Fourth Connecticut Lake Preserve
Pittsburg, New Hampshire

SAVING THE LAST GREAT PLACES ON EARTH

Tucked into a mountain valley just below the Canadian border lies Fourth Connecticut Lake (elevation 2,670 feet). Here in the headwaters of the Connecticut River, water gathers in a small, quiet, pristine 2.5-acre pond rimmed with abundant plants and wildlife. The gentle gurgling brook flowing from this pond is the beginning of the Connecticut River, New England’s greatest and longest river. Thanks to a generous donation of Champion International Corporation, this 78-acre tract is preserved forever.

Fourth Connecticut Lake is a northern acidic mountain tarn, a remnant of the post-glacial tundra. The acidic cold water results in very slow decomposition of organic matter. The edge of the lake is surrounded by a well-developed floating bog mat of mosses, sedges, grasses, leather leaf, the uncommon buckbean, and a large concentration of insectivorous plants, such as pitcher plant and sundew. The lake’s waters contain bladderwort, an aquatic plant with underwater bladder-like leaves that trap tiny aquatic creatures.

Most of the lake is 2 to 4-feet deep, with a maximum depth of 5 feet. The lake has actually dried up under extreme drought conditions. In winter the lake does not freeze through its entire depth, and there is sufficient dissolved oxygen to support a year-round fish population and resident river otter. There are two outflows from the lake, and the beavers determine which one actually becomes the main stem of the Connecticut River. Other wildlife abounds, including moose, white-tailed deer, black bear, spruce grouse, and northern three-toed woodpecker, among others. The surrounding forest is fragrant with balsam fir. Other species include red spruce, white birch, and some American mountain ash. On the forest floor you are likely to see some northern wood sorrel, creeping snowberry, bluebead lily, and goldthread. Wildflowers abound at the southern end where the Connecticut River flows out of the lake.

The Connecticut River

Native Americans called it Quinnetukut, the great tidal river. The Connecticut River was one of the first settled by European immigrants and has long been the industrial powerhouse of New England. Its rich forests and fertile floodplains gave birth to the region’s post-settlement economy: its broad waters became the major artery for transportation and log drives; its power drove the mills of the Industrial Revolution and built many of New England’s thriving towns. With this early settlement came impacts from human use. In 1798, a dam was built in Turners Falls, Massachusetts, blocking passage from Atlantic salmon, shad, and northern three-toed woodpecker, among others. The surrounding forest is fragrant with balsam fir. Other species include red spruce, white birch, and some American mountain ash. On the forest floor you are likely to see some northern wood sorrel, creep
Land Use History

Champion and its predecessor, St. Regis Paper Company, had owned and managed the land, including the area around Fourth Lake, since 1926. The forest was last cut around 1916, but natural forces have also shaped the forest seen today. Recurring cycles of spruce budworm infestations – the most recent ending in 1982 and reported to have killed about half the conifers – have left their mark on the forest. The area is exposed to extreme weather conditions, and the thin, rocky soils leave the forest prone to wind damage, as evidenced by numerous tree root-balls and tip-ups. Such natural forces will continue to shape a dense forest of diverse age classes and ample regeneration.

Preserve Guidelines

This natural area is open to the public for recreation and education. Please, for the protection of this area and its inhabitants, and for everyone’s enjoyment:

- Foot travel only
- No pets
- Please carry out trash
- No removal or destruction of plants, wildlife or minerals
- No camping or open fires
- No hunting, trapping or fishing.

To Reach the Preserve

From the village of Pittsburg, take Route 3 north 22 miles to the U.S./Canada border. Park at the parking sign on the east side of Route 3 (across from the U.S. Customs station), and sign in at the trailhead. (Please respect that the border officers may be busy and unable to answer questions about the preserve.) The trail to the preserve is just uphill from the station and heads west along the international boundary.

Trail Notes

The trail heads west along the U.S./Canada border, at times climbing steeply. Please be sure to watch your footing. At 0.4 mile you will come to the preserve corner and eastern boundary. Remain on the international boundary trail another 0.1 mile until you come to the place where the Conservancy’s trail drops south from the international boundary. Follow this trail 0.1 mile to the north end of the lake, where you may choose either direction for a 0.5-mile loop walk around the entire water body. At the south end of Fourth Lake, you will literally step over the Connecticut River as it begins its great journey southward. Your return back along the international boundary trail will be easier, but watch your footing in steep and wet places. Take time to enjoy the views of the surrounding landscape as you crest the last knoll before the end of the trail. The entire round trip is 1.7 miles and usually takes about 2 hours.