



Environmental Dashboard

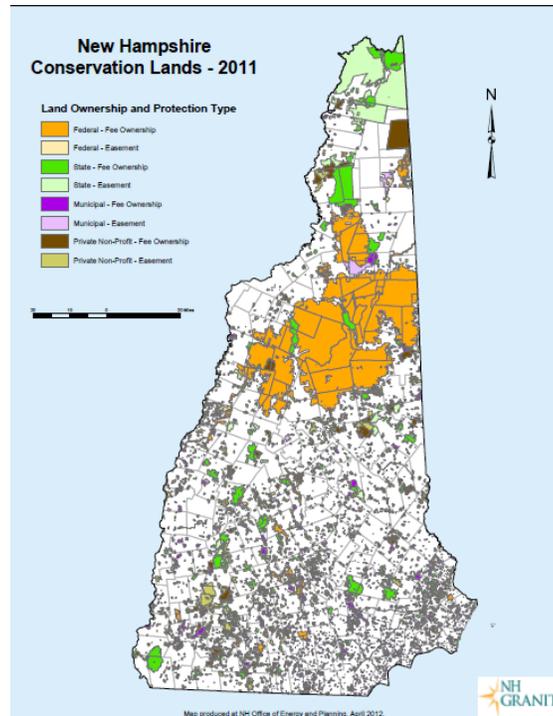
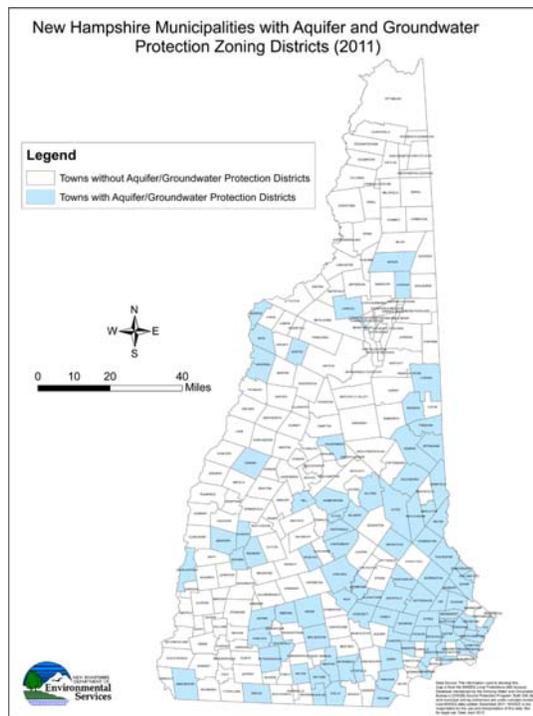


Trends in New Hampshire's Environment Drinking Water: Groundwater Protection

Approximately 60% of the state's population relies on drinking water drawn from underground aquifers. Protecting groundwater as a clean source of drinking water is vitally important to public health now and long into the future. Even very small quantities of contaminants within groundwater may render it unhealthy and unsuitable for human consumption. Once contaminated, it is difficult if not nearly impossible to clean up an aquifer; therefore, preventing groundwater contamination and ensuring that precipitation soaks into the ground to recharge local aquifers is of critical importance. This is primarily accomplished through local land use policies and land conservation.

Current Condition

Ninety municipalities, or less than 40% of the state's municipalities, have adopted groundwater/aquifer protection zoning ordinances to protect groundwater from contamination. Further, it is estimated that only 20-25% of the land area overlying highly productive aquifers is permanently protected through land conservation.



SOURCES: DES Drinking Water and Groundwater Bureau. State Office of Energy and Planning.

Explanation of Indicator and Trend

Land conservation protects sensitive landscapes, including land areas overlying highly-productive aquifers. The Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests estimates that only 20-25% of the land area overlying highly-productive aquifers is permanently protected through land conservation. However, encroaching roads and land development is reducing suitable land over highly-productive aquifers suitable for developing new large municipal wells

Researchers estimate that within the next 25 years, southeastern New Hampshire will be built-out, meaning that all available land not conserved will be developed. Since 2006, over 250,000 acres of land have been conserved across the state; however, most of this newly conserved land is part of the White Mountain National Forest. With land conservation resources dwindling in recent years, the overall pace of land conservation has slowed. Nevertheless, efforts continue throughout the state to protect valuable drinking water resources.

How Does DES Address This?

The DES Drinking Water Source Protection Program provides technical and financial assistance and enforces state regulations that serve to protect the state's sources of drinking water. Effective protection, however, relies on the combined efforts of the state, water suppliers, municipalities, businesses, institutions and individuals whose activities have the potential to affect source water quality. Since 2006, 20 communities have adopted new groundwater/aquifer protection ordinances, and many of these ordinances utilize DES's Model Groundwater Protection Ordinance.

For More Information, Including What You Can Do to Help

- DES Drinking Water Source Protection Program
<http://des.nh.gov/organization/divisions/water/dwgb/dwspp/index.htm>
- Map of groundwater protection
<http://des.nh.gov/organization/divisions/water/dwgb/dwspp/documents/groundwater-zoning.pdf>
- DES Drinking Water and Groundwater Bureau
<http://des.nh.gov/organization/divisions/water/dwgb/index.htm>
- Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan
http://www.nh.gov/oep/programs/recreation/SCORP_2008-2013/documents/SCORPCompleteReport.pdf
- Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests <http://www.forestsociety.org/>

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