



NATURAL RESOURCES in Central NH

INTRODUCTION

Many communities in the Central NH region define themselves by their connection to natural resources and how it supports rural character and quality of life. Open space, agriculture, recreational resources, water infrastructure, and conserved lands are all highly valued resources by residents of the Central NH region, and they depend on CNHRPC communities to expand and protect them throughout local decision-making processes.

In recent years, several communities have made strides to purchase and secure conserved lands, introduce new ordinances to protect natural features, and develop documentation of existing natural resources. As the Central NH region and the State as a whole face increased demand for development to meet other community needs, such as housing and economic development, incorporating planning and design guidelines that aim to reduce new impervious surfaces and preserve open space will help protect natural resources. See the [Regional Plan Tool Sheets](#) for details of strategies available.

FACTS TODAY

Indicator	In 2024
Acres in Conservation	98,774 (21.3% Total Land Acres)
Acres in Current Use	273, 856 (59.2% Total Land Acres)
Acres of Highest Ranked Habitat in NH	113,964 (24.6% Total Land Acres)
Acres of Prime Farmland	14,522 (3.1% Total Land Acres)
Designated Rivers	Upper Merrimack River (1990) Contoocook and North Branch Rivers (1991) Warner River (2018)
Communities Containing Unfragmented Block(s) (5000+ Acres)	Seventeen Communities
Communities with Wetlands Protection Ordinances	Fourteen Communities
Source(s): NH GRANIT, NHDES, CNHRPC Calculations	

More properties in the region are being put into conservation through easements, donations, or other agreements with conservation trusts, such as the Five Rivers Conservation Trust. **Trail networks have also expanded** due to the efforts of both local committees and landowners. Most of the region lives less than one mile from conserved lands.

WHAT WE ARE LEARNING ABOUT CENTRAL NH

In 2018, the Warner River became the newest **Designated River** under the NH Rivers Management and Protection Program, spurred by the efforts of the Warner Conservation Commission. As of 2026, **many communities now have wetland protection ordinances and/or groundwater protection districts.**

With higher temperatures and milder winters, some threats to natural resources have been able to spread farther or endure for longer parts of the year, such as cyanobacteria and milfoil in local water bodies or invasive species such as the hemlock woolly adelgid forested areas.

WHAT IS IMPROVING?

1 ___ More conservation of land and wildlife habitat.

The addition of conservation lands protects wildlife with unfragmented corridors and expands recreational resources for residents. Easements are held by communities or by land trusts.

2 ___ New protections for wetlands, aquifers, and rivers.

More communities have wetlands ordinances or aquifer protection ordinances help to protect water quality in local surface and drinking water resources. The Warner River was most recently designated as protected.

3 ___ Development of Natural Resource Inventories.

NRIs help communities to identify priority areas for future conservation, along with potential zoning ordinances to protect natural resources.

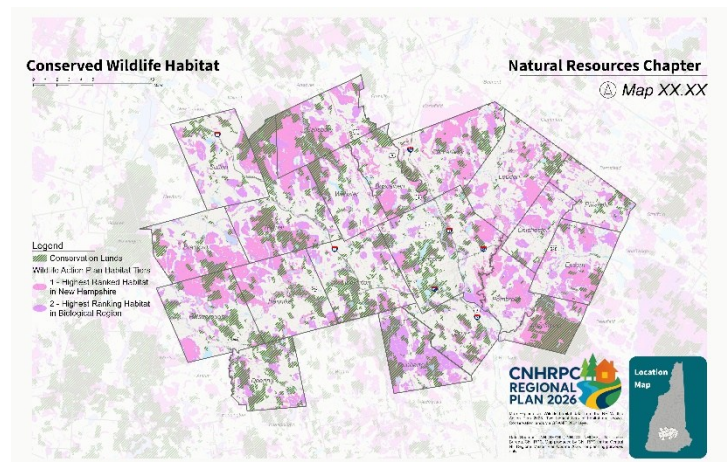
Some communities with NRIs have already successfully used them to aid in conserving new properties; Boscawen

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and its recent conservation of 215 acres around Walker Pond is an example.

WHAT DO WE NEED TO WORK ON?

- ☐ **Monitoring and improving water quality.** Water quality remains a significant issue throughout the region. Cyanobacteria in ponds and lakes, contaminants in private wells, PFAS, and runoff from salt and fertilizer all remain **threats to water quality that need to be regularly monitored and addressed.**
- ☐ **Managing invasive species.** Warmer temperatures allow for the increased spread of pathogens and invasive plants, including hemlock woolly adelgid and emerald ash borer, variable milfoil, Japanese knotweed, and more. **All of which can be detrimental to ecosystem health, and damage natural areas, if not reported and addressed.**
- ☐ **Planning for open space through coordinated development zoning.** As communities address housing affordability and economic development, **planning with natural resources in mind through zoning guidelines can help to preserve open space and maintain neighborhood character that depends on natural areas.** Maintaining agricultural land will enable more local food production.



Please visit cnhrpc-connect.org to provide your thoughts into the Regional Plan 2026 update..