ENVIRONMENTAL
Fact Sheet

NEW HAMPSHIRE DEPARTMENT OF Environmental Services

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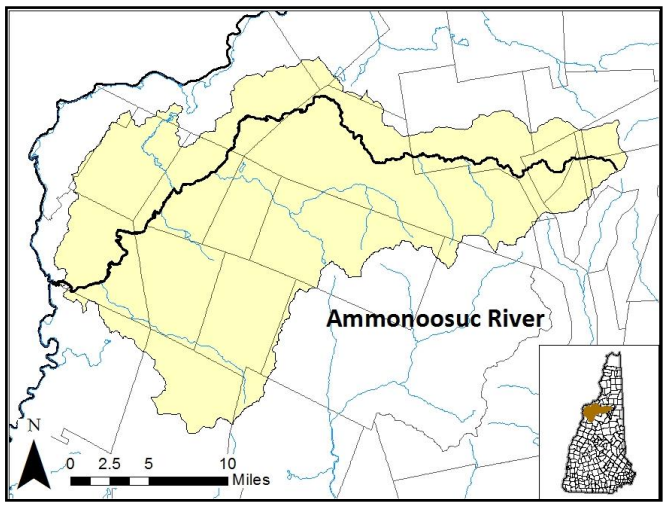
The Ammonoosuc River



The Ammonoosuc River begins at the Lake of the Clouds on the western slopes of Mount Washington and flows approximately 60 miles west through the town of Carroll to Bethlehem Junction, north to Littleton, and southwest through Lisbon, Landaff and Bath, to its confluence with the Connecticut River at Woodsville, in the town of Haverhill. The lower portion of the river, from the White Mountain National Forest boundary in Carroll to the Connecticut River, was designated into the New Hampshire Rivers Management and Protection Program in 2007. The upper reaches, within the national forest, were added to the program in 2009. The Ammonoosuc River watershed drains an area of approximately 400 square miles. The entire Ammonoosuc River offers a spectacular and varied scenic and cultural vista, which makes it highly valued by the surrounding communities, making local planning and protection efforts a priority.

The Ammonoosuc River corridor contains a number of historical sites including historic buildings and archeological sites. Due to the watershed's largely undeveloped landscape, proximity to the White Mountain National Forest, and highly diverse natural communities, the river corridor also boasts a large variety of wildlife and plant species. Several recreation areas along the Ammonoosuc River allow access to the river for fishing, boating, hiking and other activities.

History

Ammonoosuc is an Abenaki word for "fish place." Before the first European settlers, the Abenaki fished and camped along the river, netting fish in the narrow river bends such as Salmon Hole. Six archaeological sites containing evidence of the presence of Native American populations have been documented in the river corridor.

Several historic buildings dating from the mid-1700s to the mid-1800s are located within the Ammonoosuc River corridor. Notably, seven buildings are listed on the National Register of Historic Places, including the Bath Brick Store, the Bath Foodall-Woods Law Office, the Bath Jeremiah Hutchins Tavern, the Lisbon Inn, Littleton's Lane House, the Littleton Opera House, and Littleton's post office. Additionally, the Cog Railway, built in 1869, still operates today and is one of New Hampshire's most recognizable tourist attractions.

Geology

The Ammonoosuc River watershed lies within the Connecticut River watershed and was once part of the great Glacial Lake Hitchcock. The Connecticut River watershed is internationally renowned as a glacial geology

research site for the study of sediment deposition that occurred in Glacial Lake Hitchcock as the ice sheet receded. Glacial till and glacial outwash deposits were the two major types of material deposited in this area. Outwash deposits are important economically for mining purposes, and also serve as major groundwater-recharge areas.

Wildlife, Habitat and Vegetation

The Ammonoosuc River supports an extremely diverse habitat comprised of forest, wetlands and open space that is home to a variety of wildlife. Its floodplains, wetlands and large sections of unfragmented lands are critical habitat areas that offer important wildlife benefits. Several threatened or endangered wildlife species are found in the Ammonoosuc River watershed, including the state-threatened bald eagle, peregrine falcon and American marten. The river is also home to the state-endangered upland sandpiper and brook floater (mollusk), in addition to the federally endangered dwarf wedge mussel. The resident osprey and northern bog lemming are species of special concern. The Ammonoosuc River originates in the alpine habitat at an elevation of 5,018 feet above sea level. In this habitat, unique plant communities, extreme climate and isolation lead to rare, sometimes site-specific, species such as the state-endangered White Mountain fritillary butterfly. The Ammonoosuc River also provides habitat for at least 15 resident cold and warm water fish species.

Many exemplary natural ecological communities exist within the Ammonoosuc River corridor, with most related to special forested or forested wetland environments. The New Hampshire Natural Heritage Inventory lists 20 state-endangered plant species as occurring along the Ammonoosuc River. Among these are Boott's rattlesnake-root, chestnut sedge, Robbins' cinquefoil, green dragon, Kalm's brome, bristly rose, wavy blue grass, and hairy-eared rockcress. In addition, there are 15 known plant species that are listed at the state level as threatened.

Recreation

The Ammonoosuc River is a high quality fishery for both cold and warm water species and, according to the New Hampshire Fish and Game Department, is suitable for wild, self-sustaining populations of brook trout. The river has been stocked with Atlantic salmon as well as rainbow, brook and brown trout.

The Appalachian Mountain Club's *New Hampshire/Vermont River Guide* and the *New England Whitewater Guide* identify the Ammonoosuc River as offering a wide variety of opportunities for canoe and kayak paddlers of all skill levels. Public access for fishing, kayaking, canoeing and swimming can be found in many places.

Publicly owned recreation areas include the White Mountain National Forest Zealand Mountain trails in Carroll, the town park in Lisbon, Dells Park in Littleton, the Bath Covered Bridge Picnic Area, and many state and federal snowmobile trails. These areas offer a mix of recreational opportunities including hiking, nature study, picnicking, swimming, boating, team athletics and snowmobiling. The Mount Washington Resort and Bretton Woods ski area offer opportunities for alpine and cross country skiing as well as horseback riding and hiking.

Land Use

Overall, the landscape is largely undeveloped; however, the Ammonoosuc River valley has experienced a substantial increase in the number of commercial and residential uses in recent years with population growth exceeding projections. Interstate 93 and Route 302, which parallels the river for most of its length, make the area easily accessible for large and small-scale commercial development. There is growing concern about the impact of development on the highly valued river corridor as much of the land has been zoned for development.

For More Information

For further 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.