

ENVIRONMENTAL Fact Sheet



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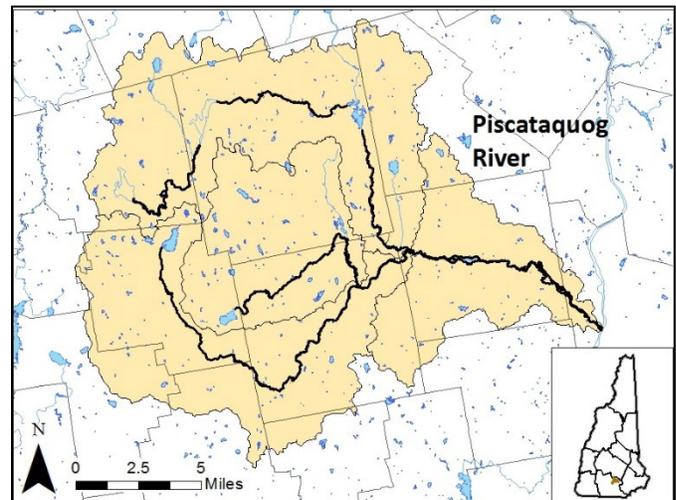
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The Piscataquog River

The Piscataquog River consists of three branches, the South, Middle, and North, which together were designated into the New Hampshire Rivers Management and Protection Program in July 1993. These branches run through the south-central New Hampshire communities of Deering, Frankestown, Lyndeborough, New Boston, Weare, Goffstown and Manchester. Despite its proximity to Manchester, the Piscataquog River is predominantly a quiet stream. With a total length of approximately 63 miles, the river is free flowing for 96 percent of its length and drains approximately 220 square miles.

Much of the land along the river is protected and open to the public, providing many recreational and educational opportunities as well as excellent water quality. During the spring high waters, the river is frequently utilized for canoeing and kayaking and is said to be an ideal training ground for beginning whitewater enthusiasts. The summer offers fishing in the private pools and along deep, forest-lined stretches of riffles. Sites hosting remnants of early colonial commerce line the river's banks.



Open Space Protection

Since 1985, the Piscataquog Land Conservancy (formerly the Piscataquog Watershed Association), the Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests, the New England Forestry Foundation, New Hampshire Audubon, riverfront towns, state agencies, private landowners and river stewards have worked to protect the watershed of the Piscataquog River. As a result, 4,356 acres along the river are protected as well as 8.5 percent of the open space within the Piscataquog Watershed. Large tracts of protected land are carefully managed for both timber production and protection of natural habitat.

Geology

The Piscataquog is rich in geologic formations, especially glacial deposits. Most notable is an esker train along four miles of the South Branch, following the remnants of a stream which once coursed through glacial ice. Other significant formations include glacial kettles, a gorge on the Lyndeborough/New Boston town line, and "the plains," a glacial deposit of sand and gravel which may have been the site of New Boston's first settlement. An ever-running natural spring southeast of the Lyndeborough/New Boston town line is another geologic highlight of the area.

History

Indigenous people used the Piscataquog as an important travel corridor, with trails running along the riverbank from Manchester to Frankestown. The river's name translates as "to the place of the dark river." Stands of large white pine and red oak attracted early settlers, with some of the massive trees reserved by the King of England

for British Navy ship masts. The Piscataquog River provided essential resources for these early inhabitants. In the late 1700s and into the 1800s, the primary colonial use of the river was as a source of power for numerous mills and shops. A site along the Piscataquog River holds claim to being home to the first shoe factory in the nation, which produced nearly 23,000 pairs of boots in its first year. Francestown, Deering, Weare, and New Boston still contain many reminders along the river's banks of their early history in the ruins of the water-powered mills and long-forgotten stone masons. The lower segment of the Piscataquog was an important link in the transportation of cargo around Manchester. Dam locks were built at the river's mouth in 1818 to facilitate boat passage to and from the Merrimack River.



Wildlife, Habitat and Vegetation

Due to the extensive natural and protected lands along the river, the Piscataquog supports diverse habitat for a wide variety of wildlife and plant species, including several endangered and threatened species. Bird species observed in the Piscataquog Watershed on the state endangered list include the northern harrier and common nighthawk. Those on the threatened species list include the common loon, pied-billed grebe, and peregrine falcon. In addition, the watershed is home to two state endangered reptiles, the eastern hognose snake and Blanding's turtle, and one state threatened species, the spotted turtle. The river also supports some of the world's finest populations of the state-listed endangered brook floater mussel.

Wildflowers deserving special protection within the Piscataquog Watershed include the small spike-rush, gall-of-the-earth, one-sided rush, piled-up sedge, and slender crabgrass. A plant species of particular distinction which inhabits the watershed is the small whorled pogonia. The largest-known populations of this perennial wildflower are found in central New Hampshire and Maine. Initially given federal listing as endangered in 1982, habitat protection efforts have allowed the species to be reclassified as threatened. Biologists hope that with continued landowner awareness and concern, the plant will continue to make a recovery.

Also of note in the watershed is a large ironwood community found along the banks of Dudley Brook and at its confluence with the Middle Branch of the Piscataquog River. The tree community is unusual in that this species does not normally cluster in such a massive group. Numerous wildlife species including wild turkey and ruffed grouse are attracted to the area for the nuts these trees produce.

Fishing

The Piscataquog River is a relatively steep gradient stream with a predominantly cobble and gravel substrate, dominated by riffle/pool habitat. The three branches of the Piscataquog River, together with its tributaries and lakes, provide both novice and experienced anglers with rewarding fishing. The river is considered one of the two most important salmon nursery tributaries in southern New Hampshire. With a variety of benthic habitats and several impoundments, the river supports both warm water fish species and trout.

Boating

The Piscataquog River is home to hundreds of boating enthusiasts. Whether it is on the secluded sections of the river or on the lakes, boaters can enjoy rural New Hampshire at its finest. Many of the numerous access points along the river include not only launch sites and parking, but also bathhouses, restrooms, and picnic areas.

For More Information

For further information, visit the New Hampshire [Rivers Management and Protection page](#) on the NHDES website, or contact the Rivers Coordinator at [\(603\) 271-2959](tel:6032712959) or riversprogram@des.nh.gov.