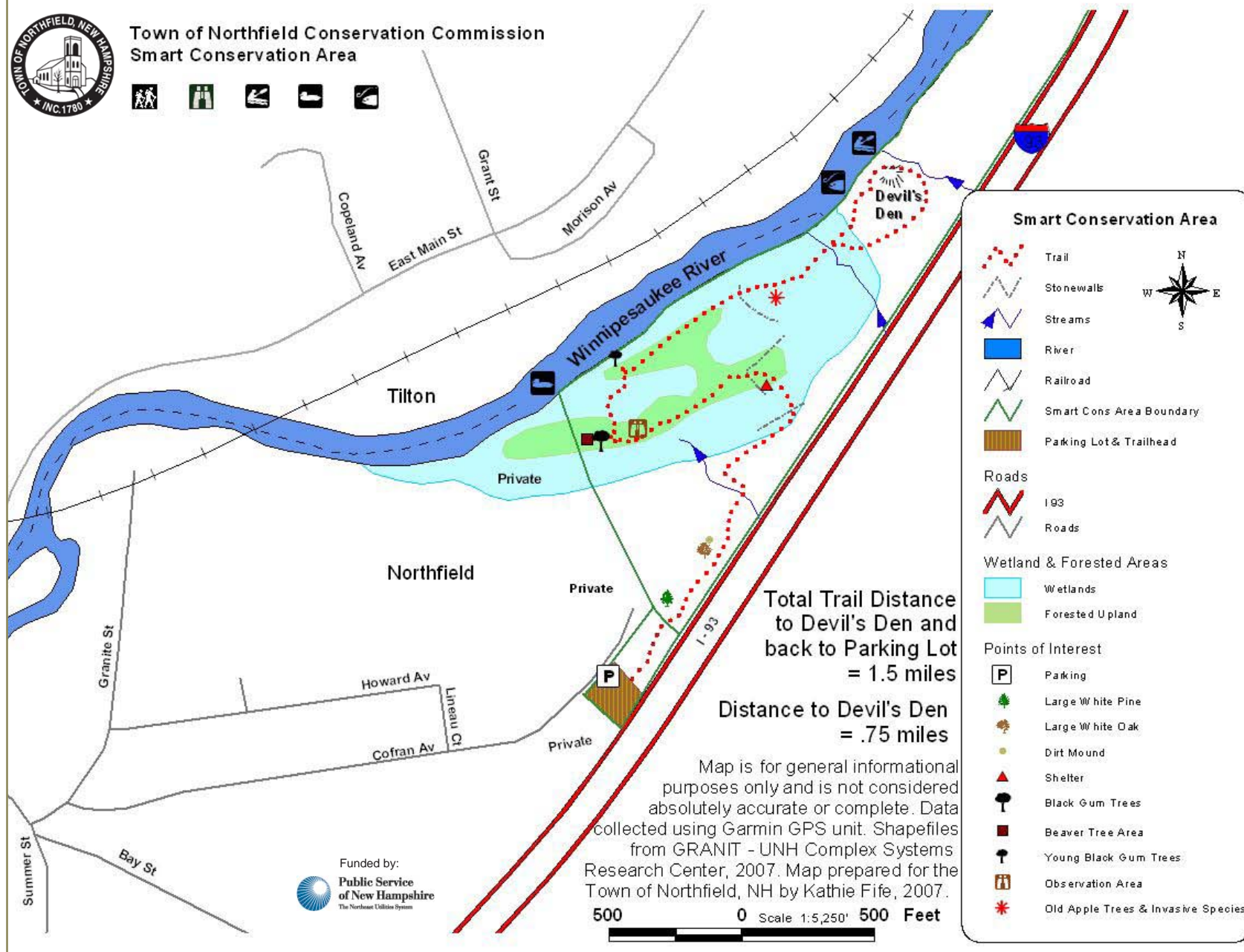




Town of Northfield Conservation Commission Smart Conservation Area



SMART CONSERVATION AREA TRAIL GUIDE

NORTHFIELD, NEW HAMPSHIRE



Though the Smart Conservation Area is located close to the highway, visitors can quickly find themselves feeling as though they are in a nature preserve. Stonewalls and old apple trees remain in the maturing forested landscape telling us this area once was used for agricultural purposes, perhaps for grazing livestock. Black gum trees, wildlife observations, nature trails, fishing, and kayaking are the area highlights. A mysterious glacial formation covered with lichen and ferns intrigues visitors to investigate the cracks and crevices of a pleasantly eerie but inviting site known locally as "The Devil's Den".



Length: 1.5 miles round trip
Difficulty: Easy to Moderate

Time: 1-2 hours
Location: 43.44181409 -71.57797149

Directions: From the South: From 93N take Exit 19. Left on Rt 132. First right onto Summer St (pass Baseball Field and Pines Community Center). Pass Northfield Town Office on the left. Take second right onto Granite St. Take immediate right onto Cofran Ave. Go straight to the end.
From the North: 93S Exit 20. Take right towards downtown Tilton, Rt 3 (E Main St). At the center of town take left at the statue onto Bridge St. Take left onto Elm St/Summer St. Take left onto Granite St. Immediate right onto Cofran Ave. Follow to the end. **From Rt 132:** Take Summer St or Elm St (roads unite). Granite St to Cofran Ave. Parking Lot is on the right.

TRAIL DESCRIPTION: The trail begins on private property in a mixed forest of white pine, hemlock, and white oak that follows closely with Interstate 93. The trail crosses intermittent streams and through seasonally flooded and saturated forested wetlands dominated by a varying mixtures of broad-leaved deciduous trees (red maple, oak, ash) and needle-leaved evergreen trees (white pine, hemlock) canopy species.

After crossing over a stonewall, meander through an upland white pine/hemlock/white oak forest to a small pool with a clump of young black gum trees. Here it crosses shrubby wetlands again, and follows near the sandy forested shore of the Winnepesaukee River to an interesting geological feature, known as *The Devil's Den*; a popular spot for kayakers.

HIGHLIGHTS: THE SMART CONSERVATION AREA is owned by the Town of Northfield. Though very close to the busy interstate, it offers a unique opportunity for plant and wildlife observation.

Common wildlife signs in the forest include deer, coyote, fox, and beaver, ducks, heron, and other bird species can be seen along the river. In the early spring and summer wood frogs, American toads, and grey tree frogs broadcast loudly their mating calls. Young black gum trees are found in small clumps near the shore of the river.

The large rock formation near the end of the loop trail, called *The Devil's Den*, offers a fun place for easy climbing, fishing and a relaxing rest stop before heading back to the trail head through a second growth forest. Here is where old apple trees and stonewalls tell of a time when the area was once a field, most likely used for grazing livestock prior to the land being changed from the construction of Highway 93 in 1963.

**FIRES ARE PROHIBITED
PLEASE CARRY OUT WHAT YOU CARRY IN**

POINTS OF INTEREST

- **AN ESKER OR A PILE OF DIRT?** Eskers are long, winding ridges of stratified sand and gravel material, somewhat resembling railroad embankments. Eskers are the deposits left by streams which flowed within and under glaciers; after the retaining ice walls melt away, the stream deposits remain as long winding ridges. Typically, a formation like this in the forest would appear to be an esker, however why is this not an esker? In 1963, Highway 93 was constructed from Bow to Tilton and during that time, large amounts of dirt and debris were pushed aside with heavy equipment. As you continue to walk through the Smart Conservation Area, take notice of what other man made features changed the landscape.

STONEWALLS During the 1800's settlers would prepare the land for containing livestock and growing agricultural crops by cutting trees, removing the stumps, plowing and then stacking stones later used for fencing in livestock.



- 🔍 **OBSERVATION AREA** From here and throughout the area, many interesting plants and wildlife signs can be found. Can you find the black gum trees? Woodpecker holes in trees? What species of woodpecker did this? Can you spot frogs in the woodland pools? Look on the ground, how many species of animal signs, tracks and scat can you identify?

- 🌳 **BLACK GUM TREES (*Nyssa sylvatica*):** Crooked, gnarly and corky - black gum is the longest-lived broadleaf deciduous tree in North America. Though these trees here are not rare, the black gum trees are not as common as most wetland species. The wood is very tough, and difficult-to-split that warps on drying making it's use in pallets, crossties, containers, wharves, docks, fish weirs, buttons, tool handles, scaffolding, and wooden machinery parts.



WINNIPESAUKEE RIVER Being so close to a major water source was a critical means for transportation and trade for the early settlers. Today, we can enjoy recreational opportunities such as wildlife viewing, fishing, and kayaking.

DEVIL'S DEN This interesting geological formation has been here for centuries. Over time ice and tree roots have cracked the giant rock into smaller pieces. How do the trees growing on top of the rocks survive? The rocks are covered with "rock tripe" lichen and polypody fern that help break down the igneous material into soil. The roots reach for the soil and obtain essential nutrients and elements for growth.



- * **APPLE TREES AND INVASIVE SPECIES AREA** Can you find the old apple trees? How and why did they grow here in the forested wetlands? Most likely this area was a drier field prior to the construction of the highway. The change may have altered or rerouted the water flow of underground and seasonal streams. The invasive species here (bittersweet, barberry, and buckthorn) were once common landscape plants, however their escape into the forests out competes the native vegetation that wildlife need for foraging. Today, because of their invasive nature, these plants are no longer available for sale at garden centers.

For More Information Contact
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