

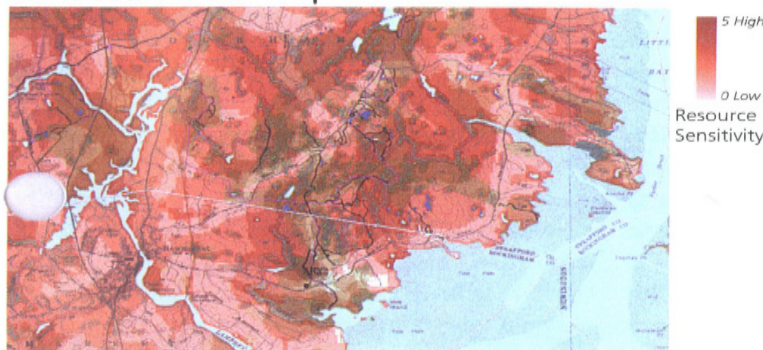
Building A Bridge to Nature

Helping Connect People and the Environment

From improving academic performance to enhancing psychological and physical health, recent research documents what many have already guessed; that connecting children with the natural world brings a myriad of benefits. The findings are so powerful that the US Congress is considering the No Child Left Behind Reauthorization. This would support state and national efforts to increase environmental literacy in our schools.

This exploration into nature is also

Co-occurrence Map



taking place at the state level and has been largely spurred by books such as “Last Child in the Woods, Saving our Children from Nature Deficit Disorder” by Richard Louv. The Reserve is working with its partners to do its small part to help build a bridge to nature, for both children and adults.

Great Bay NERR is one of nine principal conservation organizations that form the Great Bay Resource Protection Partnership. Together we are working to develop a trail from downtown Durham to Great Bay’s shores in Newmarket. The goals prioritize protection of our area’s unique ecological resources. However, sharing these treasures, protecting lands for aesthetic purposes and providing quality public recreation and education

opportunities are also important.

To preserve the integrity of the ecosystem, even relatively small projects are science-based and set in context with the surrounding landscape. The two-town trail we are developing is an example of this. In order to route it in the most ecologically sensitive manner, we first mapped all pre-existing trails. This allowed us to cut as little new trail as possible and connect lengths already in use. We chose which trails to connect by developing a co-occurrence model (see figure). By dividing the area into a grid and scoring each unit by the number of special features it supports, we developed a map to route the

trail to avoid areas that support natural treasures such as osprey, golden-winged warblers, and rare turtle species.

Last fall, after several years of comprehensive planning, it was time to let the fun begin. Roughly thirty volunteers joined us for a workday to build “bog bridges” along a 3.8-mile section of trail. These

simple structures built of tamarack and cedar help prevent soil erosion by being placed in areas that can become wet. People hauled rain soaked planks into the woods, some carrying 100 pounds or more. Headquarters for the workday was an area we plan to develop into an interpretive site, accessible to wheeled chairs and strollers. Advice from North East Passage at the University of New Hampshire has allowed us to construct other sections of the trail accessible to specially modified wheelchairs.

Thanks to these volunteers, we have taken the first steps in helping as many people as possible build a bridge into nature and connect with it in their own way.

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