

ENVIRONMENTAL Fact Sheet



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The Cold River

The headwaters of the Cold River are nestled in the hills of Acworth and Unity at Crescent Lake. Along the Cold River's 23.5-mile course, it drops nearly 980 feet through a mostly rural landscape interspersed with small villages, which contribute to the river's vitality and uniqueness. The Cold River's inaugural plunge from the east side of Crescent Lake lacks the grandeur of the animated river the Cold is known to be, but soon after leaving the lake, the stream is joined by several tributaries and more than doubles in size. The river drains a watershed of approximately 100 square miles.

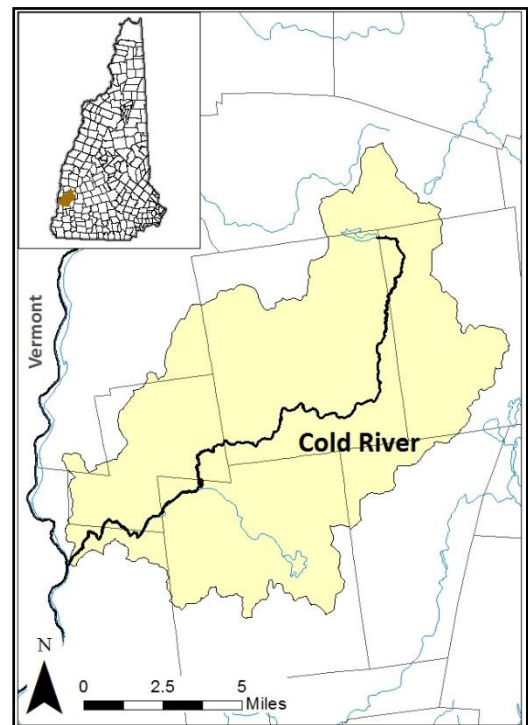
Geology

The river's character changes little as it works its way through several marshes and woodland areas but when it reaches South Acworth, the river valley becomes steep and narrow as it plunges 60 feet in 0.2 miles over two significant waterfalls. The first fall is located downstream of a breached millpond dam at Beryl Mountain Road, while the second pours between two pillars of rock into a formation known as Deep Hole. After Deep Hole, until its confluence with the Connecticut River, the average gradient of the Cold River is 40 feet/mile. From there, it passes under McDermott Covered Bridge and enters Vilas Pool, an impoundment at the head of a small gorge. The river broadens as it leaves the gorge and enters the town of Alstead. After several miles, the valley walls close once again as the Cold River rushes into Drewsville Gorge, where cliffs rising 25 feet from the river's edge surround several waterfalls. Below the gorge, the Cold River scoops up deep deposits of sand and gravel, which are laid out in a large sand bar as the river finally sweeps into the larger and slower Connecticut River.

History

The history of the Cold River is as intriguing to historians as the lure of the rapids is to kayakers. Throughout history, activity has been abundant within the river corridor. Some of the earliest visitors to the river were the Native Abenaki people, who lived in the Cold and Connecticut River Valleys and made encampments along the river during the fishing season. Later, the area was an industrial center housing mills, which processed trees, wool, corn, grain, apples and clay into products to be shipped by rail to population centers. Though none of the mills remain operational, several footings of buildings show their location and mark the size of the operations that attracted many people to the area.

Throughout the river corridor, stone bridges span small tributaries and stone walls remain bordering long overgrown fields. The McDermott Covered Bridge, spanning the Cold River in the town of Langdon, is listed on the National Register of Historic places.





Wildlife, Habitat and Vegetation

Due to the steeply sloped topography and narrow roads of the Cold River watershed, the area has been largely untouched by modern influences, which makes the region excellent habitat for numerous wild animals. Residents along the river often report sightings of wild turkeys, mossback snapping turtles and weasels. In the wetlands surrounding the river, canoeists can view herons and numerous other waterfowl along with moose, deer, otters and beavers. The wetland areas are also home to balsam fir, a rarity in Southern New Hampshire, and alder thickets that provide excellent habitat for scores of wildlife.

The state-listed threatened bald eagle and peregrine falcon have been sighted at the mouth of the river along with many other raptors such as the osprey, a state-listed species of special concern, and the Cooper's hawk, a skillful woodland flier. The New Hampshire Natural Heritage Bureau also has records of several state-listed plant species located within the river corridor, including the eastern waterleaf, Fogg's goosefoot, licorice goldenrod and the Virginia stickseed. The rocky landscape of the watershed offers desirable habitat for the state-listed endangered timber rattlesnake.

Recreation

The Cold River is recognized as a stimulating course for both novice and expert paddlers. Canoeists and kayakers will find Class II and III rapids for running during spring high water. With the Cold River's steep banks, swift current, and the region's severe winters, the river's natural flow dynamics ensure that one year's run will never duplicate another.

In winter, the river sometimes serves as a flat run for cross country skiers and snowmobilers, while the steep rock faces provide the more adventurous souls with an expanse of exhilarating ice climbing. In summer, tubing down the river is a popular past time. Several informal swimming holes have been established along the length of the river while a formal, town-managed beach and recreation area can be found at the historic Vilas Pool in Alstead. Venturing out of the river corridor, a hiker will find several trails meandering close to fallen stonewalls and foundations, whispering reminders of time gone by.

Fishing

Roadside put-ins and bridges along with wooded and wetland areas make the Cold River a favorite fishery for cold water anglers. The many pools and undercutts of the river provide an ideal nursery for juvenile Atlantic salmon and protective cover for trout. Naturally-reproducing cold water species found in the river include blacknose dace, common shiner, longnose sucker and native brook trout. Northern redbelly dace, a state-listed species of concern, can also be found.



For More Information

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