Reaching Out to Landowners and Communities in the Merrimack River Watershed

About the Project

The Merrimack River watershed is the most threatened watershed in the nation based on loss of private forested land.

This 3-year project—Expanding Riparian Forest Buffers in Threatened Urban and Suburban Watersheds: A Precision Stormwater Approach—aims to protect the waters of the Merrimack River by helping landowners and communities care for the land within the most important subwatersheds.

We’re focused on 4 subwatersheds in New Hampshire:
- Merrimack River Drainage (Concord Tributaries)
- Lower Piscataquog River
- South Branch Piscataquog River
- Powwow River

The Merrimack River Watershed Council identified the most important subwatersheds through landscape analysis. They looked at:

- Impervious surface percentages by HUC12 watershed and 100-meter buffer
- Projected population increases in the next 10 years
- Index of development threats to forests important to drinking water
- 303(d) water quality impairments
- SPARROW modeling
- Outstanding resource waters
- Forest blocks
- Freshwater resilience
- Cold-water fish ranking
- Numbers of threatened and endangered species
- Regional conservation priorities

Boots on the Ground

UNH Cooperative Extension Foresters working in the communities of the 4 subwatersheds are conducting targeted outreach to landowners and communities. They provide technical assistance using local information and considering local issues to encourage forest stewardship planning, improve forest management, and protect lands.

Tim Fleury, Merrimack County Extension Forester
Targeting the Merrimack River Drainage (Concord tributaries) watershed: Canterbury, Loudon, Concord, Pembroke and Bow

Jon Nute, Hillsborough County Extension Forester
Targeting the Lower Piscataquog and South Branch Piscataquog watersheds: Dunbarton, New Boston, Goffstown, Francetown, Lyndeborough, Mont Vernon, Manchester and Bedford

Fred Borman, Rockingham County Extension Forester
Targeting the Powwow watershed: Sandown, Danville, Hampstead, Plaistow, Kingston, East Kingston, Newton, South Hampton and Seabrook

Key Messages

Using the data gathered by the Merrimack River Watershed Council during their landscape analysis, we created watershed-specific outreach materials for landowners. We focused on these categories:

- Actions of landowners
- Useful resources
- Help is available
- Watershed information, by the numbers
- General information about the watershed

Data-Rich Information

Landowners are encouraged to act to help protect the Merrimack River.

1. Call your county extension forester for help
2. Set goals and develop a plan for your land
3. Use best practices for managing your land
4. Look for invasive plants and insects
5. Plant native trees and shrubs along riverbanks, 100 feet or greater is best!

Data from the landscape analysis helps to make the case for protecting the watershed:

- Total acres of land, including forested and impervious cover
- Numbers of known endangered and threatened plant and animal species found in the towns of the subwatershed
- Total acres of protected land

For more information, contact Karen Bennett and Alicia Carlson at (603) 862-3883 or forest.info@unh.edu.

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