

ENVIRONMENTAL Fact Sheet



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The Pemigewasset River

The Pemigewasset River's headwaters are in Profile Lake in New Hampshire's Franconia Notch State Park. The river cascades through the park where crystal clear waterfalls and elevation drops such as the Flume and the Basin attract thousands of visitors each year. The river eventually widens as it flows south along its almost 70-mile route to Franklin, where it joins with the Winnepesaukee River to form the Merrimack River. The watershed drains approximately 1,000 square miles. Since 1991, the entire river, except a 10-mile segment through Lincoln and Woodstock, has been protected under the New Hampshire Rivers Management and Protection Program. As the majority of the river's corridor is undeveloped, the natural resources of the area and river are of especially high quality.

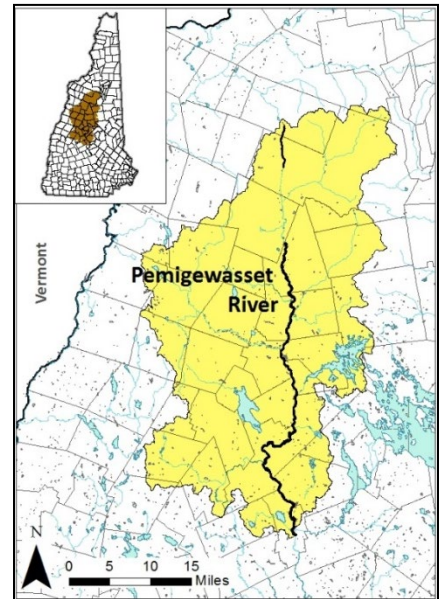
Geology

The southern Pemigewasset River valley was once part of the great glacial Lake Merrimack, which extended north from Manchester to Plymouth. Dunes, deltas, and terraces from the glacier have left sand deposits, sometimes reaching 100 feet deep, in the valley. The glacier also left large outcroppings, basins, and gorges throughout the northern Pemigewasset River Valley. One particularly unique metamorphosed section of rock through Livermore Falls was first discovered in 1879. This rock, Camptonite, named after the town of Campton in which it was found, is of unusual chemical composition. Geologists from around the globe have since discovered this rock type in other regions, and it continues to be called Camptonite throughout the world.

History

Numerous Native American tribes passed along the Pemigewasset River, mainly from the Algonquin group. The name Pemigewasset comes from an Abenaki word meaning approximately "swift current and where the side (entering) current is." Trails, campsites and tools of these indigenous people have been discovered along the river, illustrating historical uses of the river. As settlers moved north into the valley during colonial times, logging and paper mills flourished. The Pemigewasset River was a highly valued resource to settlers, who used it to transport logs to various mills downstream. Due to the influx of population to the area, the Pumpkin Seed Bridge at Livermore Falls was built in 1885. The single remaining span of this once double-span bridge is a unique example of bridge engineering, as it is the only double-bow truss bridge formed by curved upper and lower chords in New Hampshire.

Several sites within the Pemigewasset River corridor are listed on the National Historic Register, including the Minot-Sleeper Library in Bristol and the Daniel Webster family home site in Franklin. Another notable historic site is the Grafton County Courthouse in Plymouth, which has been relocated three times since its construction in 1774, and is the site where Daniel Webster, the 19th century US Senator and Secretary of State, earned his first lawyer's fee.



Wildlife, Habitat and Vegetation

The Pemigewasset River corridor is ideally suited to support numerous wildlife species as it is primarily undeveloped, except through the towns of Plymouth and Franklin. Native flora benefits from silt deposits left by recurring flooding. Native plants such as elderberry, blueberry, and shadbush provide an important food source for deer, bear, and birds. Common wildlife includes black ducks, wood turtles, eastern forktail damselfly, slaty skimmer dragonfly, North American beaver, otter, and bullfrogs. Endangered birds that depend on the river and its banks for nesting or feeding include the golden eagle, upland sandpiper, northern harrier, sedge wren and common nighthawk. The peregrine falcon and common loon are two of the threatened wildlife species that rely on the river and its resources, which also hosts species of special concern such as the bald eagle.

Recreation

The Pemigewasset River provides scenic vistas for residents and tourists throughout the valley. The White Mountains in all their grandeur surround the natural beauty of the northern reaches of the river. Notable scenic locations along the river are the Flume, an 800-foot gorge, the Basin, a 20-foot diameter pothole, and the site of the former Old Man of the Mountain, still used as the state's symbol. One of the most outstanding scenic values on the river is Livermore Falls Gorge, located in Campton. This gorge boasts the river's largest falls, with a drop of 50 feet. Hiking and camping opportunities also exist along the river. The Pemi Loop, rated as the second hardest day hike in America, offers 31.5 miles of rugged climbing, featuring eight wide open summits on the list of New Hampshire's 48 4,000+ foot mountains. Opportunities for less strenuous hiking, mountain biking, horseback riding, snowmobiling, cross country skiing, snowshoeing, and dog sled running exist within the river corridor on numerous trails maintained by the US Army Corps of Engineers, New Hampshire Division of Forests and Lands and New Hampshire Heritage Trail Program. Numerous campgrounds are located along the river from Franconia Notch State Park to Franklin, providing a full spectrum of camping experiences. The only Nicklaus-designed golf course in New Hampshire is also located within the river corridor in Thornton.



Swimming and Boating

Canoeing, tubing, whitewater rafting and kayaking are popular boating activities on the Pemigewasset River. The river offers whitewater, quick water and flat water experiences for boaters of all levels. Ayers Island, an eight-mile section of rapids with flow ensured by the Ayers Island Hydro Dam, attracts numerous whitewater enthusiasts during spring, summer and fall to paddle the Class II rapids or surf Rodeo Hole. Canoeists and fishermen frequently use bridge crossings as informal access points to the river. Also, there are five public boat launches on the river in Bristol, Franklin, Holderness and Plymouth, as well as cartop launch areas, shore bank access points and walk-in fishing sites. A large portion of the river is shallow and flows over a gravel bed bordered by wide gravel and sand beaches. The river offers many good spots for swimming with a few deep swimming holes complete with a rope swing.

Fishing

Of the approximately ten fish species the Pemigewasset River supports, eastern brook trout (squaretails) are among the most popular species sought by anglers. The New Hampshire Fish and Game Department stocks the Pemigewasset annually with trout. Southern segments of the river are used by New Hampshire's numerous bass clubs for their annual tournaments, while the river above Livermore Falls provides excellent habitat for trout. Fish passages at Eastman Falls, Ayers Island Hydro Dam and the Franklin Falls Dams promote passage of trout.

For More Information

For further information, visit the [New Hampshire Rivers Management and Protection page](#) on the NHDES website, or contact the Rivers Coordinator, 29 Hazen Drive; PO Box 95; Concord, NH 03302-0095; [\(603\) 271-2959](tel:6032712959); riversprogram@des.nh.gov.