

WATERSHED & STORMWATER MANAGEMENT

- **Lakes in New Hampshire are experiencing a downward trend in water quality due partly to runoff contaminants. Polluted runoff from agricultural, urban, and residential areas can introduce harmful substances into lakes, leading to issues such as algal blooms and reduced water clarity. Stormwater management is a cornerstone element of protecting the health of the Laurel Lake ecosystem.**
- **The Laurel Lake Association offers several environmental stewardship volunteer opportunities such as the Aquatic Invasive Species (weed watchers), lake host, and VLAP water quality assessment programs. These important initiatives help us monitor the water quality and general health of our lake environment.**

Stormwater management is a cornerstone element of protecting the health of the Laurel Lake ecosystem. Just as the food and beverages that we consume directly impact our bodily health, stormwater runoff and winter melt traveling into our lake directly impact its water quality and the wellbeing of its wildlife. “The leading cause of lake water quality degradation is stormwater runoff. Runoff allows contaminants such as oil, road salt, septic leaks, and animal & pet waste to enter the water, increasing the amounts of potassium and nitrogen in the water which, in turn, leads to an increase in plant life which threatens the oxygen levels of the water and a thickening of unwanted plants.” (source 2024 *Laurel Lake Ledger*) Runoff also allows silt & soil to enter the lake and it is the leading cause for issues such as algal blooms and reduced water clarity. Lakes in New Hampshire are experiencing a downward trend in water quality due to runoff contaminants. Increased precipitation and warmer temperatures are worsening these challenges in NH. Managing and reducing runoff is essential for protecting lake health.

Understanding where and how stormwater flows into Laurel Lake and the contaminants that may be in that runoff is an essential first step in managing stormwater. The Town of Fitzwilliam has mapped its wetlands and watershed areas and is available to the public at the link provided below. Additionally, a joint project of the NH DES, Town of Fitzwilliam, and Laurel Lake Association (LLA) is currently underway to specifically study and map the Laurel Lake watershed. Project updates on this are available on the [LLA website](#).

Every Laurel Lake community member should be mindful of the composition of stormwater, winter melt, and human brown water entering our lake and the actions we can take to minimize its harmful effects. Protecting the watershed around the lake by maintaining natural vegetation and reducing runoff pathways are a couple of important ways each of us can caretake our lake environment and water quality. Implementing erosion control measures like planting vegetation around the lake shores can prevent soil from washing into the water. And, of course, engaging in activities like the Laurel Lake Association’s water quality testing, weed watchers, and lake host programs are important in keeping an eye on our water quality.

Recent examples of the direct positive impact of community stewardship projects targeted to stormwater runoff include the regrading and culvert replacement on Howeville Road near the Town Beach, the upgrades to the public boat ramp, and the repairs and regrading of White’s Grove Road near Sandy Beach. These projects were generated by community action with town support and had a direct impact on managing runoff into the lake. The regrading of Howeville Road, in particular, has dramatically reduced the flow of stormwater and the related washing out of the Town Beach sand into the lake.

Important Resource Links:

Fitzwilliam Conservation Commission - <https://fitzwilliam-nh.gov/conservation-commission>

Fitzwilliam Wetlands Overlay District - https://fitzwilliam-nh.gov/vertical/sites/%7B5152AF08-0D8E-4832-8682-9F3DC8413E4B%7D/uploads/Chapter_127-16.1_WPOD_2022.pdf

Fitzwilliam Wetlands Map - https://fitzwilliam-nh.gov/vertical/sites/%7B5152AF08-0D8E-4832-8682-9F3DC8413E4B%7D/uploads/Fitzwilliam_Wetlands_Map.pdf

NHDES Rivers and Lakes - <https://www.des.nh.gov/water/rivers-and-lakes>

NHDES Stormwater Website - <https://www.des.nh.gov/water/stormwater>

NHDES Stormwater Manual - <https://www.des.nh.gov/sites/g/files/ehbemt341/files/documents/2020-01/wd-08-20b.pdf>

2025 Stormwater Management Manual - <https://extension.unh.edu/stormwater-center/nh-stormwater-manual>

NH Watershed Forum - <https://www4.des.state.nh.us/blogs/watershed/?p=5332>

NH LAKES - <https://nhlakes.org/>

Laurel Lake Watershed Study - <https://www.laurellakeassn.com/water-quality-environment>

Keeping Stormwater at Bay and Protecting Shoreland Vegetation - <https://www.nhpr.org/the-exchange/2017-08-25/ongoing-challenges-facing-n-h-lakes-keeping-stormwater-at-bay-protecting-shoreland-vegetation>

Soak Up the Rain NH - <https://www4.des.state.nh.us/soaknh/>

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