



The State of New Hampshire
Department of Environmental Services



Robert R. Scott, Commissioner

January 16, 2024

The Honorable Andrew Renzullo
Chair, House Resources, Recreation and Development Committee
LOB Room 305-307
Concord, NH 03301

RE: HB 1060, An Act relative to establishing a geologic resources committee

Dear Chair Renzullo and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on HB 1060. The New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services requested this legislation and fully supports the bill.

The New Hampshire Geological Survey (NHGS) at NHDES receives annual federal funding from the United States Geological Survey (USGS) National Cooperative Geologic Mapping Program (NCGMP) to collect geologic information about the state's surficial materials deposits and bedrock. Geologic maps produced and made available through this funding by NHGS are fundamental to the mission of NHDES to safeguard New Hampshire's natural resources. The maps also address natural hazard mitigation, disaster management, engineering, health, municipal planning, consulting and private citizen needs that requires knowledge of what lies underground. The federal funds support both contract geologic mappers to perform field investigations, while also supporting personnel within NHGS to compile and make the maps and data available to state agencies, and the public. NHGS' annual proposals to USGS NCGMP have been effective and score highly at the federal level.

The federal law governing the NCGMP mandates that states applying for, and receiving program funding, have a state mapping advisory committee that determines the state's mapping plan and must vote on each year's mapping proposal. In New Hampshire, this function has been provided by the Geologic Resources Advisory Committee (GRAC), which has incorporated users of geologic mapping products. Since 1992, when the NCGMP was enacted into federal law, GRAC has functioned in an ad hoc manner.

In 2021, NHDES examined the composition of GRAC to broaden representation and address future geologic mapping needs. During this review, the department's legal counsel found that the functioning of GRAC was inconsistent with RSA 21-G:11. This RSA, which governs advisory committees, indicates that an agency Commissioner, with approval by the Governor, may create advisory committees. To fulfill the intent of this law, I officially created GRAC, and the Governor appointed the members from organizations representing the primary users and sectors of geologic maps. These organizations are each represented within the current language of this bill. This process was completed in 2022. However, RSA 21-G:11 requires advisory committees to terminate after 3 years, unless continued by legislative action. GRAC, as created under RSA 21-G:11, will terminate on June 30, 2025. Without legislative action, GRAC will cease to exist, and New Hampshire will no longer have the required committee to discuss and vote on grant proposals and qualify for federal geologic mapping program funding.

Through this program, New Hampshire has completed detailed surficial materials mapping for 67% of the state's land area, with 23% for detailed bedrock mapping. Continuance of this geologic mapping is crucial for NHDES' conservation goals. During the past two years, GRAC has prioritized mapping in populated areas that have not yet been mapped at a detailed scale, maximizing benefits to the needs and people of New Hampshire.

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It should be noted that the language of HB 1060 that governs the functions of GRAC are designed to ensure consistency with the requirements for each state's mapping advisory committee, as directly outlined in the federal law that governs the NCGMP. This is specifically referenced in the bill.

In conclusion, NHDES fully supports HB 1060. Passage of this bill will allow GRAC to fulfill its role as New Hampshire's state mapping advisory committee to comply with USGS NCGMP statutory requirements and allow the state to continue to qualify for and receive federal funds to continue this work to meet the state's needs, while ensuring compliance with the state law governing advisory committees.

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment on HB 1060. Should you have questions or need additional information, please feel free to contact Shane Csiki, State Geologist and Director of NHGS at Shane.J.Csiki@des.nh.gov, or (603) 271-1975.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert R. Scott", with a long, sweeping horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Robert R. Scott
Commissioner

cc: Sponsors of HB 1060: Representatives Aron and Bixby, and Senators Avard and Watters