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The New Hampshire Lakes Management and Protection Program

The lakes of New Hampshire mean different things to different people, but to all of us, the nearly 1,000 lakes and great ponds are symbolic of the state's unique natural beauty. Human presence in and around the waters of the state has grown significantly in this century. The Granite State's lakes provide various uses and values which cannot be overlooked. The increased pressure placed on the state's lakes from development has resulted in the need for an active, multidisciplinary management approach to secure the wise management and preservation of New Hampshire lakes.



Recognizing the impacts of human activities and the potential financial consequences if the quality of New Hampshire's lakes deteriorates, the legislature established the Lakes Management and Protection Program (Lakes Program) with the passage of [RSA 483-A](#). The program established the Lakes Coordinator and the Lakes Management Advisory Committee (LMAC), which advises the NHDES Commissioner and the Lakes Coordinator in carrying out the purposes of the statute. The advisory committee is comprised of 19 members representing state agencies, municipalities, the conservation community, marine trades, tourism, real estate, business and industry interests, and academia. The numerous projects and products of the Lakes Program encompass the broad spectrum of lakes management.

Why is lake management important?

The goal of lake management is to balance the multiple uses of lakes and ponds while also protecting the health of the lake. For example, lakes used as drinking water supplies should not allow swimming near the water supply intake due to the possibility of introducing contaminants. Similarly, wildlife viewing and boating are important to many New Hampshire residents and visitors, but boating near loon nests endangers the birds. The interrelation between human activities and environmental quality places unique and complicated demands on lakes and ponds, and these demands often conflict. Lake management proposes compromises that allow multiple uses of our lakes.

The following illustrate the diversity of ways that lake management is being pursued or has been achieved by the Lakes Program.

Cooperation Among State Agencies and Organizations

The central purpose of the Lakes Program is to promote communication and coordinated action among the many stakeholders who use New Hampshire's lakes. In support of this goal, on February 24, 2006, former Governor John Lynch convened the first *New Hampshire State Agency Lakes Forum*. The purpose of the forum

was to bring together state agencies with lake-related responsibilities and statewide lake organizations to identify better ways to coordinate efforts and preserve and improve the state's lakes and ponds. During the meeting, participants identified eleven current and critical topic areas and 41 action items related to lake management. The Lakes Forum provided opportunities for state agencies to examine overlapping jurisdictions and more effectively coordinate and communicate about lake issues.

Over a decade later, the Lakes Coordinator continues to act as a liaison and facilitator to promote and maintain communication and cooperative efforts between state agencies and other relevant organizations when lake or pond resources may be impacted. In one ongoing example, the Lakes Program has brought together three divisions within NHDES, three additional state agencies, a lake association, a private wildlife organization, a university, and EPA New England to address contaminants in one New Hampshire lake.

Technical Assistance

Since its inception, another cornerstone of the Lakes Program has been the technical assistance it provides to private interests and the general public on lake-related issues. The Lakes Coordinator meets with private citizens, lake associations, and municipalities across the state to provide guidance on water quality, shoreland development, and lake management.

Among the tools developed by the Lakes Program to assist the public with lake management are two guidance documents on how to conduct a lake inventory and then use the information collected to develop a lake management and shoreland protection plan. They are designed to provide municipalities and lake associations with the information they need to develop and apply lake and watershed management plans at the grassroots level. The process of developing a management plan leads to the creation of cooperative partnerships between federal, state, and local agencies, as well as between lake associations, municipalities, landowners, and the general public. Developing a management plan can also promote environmentally responsible use of a watershed's land and water resources.

Setting Statewide Policy on Lake-Related Issues

The LMAC annually reviews existing and proposed legislation and rules, and offers testimony to the General Court on lake-related legislation and to state agencies on changes to rules. When appropriate, the LMAC also proposes legislation for consideration by the General Court.

Recreational Use Conflicts

NHDES and the LMAC work in cooperation with numerous agencies and organizations to determine that the recreational uses of lakes are consistent with the carrying capacity and character of each waterbody in the state. Optimizing the use of surface waters, while minimizing the impacts to the resource and conflicts among users, is an increasingly important issue in New Hampshire. An early example of successful cooperation was the *New Hampshire Clean Marine Engine Initiative*, where marine dealers voluntarily agreed to set sales goals for low pollution two- and four-stroke engines. New Hampshire's program earned an EPA Environmental Merit Award and set the example for a region-wide program.

The LMAC is currently working closely with its sister organization, the Rivers Management Advisory Committee, and the New Hampshire Instream Flow Program to protect instream flows in order to balance the needs of human and wildlife use of rivers and lakes. Because instream flow management can include releases of water from impoundments during extended periods of low flow, the LMAC has worked with the Instream Flow Program to place limits on releases from lakes that protect fish, nesting loons, hibernating turtles, and boaters.

For More Information

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