

## People Love Their Rivers

By John Magee, Fisheries Habitat Biologist

Thirty years ago, there were few opportunities to provide a coordinated and local voice to protect New Hampshire's rivers. The passage of RSA 483 in 1988 established the Rivers Management and Protection Program (RMPP), a grass-roots effort to protect certain rivers for their outstanding natural and cultural resources. The program is administered by N.H. Department of Environmental Services (NHDES) staff, with assistance from the Rivers Management Advisory Committee (RMAC). As Fish and Game's Fish Habitat Biologist, I've been a non-voting member of the RMAC since 2004. I offer technical assistance to help the committee formulate solutions to issues affecting Designated Rivers and to empower local communities to help their rivers.

For a river to be included as "Designated," a formal public process must be followed that calls for extensive engagement by the communities in the river's watershed and approval by the Advisory Committee, the NHDES Commissioner, and the State Legislature. Community involvement is the real strength of the program. A volunteer Local Advisory Committee (LAC) is set up to develop and implement a River Management Plan to protect the outstanding qualities of the river. On my personal time, I have served for 16 years on the Piscataquog River LAC, so I've seen for myself how the program can help protect a community's special river.

Fish and Game has an obvious interest in this program because it helps provide greater protection and restoration of riverine habitat, water quality, and recreation on rivers. In addition, the inclusion of a river in the program provides recognition of its importance to local communities and makes it



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One of New Hampshire's 18 Designated Rivers, the Pemigewasset (above) flows south through the White Mountains from its headwaters at Profile Lake in Franconia Notch State Park. Signs such as the one at left identify Designated Rivers.



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more likely that projects to help the river will get funded. For example, stream crossings in the Piscataquog River watershed were assessed for their vulnerability to floods and to determine which ones impact the movement of aquatic animals throughout the watershed. This project helps communities reduce flood risks, precluding habitat impacts from erosion caused by flooding. It also helps restore the connections among riverine habitats, which is essential for healthy populations of aquatic animals.

A similar project in the Ammonoosuc River watershed was conducted in 2016 and 2017. (The Ammonoosuc has been a Designated River since 2007.) After floods devastated the Cold River watershed in 2005, substantial restoration work was done in Warren Brook, a major tributary of the Cold River, as a collaborative effort between the Town of Alstead, Cold River LAC, N.H. Fish

and Game, NHDES, and the N.H. Department of Transportation. River restoration and land conservation projects have been completed in the watersheds of several other rivers, in part because of their Designated River status and locally involved communities. N.H. Fish and Game staff have assisted with many of these efforts.

The River Management and Protection Program, with its focus on community involvement, supports local action and interest in protecting our rivers. The federal Wild and Scenic Rivers Program, which is coordinated by the National Park Service, is similar to New Hampshire's RMPP, but only two rivers, the Lamprey and Wildcat, are protected under the federal program. Of New Hampshire's nearly 11,000 miles of river, 38 miles are designated as Wild and Scenic.

As of March 2018, New Hampshire has 18 Designated Rivers covering 990 miles, and a nomination for the Warner River is being reviewed by the Legislature to add 20 more miles of river to the RMPP. As the program passes its 30-year milestone, it's wonderful to see more people in New Hampshire working together to protect our riverine resources.