

## New Hampshire Critical Piece in Great Bay Conservation Puzzle Put into Place

*This conservation easement links together other protected lands in the Great Bay Estuary.*

Photo credit:  
Dea Brickner-Wood



On Friday afternoon, January 14th, you might have heard a loud “clink” coming from southeast New Hampshire—the sort of clink you hear when a stone mason drops the keystone into an arch. That “clink” was another piece of the Great Bay/Little Bay shoreline sliding into protected status. The Nature Conservancy, acting for the Great Bay Resource Protection Partnership, acquired a conservation easement on 33 acres in Dover at the mouth of the Bellamy River, where it enters Little Bay. The easement was immediately assigned to the Forest Society.

“We’re proud to partner with the Great Bay Resource Protection Partnership to conserve this critical section of the Great Bay shoreline,” said Forest Society President/Forester Jane Difley. “This area of the state has been widely recognized as an estuarine ecosystem of local, regional, and national importance.”

“The Great Bay Resource Protection Partnership could never have achieved over 5,500 acres of conserved land around Great Bay without the willingness of landowners to work with us on conservation opportunities for their property,” said Duane Hyde, Director of Protection for The Nature Conservancy.

This property adds nearly 800 feet of protected shoreline, extending an unbroken string of protected Bellamy River shoreline properties that begins not far from downtown Dover. On the other side of this newly conserved land, only about 800 feet separates this conserved area from the Madbury town line and other lands under conservation easement held by the Forest Society. From there the string of protected shoreline continues all the way to the Durham town line, with its cluster of conserved land around Wagon Hill Farm. In short, this conservation easement really

is something of a “keystone” supporting the many other protected properties forming this “arch” along Little Bay.

Great Bay has been a focus of New Hampshire’s conservation planning and management since the 1940s. The Bellamy, along with four other rivers flowing into Great Bay, draws a tidal flush of salt water from the Atlantic Ocean nearly five miles east of the estuary itself. The mixing of fresh and salt water creates a rich aquatic habitat. The estuary’s healthy salt and brackish marsh, eelgrass beds, and mud flats provide feeding, breeding, and nursery grounds for finfish, oysters, shellfish, waterfowl, wading birds, and shorebirds.

If you have driven west on Route 4 across the Scammell Bridge separating Dover from Durham, you have seen this most recent addition to the conservation mosaic up ahead to your right as part of Great Bay’s undisturbed shoreline. (If you saw the property while driving east, you were not driving attentively).

In addition to its importance to the estuary as a buffer, the property includes an unusual salt panne, a pond that sits a few feet above sea level but just a few steps from the bay. The pond’s clay bottom retains the water, acting as an impervious layer. Water very slowly seeps away through a small outlet, but the pond is replenished any time an unusually high tide brings water up over its banks. Then, whatever and whoever came in with the tide is pretty much stuck there – think of it as a fast food dining establishment for shorebirds.

The easement has an elaborate system of zones to ensure that the management of the land continues to protect the bay. The property is managed to maintain a protective vegetated buffer of forest and scrubland along the shore.



Mike Speltz is a Land Protection Specialist for the Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests.