

Waterfowl habitat along Piscassic River in Exeter now permanently protected

Saturday, April 16, 2005

EXETER — Critical waterfowl habitat along the Piscassic River in Exeter, Epping and Newfields is now permanently protected in a transaction recently completed by the Great Bay Resource Protection Partnership.

The 359 acres was purchased this month on behalf of the Great Bay partnership by The Nature Conservancy. Ultimately, the parcel will be transferred to the N.H. Fish and Game Department.

The parcel had been owned for several generations by the Dow family, which at one time had been in the forestry business. Heirs to the land — living in Pennsylvania, Florida and North Carolina — had long appreciated the land's value for its forest and as waterfowl habitat.

“The Dow tract is one that we've had identified for years as a high priority for waterfowl habitat conservation,” said Edward Robinson, a waterfowl biologist for the N.H. Fish and Game Department. “The habitat contains a significant amount of high quality freshwater wetlands that include beaver impoundments, shrub scrub, and emergent wetlands with forested upland buffer. The Dow tract will provide high quality nesting and feeding areas for local wood ducks, mallards, and black ducks.”

The tract includes about 8,300 feet of frontage along the Piscassic River and has extensive wetlands associated with the Piscassic and Fresh rivers. Especially pleased to see this piece protected is Peter Dow, a member of the Exeter Open Space Committee. Dow, who is unrelated to the sellers, has long been active in efforts to protect land in the area.

“With this piece, when you add it all up, there are now well over 1,200 acres of contiguous protected land in this part of Exeter, Newfields and Epping,” Dow said. “And there are other protected lands nearby that aren't contiguous. So, this shows you can still put together a large block of protected lands here in the eastern part of Rockingham County, all with cooperating landowners from very diverse backgrounds.”

Some of those lands (454 acres in Exeter and Newfields; 88 and 54 acres in Exeter) and were protected by the Great Bay Resource Protection Partnership. Others were protected by the towns of Exeter and Newfields.

The newly protected 359 acres will be owned and managed by the N.H. Fish and Game Department and will be open to the public for hunting, fishing, and non-motorized recreational uses.

The property was acquired with funds from the North American Wetlands Conservation Act on behalf of the Great Bay Resource Protection Partnership.

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 Ducks Unlimited, Great Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve, Natural Resources Conservation Service, New Hampshire Audubon, 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 more than 4,000 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. The leading sources of funds include the National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration, North American Wetland Conservation Act and private donations. A key player in securing those funds is U.S. Senator Judd Gregg, who knows the Great Bay area well.