

# ENVIRONMENTAL Fact Sheet



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## The Pemigewasset River

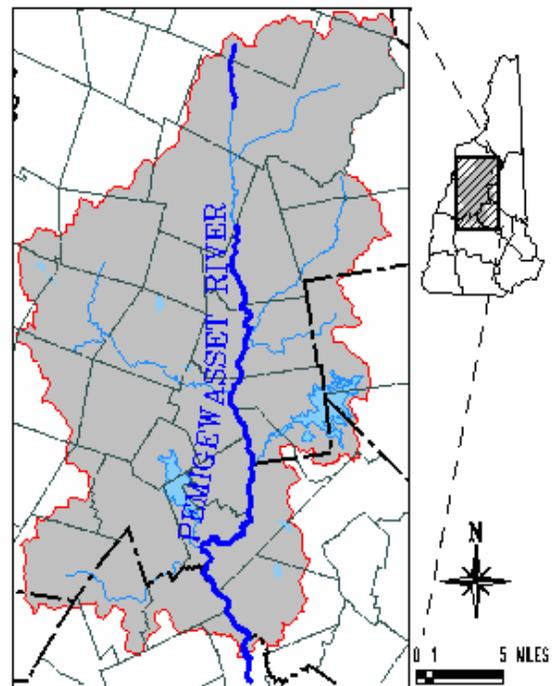
The Pemigewasset River's headwaters are in Profile Lake in New Hampshire's Franconia Notch State Park, at the base of the famed Old Man of the Mountain. The river cascades through the park where crystal clear waterfalls and elevation drops, such as the Flume and the Basin attract thousands of visitors each year. The river eventually widens as it moves southerly along its approximately 70 mile route to its confluence in Franklin with the Winnepesaukee River thereby forming the Merrimack River. The entire river, except a 10-mile segment through Lincoln and Woodstock, is protected under the New Hampshire Rivers Management and Protection Program as of June 1991. The watershed drains approximately 1,000 square miles. As the majority of the river's corridor is undeveloped, the natural resources of the area and river are of especially high quality. Due to these exemplary natural resources, the river was found eligible for inclusion in the federal Wild and Scenic Rivers Program.

### Geology

The southern Pemigewasset River valley was once part of the great glacial Lake Merrimack extending north to Plymouth from Manchester. Much of the remains of that glacial lake can be found today along the Pemigewasset River. Dunes, deltas and terraces from the glacier have left sand deposits, sometimes reaching 100 feet deep, in the valley. The glacier left large outcroppings, basins, and erratics (glacial boulders), throughout the northern Pemigewasset River Valley. Gorges, characterizing the river's name, which by Abenaki definition means "narrow and shallow swift current," are prevalent in northern reaches as well. 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

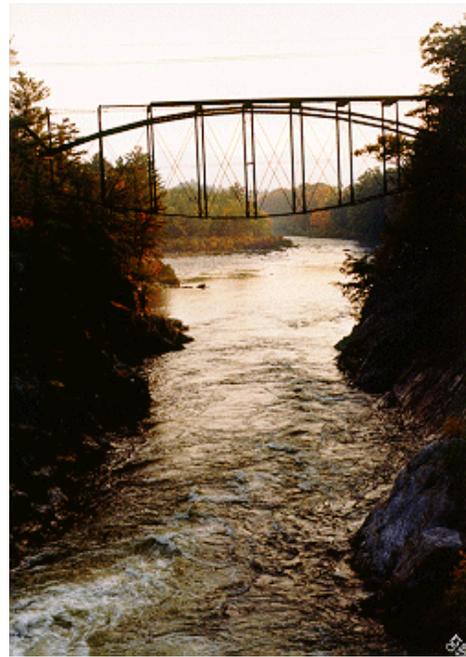
Numerous Native American tribes passed along the Pemigewasset River, mainly from the Algonquin group. Trails, campsites and tools of these indigenous people have been discovered along the river, presenting artifacts illustrating historical uses of the river. As settlers moved north into the valley during 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. A fine example of bridge engineering, necessary because of the influx of population to the area, is the Pumpkin Seed Bridge at Livermore Falls, built in 1885. One span of this once double-span bridge, which extends 263 feet, remains as 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**

The Pemigewasset River corridor is ideally suited to support numerous wildlife species as it is primarily undeveloped, except through the town of Plymouth. A 1987 US Forest Service report listed 19 amphibian and reptile species, including the red spotted newt, snapping turtle and northern water snake, living in the Pemigewasset corridor. Endangered birds that depend upon the river and its banks for nesting and feeding include the golden eagle, upland sandpiper, peregrine falcon and the sedge wren. The bald eagle, osprey, northern harrier, common loon, common nighthawk, Cooper's hawk and purple martin are several of the threatened wildlife species that are also dependent on the river and its resources.



### **Recreation**

The Pemigewasset River provides scenic vistas for residents and tourists throughout the valley. Surrounding the natural beauty of the river, in the northern reaches, are the White Mountains in all their grandeur. As previously mentioned, and of considerable scenic value, are the Flume, an 800 foot gorge; the Basin, a 20 foot diameter pothole; and the Old Man of the Mountain, 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, having a drop of 50 feet.

Hiking and camping opportunities also exist along the Pemigewasset River. Sections of the New Hampshire Heritage Trail, a NH Division of Parks and Recreation program, create a trail connecting communities from Massachusetts to Canada, are complete in Plymouth and Franklin. Numerous campgrounds are located along the river from Franconia Notch State Park to Franklin, providing a full spectrum of camping experiences.

**Boating.** Canoeing and kayaking are popular boating activities on the Pemigewasset River. The river offers whitewater, quick water and flat water experiences for boaters. Ayers Island, an eight-mile section of rapids with flow ensured by Public Service of New Hampshire in Bristol and New Hampton, attracts numerous whitewater enthusiasts during spring, summer and fall. Canoeists and fishermen frequently use bridge crossings as informal access points to the river, as the only public boat launch on the river is located in Bristol at the Rte. 104 bridge.

**Fishing.** Of the approximately ten fish species the Pemigewasset River supports, Atlantic salmon, bass, and trout are among the most popular species sought by anglers. 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. Atlantic salmon are being restored to the Pemigewasset River through a joint project of the US Fish and Wildlife Service and the states of New Hampshire and Massachusetts. Completed fish passages are used by both Atlantic salmon and trout at Eastman and Ayers Islands and at the Franklin Flood Control Dam. Atlantic salmon fry are also stocked into the river's main stem and its tributaries each year as part of the restoration effort.

**For further information** about the NH Rivers Management and Protection Program, see [www.des.nh.gov/rivers](http://www.des.nh.gov/rivers), or contact Jacquie Colburn, Rivers Coordinator, at (603) 271-2959 or [jacquie.colburn@des.nh.gov](mailto:jacquie.colburn@des.nh.gov).