

New Hampshire Living Legacy Project News

Conserving the Biological Diversity of the Granite State

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New Project Name!

The NH Ecological Reserve System Project has a new name -- New Hampshire Living Legacy Project. The new name more fully represents the mission of this Project: to establish and support a well-coordinated, comprehensive system of public and private lands voluntarily dedicated to protecting the full spectrum of biological diversity in the state.

Ecological reserves are one of the tools that the Project is exploring to achieve this mission. As noted below under Project Goals there are other tools and strategies, in addition to ecological reserves, that contribute to biodiversity conservation. In 1998, the Project produced, "Protecting New Hampshire's Living Legacy: a blueprint for biodiversity conservation in the Granite State". It is in this spirit that the Project adopts its new name. We look forward to the ongoing and new partnerships that collectively will advance the conservation of land, water, and wetlands and the biological elements and functions they support.

Pilot Phase Summary

The NH Living Legacy Project embarked on a pilot phase in summer 2001 to test and evaluate the process for identifying and assessing potential ecological reserves and to modify and enhance the scientific criteria and reserve design principles. We solicited public and private landowners interested in participating in this pilot phase. We sought a range of ownerships across New Hampshire's nine ecological regions. The results of the pilot were used to guide Project partners in implementing a system that conserves the state's biodiversity. The Project's Scientific Advisory Group (SAG) met November 20, 2001 to review the pilot phase and to evaluate reserve design principles. Five breakout groups of 4-6 people met around each of the five sites chosen for a hypothetical reserve design. Each group reviewed and analyzed their site for its ecological merits and reserve design. The SAG meeting generated several overarching themes:

Ecological reserve design, including management options, is influenced by landscape context such as whether the site is embedded in a forest matrix, in a developed landscape, or in a conservation lands matrix.

Ecological reserve selection and design are difficult without a sense of how the site fits within a larger context, in other words we need an understanding of the ecoregional and statewide distribution of ecologically significant areas.

The primary recommendation resulting from the pilot phase is for New Hampshire to create a statewide assessment (or map) identifying ecologically significant areas that guides research, management, and conservation of the state's biological diversity.

Important Ecological Areas

In light of the results of the pilot phase, NH's Living Legacy Project is developing a framework for Assessing and Mapping Important Ecological Areas in New Hampshire. This effort will advance our knowledge of ecological processes and elements, build capacity to manage and monitor our progress in conserving biodiversity, integrate wildlife habitat and natural community inventory and monitoring, and guide public and private land and aquatic habitat conservation for biodiversity in New Hampshire. The following components are part of this initiative:

§ Identify known elements of biodiversity (e.g., exemplary natural communities, rare plant populations, critical wildlife habitat) and set biodiversity conservation goals for these elements in each of the state's nine ecological regions.

§ Use predictive modeling and known information to map areas necessary to support viable elements of biodiversity in each ecological region.

§ Verify historical records of rare plants and animals.

§ Integrate this information and maps into educational documents and web-based materials for use by land trusts, communities, landowners and land managers, agencies, businesses, and decision-makers.

Project Goals

The NH Living Legacy Project has a set of goals and strategies to be implemented over the next three years. The goals include:

Goal 1 Guide land protection for biodiversity by fostering the development of new conservation tools and sustaining and enhancing existing programs.

Goal 2 Measure and acknowledge our success in conserving biodiversity by working with state agencies to develop and sustain a tracking mechanism.

Goal 3 Enhance the capacity for NH's natural resource agencies to conduct field inventories and research and to manage the data to make it more useful and available for conservation planning.

Goal 4 Increase "public" understanding of the values of biodiversity and opportunities for conserving these values. "Public" includes land trusts,

conservation commissions, volunteers, decision-makers, natural resource professionals, conservation organizations, natural resource agencies.

Goal 5 Continue the NH Living Legacy Project as an effort based on and integrated into existing programs, agencies, and conservation lands.

Goal 6 Assess the impacts of particular land uses and activities on biodiversity and assess the impacts of biodiversity conservation on particular land uses.

Land Trust Initiatives

The NH Living Legacy Project received a \$30,000 grant from the USDA Forest Service State and Private Forestry to apply the Project's ecological principles and criteria to two watersheds in New Hampshire. The two watersheds were chosen based, in part, on the presence of an active local land trust.

We look forward to this new initiative with the Piscataquog Watershed Association in Piscataquog River Watershed and the Ammonoosuc Conservation Trust in the Ammonoosuc River Watershed.

These two watersheds touch on the three ecological regions or sections identified and mapped in New Hampshire by the U. S. Forest Service.

Specifically this grant will enable the Living Legacy Project and its local partners to:

- Conduct an ecological landscape analysis of each watershed using aerial photos, topographic maps, GIS data, and other tools.
- Identify and map Important Ecological Areas using the Project's scientific criteria and local knowledge.
- Conduct limited field inventory to refine knowledge of locally significant areas.
- Compare current conservation lands data layer with landscape analysis and ecologically significant resources map to determine priority conservation areas.
- Establish a local "scientific advisory group" that can apply the ecological principles to guide review of potential management strategies and human uses on land conserved as part of this initiative.
- Develop and begin implementing a conservation plan for each watershed.

You are invited to join us for the first in a series of gatherings to discuss and collect information known about the ecology of the Ammonoosuc and Piscataquog River Watersheds, respectively. The programs include a presentation by Ellen Snyder, Coordinator of the New Hampshire Living Legacy Project and Biodiversity Specialist with UNH Cooperative Extension on this new initiative to identify, map, and conserve the biological diversity of these watersheds. Anyone interested in these watersheds or with knowledge they'd like to share about the ecology of these rivers and their watersheds is welcome at these and future meetings.

June 9, 2002 3 pm "Conserving the Ecology of the Ammonoosuc River Watershed" at the Sugar Hill Community House

June 20, 2002 7 pm "Conserving the Ecology of the Piscataquog River Watershed" Location TBA

If you'd like to be included in future mailings about these watershed projects
please send your email address to ellen.snyder@unh.edu