

# THIS LAND

NEWS AND INFORMATION FROM THE SOUTHEAST LAND TRUST OF NEW HAMPSHIRE

## Growing the Oaklands Campaign Seeks to Keep Key Trail

When a 34-acre property in Exeter came on the market that not only provides important wildlife habitat, but also includes a critical leg of a popular trail network, the Southeast Land Trust sprang into action with the Town of Exeter's Conservation Commission to find a way to conserve the property through the "Growing Oaklands – Our Forest, Our Trails" initiative. The Southeast Land Trust now has the property under contract, but we need to raise the final \$37,000 by March 2014 in order to complete the acquisition.

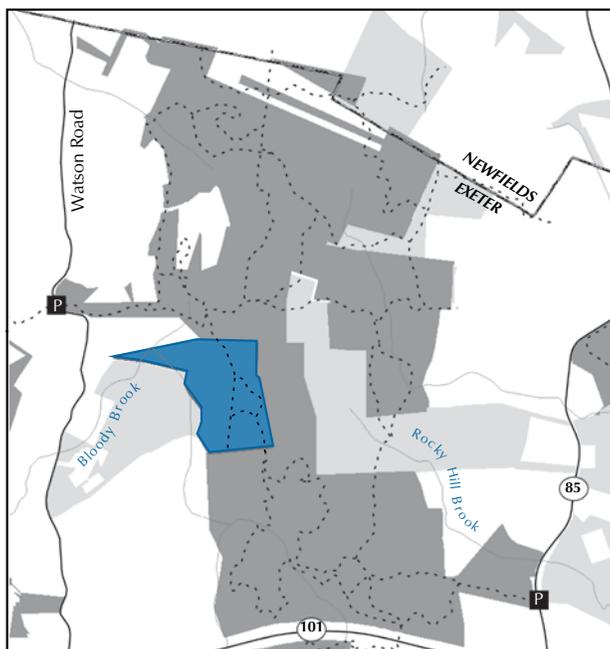
The Oaklands Town Forest (which many people commonly refer to as "Fort Rock") is loved and used by many and is a destination for people well beyond the confines of Exeter and even New Hampshire! It is a welcoming place to visit with several parking lots and entry points at locations around the Forest. Visit the Oaklands and you are likely to come across a family walking their dog or exploring the natural wonders the forest has to offer, a group of mountain bikers enjoying some of the best riding New Hampshire has to offer, or a trail runner getting their miles in. In the winter the forest continues to provide opportunities for people to enjoy nature through cross country skiing, snowshoeing and snowmobiling.

What all of these recreational users may not know is that one of the major routes in the looped trail system is on private property with no guarantee of continued public use. In fact that property is the very one that is the focus of the Growing Oaklands campaign. If we aren't successful, the alternative is that the property is sold to a private buyer who is likely to build one or two houses on the property. The logical location for a house is smack dab in the location of the existing trail network which would break a critical and remote looped trail with no obvious or easy way to reconnect it.

*continued on page 7*

### Contribute to the Growing Oaklands: Our Forest, Our Trails Campaign

The Oaklands Town Forest is truly a treasure in the southeastern part of New Hampshire. Your donation will help ensure the continued enjoyment of the Oaklands Town Forest. Use the enclosed envelope or visit [www.seltnh.org](http://www.seltnh.org) to donate to this project so we can conserve this remarkable resource.



Growing Oaklands Project  
 Oaklands Town Forest & Town Owned/Managed Land  
 Other Conservation Land  
 Trails  
 Streams and Rivers  
 Town Boundary

**Growing Oaklands**  
 Exeter, NH

Boundary and feature locations are approximate.



## GET *Out & About*

Unless otherwise noted, all field trips are free and open to the public. Pre-registration is requested. To sign up, please e-mail [info@seltnh.org](mailto:info@seltnh.org) or call Isabel at 603.778.6088. Directions and additional details will be sent to registrants.

### The Growing Oaklands Experience

**Sat., January 11 • 9–11am • Exeter**

If you haven't had the opportunity to visit the Oaklands Town Forest (aka Fort Rock) or if you are a regular visitor but want to learn more about the Forest and the Growing Oaklands Campaign, then come join us for a tour of several of the great trails this forest has to offer and burn off some of those holiday calories. We'll see beaver ponds, a variety of upland forest types, and a few glacial erratics. If you don't know what an erratic is, well, then come and find out! Depending on snow and ground conditions snowshoes or cross country skis may be advisable. Be prepared for a moderate terrain.

### Rock Around the Rockrimmon with Us

**Sat., February 8 • 9–11am • Kingston**

Join us for a 'rocking' tour of the properties that were conserved with the Town of Kingston as part of the Rockrimmon Conservation Initiative. We'll see the forests and wetlands that provide important wildlife habitat and some of the interesting rock ledges, and who knows, maybe we'll spot Elvis. We'll end our visit by hiking up Rockrimmon Hill to the Rockrimmon State Forest and the site of a former fire tower where wonderful views of Long Pond in Danville and beyond can be seen. Depending on the snow and ground conditions snowshoes may be needed. Be prepared for a moderate to moderately strenuous walk.

# UNH Interns Bring Their Skills and Enthusiasm to the Land Trust

This fall, University of New Hampshire students Christos Tsiamis and Amber Matsumoto assisted the Land Trust in completing a diverse array of projects ranging across all aspects of the day-to-day operation of a non-profit land conservation organization. In exchange for job experience and UNH credits, Christos and Amber dedicated over 400 hours of work and each brought their own talent, skills, and passion to their work.



Christos, a New Hampshire native, is currently pursuing his Masters in Integrated Coastal Ecosystem Science, Policy, and Management under the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's TIDES program. He assisted the Land Trust with research and recommendations on improving our Model Conservation Easement to better address emerging and continuing uses and issues such as renewable energy, climate change, farming, riparian buffers, and third party violations. With a law degree and expertise in title and real estate transactions, Christos' specialized skill set made him a perfect fit for assisting with our easement model revisions. Christos also assisted with deed research, conservation land acquisition closings, and baseline documentation field work for several projects, as well as our annual Fall Foliage Fundraiser.

Born in Hawaii and raised in the Granite State, Amber is a senior in the Environmental Conservation Studies program at UNH and is considering a master's degree in wildlife conservation biology. Amber's coursework in Geographic Information Systems (GIS) mapping software was put to good use in assisting the Land Trust with mapping for the Governor Dale Farm in North Hampton. She also helped write the narrative for the baseline documentation report, which describes the current conditions of the farm's natural resources, and other key features that are critical for the ongoing stewardship of the property. In addition to her work on the Governor Dale Baseline Report, Amber helped with the Land Trust's outreach program by staffing a table at the Exeter



Farmers' Market and assisting with our Fall membership renewal appeal. Amber also contributed to the success of the Fall Foliage Fundraiser by assisting with preparations and helping attendees to register and check out at the event.

Please join us in thanking Amber and Christos for a job well done and wishing them a bright and successful future! ■

# Rockrimmon Continues to Rock On!

Tucked in the northwest corner of Kingston is the 40 acre Rockrimmon State Forest, one of the smaller state forests in New Hampshire. Although small in stature, it is a hidden gem and worthy of a visit, especially now that thanks to a partnership between the Land Trust and the Town of Kingston an area four and a half times the size of the State Forest has been conserved!

From about 1928 to 1982 the Rockrimmon State Forest, which includes the peak of the 308 foot tall Rockrimmon Hill, had an active fire tower. Now all that remains are some abutments, metal flanges, and a remarkable view. Surrounding Rockrimmon State Forest is a contiguous block of undeveloped forest in Kingston and Danville that is habitat for several rare species, the site of numerous vernal pools, and wetlands that provide valuable waterfowl habitat.

The Southeast Land Trust partnered with the Town of Kingston on conserving this valuable habitat and creating a nearly 170-acre town-owned forest that will be available for the enjoyment of generations to come. After overwhelming support at the 2013 Town Meeting, where the Kingston voters agreed to spend up to \$424,000 on the Rockrimmon Project, the Land Trust secured contracts on five tracts totaling 181 acres. One of the landowners generously agreed to donate their property and another agreed to sell at less than its fair market value. Thanks to the support of the Town, the generosity of the landowners, and funding from a variety of sources including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Piscataqua Regional Estuaries Project, and mitigation funds, the almost 170 acres is now owned by the Town of Kingston and approximately 13 acres in Danville is owned by the Land Trust. The next step is for the Town to convey a conservation easement to the Land Trust by the end of the year.

While exploring these properties you will

come across a variety of terrain ranging from sphagnum covered hummocks amidst red maples and high bush blueberry to rocky ledges and talus slopes to gently sloping mature hardwood forests. You can explore the many vernal pools in the spring looking for egg masses of the salamanders and frogs that call this special place home or maybe you'll hear the haunting calls of a barred owl as dusk begins to set. All of this awaits you if you visit. There is a network of informal trails on several of the properties and the Land Trust looks forward to working with the Town of Kingston in the future to develop a more formal network of mapped trails. For now, consider your exploration an adventure and feel free to send us photos of your visit or pictures of wildlife that you may observe.

If you are interested in visiting Rockrimmon with us and exploring the great habitats and views from the State Forest, check out our upcoming field trip (see page 2 for details). ■



The Rockrimmon area includes rocky ridges approaching Rockrimmon Hill which affords a beautiful view of Long Pond in Danville.

CREDIT DUANE HYDE.



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## Questions, Comments, Concerns?

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# Restoring Wetlands and Wildlife on the *Wild and Scenic*

The Mast Road Natural Area, located in Epping, encompasses 531 acres – making it the largest single tract owned by the Southeast Land Trust. The parcel extends eastward for more than 1.5 miles from Route 27 to Route 87, and nearly 3/4 of a mile in a northerly direction from the Piscassic River to the boundary with Camp Hedding.

Since acquiring the property in 2011, the Southeast Land Trust embarked on a comprehensive planning process for the management and restoration of this severely impacted land. This year marked the completion of the work aimed at restoring the landscape to a more natural condition. To understand the restoration work and the property, a quick introduction to this interesting land and its natural resources is necessary.

The Mast Road Natural Area has slightly less than a mile of frontage on the south side of the Lamprey River and approximately one half mile of frontage on the north side. This section of the river is designated as “Wild and Scenic” and has been the focus of the Land Trust’s partnership conservation efforts with the Lamprey River Advisory Committee (LRAC). The river here meanders a great deal and is broad and shallow with clear, slow to moderately fast moving water – ideal for canoeing. Oxbows are found on each side of the river indicating historic river channels.

Rolling, gently sloping hills lie along the eastern boundary line and near the Lamprey. The hilly terrain quickly gives way sharply as one travels eastward to a nearly level, stone free landscape. Nearly two thirds of this land is, by most standards, level. Geologically this portion of the Mast Road Natural Area is part of a large outwash plain that extends beyond Mast Road and the Piscassic River southeast to Exeter’s Little River. Deep, stone free sand deposits dominate this landscape here varying from 2 feet to less than a foot above the seasonal high water table. Approximately 2/3 of the property is classified as wetland.

What the Mast Road Natural Area lacks in topography it does not want for habitat diversity – making it a mecca for wildlife of all kinds. The list includes old field habitat, early succession forest, floodplain forest, beautiful white pine forests, a kettle hole wetland, two large fens, and shoreline on the Lamprey.

Located here is one of four known populations of button sedge (*Carex bullata*) in the state and possibly the most extensive acreage of the plant in one location. This small wetland plant was discovered on the property through an inventory conducted by the Land Trust. More common on Cape Cod and points south, this plant thrives in wet sandy soils on the edges of bogs or fens. The button sedge plants dominate much of the area in and around two exemplary fens on the northern edge of the property. Exemplary is a designation given to natural plant communities that represent the best or only remaining examples in the state.

Fens are slightly different than true bogs because there is water inflow or outflow, and there are slightly better growing conditions for plants because of less acidic water. Most of what we call bogs in New Hampshire are actually fens. The fens on this property are quite different from each other. One has a considerable amount of pitch pine and a small open water area. The other has a large open, floating mat of sphagnum moss fringed by large (and productive – yummy!) high bush blueberry and winterberry with spruce trees on the fringe.

Also of interest to some readers may be that the largest black gum (tupelo) tree in the state is located here, found by Epping resident Kevin Martin. New Hampshire happens to be at the northernmost edge of this tree’s range. Black gums are most common in and around wetlands where they are adapted to the challenging growing conditions of wetland sites. This species is renowned for living to incredible ages for trees in our area. A black gum in a bog in Northwood not long ago was found to be more than 600 years old. Though large, the black gums on the Mast Road Natural Area are probably much younger than this.

## Troubled Past

Over the last 75 or more years, the Mast Road Natural Area went through a series of uses that left a severe mark on the land. Sand and gravel extractions occurred off and on in the dry western uplands close to Route 27. This portion of the property was owned by a resident farmer who built an oval track for training on the property that was aligned east to west. The track was later replaced with one that was aligned north to south when portions of the earlier built track became part of the sand pit. Both are visible on aerial photographs. By about 1980, sand and gravel extraction were abandoned. The track then became an attractive nuisance, drawing in locals to race a car, dirt bike or more recently ATVs.

Around 1930, a large scale piggery was constructed along what was thought to be the northern border with Camp Hedding. Not a great deal is known about this venture but large concrete foundations and an



1 To restore the old gravel pit and convert it to field habitat, a bulldozer spreads loam across the surface. CREDIT PHIL AUGER.

# Lamprey River

extensive disturbed area indicate that quite a few pigs were raised here at one time. The piggery stopped functioning when Camp Hedding surveyed its property and found that much of the operation was actually located on Camp Hedding's property!

In the 1980's, new owners conducted extensive logging in eastern sections of the property and in fact, one of the first whole tree chipping timber harvests in the region took place here. This new technique was of such interest that Phil Auger, who at that time was the County Forester, held a tour for landowners and the general public to demonstrate the technology and its evolution with the newly created biomass energy market. Unfortunately, this harvest was a precursor to much more extensive site damage, as the landowners followed the harvest with a prolonged, failed attempt to drain and clear portions of the land.

The property was eventually sold to a small family company that owned golf courses throughout northern New England. They had long term plans to convert the land into a golf course and with no immediate interest in developing the property, they did very little monitoring of how the land was being used. As a result, the abandoned skid roads from the timber harvest and bulldozed drainage ditches became an additional attraction for wide-scale four wheeling and other off-highway recreation vehicle (OHRV) uses. These uses were intensified with the land's proximity to the Rockingham Recreation Trail which provided ready access for OHRV users from near and far.

## “Never Been Done Before” Plan of Action

When the Land Trust first acquired the Mast Road Natural Area the extent of damage and disregard for the property from decades of misuse was daunting. Deeply rutted pathways, some

in excess of four feet, crisscrossed the property. Drainage ways and recreation vehicle paths extended to the edge of the fens. Litter of all sorts was found throughout including hundreds of tires and an abandoned car. Enough damage had been done and the alteration of the natural topography was so extensive that water that had historically flowed toward the Lamprey River now flowed in the opposite direction toward the Piscassic River. This resulted in so much water flowing toward Mast Road that the Epping Road Agent enlarged ditches along Mast Road to deal with spring flooding and prolonged rain events.

Fortunately, both acquisition partners – the Natural Resources Conservation Service's Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) and the Lamprey River Advisory Committee (LRAC) – provided substantial funds to support the restoration of the damaged wetlands and the long-term management of the property. With their support, the Land Trust first inventoried the property and planned for its management and restoration. To that end, Ellen Snyder of Ibis Wildlife Consulting was hired to write a comprehensive wildlife habitat management plan in 2011. Upon her recommendation, the Land Trust hired Dan Sperduto of Sperduto Ecological Services to do an ecological assessment of the property, through which he identified many sensitive features, such as the exemplary button sedge community discussed previously. As plans evolved, UNH hydrologist Tom Ballestero was hired to review evolving thoughts on restoration of the site and to make recommendations. Finally, Mark West of West Environmental also provided input and took care of wetlands permitting – no minor detail given the scope of the work. And throughout, the Natural Resources Conservation Service provided input and guidance on the wetlands restoration.

*continued on page 6*



2 This October, the field had greened up dramatically. CREDIT EMMA CARCAGNO.

3 Much of the trail network consisted of standing water and ruts, like above. CREDIT PHIL AUGER.

4 Heavy equipment dumps sand to restore the natural topography and hydrology of the trail networks. CREDIT PHIL AUGER.

## Restoring Wetlands and Wildlife on the Wild and Scenic Lamprey River, continued

The restoration plan involved reopening the abandoned sand and gravel pits in the western portions of the land. Sand excavated from these areas would be mined and transported to the eastern portions of the property and deposited in the eroded OHRV trails to form a new “base”. Sand was desired because it is the primary soil in the outwash plain where the paths are located. Once pathways were filled in, an excavator would be used to pull in berms of dirt and vegetation from the trail edges that were left by the bulldozer and OHRV tires.

The plan was unusual, risky and without question, costly. It was unusual in that few if any have ever tried this approach. It was risky in that it may not have worked from a hydrologic perspective. In the end, the Land Trust, with the full support of the Natural Resource Conservation Service, Town of Epping, and LRAC, decided to proceed.

Contract work began in January of 2013 when John Brown and Sons were hired to clear the trail paths using a Brontosaurus (a flailing head mounted on an excavator to chip shrubs and small trees). The Brontosaurus work was followed by a spring timber harvest on the dry upland soils in the western section of the property. This area of just under 200 acres is the only section of the property available for commercial timber harvesting and long-term forest management. The harvest was done in such a way that some areas were cleared for sand and gravel removal while others were harvested for long-term forest growth and to enhance wildlife habitat.

Finally in August the real restoration work began. S.U.R. Construction Inc. from Rochester won the competitive bid for the work and began in mid-July when the water table was at its lowest. All sorts of heavy equipment were brought in to stump,

sort, store, haul and grade soil and other materials to implement the restoration. In just four weeks, the first phase of the project was completed.

### Creating a Promising Future

This winter the Mast Road Natural Area is a vastly different and improved property after this summer’s restoration work. The list of accomplishments is extensive, including the:

- Closing and restoration of more than a mile of OHRV trails.
- Conversion of an old gravel pit to a 2.5 acre field area. This new field, along with abutting old field habitat near Route 27, provide critical wildlife habitat.
- Installation of five gates and more than 1,600 feet of guard rail to control OHRV access.
- Reestablishment of 15 acres of early successional habitat and a turtle nesting site.
- Improvement of more than a mile of interior trails for recreational uses. This work included the Hedding Spur Line Trail, which was originally a short rail spur constructed in 1881 to bring visitors from Hedding Station to Camp Hedding.

Currently Phase II permitting is underway with the final work scheduled for 2014. The goals are to connect the Piggery Woods Road to Mast Road, construct a pedestrian bridge at the inlet of the large beaver pond, establish a public parking area along Mast Road, and restore another half mile or more of OHRV trails.

Stay tuned for a celebration marking the completion of the Mast Road Natural Area restoration project and what the Southeast Land Trust is confident will quickly become one of our most visited and enjoyed properties. A future field trip is being planned – check the website to see when it is scheduled! ■



5 A restored trail is hard to discern from the surrounding lands. CREDIT PHIL AUGER.



6 Unauthorized vehicle use actually widened the unmaintained Birch Road onto the Mast Road Natural Area. 1,800 feet of guardrail was installed to help control illegal vehicle access. In this picture, Birch Road is actually located to the **right** of the guardrail. CREDIT PHIL AUGER.



7 This fen includes one of the state’s largest known populations of button sedge. CREDIT DAN SPERDUTO.

# Fall Foliage Fundraiser: An Evening of Fun and Fundraising in Portsmouth

More than 230 people attended the 11th annual Fall Fundraiser on November 2nd, and through their generosity, the evening raised more than \$67,000 for the Land Trust, exceeding our expectations! From the Conserve-a-Copia package (12 items from conservation land) to a Gourmet Dinner

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for Six, attendees bid on a wide swath of donated products, services, and getaways. This year Churchill's went over the top on decorations, even bringing a working water statuary to the Discover Portsmouth Center! The proceeds from the event go directly to our mission of land conservation –

## Recreation Supporter

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ensuring we have the resources to save the next special place. Thank you to all the volunteers and the hundreds of businesses, big and small, who made this evening possible! We especially want to thank our generous 2013 Sponsors. Please consider thanking them with your business. ■

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## *Growing the Oaklands Campaign Seeks to Keep Key Trail, continued*

The Growing Oaklands initiative is not just about conserving a recreational resource though; the property also has natural resource values of local and state-wide importance. For example, many of the wetlands on the property have been designated "Prime Wetlands" by the Town of Exeter. And, the property's many wetlands and surrounding upland habitats are also potential habitat for several rare reptiles and one bird species (common moorehen) that are of statewide conservation concern. And of course, numerous more common wildlife can be spotted on this parcel and the abutting Town Forest, including deer, turkey, barred owls, and great blue herons.

The total cost for the purchase and protection of the Growing Oaklands parcel is \$149,400. The Exeter Conservation Commission and a federal wetlands program have already committed \$112,500 toward the project, leaving just \$37,000 left to complete the project. While the Town is considering an appropriation at the 2014 Town Meeting and the Land Trust is pursuing other grants, there is no guarantee that these highly competitive sources will commit funding. Therefore, private donations are needed to help fill the gap of \$37,000 and show grant funders the strong support for this project.

We continually hear about a strong desire to have more trails and opportunities to get out on conservation lands, and here we have an opportunity to conserve a place and trail system that already exists, but could be lost! Please share the word about this great opportunity with your friends and neighbors in Exeter and the region! ■



A key trail runs through the proposed addition to the Oaklands Town Forest. PHOTO BY DUANE HYDE.

# A Note to our Members: Membership Cycle to Change in 2014

As you are a supporter of the Land Trust, we want to inform you of a planned change in our annual membership program. Currently, memberships are for a one year period, beginning from the date your membership gift is received. For instance, a member renewing on August 15 would be in good standing through August 15 of the following year. This “rolling” membership cycle results in the Land Trust having to send multiple renewal mailings a year to the donors whose membership is expiring. As you can imagine, this rolling process consumes significant staff time and limited dollars — resources that we (and we suspect you) — would prefer we spend on our core mission: land conservation.

**Therefore, beginning in 2014, all memberships will be due by July 1 and will be good for one year through the following June 30th.** You will receive a membership renewal letter in the spring of 2014, asking you to renew by June 30 for the next year.

This change will save postage and printing costs, reduce the need for multiple mailings, and allow us to better forecast membership contributions for the year. We understand and respect that some supporters have strong preferences as to what time of year they make charitable contributions. Should you have such preferences or any questions or concerns, please contact us at 778.6088 or [info@seltnh.org](mailto:info@seltnh.org) and we will do our best to accommodate them. *Thank you!* ■



## Land Protection BY THE NUMBERS

**As of November 18, 2013,  
the Southeast Land Trust has  
conserved 156 special places  
totaling 9,046 acres:**

- 6,386 acres via conservation easements and executory interests
- 2,660 acres owned by the Land Trust

*Help the Oaklands Campaign Raise \$37,000 to  
complete important acquisition*  
See details on page 1

*Rockrimmon Continues to Rock On!*  
See details on page 3

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