

ENVIRONMENTAL Fact Sheet



29 Hazen Drive, Concord, New Hampshire 03301 • (603) 271-3503 • www.des.nh.gov

WD-R&L-8

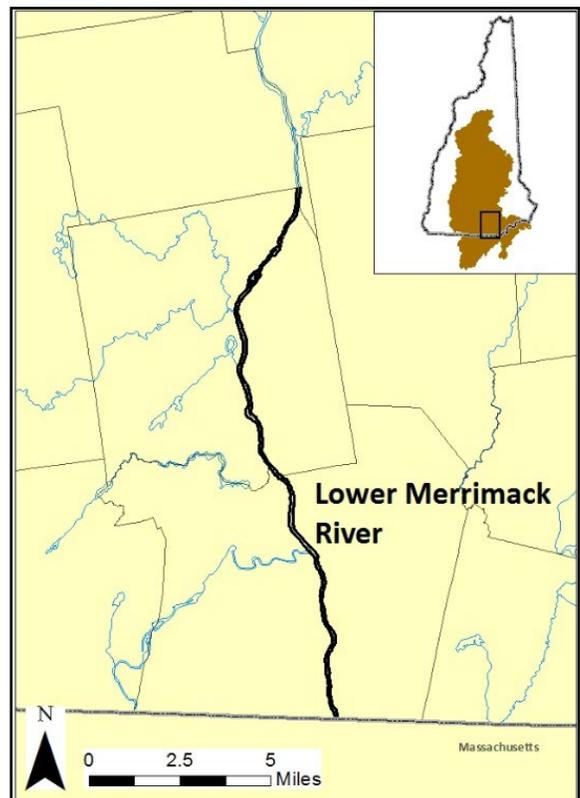
2023

The Lower Merrimack River

The Merrimack River is the second largest river in New England, draining an area of 5,014 square miles extending from the White Mountains region of New Hampshire to east-central Massachusetts. Approximately 3,550 square miles of drainage area are located in New Hampshire. The river, which bisects the lower third of New Hampshire, begins at the confluence of the Pemigewasset and Winnepesaukee Rivers in Franklin. It flows for 116 miles before entering the Atlantic Ocean in Newburyport, Massachusetts.

The lower Merrimack River is one of two segments of the river that was designated under the New Hampshire Rivers Management and Protection Program in June 1990, protecting nearly 45 miles of the river in New Hampshire. The lower Merrimack segment begins at the Merrimack-Bedford town line and flows for approximately 15 miles through the communities of Merrimack, Litchfield, Hudson and Nashua before entering Massachusetts.

The lower Merrimack River flows through a region of rapid population growth and development that is heavily influenced by the Boston metropolitan area. The river provides drinking water to the City of Nashua and surrounding towns as well as to Manchester upstream and communities in Massachusetts downstream, including the cities of Lowell and Lawrence.



History

The Merrimack River played a pivotal role in the settlement and subsequent development of the region. Native American sites, cellar holes, cemeteries, and the remains of a canal navigation system are among the prehistoric and historic sites present in the river corridor. Of particular interest are the Naticook Islands, just downstream of the Depot Street public access in Merrimack, which are said to have been the summer home of the great Native American Chief Passaconaway. Another historical highlight of the area is the locks at Cromwells Falls, renowned by The American Canal Society as the best remaining example of the Merrimack River Navigation System. In Litchfield, two archaeological sites have been deemed eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places: the Thebodeau site north of Chase Brook and the Danforth Archaeological District in south Litchfield.

Wildlife, Habitat and Vegetation

Though located in a region of rapid land development, the lower Merrimack River corridor contains critical habitat for a variety of plant and animal species, including the state species of concern bald eagles. New Hampshire Audubon, which records eagle sightings in New Hampshire, has found that the level of winter eagle activity on the Merrimack River is second only to that on Great Bay, a tidal estuary system on New Hampshire's

coast. As one of New England's major north-south running rivers, the Lower Merrimack River also serves as a key migratory route for waterfowl and songbirds.

In addition to birds, other species that make their homes in the lower Merrimack River corridor include the state-listed endangered New England cottontail rabbit, eastern hognose snake, Blanding's turtle, and Persius dusky wing butterfly. The wood turtle and the northern leopard frog are species of special concern in New Hampshire that can also be found near the river.



The New Hampshire Natural Heritage Inventory has identified several state-listed plant species within the river corridor, including the endangered long-spined sandbar and the threatened wild lupine and clasping milkweed. In addition, the river corridor supports two wetland natural communities: red maple floodplain forest and high-gradient rocky riverbank system.

Recreation

Efforts are under way to establish trail segments along the Lower Merrimack that would become part of the New Hampshire Heritage Trail, a trail that would connect to a proposed trail along the Merrimack River in Massachusetts and ultimately extend north along the Merrimack, Pemigewasset and Connecticut Rivers to the Canadian border. Several trail sections have been completed along this part of the river and northward, with existing segments in Nashua, Hooksett and Manchester.

Boating

Current boating activities on the Lower Merrimack River include canoeing, kayaking, rowing and motor boating. The river provides both quickwater and flatwater experiences for canoeists and kayakers and is one of the largest surface water bodies in the region for motor boating. Local watershed organizations sponsor a variety of paddling trips on the Merrimack and its tributaries throughout the spring, summer and fall for beginner and intermediate paddlers.

Just north of the designated segment, boaters can access the river at three public access sites in Manchester. Kayakers and whitewater canoeists may be lured to Arms Park, a city recreation area, located off North Commercial Street, as a whitewater slalom course exists at the site. In Merrimack, there is access at Depot Street (off Exit 12 on the Everett Turnpike) at Reeds Ferry. This access is suitable for motorboats, as the river slows from the rocky rapids upstream. A paved ramp at the north end of Greeley Park in Nashua has recently been upgraded and now includes ADA-approved access to the river for boaters.

Fishing

The Atlantic salmon restoration program in the Merrimack River watershed officially ended in 2013. Important game species sought by anglers on the Lower Merrimack River include small and large mouth bass as well as rainbow and brook trout, which are stocked by the New Hampshire Fish and Game Department. American eel and sea lamprey can also be found in the lower Merrimack River. Recommended fishing access to the river can be gained at Moore Falls in Litchfield, Greeley Park in Nashua, and both the Taylor Falls Bridge and Route 111 bridges between Hudson and Nashua.

For More Information

For further information, visit the [New Hampshire Rivers Management and Protection page](#) on the NHDES website, or contact the Rivers Coordinator, 29 Hazen Drive; PO Box 95; Concord, NH 03302-0095; [\(603\) 271-2959](tel:6032712959); riversprogram@des.nh.gov.