



From Dishwater Pond to Mirror Lake: What Is The Difference Between A Lake And A Pond?

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One of the most common questions I get as a limnologist 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! (Incidentally, the second-most common question I get is, "What is a 'Limnologist?'"—a limnologist is a scientist who studies freshwater including lakes and ponds.)

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 Pond in Gilmanton is 49 acres in surface area and 45 feet at its deepest point, while Loon Lake in Plymouth is 45 acres in surface area and its maximum depth is only 29 feet!

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" to "Mirror Lake" in Canaan, "Mosquito Pond" to "Crystal Lake" in Manchester and "Dishwater Pond" to "Mirror Lake" in



Sand Pond in Marlow, at 64 acres in surface area and 71 feet at its deepest, is larger and deeper than Kolelemook Lake in Springfield (which appears on the next page) which is 40 acres in surface area and 22 feet deep!

Tuftonboro. (By the way, I have heard of groups who want to change the name of their waterbody from a "lake" to a "pond" so that it will sound less attractive to visitors!)

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 perspective. See **LAKES** on 20

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gist'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.

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. However, I have found that these definitions do not always hold true—I have visited "ponds" that are 10 to 15 feet deep with brown, murky water where it is too dark for rooted plants to grow on the bottom and I have visited deeper "lakes" with crystal clear water where rooted plants grow throughout.



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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 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!

wide, nonprofit, member-supported organization headquartered in Concord. The organization is dedicated to protecting New Hampshire's lakes, which are integral to the quality of life and economic health of the state. NH LAKES serves as a source of information about lakes and lake issues through educational materials and programs, and through its work with state legislators advocating on issues of water quality, boater education and boating safety, invasive species prevention, appropriate public access and a balance of lake uses. For more information, including how to become a member or donor, visit www.nhlakes.org or call (603) 226-0299.

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