



**Rivers Management Advisory Committee  
June 30, 2010**

**Summary of the Lower Exeter/Squamscott River Nomination by the Exeter River Local Advisory Committee**

The Lower Exeter/Squamscott River is being nominated by the Exeter River Local Advisory Committee (ERLAC) to complete a long-held goal of ERLAC – to have the entire river corridor designated by the NH Rivers Management and Protection Program (RMPP).

The majority of the Exeter River was enrolled in the RMPP in 1996 and ERLAC believes participation in the program has benefitted communities, riverfront landowners, and river users. Two of the communities in the watershed, Newfields and Stratham, have not benefitted from the RMPP because the tidal portion of the river, the Squamscott, is not enrolled in the program.

The Exeter/Squamscott River is one river with two names. These two names help define the outstanding characteristics of the river system. The Exeter River is freshwater and the Squamscott River is salt water.

As a primary tributary to Great Bay, the river possesses natural resources associated with both freshwater and saltwater systems, including freshwater wetlands, floodplain, vegetated shoreland, salt marsh, and tidal creeks.

The Lower Exeter River moves slowly through the Town of Exeter, passing the Phillips Exeter Academy forest, the Town of Exeter's Gilman Park, into historic downtown Exeter, and over the Great Dam. Gilman Park is a popular access point for paddlers and fishermen. Two bridges cross the river in downtown Exeter, providing scenic views of Exeter's historic streetscape, which contains several blocks of properties on the list of the National Register of Historic Places.

The tidal Squamscott River begins at the foot of Great Dam in downtown Exeter. Abutting Great Dam is a fish ladder operated by NH Fish and Game for the passage of anadromous fish. During the spring migration period, staff from NH Fish and Game check the ladder daily for the

passage of alewives, shad, and bluebacks. Fish and Game continues to implement a restoration program for these species, begun in the early 1970's when the fish ladder was constructed. The Squamscott River flows through downtown Exeter, past the Town of Exeter's Swasey Park, under NH Route 101, through salt marshes in Stratham and Newfields, and out to Great Bay. Public access to the river is available from town landings in all three communities, and at the Fish and Game landing alongside Route 108 in Stratham.

There are over 1,100 acres of conserved land along the Lower Exeter/Squamscott River, and protection of natural resources and water quality are identified as high priorities in the Master Plans of the three watershed communities.

The nomination of the Lower Exeter/Squamscott River to the RMPP was a specific topic of discussion at 14 public meetings held between September 2009 and May 2010. ERLAC and staff from NH DES and the Rockingham Planning Commission met with the Boards of Selectmen, Planning Boards, and Conservation Commissions in all three communities to discuss the nomination. Meetings were also held for landowners in the river corridor in all three communities.

These meetings resulted in support for the nomination from local officials in the three watershed towns and from residents. In addition, letters of support for the nomination have been submitted by several other stakeholders, including the Great Bay Resource Protection Partnership, Great Bay Stewards, Piscataqua Region Estuaries Partnership, and the Great Bay Chapter of Trout Unlimited.