

ENVIRONMENTAL Fact Sheet



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The Cocheco River

The Cocheco River is part of the Piscataqua River drainage basin, flowing near New Hampshire's boundary with Maine. The Cocheco River watershed's 175 square miles is entirely within New Hampshire. Headwater streams arise in Milton, Farmington, Middleton and New Durham. The river flows approximately 34.8 miles in a southeastern direction from New Durham, descending to the Cocheco River valley in Farmington. From Farmington to Rochester, it flows as a small river in a forested river corridor. In Rochester the river emerges from the backyards of residential neighborhoods into the urban center of downtown Rochester before becoming tidal in Dover, where it joins with the Salmon Falls River to form the Piscataqua River.

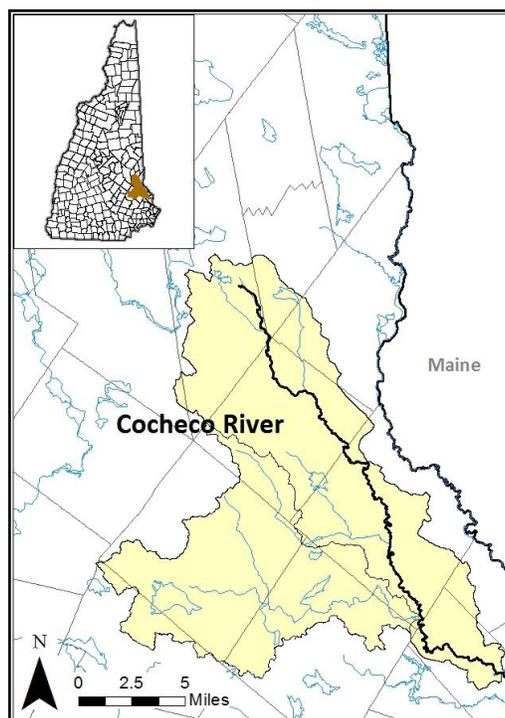
Land use in the river corridor is a complex mix of rural development, forests, wetlands and heavily-settled urban areas. Rapid suburbanization is decreasing the area of open lands in the middle and lower portions of the sub-watershed. In the lower Cocheco River reach, there is rapid growth in formerly rural areas of Dover, Somersworth and Rochester.

Geology

The formation of the Cocheco River began about 18,000 years ago, as the last glacier moved its way across New Hampshire. The glacial activity played a major role in influencing the landscape and characteristics of the Cocheco River watershed. Nearly 20% of the watershed is overlain by stratified-drift aquifers, and about 10% of these aquifers are considered to be potentially high-yielding water sources. The larger aquifers are found in the New Durham, Farmington and Rochester areas.

History

The Cocheco River corridor has an extensive human history, starting with aboriginal populations about 3,000 to 5,000 years ago, to European settlement beginning in 1623 resulting in the formation of the village of "Cochecho," now known as Dover. Historically, many nomadic Native Americans set up sites by the river falls to take advantage of the fishery and convenient river transportation while hunting large game. The Cocheco River also played an important role in the American industrial revolution. The river powered early development of the great mills at the Cocheco Falls at Dover Landing. Several of the buildings constructed between the mid- to late-1700s and early- to mid-1800s remain today and are listed on the National Register of Historic Places.



Wildlife, Habitat and Vegetation

The Cocheco River corridor contains several areas of the highest quality habitat in New Hampshire, according to New Hampshire Fish and Game. Over 100 bird species have been identified in the Cocheco River corridor, including state-listed species such as the osprey and the upland sandpiper. A variety of wildlife is dependent upon the resources of the river, including moose, otters, fishers, beavers, muskrats, deer, wood turtles and Blanding's turtles. Overall, the Cocheco River has a diverse and healthy population of returning anadromous fish and is one of the three most productive rivers for river herring of the monitored Great Bay tributaries.

The dominant ecosystem types within the river corridor are dry coastal forest and moist coastal forest. These ecosystems are also widespread throughout the watershed. Bogs, an uncommon ecosystem type, are also present. The New Hampshire Natural Heritage Bureau has record of several state-listed plants known to occur in the river corridor, including wild lupine, little-headed spikesedge, smooth black sedge, clustered sedge, Canada shore quillwort and button sedge.

Recreation

There are several publicly-owned recreation areas in the river corridor. These areas offer a mix of recreational opportunities, including hiking, nature study, picnicking, swimming, river access, recreational fields and urban river walks. Public access for fishing, kayaking and canoeing can be found along the Cocheco River in Dover, Rochester, Gonic, and Farmington. A variety of scenic views can be found from the headwaters area in New Durham to the tidal waters at the Cocheco Falls Dam in Dover.



Boating

The Cocheco River offers canoeists and kayakers a mixture of natural and urban experiences. The upper reach is largely an undeveloped winding riverfront. The middle section flows through the heart of Rochester, offering views of the city. The river section through Dover provides excellent flatwater canoeing and kayaking with varying landscapes. Public access can be found in many places along the Cocheco River in Dover, Rochester, Gonic, and Farmington. The first navigable reach of the river begins in Farmington, near Cocheco Road, at a well-marked canoe launch.

Fishing

The primary freshwater habitat on the Cocheco River is above the dams. The river supports a warm water finfish population that includes: American eel, Lamprey white sucker, yellow perch, Eastern chain pickerel, Eastern brook trout, small-mouth bass and common shiner. The New Hampshire Fish and Game Department has identified 17 fish species, including red river herring, using the ladder located at Cocheco Falls in Dover. The Cocheco River is stocked in the spring-early summer at its upper reaches by the New Hampshire Fish and Game Department for rainbow and brook trout.

For More Information

For more information about the New Hampshire Rivers Management and Protection Program, visit the NHDES website at <http://des.nh.gov/organization/divisions/water/wmb/rivers/>, or contact the Rivers Coordinator, 29 Hazen Drive; PO Box 95; Concord, NH 03302-0095; (603) 271-2959; riversprogram@des.nh.gov.