

Conservation Matters

A monthly column focused on conservation education, as the result of collaboration among several area conservation commissions and organizations. If your town's commission or conservation organization would like to contribute articles, please contact Jessica Tabolt Halm jess_tabolt@hotmail.com

Title: The Beebe River Tract

Submitted by: Campton Conservation Commission, in conjunction with The Conservation Fund

The Beebe River Tract, a 5,435-acre parcel located along the Beebe River in the towns of Campton and Sandwich, is a testament to the resiliency of the earth and its natural processes. In the early 20th century, the Tract was bisected by a 26-mile long railroad cutting deep into the Sandwich Range. Into the 1920's, the area was home to hundreds of logging camp workers with five trains a day, of 12-14 cars each, carrying millions of board feet of top-quality Beebe River spruce to the burgeoning aircraft industry. Today it remains a working forest in an area described as "wild and serene" by those who visit on foot, bicycle, or snowmobile. Many come to fish and hunt, or swim in the river.

To help preserve and protect this land in a way that best benefits the public, the Conservation Fund, a nationwide land trust, used its Working Forest Fund to purchase the Beebe River Tract in May 2014. The purchase was part of a 30,000-acre acquisition in four states in the Northern Forest. It is intended as a short-term investment, literally buying time for more local interests to craft a conservation plan with federal, state and local partners. Working with the Squam Lakes Conservation Society, the Conservation Fund now seeks partners interested in placing the Beebe River land and adjoining properties under conservation easement.

The Beebe River area is at the confluence of three distinct eco-regions: the White Mountains, the New Hampshire-Vermont Uplands, and the Coastal Lowlands. As such, it has a wide variety of environments and diverse geology, landforms, and climates that brings together an abundance of species, including numerous state-listed plant species like the Yellow Lady's Slipper, Purple Clematis and Fern Leaved False Foxglove, as well as tree species like tupelo, oak and spruce-fir.

The property's mix of boreal and northern hardwood forests is good habitat for Canada lynx, a species considered at threat of extinction nationally. In addition, NH Fish & Game report that another threatened species, the American marten, makes its home within the Beebe River Tract. Via a six mile-long shared border with the White Mountain National Forest, the Beebe River Watershed provides a vital link to over 500,000 additional acres of protected land, and critical reproductive habitat for both threatened and more common species in New Hampshire, like black bear, fisher and moose.

Because of its high diversity of elevations, soil types, and habitat types, conservation of the Beebe River Tract preserves habitat and migration routes for species as they adjust to changes in climate and land use, reducing the severity of those impacts on wildlife.

Of the intact forests of the Beebe River watershed, roughly half occur in the Beebe River Tract and half are in the White Mountain National Forest. It is a real rarity these days to have completely undeveloped headwaters for cold-water streams that provide spawning habitat for wild Eastern brook trout. In recent weeks, the NH Fish and Game, in partnership with local Pemi Trout Unlimited group, has been conducting studies to determine the quality of the riverine habitat for native fish. Results will be out soon.

In addition to hunting and fishing benefits, protection of this property ensures the long-term use of the area by recreationists including snowmobilers, hikers and cross-country skiers. Conservation will support continued public access to a number of hiking trails, especially a 2.5-mile section of the 17-mile Crawford- Ridgepole Trail that runs the length of the bordering Squam Range.



Photo caption: The completely undeveloped headwaters of the Beebe River provide excellent habitat for Brook trout and other aquatic species.