



REFUGE INFORMATION

Nestled beneath the mountains north of the Presidential Range, Pondicherry Wildlife Refuge has often been called one of the "crown jewels" of New Hampshire's landscape, and visitors to the site will easily understand why. The ponds, wetlands, and forests of this refuge support a wide variety of significant ecological features. The sweeping views from the wetlands and ponds are truly unique, and the hiking trails through lowland spruce - fir forest provide an easy way to experience this characteristic natural community of New Hampshire's North Country in person.

Pondicherry is a Division of the **Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge**, and it is owned and managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in partnership with New Hampshire Audubon and the New Hampshire Department of Fish and Game. A local Friends group also plays a role in the management of the refuge, and the New Hampshire Bureau of Trails has specific jurisdiction for the rail-trails. The refuge was designated a National Natural Landmark in 1972 by the National Park Service, and it was named the first Important Bird Area in New Hampshire. The Little Cherry Pond Trail was named a National Recreation Trail in 2006 by the U.S. Department of the Interior.

PROPERTY USE GUIDELINES

This refuge is open to the public during daylight hours. Please, for the protection of the area and its inhabitants, and for everyone's enjoyment:

- No camping or fires permitted.
- Carry out all trash and litter.
- Do not collect or disturb plants or animals.
- Dogs are allowed, but must be on a leash or under the control of the owner at all times.
- Hunting is allowed on the refuge in accordance with state regulations. Be sure to wear blaze orange during hunting season. Hunting is not allowed between Cherry Pond and Little Cherry Pond.
- Foot travel only on the Little Cherry Pond Trail.
- Bicycles and horses are allowed on the rail trail only.
- No motor vehicles allowed in spring, summer, and fall.
- Snowmobiles and cross-country skiers share the rail trail in winter - use caution when crossing trails.
- Be prepared for uneven walking. Trails may be wet, and the boardwalks will be slippery when wet.

NATURAL COMMUNITIES

Natural communities are recurring assemblages of plants and animals found in particular physical environments. New Hampshire has a fascinating and complex variety of them, from tidal marshes to alpine meadows, riverbanks to mountain forests, and streams to lakes. Each type of natural community has a unique set of environmental conditions that support certain species adapted to those conditions. Communities in turn often cluster together on the landscape in similar settings to form larger scale natural community systems. The NH Natural Heritage Bureau surveys and maintains a comprehensive database of the state's exemplary natural communities and systems, as well as all of the rare and endangered plants and animals.

Since natural communities are assemblages of multiple species of plants and animals, protecting a community provides protection for many individual species. Therefore, if we protect an adequate number of viable examples of each type, we can protect the majority of New Hampshire's species. This is sometimes referred to as the "coarse-filter" approach to biodiversity conservation.

Pondicherry harbors numerous natural communities and systems, including bog, fen, marsh, swamp, and forest types. The **poor level fen / bog system** at the margins of both Cherry and Little Cherry Ponds is considered exemplary, and the surrounding upland supports an extensive stand of **lowland spruce - fir forest**, one of the southernmost in the state.



Rhodora.



Pickereelweed.



Painted trillium.



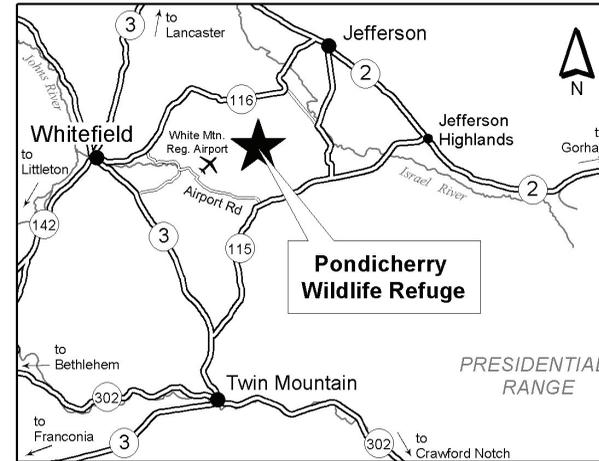
Little Cherry Pond Trail through **lowland spruce—fir forest**.

DIRECTIONS

From the junction of Rte. 3 and Rte. 115 in Twin Mountain, go 4.3 miles east on Rte. 115. Turn left (west) on Airport Rd and go about 1.5 miles to a small parking lot on the right.

From Rte. 2 in Jefferson, go 5.4 miles southwest on Rte. 115. Turn right (west) on Airport Rd and go about 1.5 miles to a small parking lot on the right.

From the junction of Rte. 3 and Rte. 116 in Whitefield, go 1.6 miles south on Rte. 3. Take a left (east) on Colby Rd and go 1.5 miles to Hazen Rd. Go right (east) past Airport Marsh and the airport for 1.6 miles to trail parking on left just beyond the Biomass Power Plant.



This brochure was created by the New Hampshire Natural Heritage Bureau as part of a series designed to educate the public about the state's special plants and natural communities. More site guides and profiles are available on the Visiting New Hampshire's Biodiversity program page at: www.nhnaturalheritage.org.



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NH NATURAL HERITAGE BUREAU

VISITING NEW HAMPSHIRE'S BIODIVERSITY

PONDICHERRY WILDLIFE REFUGE



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**New Hampshire Audubon,
US Fish & Wildlife Service,
and
New Hampshire Fish & Game Department**



This brochure was paid for with funds from the NH Conservation License Plate www.mooseplate.com



TRAIL DESCRIPTION

From the trailhead kiosk at the parking area off Airport Rd, walk northeast along the wide and flat trail. Note the white spruce and balsam poplar along the first part of the trail. The route follows the old Maine Central railroad bed through a young mixed forest, passes under a powerline, and in 1.5 miles arrives at Waumbek Junction, a former railroad station where three rail lines converge.

At the junction, bear right on the trail to reach the Tudor Richards Viewing Platform on the south side of **Cherry Pond**. This deck is a great vantage point for viewing scenery and the tremendous diversity of wildlife that visits Pondicherry throughout the year. Over 200 species of birds including more than 50 waterbirds have been identified here. Moose can often be seen frequenting the edges of the shallow pond (maximum depth 6 ft.). Also look for signs of otter, muskrat, and beavers, as well as painted and snapping turtles, frogs, dragonflies and butterflies.

Several wetland natural community types can also be seen from the platform. A small *sweet gale - meadowsweet - tussock sedge fen* community occurs just off the trail along the upland edge. A larger *leatherleaf - sheep laurel dwarf shrub bog* occurs farther out and extending around the pond, and both *emergent marsh* and *aquatic bed* occur in shallow water along the its edge. These communities intergrade in places, but each is comprised of a distinct assemblage of dominant and characteristic plant species. The bell-shaped flowers of leatherleaf (*Chamaedaphne calyculata*), the dominant shrub in the bog, are arranged in a delicate arc. Other notable plants found in bogs and fens that can be seen here include Labrador tea (*Ledum groenlandicum*) and rhodora (*Rhododendron canadense*). The rhodora flowers create a sea of purple in late May. In the pond, look for the showy terminal blue flowering spikes of pickerelweed (*Pontederia cordata*) emerging from shallow water in mid-summer.

Back at Waumbek Junction, continue walking northeast and cross the **Johns River**, Cherry Pond's small, rocky, and meandering outlet stream. Note the area downstream to the left of the wooden rail bridge that has been flooded by beavers. This river eventually drains into the Connecticut River.

After crossing the bridge, take an immediate right into a stand of balsam fir (*Abies balsamea*) on the **Shore Path**. This short trail follows a low berm called an "ice-push rampart." This post-glacial feature is caused by the force of freeze-thaw action and wind-driven floating ice packs along the pond's margin. Note the National Natural Landmark plaque on a boulder beneath a large white pine tree. Just offshore are several floating islands of peat moss and shrubs. These wandering bog mats occasionally get caught on submerged rocks for periods of time. Beavers have built a lodge on one of the mats, and loons can also be found nesting on them sometimes. There is a magnificent view from here of the western slopes of the Presidential Range above the pond.

The **Little Cherry Pond Trail** begins ¼ mile northeast of Waumbek Junction on the west side of Cherry Pond. This

woodland path with 600 feet of bog bridges (use care – the boards are slippery when wet) takes you through a regenerating *lowland spruce - fir forest*. The area was logged in 1952-1953 and was acquired by the US Fish and Wildlife Service in 2000. Now, the stand is comprised of both snags and live aspen, paper birch, red maple, balsam fir and some large red and black spruce (*Picea rubens* and *P. mariana*) trees. Plants on the forest floor include partridgeberry (*Mitchella repens*), Canada mayflower (*Maianthemum canadense*), pink lady's slipper (*Cypripedium acaule*), painted trillium (*Trillium undulatum*), wakerobin (*Trillium erectum*), goldthread (*Coptis trifolia*), and many types of moss, including the curious-looking stairstep moss (*Hylocomium splendens*). The forest is perfect habitat for snowshoe hare, which browses on the shrubby vegetation (look for patches of their orange urine on the snow in winter). A chorus of birds such as golden-crowned kinglets and blackburnian and parula warblers can be heard here in May and June.

Arrive at a junction and follow the path to the left (marked with an arrow). Twinflower (*Linnaea borealis*) can be seen along this trail. Be sure to look for a very short spur trail "loop" through the middle of several glacial erratic boulders to the right of the main trail.

Go straight ahead at the second trail junction. After crossing a stream on a small bridge, larch (*Larix laricina*) becomes abundant and creeping snowberry (*Gaultheria hispidula*) and peat mosses (the genus *Sphagnum*) carpet the ground. This is a small zone of *black spruce swamp*, with a strong larch component. The boardwalk then curves left through leatherleaf, bog rosemary (*Andromeda polifolia*), sheep laurel (*Kalmia angustifolia*), and rhodora. The bright pink rhodora blooms are especially spectacular here in May.

The boardwalk ends at a viewing platform on an abandoned beaver lodge by the edge of **Little Cherry Pond**. There is 2-3 person bench here. Nice views of Garfield Ridge and the Franconia Range appear over the *lowland spruce - fir forest* on the far side of the pond. This could make a perfect sunset spot, as long as you bring flashlights! The water level is fairly constant in this pond (maximum depth 3 ft). Near it's edge *emergent marsh* and, in somewhat deeper water, an *aquatic bed* community support yellow pondlily (*Nuphar variegata*), pickerelweed, bladderworts (*Utricularia* sp.), and pondweeds (*Potamogeton* spp.).

Leatherleaf - sheep laurel dwarf shrub bog and *leatherleaf - black spruce bog*, together comprising an exemplary *poor level fen / bog system*, occur around the shore of Little Cherry Pond. These two natural communities are similar, but the first type has no black spruce, whereas the second type has black spruce and larch in a sparse tree cover. The black spruce bog appears in a zone near the upland while the dwarf shrub bog is near the edge of open water on a quaking mat of loose peat moss. Several notable plants here include northern blue flag (*Iris versicolor*), swamp milkweed (*Asclepias incarnata*), sundews (*Drosera* sp.), cranberries (*Vaccinium* sp.), and pitcherplants (*Sarracenia purpurea*).

Little Cherry Pond is another hotspot for birding. White pine trees on the west side of the pond support a great blue heron colony. You may spy an osprey sitting on a snag. Palm warblers, black-backed woodpeckers, spruce grouse, and marsh wrens nest here. Boreal chickadees and gray jays are sometimes seen. It is one of the southernmost points for nesting ring-necked ducks. Wood ducks, hooded mergansers, and American black duck may all be seen. Other animals you might see here include moose, black bear, otter, beavers, coyotes, dragonflies, and butterflies.

Heading back towards Cherry Pond, take the other leg of the trail by going left at the junction. Pitcherplants appear in the black spruce flats that you will soon cross on bog bridges. Much "primitive" flora abounds including *Sphagnum* moss, lichens, and liverworts. A little further on, the low-growing trailing arbutus (*Epigaea repens*) blooms from April to May. Other frequent groundcover in this area includes partridgeberry, dewdrop (*Rubus dalibarda*), and snowberry. Note

porcupine-girdling on some of the larch trunks here.

Soon you cross more bog bridges and arrive back at the first trail junction. You have now closed the Little Cherry Pond loop. Continue straight ahead and follow the trail back to the railroad tracks at Cherry Pond. Cross the railroad tracks and continue for 100 feet until you come to the Rampart Path (described below).

Before returning, hike left on the **Rampart Path**, a short out and back trail along the north shore of Cherry Pond. Along the way there are several spectacular views of the pond and the mountains beyond. The spongy peat mat is mostly grounded, but its outer edge floats in the open water. The mat itself is composed primarily of *Sphagnum* moss, but other plants present include leatherleaf, rhodora, Labrador tea, alder, and black spruce. Landward, it grades into a swampy forest of mostly larch, with some black spruce, over a bed of wintergreen (*Gaultheria procumbens*).

