

Large parcel of land near Great Bog protected

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PORTSMOUTH — Another piece of land around the Great Bog has now been permanently protected from development.

Earlier this month, The Nature Conservancy purchased a 269-acre parcel on behalf of the Great Bay Resource Protection Partnership. The land is adjacent to 335 acres that were acquired by the city in 2001. It is near Interstate 95 along Route 33.

Eric Aldrich, director of communications for the Nature Conservancy, said this parcel has been on the partnership's collective radar screen for many years.

"It really protects a significant chunk of Great Bog, especially when you look at it in context with other previously protected parts more on the western and southern end of this particular parcel," he said.

Aldrich said this aspect of the bog is sort of a forested wetland, which is a great habitat for many bird species. Also, it is a home for migratory waterfowl. A total of 112 bird species have been observed in and around Great Bog. Of those species, 63 breed there, according to the Seacoast Chapter of New Hampshire Audubon. Among them are alder flycatchers, yellow warblers, black and white warblers and Virginia rail.

In addition, this part of the bog offers great upland habitat with trees. There are a variety of species such as American woodcock and New England cottontail rabbit that depend on the combination of grasslands and early forest. The Department may also work with Ducks Unlimited on a project to remove nonnative invasive species and restore wetland habitat, according to a press release.

Aldrich said the Fish and Game Department was particularly excited to acquire this parcel as part of its wildlife action plan to keep certain species from becoming rare and endangered. "This project meshes very well with that so they can do some management work to protect some species that are declining," he said.

Conservation of this parcel can also help protect the public drinking water supply as it is near a well owned by Portsmouth.

The purchase price was \$3.27 million and will be funded by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Aldrich added that the purchase was a partnership between so many different organizations and agencies. "This is why there is a Great Bay Resource Protection partnership — a perfect example of how the power of partnership can pull together and do some great conservation work," he said.

Other partners included 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.

Aldrich said the Fish and Game Department will work with the city of Portsmouth and the Seacoast Land Trust — which holds an easement on 193 acres of city-owned land — in managing the property. The land will be open to hiking, hunting and other non-motorized recreation.

Dignitaries praised the acquisition of this parcel.

"The Great Bay area is one of the most diverse and vibrant ecosystems not only in our state but in the entire Northeast region," said U.S. Sen. Judd Gregg in a press release. "However, it is also one of the most fragile and therefore it is critical we work to protect it. Fortunately, The Nature Conservancy and the Great Bay Resource Protection Partnership understand the need to act now. They are again leading the way in carrying out this critical work."

"We're very happy about this," said Mary Griffin of Portsmouth in a press release. "I think it's a wonderful turn of events that this is getting protected and that it will join existing conservation lands."

Mayor Steve Marchand also praised the initiative.

"Not only will this nearly double protected land in the bog, but it speaks well of the city's continuing partnership with these agencies. Acquisition of this land will create new public access opportunities, safeguard our water quality and protect the Great Bog's unique natural resources," he said. Since 1994 the Great Bay Resource Protection Partnership has protected 4,456 acres of critical habitat around Great Bay.