

Loons Call on the Reservoir

Clean Water for a Comeback

This unique native bird was driven out of Massachusetts in the early 1900's as a result of habitat loss and increasing pollution.

Conservation efforts brought cleaner water and more favorable habitat, encouraging a comeback. The first documented nesting loon pair returning to Massachusetts was in 1975 at Quabbin Reservoir, then at Wachusett Reservoir around 1980.

The Division of Water Supply Protection reservoirs are particularly suitable for loons. They require vast areas of open, clear waters where fish can easily be seen while hunting underwater. Seeing loons living on a lake, pond or reservoir indicates clean, clear water.

Monitoring Loons

Natural Resources staff studies loon pairs by locating nests, identifying individuals, and tracking the health of chicks. Sleeping loons are briefly captured in summer at night. Loons are checked for overall health and contaminants like mercury or lead and given a leg band for later identification. This information is logged to track their wellbeing, overall progress, and for use as an indicator for water quality.

Loon Rafts

Loons nest on islands that are easy for them to get to. Their legs are far back on their bodies, ideal for diving, but they are quite clumsy on land and will not travel far.

The reservoir water levels can change depending on precipitation and consumer use. So, an increase of water level greater than 6 inches or a drop of more than 12 inches typically means nest flooding or abandonment.

Since reservoir water levels cannot be controlled during the loon nesting season, DWSP staff have built and installed floating artificial nesting rafts.





Usually constructed of dried cedar logs, wire mesh, and a camouflage canopy, rafts are floated each spring loaded with vegetation and anchored in the loon's territory.



To see more, watch our video on YouTube @MassDCR Water Supply Protection playlist on how loons are protected by the discarded fishing line and lead sinker recycling program available at Quabbin and Wachusett Reservoirs.

[youtube.com/c/MassDCR](https://www.youtube.com/c/MassDCR)



Leading the Way

The Reservoir System has led the way for loons in Massachusetts. The DCR is steward to the largest loon population in the state.

New loon population growth and improvements in water quality has pushed them into more pond and lake habitats in the area.

And now, when you hear their call, you know the water is clear.