

Conservation projects in Durham, Madbury Help Protect Great Bay Water Quality

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MADBURY — The Forest Society accepted three additions totaling 174 acres, adding to its growing collection of reservations near New Hampshire's Great Bay estuary. Although modest in size, the three parcels expand existing Forest Society reservations and provide critical linkages to other protected properties.

"There are simply no large unprotected parcels around the bay," said Forest Society President/Forester Jane Difley. "We work to conserve one small project after another, stitching together a greenway piece by piece."

Straddling the towns of Durham and Madbury, the 129-acre Bunker Hill property is the largest of the three new acquisitions. Laced with trails, the land offers educational and recreational opportunities as well as 29 acres of fertile agricultural soils that may be a vital asset in the future. The land is entirely within the Bunker Creek watershed just 1,300 feet upstream from the Oyster River, and its forests and wetlands provide homes for waterfowl, turkey, deer, fox, and coyote.

The Bunker Hill property connects with three other parcels, all less than 30 acres, to create a 185-acre block of conserved land. This larger block is a key link in the mostly undeveloped arc of lands between the Oyster and Bellamy Rivers, anchored by the 473-acre Bellamy River Wildlife Management Area in Dover and Durham's 136-acre Wagon Hill Farm along the Oyster River.

One of the smaller properties contiguous to the Bunker Hill land is the 25-acre Jenkins Road parcel in Madbury. This wooded property is bisected by a trail that continues through abutting lands to the northeast and the south, also serving as a wildlife corridor between larger conservation areas.

Further south, the 22-acre Crommet Creek property in Durham features forests, several large wetland complexes, streams, and ledge. The parcel is bordered by a tributary of Crommet Creek, which drains directly into Great Bay. Beavers have dammed four large areas along the stream, creating pools of open water. Lined by narrow open fields and wetlands, the stream drains these pools.

This strategically located parcel connects multiple tracts to the north, including the Forest Society's Dame Forest, with a 123-acre conservation easement property to the south, adding to a contiguous block of 1,678 protected acres.

The common conservation purpose on each of these lands is the protection of water quality and quantity as it enters the Great Bay estuary. The rivers flowing into Great Bay cause the mixing of fresh and salt water, creating a rich aquatic habitat that supports more than 150 rare species and 55 exemplary natural communities. Through the land conservation process, diverse wildlife habitat is also protected, as are opportunities for the many people living near the estuary to remain connected to the land.

The Forest Society received the properties from The Nature Conservancy (TNC), which purchased the land with National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) funding. Both the Forest Society and TNC are members of the Great Bay Resource Protection Partnership.

This group of agency and nonprofit conservation organizations has been conserving critical estuarine and upland habitat around Great Bay for more than fifteen years.

"We're grateful to our colleagues at The Nature Conservancy and the Great Bay Partnership, who did the majority of the legwork on all three projects," said Difley.

These three parcels add to the nearly 10,000 acres of open space and estuarine waters already protected within the Great Bay National Estuarine Reserve.

"If we had waited to conserve one big piece, we would have nothing," said Difley. "But our patience has been rewarded."

Founded in 1901, the Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests is the state's oldest and largest nonprofit land conservation organization. Supported by 10,000 families and businesses, the Forest Society's mission is to perpetuate the forests of New Hampshire by establishing permanent conservation areas and promoting the wise stewardship of private lands. For more information, visit www.forestsociety.org.