional environmental education.

LACs Engage on PFAS Issues: The **Pemigewasset River LAC** conducted a site visit to the New Hampton Resource Management Inc. biosolid processing facility to review the plant and understand how PFAS might find its way into the river system through leachate or feeder streams near the plant or application sites. The **Souhegan River LAC** held an informal educational seminar on PFAS where the Assistant Director of Public Works for the Town of Merrimack discussed how PFAS is detected in wastewater and post-treatment tailings used as fertilizer.

Outreach Events Raise Awareness of Riverine Ecosystems: LACs hold workshops, attend community events, host river trips, and develop educational materials in support of river health and to promote river stewardship. Activity highlights during 2019 and 2020 include:

- The **Souhegan River LAC** spoke with attendees at the Wilton Sustainability Fair.
- The **Contoocook and North Branch Rivers** and **Warner River LACs** built new websites and the **Exeter-Squamscott River LAC** created a Facebook page to distribute information to stakeholders and community members.
- The **Connecticut River Joint Commissions** and the **Exeter-Squamscott River LAC** hosted events and disseminated information to promote proper septic system management.
- The **Exeter-Squamscott River LAC** hosted a paddle event in partnership with the Brentwood Conservation Commission.

LACs Report that Designated Rivers are Over-Loved During Pandemic: LACs across the state noted increased recreation on designated rivers during the pandemic. The **Wantastiquet Subcommittee** considered whether additional emergency response support would be needed on the Connecticut River if use trends continue. The **Souhegan River LAC** worked extensively with the Town of Merrimack to try and resolve issues from overuse of the river access at Watson Park, including littering, expanded informal paths into sensitive habitat, bank erosion, and bacterial water pollution. Other LACs' efforts to expand recreation access continue. For example, the **Lamprey River Advisory Committee** updated and expanded paddling maps and guides for that river and installed public information kiosks at Thompson Forest in Durham and Tilton Conservation Park in Epping.

River Clean-ups Remove Trash and Promote Healthy Rivers: Activities during 2019 and 2020 include:

- The **Ashuelot River** and **Mascoma River LACs** participated in the Connecticut River Conservancy's annual "Source to the Sea" river cleanup. Eighty-three volunteers removed three tons of trash from the Ashuelot River in Swanzey, Beaver Brook in Keene, and the Mascoma River in Lebanon.
- The **Pemigewasset River LAC** participated in a river cleanup where a member and local outfitter provided free kayak/canoe rental and shuttle service for volunteers agreeing to pick up trash along the river from Memorial Bridge in Thornton to Branch Brook Campground in Campton.



Photo by D. Holt

- The **Piscataquog River LAC** organized a cleanup near Bass Island Park, at the mouth of the Piscataquog in Manchester.
- The **Contoocook and North Branch Rivers LAC** participated in a river cleanup in Bennington.

Permit Applications Reviewed to Support Clean Rivers: One of the LACs' primary duties is to review permit applications for proposed construction projects in and near designated rivers. In 2019 and 2020, LACs reviewed 457 actions requiring a federal, state, or local permit, and submitted comments to permit reviewers in support of clean water and healthy riparian habitat. Most of the permits reviewed were state wetland, shoreland, and alteration of terrain permit applications.

Water Quality Monitoring Provides Important Data: LAC volunteers collected water quality data from the Ashuelot, Cold, Contoocook-North Branch, Connecticut Wantastisquet, Lamprey, Pemigewasset, Souhegan, Lower Merrimack, Upper Merrimack, and Warner rivers, most as part of the Volunteer River Assessment Program. Volunteers take water samples from multiple locations along each river and give them to NHDES or other labs to test for dissolved oxygen, chlorine, pH, turbidity, conductance, bacteria, and other metrics. Upper Merrimack River LAC volunteers also collect macroinvertebrates to monitor river health.

LAC Engagement Increases with Remote Meetings: Although the pandemic posed many challenges, LACs across the state reported that remote meetings led to increased participation compared to pre-pandemic levels. LACs have faced challenges meeting quorum requirements for reasons both related to the pandemic and not. The LACs have followed legislation pertaining to remote meetings and many LACs would like to be able to meet remotely as necessary.

Rivers Program Accomplishments

RMAC Recommends Wetlands Protection at Hampton Liquor Stores Site: The RMAC reviewed a proposal from the New Hampshire Liquor Commission to sell and redevelop approximately 87 acres on I-95 in Hampton adjacent to the Taylor River. Because the parcels include prime wetlands and other sensitive resources, the RMAC recommended placing a conservation easement on the wetlands as a condition of the sale and requested participation in the decision-making process for the Request for Proposals.

Protected Instream Flow (PISF) Studies Underway: With management implemented on the **Lamprey** and **Souhegan rivers**, the Instream Flow Program is now developing flow management criteria for additional designated rivers, in a prioritized order advised by the RMAC, and developing the tools necessary to ensure that water continues to flow in these rivers during future droughts.

- The **Cold River**, only 24 miles long with two dams and one water user subject to management, was chosen as the test for the 2018 revised Instream Flow rules. Staff worked with an environmental contractor to measure habitat and flow conditions along the Cold River. This data informed the draft protected instream flow criteria that will form the basis of the river's water management plan.
- Along the **Warner** and **Ashuelot rivers**, NHDES contracted with two environmental consulting firms to assist with baseline data collection about riparian vegetation, water levels, and other river characteristics. Field work is nearly complete for the Warner River and was started on the Ashuelot River.

- Implementation of the Instream Flow Program relies on real-time stream flow data for 45 sections of designated rivers. Unfortunately, many of these rivers do not have gages to measure flow. In 2021, staff installed a pilot real-time stream flow station on the **North Branch-Contoocook River** to test a new method of measuring flows. This station can send flow data over the internet every 30 minutes, which allows staff to track river levels in real time and determine when management is needed to remedy low flows. Based on the success of the stream flow station, additional stations will be installed on other designated rivers. [Data](#) are available through the NHDES website.



Rivers Program Hosted “Confluence Call” for LAC Volunteers: On October 5, 2020, 26 LAC members representing 17 designated rivers joined a call to discuss increased public recreation on rivers and to learn more about alteration of terrain permit rule changes, wetland rule changes, and compliance and enforcement. The annual LAC workshops for 2020 and 2021 were cancelled due to COVID-19.

For further information, please visit the New Hampshire [Rivers Management and Protection Program](#) or contact the Rivers Coordinator, 29 Hazen Drive, PO Box 95, Concord, NH 03302-0095; (603) 271-2959; riversprogram@des.nh.gov.



Photo by Southeast Land Trust

New Hampshire Rivers Management and Protection Program Fiscal Years 2020-2021 – By the Numbers

