



## What IS the difference between a lake and a pond?



*Loon Lake, Plymouth, NH (left) vs. Loon Pond, Gilmanton, NH (right)*

**One of the most common questions we get at NH LAKES is, “What is the difference between a lake and a pond?”** If you are like most folks, you probably think that lakes are bigger and deeper than ponds—this isn’t always the case!

In New Hampshire, there are many examples of a waterbody being called a “pond” when it is larger and deeper than another waterbody called a “lake.” For example, Loon Lake in Plymouth is 45 acres in surface area and its maximum depth is only 29 feet while Loon Pond in Gilmanton is bigger at 49 acres in surface area and deeper at 45 feet at its deepest point!

### **How did my favorite lake or pond get its name?**

In New Hampshire, the naming of a waterbody as a “lake” or a “pond” is arbitrary—most were named by the early settlers who lived nearby. The New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services reports that many lakes and ponds have had official name changes over the years. Most name changes have involved changing from a “pond” to a “lake” in an attempt to make the waterbody sound more attractive to home buyers and visitors. Examples of ponds that are now called lakes include “Mud Pond” in Canaan (now “Mirror Lake”), “Mosquito Pond” in Manchester (now “Crystal Lake”), and “Dishwater Pond” in Tuftonboro (now “Mirror Lake”).

**Is there a legal difference between a lake and a pond?** In New Hampshire, for legal purposes, there is no difference between a “lake” and a “pond.” However, to make matters more confusing, if a lake or pond in New

Hampshire is 10 acres or greater in size, then it is considered a “Great Pond”—a waterbody that is regulated by the state and subject to state water quality laws.

**Is there a scientific difference between a lake and a pond?** Yes, from a limnologist’s point of view, there is a difference between a “lake” and a “pond.” But, to add to the confusion, the distinction between a “lake” and a “pond” is not always the same for every limnologist. (By the way, a “Limnologist” is a scientist who studies freshwater.)

Some limnologists say that a waterbody which has rooted plants growing throughout should be classified as a “pond” since it is shallow enough for sunlight to reach the bottom in all areas. These same scientists would say that a “lake” is a waterbody that only has rooted plants growing around its edges, since it is too deep for sunlight to shine on the entire bottom.

Other limnologists define the difference using temperature. During the summer, if a waterbody is deep enough to stratify into three distinct layers, with one warm layer on top, one cold layer at the bottom and a layer of rapidly changing temperature in between (called a “thermocline”), then it is a “lake,” while a waterbody with one or two weakly defined layers is a “pond.”

**Enjoy your favorite lake or pond!** New Hampshire is home to approximately 1,000 lakes and ponds. So, no matter whether your favorite waterbody is a lake or a pond, or which limnologist defines it, be sure to go out and enjoy it!

NH LAKES is the only statewide, member-supported nonprofit organization working to keep New Hampshire’s lakes clean and healthy, now and in the future. The organization works with partners, promotes clean water policies and responsible use, and inspires the public to care for our lakes. For information, visit [www.nhlakes.org](http://www.nhlakes.org), email [info@nhlakes.org](mailto:info@nhlakes.org), or call 603.226.0299.

*We hope that you will share this article with others—we just ask that you include the following: This article was originally published by NH LAKES. Thank you!*