

Pemigewasset River Corridor Management Plan by Myrtle Lewis, Thornton Conservation Commission

The Pemigewasset River Corridor Management Plan was recently updated by collaboration of the Pemigewasset River Local Advisory Committee (PRLAC) and the Lakes Region Planning Commission. Here is what this means to you.

Most people will agree that good water quality in rivers in New Hampshire is important. Whether you spend summertime in the water swimming or kayaking, or if you appreciate the aesthetics of a beautiful river environment, this new Management Plan is important! The Plan is updated roughly every ten years. Since the last update, we have seen substantial changes in New Hampshire, including increases in housing, construction and recreational activities. Growth is often viewed as good, but some of these changes have caused negative impacts on the river water quality.

The Pemigewasset (Pemi) River roughly bisects central New Hampshire and flows 65 miles, through the White Mountain region and the Lakes region including the following towns: Franconia, Lincoln, Woodstock, Thornton, Campton, Holderness, Plymouth, Bridgewater, Ashland, New Hampton, Bristol, Hill, Sanbornton and Franklin. Its drainage area (watershed) is over one thousand square miles and includes many more towns along the Pemi's tributaries. What goes into the Pemi (silt, salt, pollution, warmer temperatures) is carried downstream, combining with the Winnepesaukee River, then the Merrimack River and, finally, the Atlantic Ocean.

Water quality in the Pemi generally meets Class B Standards, which are acceptable for fishing, swimming, and other recreational purposes, and as water supplies when adequate treatment is applied. As with all surface water in the state, the Pemi does not meet the standard for mercury. In addition, several sections of the Pemi are impaired for high acidity or low dissolved oxygen.

The updated Pemigewasset Corridor Management Plan is a 93 page report, so here are a few takeaways that apply to everyone who lives or spends time outside in Central New Hampshire, and especially those living near a stream or river. You can have a positive impact on water quality by following these practices:

- **Diversify Vegetation:** Keep naturally occurring, native plants and avoid growing a lawn along the shoreline. From tall grasses to shrubs and mature trees, roots stabilize the bank during high water events, which reduces shoreline erosion. Native plants also provide better habitats for fish and wildlife.
- **Extend the Riparian (River) Buffer:** As a rule, having a vegetation buffer between structures and the river is highly beneficial and, the wider the buffer, the more effective it is for protecting water quality and the more diverse a wildlife it supports: chickadees and cardinals need 50 ft, bobcats prefer 300 ft and bald eagles and heron need about 600 ft.
- **Bank Stabilization:** Let the stream take its natural course. Putting in rip-rap can make erosion worse, and shift it elsewhere on the river. Bank and shoreline stabilization projects that restore healthy and vegetated shoreline habitats help reduce erosion. Some organizations offer funds to support this kind of effort.
- **Septic System:** Maintain your septic system to reduce risk of pollution. Generally, you should pump your septic every three years and avoid driving, digging or building on your leachfield.

If you are interested in learning more about protecting the Pemi, you might want to attend the Pemigewasset River Local Advisory Committee (PRLAC) monthly meetings at the Pease Library (downstairs) on the last Tuesday of the month, starting at 6:30 pm. The public is welcome:

- PRAC is an advisory committee that informs towns, conservation commissions and the NH-

Department of Environmental Services.

- PRLAC duties include the review of construction projects within a half mile of the river, water quality monitoring in summer, and outreach activities. We don't enforce or regulate.
- Learn about our water monitoring program – perhaps join us along the river.
- For more information, contact Sherrill Howard, PRLAC Chair at golfmoms@gmail.com.

If you would like more details about the Pemigewasset River Management Plan, go to the Lakes Region Planning Commission website: <http://www.lakesrpc.nh.gov/> and select the PRLAC tab or use this QR code to go directly to the Corridor Management Plan:

Pemigewasset River Base Map

