



The State of New Hampshire  
**Department of Environmental Services**



**Robert R. Scott, Commissioner**

April 10, 2019

The Honorable Suzanne Smith  
Chair, House Resources, Recreation and Development Committee  
Legislative Office Building, Room 305  
Concord, NH 03301

**RE: SB 164, establishing a committee to study unprotected drinking water sources and estimating the costs of protecting such sources**

Dear Chair Smith and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on SB 164. This bill would establish a Legislative committee to study unprotected drinking water sources and estimate the costs of protecting such sources. The New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services (NHDES) supports this bill.

Protecting drinking water sources from contamination encompasses a wide range of tools, including education of businesses in the area, inspecting industrial facilities, restricting activities such as swimming on water supply lakes, land use restrictions, and land protection. While NHDES' drinking water source protection program encourages water suppliers and municipalities to practice the full range of source water protection tools, land protection is both the most effective and requires the greatest investment. To address this challenge, the Legislature established the Water Supply Land Protection Grant Program in 2000 and provided approximately \$9 million over nine years for grants to municipalities, water suppliers, and land trusts. Since 2008, no statewide funding source was dedicated to water supply land protection until the Drinking Water and Groundwater Advisory Commission held its first open grant round in 2018, ultimately awarding \$2.4 million that first year.

In 2017 NHDES convened a group of water supply and land conservation stakeholders to begin work toward the development of a state water supply land conservation plan. The group reached consensus regarding the identification of high-priority water supply lands and NHDES conducted analysis to determine the acreage of land in each category, and the extent to which those lands are permanently protected or currently developed. The attachment summarizes the work to date. NHDES believes the committee that would be created under this bill represents a logical step forward in this effort to develop a statewide plan, and looks forward to working with the committee and with the Drinking Water and Groundwater Advisory Commission to plan for the protection of important water supply lands.

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment on SB 164. Should you have further questions or need additional information, please feel free to contact either Paul Susca, Supervisor of Planning, Protection and Assistance in the Drinking Water and Groundwater Bureau ([paul.susca@des.nh.gov](mailto:paul.susca@des.nh.gov),

[www.des.nh.gov](http://www.des.nh.gov)

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271-7061) or Sarah Pillsbury, Administrator of the Drinking Water and Groundwater Bureau,  
([sarah.pillsbury@des.nh.gov](mailto:sarah.pillsbury@des.nh.gov), 271-1168).

Sincerely,



Robert R. Scott  
Commissioner

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cc: Sponsors of SB 164: Senators Chandley, Sherman, and Watters; Representatives Martin, Panasiti,  
Rung, and Marsh

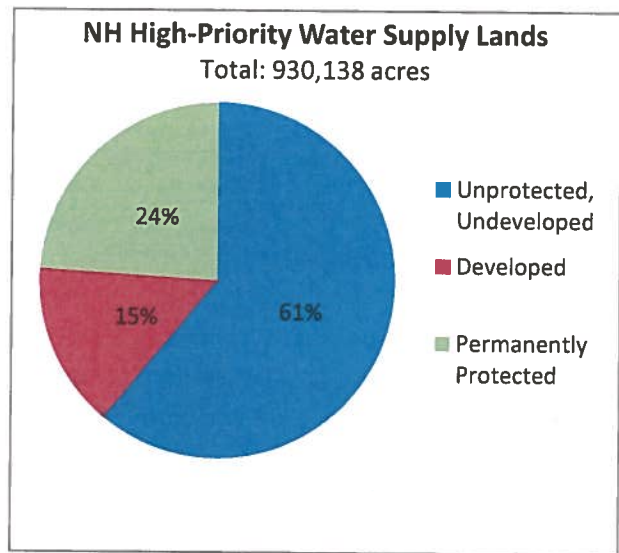
Attachment: New Hampshire's High-Priority Water Supply Lands - Only 24% Are Protected

## New Hampshire's High-Priority Water Supply Lands Only 24% Are Protected

Land protection is part of a multi-stage approach to ensuring safe drinking water. Advocated by the water supply industry and NH Department of Environmental Services, the approach includes choosing clean sources, preventing contamination, treating the water, and ongoing monitoring.

New Hampshire's water supply lands are not sufficiently protected and are vulnerable to deteriorating water quality as a result of declining forest cover and inappropriate development.

- The conversion of undeveloped land to rooftops and pavement harms water quality and *increases water treatment costs*.
- Only 24 percent of high-priority water supply lands in New Hampshire are permanently protected (see pie chart).
- Three New Hampshire watersheds rank in the top four watersheds *nationwide* that could experience the largest changes in water quality as a result of increases in housing density on private forest land.
- *New Hampshire ranks at the bottom* among the New England states in per capita state spending for land conservation, at \$1.46 per person annually.



NH Department of Environmental Services convened a group representing public water systems, land conservation organizations, and municipal planners to guide the development of a Drinking Water Land Protection Plan for the state. The group identified three categories of high-priority water supply lands (see table) – the lands that are most important to protect in order to prevent the deterioration of water supplies – and determined the following:

- Sixteen (16) percent of the state (930,138 acres) consists of high-priority water supply lands.
- *Roughly three-quarters of those lands are unprotected and 15 percent are already developed* (see pie chart).
- Unprotected, undeveloped high-priority water supply lands make up 9.5 percent of the state, or 561,930 acres (see table).



Category	Unprotected, Undeveloped High-Priority Water Supply Lands	
	Acres	% of State
Wellhead Protection Areas	266,496	4.5
Water Supply Watershed Areas	241,014	4.1
High-Yield Aquifers	102,434	1.7
<b>TOTAL*</b>	<b>561,930</b>	<b>9.5</b>

\*Categories do not add up to total due to overlap.

The distribution of Unprotected, Undeveloped High-Priority Water Supply Lands by county is shown on the reverse side.

## High Priority Water Supply Lands (Undeveloped, Unprotected) by County

### Legend

-  High Priority Water Supply Lands (HPWSL), Undeveloped, Unprotected
-  County Boundaries (name and acres HPSWL, Undeveloped, Unprotected)

