

### **Last 53 acres of Durham's Thompson farm preserved**

The Southeast Land Trust and the Town of Durham last week announced the purchase and permanent conservation of 53 acres in Durham as part of the Thompson Forest Conservation project.

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A portion of the Lamprey River in Durham runs alongside part of the Thompson Farm property that is now conserved.  
Photo/Courtesy

DURHAM — The Southeast Land Trust and the Town of Durham last week announced the purchase and permanent conservation of 53 acres in Durham as part of the Thompson Forest Conservation project.

The purchase price was \$425,000, according to Durham Town Administrator Todd Selig.

The purchase protects the last remaining tract of what was once part of a 200-acre dairy farm owned by the Thompson family, according to a press release from the trust. The land has been part of the family for four generations.

According to the town, while Thompson family matriarch Shirley Thompson was alive, attempts were made to reach an agreement to conserve the property. Trusteeship of the trust that owned the property has transferred to Shirley's daughter, Kim Laughton, with her sister, Norma Thompson, as a co-beneficiary of the trust. The town and trust worked with the sisters to acquire the 43.4-acre property, which has about 2,000 feet of frontage on Wednesday Hill Road and 3,500 feet of frontage on the Lamprey River, a nationally designated Wild and Scenic River.

According to Selig, the land was worth more than the final price, but the Thompson daughters were willing to accept less than market value for the land.

"She (Shirley Thompson) very much wanted to donate the land for conservation," Selig said. "But it has value and it was important the family was compensated fairly for it."

Selig also said the sale was the culmination of a 20-year effort to preserve the land.

"The Thompson family knew the importance of this tract for the community, which is why they held onto it for so long under their good stewardship and oversight," said Duane Hyde, the trust's land conservation director. "A project like this protects the drinking water supply for the Town of Durham and University of New Hampshire, but it also has important wildlife and conservation benefits and fits squarely within the mission and work of the trust."

Shirley Thompson wanted the land conserved and before she died two years ago, she asked her daughters to promise that they would ensure that the land would be protected.

"This land has been part of my family for a long time," said Kim Laughton. "We hope that the people who come and visit the land will cherish it as much as we have."

A local icon in Durham, Thompson became involved with Oyster River schools 50 years ago when her children were young. She began as a playground monitor and later tutored students in math and reading.

She served 13 years on the School Board and was an assistant moderator for the School District. She also was a school crossing guard for nine years.

Thompson was elected to the town select board in the 1980s, where she served for a time with her father, Norman Stiles. She was the town's first-ever female fire commissioner, and served on the Durham Fire Department Ladies Auxiliary for 18 years. She also sat on numerous local boards and commissions, including the planning board, zoning board and Durham-UNH Communications Committee.

"The kids called her 'Grandma Shirley,'" Selig said. "You'd regularly see her at Young's restaurant. Just a lovely person, so devoted to this community."

The Thompson Forest will help buffer and protect an intake for the Durham-UNH water system, according to a press release issued by the town. Conserving the Thompson Forest will prevent erosion, pesticides, and fertilizers from impacting the drinking water supply. In addition, 19 acres of the Thompson property is located within Spruce Hole aquifer which includes a well that is also part of the Durham-UNH water system.