

## Upper Union River

Amherst, Mariaville, Great Pond Plantation

**Description:**

A 13-mile reach of the West Branch of the Union River, beginning in Great Pond and extending downstream to Graham Lake supports habitat for rare animal species because its waters are undammed and largely unimpaired by activities in the surrounding uplands. The focus area supports healthy populations of the brook floater. The brook floater is a globally rare mussel species that inhabits free-flowing freshwater streams and rivers. Wood turtles also inhabit the Union River. These turtles overwinter in well-oxygenated flowing water and may utilize adjacent wetlands for feeding and adjacent uplands for feeding and nesting. The ribbon snake has also been documented within the focus area. This species typically inhabits vegetated wetlands and waterways with abundant amphibian populations (its most common food source).

In addition, a small population of the pale green orchis (*Platanthera flava*) was found on the east bank of the Union River in Mariaville in 1997.

**Rare Species and Exemplary Natural Community Table for Union River**

Common Name	Latin Name	S-RANK	G-RANK	State Status
<i>Rare Plants</i>				
Pale green orchis	<i>Platanthera flava v. herbiola</i>	S2	G4	SC
<i>Rare Animals</i>				
Brook Floater	<i>Alismodonta varicose</i>	S3	G3	SC
Ribbon Snake	<i>Thamnophis sauritus</i>	S3	G5	SC
Wood Turtle	<i>Clemmys insculpta</i>	S4	G4	SC

**Other Habitats Mapped by MDIFW:**

Waterfowl / Wading Bird Habitat

**Conservation Considerations:**

- Degradation of free-flowing aquatic habitat (e.g damming, channelization, flow diversion or watershed disturbance) is one of the greatest causes for the loss of riverine aquatic species like freshwater mussels and wood turtles. Care should be taken to avoid alterations to the natural hydrological regime within, and upstream of, the focus area.
- Degradation of water quality by inorganic and organic pollutants from point and non-point sources has the capacity to devastate sensitive aquatic species. One way to limit impact from erosion and siltation caused by activities such as logging in the watershed is to establish riparian buffers. Wider buffers, with as little alteration as possible within 250' of the wetland/upland border, provide better protection for riparian species.
- Introduction of exotic species (such as introduced fish species) may affect potential host fish populations for mussels in the river and thereby limit the reproductive success of mussels.

**Protection Status:**

Aside from 870 acres of protected land around the perimeter of Great Pond, the remainder of the West Branch of the Union River is in private ownership.