

The Nature Conservancy

The Nature Conservancy is a global, non-profit conservation organization. Our mission is to preserve the plants, animals and natural communities that represent the diversity of life on Earth by protecting the lands and waters they need to survive.

Supported by our members, The Nature Conservancy owns and manages a variety of ecologically significant preserves and has helped to protect thousands of acres throughout New Hampshire.

For more information, contact us at:

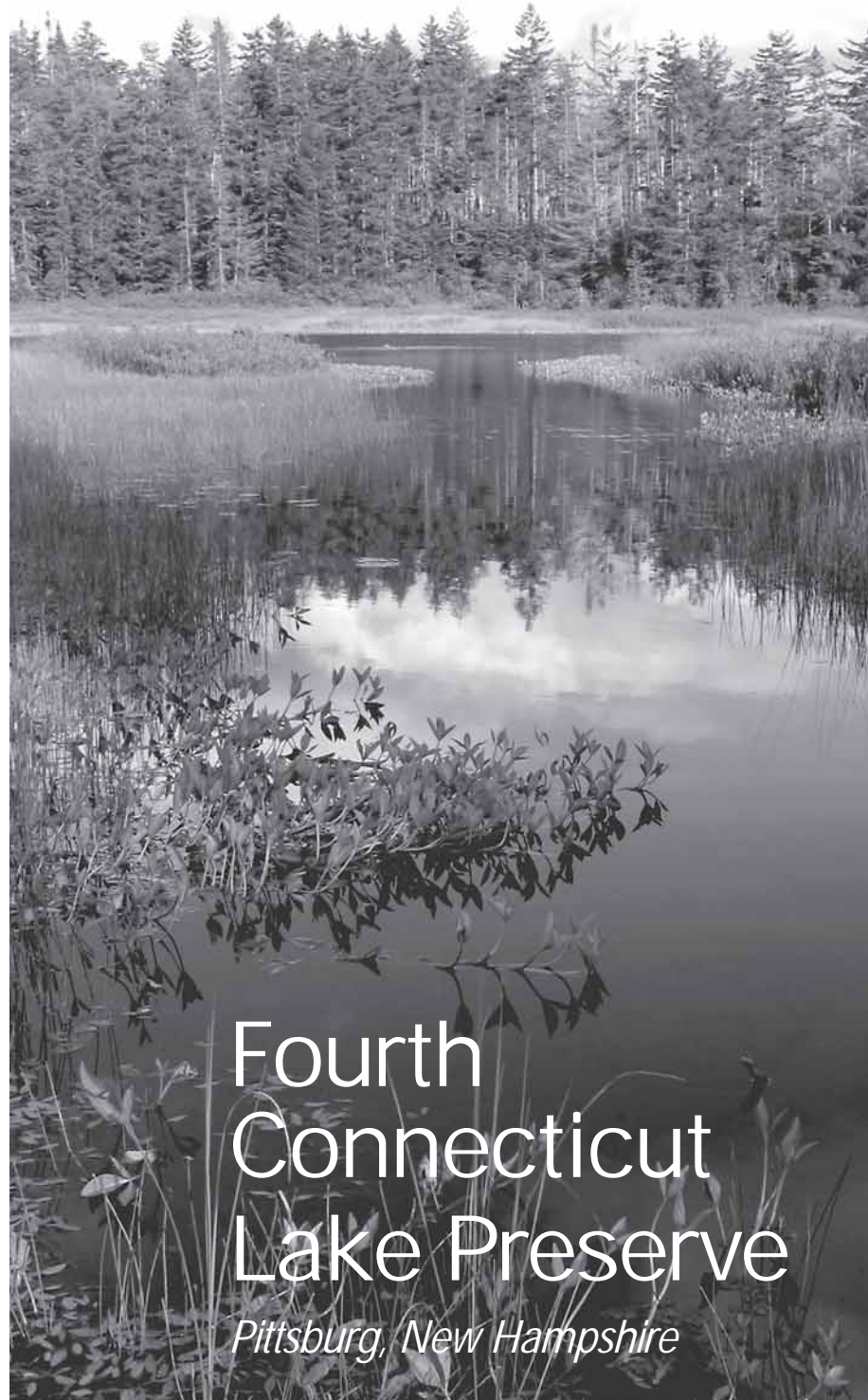
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Fourth Connecticut Lake Preserve

Pittsburg, New Hampshire

Fourth Connecticut Lake

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.



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Connecticut River. Other wildlife abounds, including moose, white-tailed deer, black bear, spruce grouse,



Straddle two countries and two watersheds (the Connecticut and St. Lawrence) on the Fourth Lake Trail.

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, herring and other migratory fish. While the river has historically received significant pollution from runoff and industrial waste, the river is still quite beautiful, and the integrity of the river is high. This quality is in part because it is the only major river in our country without a large city at its mouth.

The Connecticut River defines New England. Its watershed consists of 11,985 square miles and covers four states. The river begins here at Fourth Connecticut Lake and flows pure, wild and free from human pollution or alteration for its first 8 miles. In fact, much of the river's initial passage is through protected lands in the Connecticut Lakes region, where the Connecticut offers one of the finest coldwater fisheries in the East. Its journey is diverse – traveling 410 miles through a river valley carved by glaciers 20,000 to 30,000 years ago – and ends in a majestic, mile-wide estuary at Long Island Sound.

The Connecticut River also has a rich natural heritage and is an ecological thread that ties New England together. In 1986 the Conservancy's

ecologists noticed a high concentration of rare species and natural communities along the river. To preserve these natural areas, The Nature Conservancy began a multi-state campaign to protect the river's most ecologically significant sites (including floodplain forests, tidal and freshwater marshes, riverside seeps, outcrops and grasslands, acidic peatlands, calcareous wetlands, old-growth forests, steep rocky cliffs, and pine/oak barrens). The Conservancy's Connecticut River Program has an array of additional objectives, including working with partners to improve flow, remove dams and restore migratory fish.

One of the first acquisitions in the Conservancy's campaign was the 1987 donation by Champion International Corporation of 427 acres at Norton Pool and East Inlet (also in Pittsburg). Three years later, Champion repeated its generosity by donating the entire 78.1-acre watershed of Fourth Connecticut Lake to the Conservancy in honor of Earth Day. Having long been the target of preservation by several environmental groups, this gift was meaningful and symbolic to the campaign to protect the best of the Connecticut River. The Conservancy's management goals are simply to preserve the natural character of the land and to provide for passive recreation, nature study and education. To that end, the Conservancy built the existing trail around Fourth Lake in 1995.

Another conservation milestone came in 2002 when International Paper Company sold 171,326 acres in Pittsburg and Clarksville to the Trust for Public Land, which in turn sold 25,000 acres (some of the most ecologically sensitive lands) to The Nature Conservancy. The Conservancy held the land while the state assembled the financing and legislation for its own purchase, which was completed in December that year. The Nature Conservancy holds a conservation easement that permanently protects the 25,000 acres, including land nearly surrounding the Fourth Lake tract.

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.

