

Title: A New Preserve in Central New Hampshire.

Written By: Larry Spencer, Chair, Holderness Conservation Commission

Along the eastern shore of the Pemigewasset River, south of NH Route 175A between Holderness and Plymouth and north of the old White Mountain Country Club, is an area of floodplain containing several oxbows that represent places occupied by past passageways of the river. There are several owners of the properties composing the area; Plymouth State University, Irving Corporation, Holderness School, Plymouth Athletic Club, and Lakes Region Golf (four properties, one in Plymouth, one in Holderness, and two in Ashland). Members of the Holderness and Plymouth Conservation Commissions have long been concerned, since none of the properties have conservation easements and there hasn't been a realistic management plan for the area.

Several years ago, Larry Spencer, Chair of the Holderness Commission and Lisa Doner, Chair of the Plymouth Commission, became aware of an opportunity to submit a grant proposal to the US Land and Water Conservation Fund to conserve this important resource. An initial proposal was submitted but ran into problems at the federal level and was not granted. Then COVID-19 hit. Although we had mixed feelings about submitting the grant for a second go around, in the intervening time period we were made aware of the NH program called the Land Conservation and Heritage Investment Program (LCHIP) and decided that our proposal was a better fit for that program. We rewrote our proposal to fit the guidelines of LCHIP and were pleasantly surprised when notified in November of 2023 that we were awarded \$210,000 to match funds from both Holderness and Plymouth to purchase the four properties owned by Lakes Region Golf.

The properties total 223 acres, primarily in the Pemigewasset floodplain. Three of the properties are being purchased outright (one in Plymouth, one in Holderness and one in Ashland). The other is being donated by the owner of Lakes Region Golf, Philip Friel III, as matching funds. The Plymouth property has a large beach area on the Pemigewasset River and a riverine forest away from the river. The Holderness property consists of a field returning to a vegetative state and a mowed field that stretches from the river to the Interstate highway. One of the Ashland properties consists of a mowed field adjacent to the Interstate and the other property has some oxbow ponds and forests.

The area today is widely used by residents. Summertime users include mountain bikers, bird watchers and dog walkers. In the wintertime, use includes members of the Squam Trail Busters Snowmobile Club and folks either snowshoeing or cross-country skiing. The area has also been used by Plymouth State faculty for environmental studies. Because of the constant usage of the area, the two commissions have worried about the impact of humans on the natural ecosystem. As a permanently preserved conservation property, human use and preservation of the natural environment will be maintained in the preserve.

The two commissions are working closely with the Squam Lakes Conservation Society to address items on the due diligence list that need to be accomplished before the properties can be transferred from Lakes Region Golf to the Pemi Oxbow Preserve. These items include things such as title search, boundary marking, environmental assessment, natural history of the area, and a management plan. For the management plan the commissions will be involving the various stakeholders; the Pemi Area Local Advisory Committee, the NE Mountain Bike Association, the Squam Trail Busters Club, the local police, and members of the public. Our intent is to have all due diligence items completed so that transfer of the properties can take place before the end of June.