

Waterfowl Habitat Protection on Great Bay

GREAT BAY ESTUARY has a long history of human impact. Sewage pollution, habitat degradation and shoreline development are just some of the pressures being felt here and elsewhere. However, initiatives such as the Great Bay NERR and the Great Bay National Wildlife Refuge protect habitat for waterfowl and other wetland wildlife that depend on a healthy ecosystem.

In 1994, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USF&WS) designated Great Bay as a focal area for waterfowl habitat protection under the North American Waterfowl Management Plan. With support from USF&WS, the Refuge and Reserve have joined forces with Fish and Game and other state-wide conservation groups to acquire additional lands around the bay.

The Great Bay Resource Protection Partnership provides an unprecedented opportunity to significantly

enhance and protect waterfowl habitat along an extensive portion of the Great Bay Estuary. USF&WS has awarded the group an initial grant of \$511,000 for land acquisition in the Crommet Creek watershed. This area represents the most undisturbed freshwater wetlands around Great Bay.

The goal is to protect approximately 2,500 acres of this wetland system through conservation easements, fee simple purchase, and wetland restoration. The protection of this relatively pristine habitat will provide a buffer to help protect the water quality of Great Bay and maintain essential habitat for waterfowl.

The partnership is also preparing a Great Bay Resource Protection Plan which will identify critical wildlife species and related habitats. The USF&WS has provided a staff person to draft the plan. Utilizing an additional award of \$16,000 from USF&WS, Dea Brickner-Wood of the Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests has been hired as coordinator for the entire waterfowl habitat protection project. Her duties will include meeting with leaders of the individual communities involved.

This work will build on previous research done by Jackson Estuarine Lab as part of the Reserve's Estuarine Site Profile (published in 1993). It will provide a comprehensive habitat protection strategy which can be used in this project and in future land protection efforts. The project area presently includes 17 communities in the seacoast region.

In an era of reduced federal funding, we feel extremely fortunate to have secured this funding. It was only possible due to the collaborative efforts of everyone involved. A special thanks goes to The Nature Conservancy, which will administer the grant. For more information, please call the Reserve office. ♦

Goals of the Great Bay Protection Plan

- To identify habitat areas in need of protection in the Great Bay project area.
- To develop a comprehensive approach to protect, enhance and/or restore those identified areas of selected high priority.
- To prepare a long-range conservation and budget plan.
- To achieve a dialogue and an exchange of information, thoughts and ideas among the partners and local communities.
- To foster public awareness and support of migratory bird issues, threatened and endangered species, and wetland and upland habitat concerns.