

# Water Resource Protection Guide for the Exeter-Squamscott River Watershed



Exeter River at Scribner Road Bridge. Photo Credit: Nancy J Murray

## About This Guide

This Water Resource Protection Guide is designed to provide actionable steps for both individuals and local decision-makers in the Exeter-Squamscott River Watershed. Its aim is to offer clear, practical strategies for safeguarding water quality and enhancing environmental conditions within the Exeter-Squamscott River Watershed.

By following these guidelines, residents and municipal leaders can work together to preserve the health and integrity of the watershed, ensuring clean and sustainable water resources for the community now and in the future.



EXETER-SQUAMSCOTT RIVER  
LOCAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE



**PREP**<sup>™</sup>

Piscataqua Region Estuaries Partnership



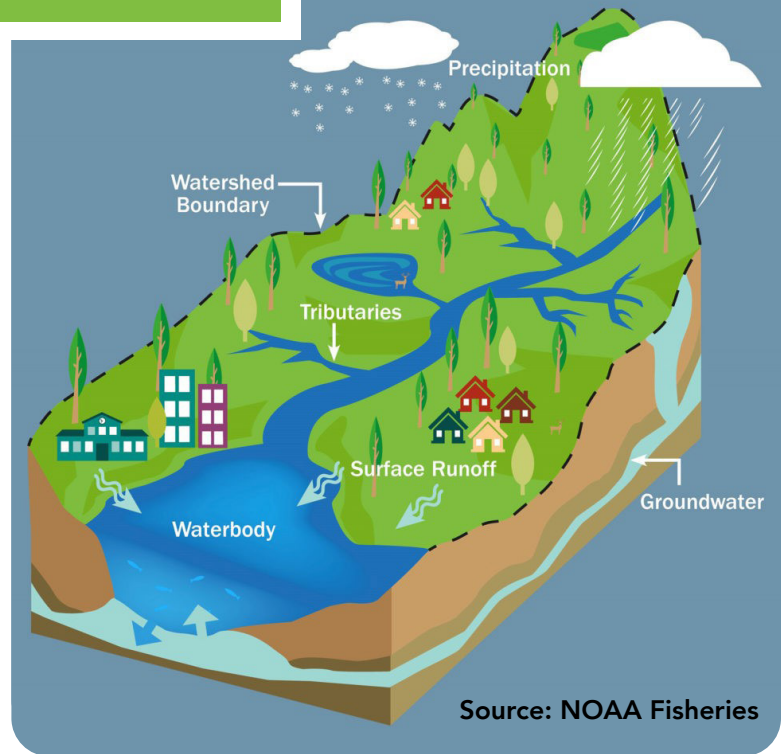
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# Why Protect our Watershed?

A watershed is like nature's giant bathtub! It's the land area that catches rain, snow, and runoff, and channels it into rivers, lakes, and streams. Imagine all the water flowing downhill from mountains, forests, and fields, eventually making its way to one shared body of water. Whether you live in a city or the countryside, you're part of a watershed!

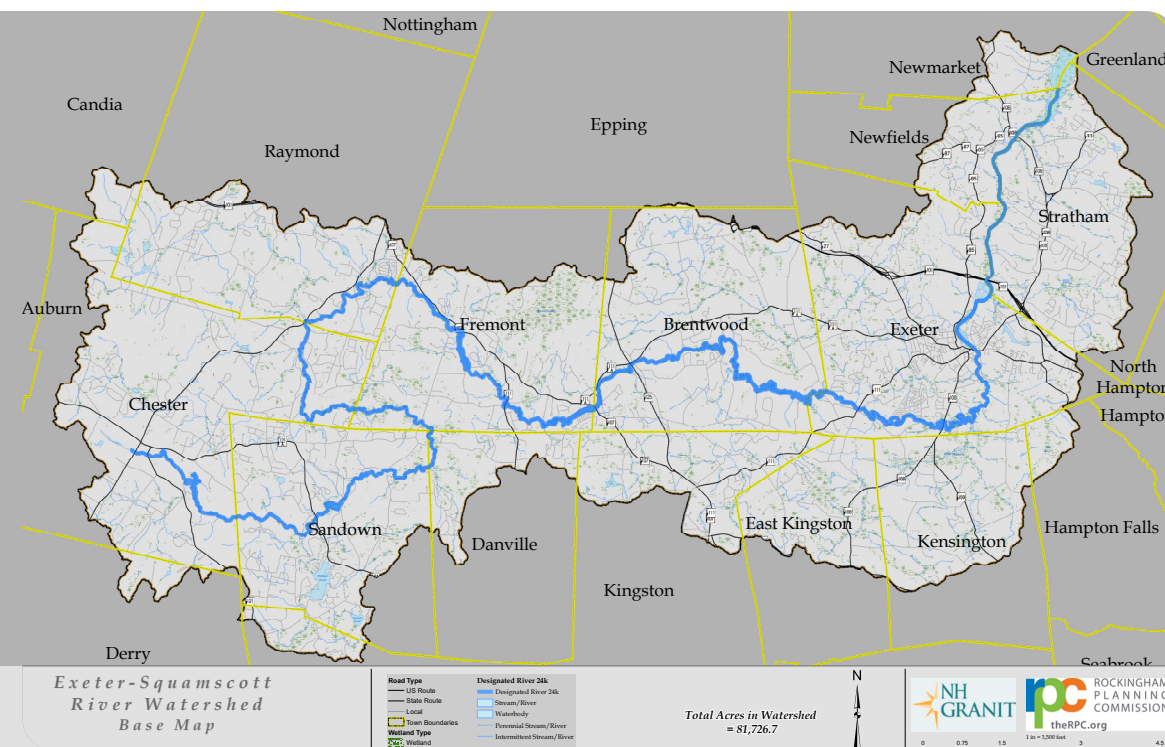
By taking care of our watershed, we're ensuring that our rivers stay healthy, our habitats thrive, and we have clean water for future generations to enjoy. It's one big, interconnected system, and every small action we take to protect it makes a huge difference!



## About the Exeter-Squamscott River

The Exeter River and Squamscott River are two names used to describe one river, connecting a dozen communities. This State-protected waterway extends 33 miles from Chester to Downtown Exeter. At Great Falls in downtown Exeter, the river becomes tidal and is known as the Squamscott River. The Squamscott flows for another nine miles, gradually transitioning from a freshwater

environment to a saline estuarine ecosystem. The watershed covers an area of approximately 128 square miles and includes parts of 12 towns: Chester, Raymond, Fremont, Danville, Sandown, Kingston, East Kingston, Kensington, Brentwood, Exeter, Newfields, and Stratham.







*Kayak event on the Exeter River*

## Challenges in the Exeter-Squamscott River Watershed

The Exeter-Squamscott River Watershed is an incredible natural resource, but like any beautiful place, it faces some challenges. Problems like stormwater runoff, pollution from roads, old septic systems, and overdevelopment can introduce harmful chemicals, trash, and excess nutrients into the water. This can lead to murky rivers, loss of wildlife habitats, and even affect our drinking water.

**The good news?** We all have the power to make a difference! Since everything we do on the land—whether it’s maintaining our lawns, managing stormwater, or conserving land—affects the water. Collective action is key. By joining forces, even the smallest efforts can make a big difference in protecting the rivers, lakes, and wetlands we all cherish. Since we all share these water resources, what one community does upstream directly affects those downstream. When we care for the watershed, we’re not just safeguarding the environment—we’re looking out for each other!

# What can you do to help protect our water resources?

## Maintain Your Septic System

- Familiarize yourself with your septic system's design, location, and maintenance requirements.
- Have your septic tank pumped at least every two to three years.
- Never flush items like diapers, cat litter, coffee grounds, grease, or hygiene products, as these can clog your septic system and cause malfunctions.
- Do not flush toxic substances such as paint thinner, gasoline, pesticides, chlorine, or drain cleaners.
- Keep vehicles and livestock off your leach field.

## Dispose of Chemicals and Toxic Materials Responsibly

- Never pour leftover medicines, paint, pesticides, or other chemicals down the drain or flush them.
- Participate in local and regional household hazardous waste collection programs. Contact your town about household hazardous waste collection events near you.
- Raise awareness about the importance of proper disposal methods among your community members.

## Consider Using Eco-friendly Cleaning Products in Your Home

- Opt for cleaning and homecare products that are labeled as biodegradable, non-toxic, or environmentally friendly.
- Never pour leftover or unused cleaning products down the drain.
- Consider making your own cleaning solutions using natural ingredients like vinegar, baking soda, and lemon juice.





## Lawn Care

- Choose natural pest control methods instead of chemical pesticides to avoid contaminating groundwater and surface water with harmful substances.
- Avoid mowing in buffer zones, which are typically planted with native grasses, shrubs, and trees.
- Properly Dispose of Pet Waste
- Use efficient watering techniques

## Get Involved in Your Community

- Inquire about opportunities to join local municipal boards, especially those focused on land use and environmental issues, such as the planning board, conservation commission, or open space committees.
- Get involved with or support local conservation organizations dedicated to protecting the watershed.
- Participate in community clean-up events, tree planting initiatives, or river monitoring programs to contribute directly to local environmental efforts.

# What can the community do to help protect our water resources?

## Buffers & Setbacks

- Establish and enforce ordinances that mandate buffers and setbacks around all water bodies, including smaller streams and wetlands.
- Encourage the use of native plants within buffer zones to boost their effectiveness in filtering pollutants, reducing erosion, and offering habitat for local wildlife.
- Inform residents and local businesses about the critical role of maintaining setbacks and buffers in protecting water quality.
- Engage in or support local riparian restoration efforts to rehabilitate degraded buffer zones.
- Support landscaping practices that reduce runoff and promote water conservation.

## Land Conservation

- Adopt Land Use Regulations Focused on Water Resource Protection
- Work closely with local conservation commissions to identify high-priority areas for land conservation.
- Encourage municipalities to raise and allocate local funds specifically for land conservation efforts.
- Develop and regularly update Municipal Natural Resource Inventories and Open Space Plans.

## Septic Systems

- Require septic systems and primary structures to be located at least 100 feet away from all streams, rivers, lakes, ponds, estuaries, and wetlands to protect water quality.
- Identify aging or potentially failing septic systems within the community and assess their risk to nearby water bodies.



## Stormwater Management

- Adopt land use regulations that promote best management practices for stormwater management
- Adopt land use regulations encouraging the use of low impact development and green infrastructure such as rain gardens in new development
- Encourage new development to incorporate pervious pavement where feasible.
- Implement best practices for road salt usage to minimize chloride contamination in waterways
- Educate residents and businesses about the impacts of stormwater runoff and encourage practices like reducing fertilizer use, properly disposing of hazardous waste, cleaning up after pets, and keeping storm drains clear of debris.
- Organize community events to clean up litter and debris from streets, parks, and waterways, reducing the amount of trash that can be picked up by runoff.

Curious to learn more? Dive into the full Water Resource Protection Guide for your community! Just head over to our [website](#) and download your copy. It's packed with useful tips, strategies, and resources to help keep our waterways clean and healthy for everyone!

*Egrets on the Little River, a tributary of the Exeter River. Photo credit: Donna Jensen.*

