

FROM: Pemigewasset River Local Advisory Committee

SUBJECT: 2023 Annual Town Report

The Pemigewasset River Local Advisory Committee (PRLAC) is a member organization of appointed local representatives that oversees the Pemigewasset (the Pemi) River corridor (one quarter mile on either side of the river) that traverses the municipalities of Ashland, Bridgewater, Bristol, Campton, Franconia, Franklin, Hill, Holderness, Lincoln, New Hampton, Plymouth, Sanbornton, Thornton and Woodstock. The members of PRLAC act on behalf of the NH Department of Environmental Services (DES) to review and comment on state and local permits for activities impacting the corridor, and they communicate with municipalities and citizens regarding corridor management. The DES does not have adequate staff to visit most permit application sites in a timely fashion, and they have asked PRLAC as well as other Local Advisory Committees to perform this task for them. Our site visits collect data, make observations, and usually take photos of the sites of the proposed projects that will impact the Pemi corridor, and then we report our findings to DES, the developer, and the property owner. Although we ourselves do not have the authority to approve or deny an application, our observations influence the action that is taken by DES.

During 2023 PRLAC's membership remained strong, and we thank your town for providing knowledgeable and engaged representatives! Their participation continues to provide valuable insight and information as we pursue our mission. Just a reminder that Select Boards of each of the PRLAC towns may appoint up to 3 members to the committee.

The Pemi is a Class B River, meaning that it has high aesthetic value and is acceptable for swimming and other recreational activities, fish habitat, and for use as a public water supply after treatment. Our mission is to do those things necessary to maintain the Pemi's Class B water quality status. Historically, the Pemi has had a wide variety of surface water problems, and PRLAC has had considerable experience in identifying potential water quality issues before they become a crisis and make suggestions for prevention and remediation.

One role of PRLAC is to investigate permit applications that are submitted to DES. With the increase of development and infrastructure projects along the Pemi, our permit investigations have expanded dramatically. We continue to monitor individual and business growth for shoreline violations. One major concern we are still working on is the clear-cut mowing along the riverbanks by the various utility companies. We have observed that they are not leaving enough flora to keep the riverbanks stable, thus causing erosion. We continue to explore what options we have to control that process while protecting against invasive species. Although not specific to a permit application, some members did research as to the possibility of PFAS chemicals being manufactured and used in areas along the river corridor.

A number of the permit applications we received had to do with water withdrawals. Right now, the Pemigewasset River has 130 registered withdrawal users. PRLAC has seen a notable increase in withdrawal applications during this past year. Our objective is to balance sensible environmental and economic goals while respecting the rights and desires of riparian property owners of the region as a whole. We wish to ensure that there is enough water to support aquatic life, fish consumption, drinking water supply after adequate treatment, swimming, boating, and wildlife.

One way we are looking to protect this goal is to have the Pemigewasset River be a part of the DES Instream Flow Program. The Instream Flow Program ensures that rivers continue to flow in spite of the uses and stresses that people put on them. The Instream Flow Program operates within the New Hampshire Rivers Management and Protection Program statute, Section 9-c (RSA 483:9-c) and in accordance with Administrative Rule Env-Wq 1900. We are pleased to announce that the Pemigewasset River has been chosen with active data collection already in process. We anticipate a final report in 2026. Here is the link for further information on this program:

<https://www.des.nh.gov/water/rivers-and-lakes/instream-flow>

Another key role of PRLAC is its participation with the DES Volunteer River Assessment Program (VRAP), where PRLAC members tested water quality at 9 stations along the Pemigewasset and three tributaries that feed into the Pemi. Last year was the 22nd year of regular water testing at these 9 stations, and we recognize what a benefit it is to have been able to rely on our volunteers to perform a 20-year longitudinal study of the Pemi River water quality parameters! Testing takes place from Bristol to Thornton and runs from April into September. VRAP tests are conducted for Dissolved Oxygen, pH, Turbidity, Specific Conductance, temperature, and chloride; all key elements in assessing overall river health. Additionally, after taking the previous year off due to COVID precautions, DES's lab was once again able to test for E coli, total phosphorus, and nitrogen at popular recreation sites on the river. We are hoping to add test sites to include the river north of Thornton to Franconia Notch. Information on DES's rivers and lakes testing program along with the results of our annual testing are posted on the DES website: www.des.nh.gov/water/rivers-and-lakes/river-and-lake-monitoring.

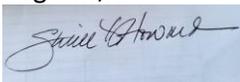
Under state law, one purpose of the Local Advisory Committee is to develop a corridor management plan which communities may adopt as an adjunct to their master plan, and report to NH DES and communities on the status of compliance to laws and regulations. Our Management Plan is used to inform the public and serve as a resource for anyone interested in going forward with a project in the Pemi River corridor. During 2023, PRLAC worked diligently with Dave Jeffers and the staff at LRPC to complete the process by year's end. We are pleased to note that the approved document will be available to the public in the spring of 2024. Online access:

<https://www.lakesrpc.org/prlac/prlacmgmtplan.asp>. We are extremely grateful to all who participated in the process.

PRLAC continues to benefit from the financial support we receive from the majority of the Pemi Corridor towns that we work most closely with. For that, we are very thankful! Your contribution goes directly towards protection of this key corridor resource. All corridor communities receive our monthly meeting agendas and minutes. PRLAC meets at 6:30 p.m. on the last Tuesday of the month from January through November. We have returned to in-person meetings with a Zoom option noted on the agenda. Details of the monthly meeting are posted through your Town, and all are encouraged to attend, and you can find out more information from reviewing the meeting minutes. The minutes of our meetings are available at our link: www.lakesrpc.org/prlac/prlacmeetings.asp

PRLAC continues to be a dedicated group of volunteers with a focus on keeping the Pemigewasset River healthy and cared for so that all of us can utilize its beauty and its natural resources.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink on a light blue background, reading "Sherrill D. Howard".

Sherrill D. Howard, Chair
PRLAC