

# ENVIRONMENTAL Fact Sheet



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## THE AMMONOOSUC RIVER

The Ammonoosuc River begins at the Lake of the Clouds on the western slopes of Mount Washington and flows approximately 60 miles west through the town of Carroll to Bethlehem Junction then north to Littleton and southwest through Lisbon, Landaff, and Bath to its confluence with the Connecticut River at Woodsville in the town of Haverhill. The Ammonoosuc River watershed drains an area of over 395 square miles. The entire Ammonoosuc River offers spectacular and varied scenic and cultural vistas.

The Ammonoosuc River corridor contains a number of historical interest sites including archeological sites and historical buildings. Due to its largely undeveloped landscape, proximity to the White Mountain National Forest and highly diverse natural communities the Ammonoosuc River boasts a large variety of wildlife and plant species. Several recreation areas along the Ammonoosuc River allow for a variety of recreational opportunities along the river, include fishing, boating and land-based activities. The Ammonoosuc River is highly valued by the surrounding communities as reflected by its inclusion in local planning and protection efforts.



### History

Ammonoosuc is an Abenaki word for “fish place”. Before the first white settlers, the Abenaki fished and camped along the river, netting fish in the narrow river bends, such as Salmon Hole. Six archaeological sites containing evidence of the presence of Native American populations have been documented in the river corridor.

Several historic buildings dating from mid to late 1700s and early to mid-1800s are located within the Ammonoosuc River corridor. Notably, seven buildings are listed on the National Register of Historic Places, including the Bath Brick Store, the Bath Foodall-Woods Law Office, the Bath Jeremiah Hutchins Tavern, the Lisbon Inn, Littleton’s Lane House, Littleton Opera House and Littleton’s post office. Additionally, the Cog Railway, built in 1869, still operates today and is one of New Hampshire’s most recognizable tourist attractions.

### Geology

The Ammonoosuc River watershed lies within the Connecticut River watershed and was once part of the great Glacial Lake Hitchcock. The Connecticut River watershed is internationally renowned as a glacial geology research site for the examination of sediment deposition that occurred in Glacial Lake Hitchcock as the ice sheet receded. Glacial till and glacial outwash deposits were the two major types of material deposited in this area. Outwash deposits are important economically for mining purposes, but they also serve as major groundwater-recharge areas.

## Wildlife and Vegetation

The Ammonoosuc River supports an extremely diverse habitat comprised of forest, wetlands, and open space that is home to a variety of wildlife. Its floodplains, wetlands, and large sections of unfragmented lands are critical habitat areas that offer important and often irreplaceable wildlife benefits. The NH Natural Heritage Inventory reports the presence of five threatened or endangered wildlife species in the Ammonoosuc River watershed, including the bald eagle, peregrine falcon, osprey, upland sandpiper and the state-threatened brook floater (mollusk). The Ammonoosuc River originates in the alpine habitat at an elevation of 5,018 feet above sea level. In this habitat, unique plant communities, extreme climate and isolation lead to rare, sometimes site-specific species such as the White Mountain Fritillary butterfly. The Ammonoosuc River also provides habitat for at least 15 resident cold and warm water fish species.

Many exemplary natural ecological communities exist within the Ammonoosuc River corridor; at least 29 have been identified with most related to special forested or forested wetland environments. The NH Natural Heritage Inventory lists eight state-endangered plant species as occurring along the Ammonoosuc River: Garber's sedge, chestnut sedge, Bosc's pigweed, green dragon, Kalm's brome-grass, prickly rose, hidden sedge and hairy rock-cress. In addition there are 30 known plant species that are listed at the state level as threatened.

## Recreation

The Ammonoosuc River is a high quality fishery for both cold and warm water species and according to NH Fish and Game Department the river is suitable for wild, self-sustaining populations of brook trout. The Ammonoosuc River is stocked annually with Atlantic salmon, rainbow, brook and brown trout.



The Appalachian Mountain Club's *New Hampshire/Vermont River Guide* and the *New England Whitewater Guide* identify the Ammonoosuc River as offering those who canoe and kayak a wide variety of opportunity and skill levels for their sport. Public access for fishing, kayaking, canoeing and swimming can be found almost anywhere along the river where there is not a private residence.

Publicly owned recreation areas include the White Mountain National Forest Zealand Mountain trails in Carroll, the town park in Lisbon, Dells Park in Littleton, the Bath Covered Bridge Picnic Area, and many state and federal snowmobile trails in every town. These areas offer a mix of recreational opportunities including hiking, nature study, picnicking, swimming, river access, recreational fields and snowmobile trails. The Mount Washington Resort and Bretton Woods ski area offer opportunities for alpine and cross country skiing as well as horseback riding and trail hiking.

## Land Use

The Ammonoosuc River valley is currently experiencing a development boom with increases in commercial and residential users and a population growth exceeding projections. The presence of Interstate-93 and Route 302, which parallels the river for most of its length, makes the area a desirable location for large and small-scale commercial development. There is growing concern about the impact of development on the river corridor. A rudimentary build-out analysis of the Ammonoosuc River corridor showed the corridor currently consisting of approximately 3,500 lots for an average lot size of 6.7 acres. Based on existing regulations, the number of lots in the corridor could double in the future if every non-protected area was subdivided. A 2001 study found that most of the land within 250 feet of the upper section of the Ammonoosuc River was zoned for commercial growth and concluded that this could have a significant impact on the ecology of the valley.

**For further information about the NH Rivers Management and Protection Program**, please visit the DES website at <http://des.nh.gov/organization/divisions/water/wmb/rivers/index.htm> or contact Steve Couture, Rivers Coordinator, 29 Hazen Drive, PO Box 95, Concord, NH 03302-0095; (603) 271-8801; [steven.couture@des.nh.gov](mailto:steven.couture@des.nh.gov).