

## Nature Conservancy buys Sawyer Farm land in Newmarket

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NEWMARKET — A superb setting for humans and eagles alike, 86 acres along the Lamprey River and Great Bay were protected from development under a deal brokered by the Nature Conservancy.

On Tuesday the Nature Conservancy bought a 35-acre parcel at Shackford Point and a 24-acre piece along the Lamprey River for an unspecified amount. The conservancy bought the land on behalf of the Great Bay Resource Protection Partnership.

The land, known locally as the Sawyer Farm, has long been considered by local conservation-minded people as one of the finest pieces of property in town. Especially when it comes to seeing the sunrise on Great Bay

“It’s probably got the best site to see the sun come up in the morning,” said Richard Shelton, a Newmarket resident familiar with the land’s fields and forests, and who has seen bald eagles perched in a tree during winters at Shackford Point.

Shelton and his daughter, Valerie, used to help former owner Junior Sawyer hay on the property. Generations of the Sawyer family farmed the land until 2002, when Warren Sawyer Jr. died.

The Nature Conservancy purchased the two parcels from Bolivar Realty LLC, and, ultimately, will transfer them to the New Hampshire Fish and Game Department.

Newmarket resident Gary Levy has purchased an additional 37 acres of the former Sawyer Farm, including the house and fields along the Lamprey River. The Conservancy has purchased a conservation easement protecting 27 of those acres.

The Newmarket Zoning Board of Adjustment, of which Shelton is a member, gave Levy a variance to subdivide the property last year, and the local Planning Board later approved the subdivision. Shelton said the town is fortunate to have Levy as a caretaker of the property.

Shelton and others are most happy to see the land remain free from residential development.

Town Council Chairman Brian Hart said members of the town Open Space Committee had looked into the possible purchase of the land but didn’t have the funds necessary to complete the deal.

The land’s 5,370 feet of frontage along the Lamprey River and 930 feet along Great Bay in

Newmarket give it terrific conservation value, Hart said. The purchase also protects Great Bay water quality, he said. Had the land been developed residentially, run-off would have had a negative influence on Great Bay, he said.

Conservation Commission member and Town Councilor Wilfred Hamel also applauds the purchase, saying he's glad it didn't end up being developed.

Hamel's wife, who years ago spent weekends with the Sawyer family and has fond memories of time spent there, is also pleased with the land's protection.

The property, visible across from Moody Point, is located where the Lamprey and the Squamscott rivers converge at the west end of Great Bay. Thousands of waterfowl congregate there, according to the Conservancy.

Deer, wild turkey and other animals frequent the land.

Peter Wellenberger, manager of the Great Bay Estuarine Research Reserve, is among many thrilled to see this land protected, according to a Conservancy news release. "Since the Reserve first began protecting land, we have always considered Shackford Point to be our highest priority," Wellenberger said. "If bald eagles ever decide to nest again on Great Bay, we have always felt that Shackford Point was the place they would most likely choose. To protect this area is a dream come true."

Edward Robinson, a waterfowl biologist for Fish and Game, said, "The mouth of the Lamprey River is one of the finest salt marsh habitat in the Great Bay Estuary and supports significant numbers of wintering Canada geese and American black ducks. This area is one of the most favored waterfowl hunting areas in the Bay."

"This is really something to celebrate," said Bob Miller, Great Bay Project director for The Nature Conservancy. "In one deal, this remarkable partnership among agencies and organizations has been able to protect a significant amount of frontage along the La prey River and Great Bay.

The Great Bay Resource Protection Partnership is a comprehensive approach to identify Great Bay's most critical habitats and to protect them. With The Nature Conservancy as lead acquisition agent, the partners also include the Audubon Society of New Hampshire, Ducks Unlimited, Great Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve, Natural Resources Conservation Service, New Hampshire Fish and Game Department, Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Since 1994 the Great Bay Resource Protection Partnership has protected 3,466 acres of critical habitat around Great Bay. Local communities and other organizations have protected an additional 3,020 acres that the partnership has been able to use as match to leverage federal funding.