



The Opportunity of a Lifetime: Birch Ridge Community Forest.

FOR SALE: Opportunities abound at this large land holding in southeastern New Hampshire! Two thousand undeveloped acres upon a ridgeline overlooking Merrymeeting Lake await your grand designs. Views of Mount Washington and the Presidentials. Establish a family recreational compound with 10 miles of trails and access to NH snowmobile Route 22. Use the great habitat as your own private hunting reserve. Developers and investors—consider the potential skyline homesites with stunning views—and the land cleared of trees...
Less than 1 hour to Portsmouth and Manchester!

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And so could have read the real estate listing for some 2,000 acres of forestland on Birch Ridge in New Durham.

But fortunately, the last-chance opportunity now awaits to conserve this land, thanks to a leap of faith taken by local residents and the Merrymeeting Lake Association (MMLA).

The Birch Ridge tract had been the focus of past efforts to purchase it, one in 2008 that raised significant public and private funds, but failed to proceed when an agreement could not be reached with the landowner. That landowner, a New York investment fund, sold the land in 2017 to the current owner, a logging company, whose plans focused on two things: an aggressive, quick timber harvest and subsequent sale for development.

To residents and lovers of Merrymeeting Lake, once again it seemed that the opportunity to acquire the land had slipped through their fingers.

“We knew we had to do something,” remarks Mark Sullivan, past-President and current Treasurer of MMLA and New Durham resident when he thinks about how he felt in response to hearing the news of the sale to the logger. And something they did. The MMLA stepped forward to secure the rights to acquire the Birch Ridge

tract, putting \$200,000 down as a non-refundable deposit. Their goal: to acquire the land, prevent subdivision and development, and conserve it for the greater good.

Their motivation to act quickly and decisively was simple. For lovers of Merrymeeting Lake, the Birch Ridge property is a scenic backdrop for summers of swimming, water skiing, boating, and family fun. Beyond its beauty, more than 1,000 acres of the property drains to Merrymeeting Lake and Merrymeeting River. If developed, the Birch Ridge property could bring additional nutrients, sediments, and more to the lake – known as one of the cleanest lakes in the state. For residents of New Durham, the development of Birch Ridge could bring more than 150 new homes, a ridgeline of lights, a network of roads, and the associated burden of road maintenance and police and fire coverage.

With an agreement in place, the MMLA reached out to SELT with a request: could SELT help manage this project and raise the nearly \$3 million needed to conserve Birch Ridge once and for all?

“The Birch Ridge land was immediately recognized as a must do,” explains SELT’s Land

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Above: View from Birch Ridge overlooking Merrymeeting Lake. PHOTO CREDIT: JERRY MONKMAN, ECOPHOTOGRAPHY, LLC

Birds of a Feather Flock Together. Or Do They?

By Jennifer Pribble, Communications Manager

On a very early morning this summer, I ventured out to Two Rivers Wildlife Preserve to meet Erica Holm. Erica is a second-year graduate student in Wildlife & Conservation Biology at the University of New Hampshire. She is leading a research team to find out how shrubland and, surprisingly, forestland birds are using clear cut and shrubland areas in New Hampshire.

According to Erica, “Earlier research showed forest birds in the shrubland habitat. The question is why? We are seeking to answer this by finding out ‘who is in the shrubland.’”



Eastern Bluebird, SELT’s Two Rivers Wildlife Preserve.

PHOTOS COURTESY: ERICA HOLM, UNH

To answer these questions, Erica and her nine team members are visiting 36 sites in southern New Hampshire and Maine. The research areas are focused on defined property types: clear-cut areas and power-line right-of-ways. Three SELT properties are being used to facilitate this research: Two Rivers in Epping (cut in 2015), Burley Farms in Epping (cut in 2016), and the Sinotte Woodlands in Danville and Kingston (power line right of way).

Erica explains that, “Right-of-ways and clear cuts are critical to the study because shrublands are decreasing throughout New Hampshire. Meadows mature to forests over time or forests are lost to human development. Actively managed areas allow us to better understand the role of succession from young to old forests in the landscape. These habitats are critical for many bird species.”

Erica and her nine team members set up bird nets at zero meters, 30 meters, and 50 meters from the edge of the forest to help understand the answers to those questions. The nets are checked by trained bird handlers every 15 minutes throughout the session.

Once captured, the technicians carefully remove the bird from the netting using species-specific handling guidelines, place the bird into a soft cotton bag, and deliver it to the bander who is stationed at the site.

At Two Rivers, that was Erica. As she delicately handled a rambunctious blue jay, she explained that “each species requires a unique handling technique.” Once positioned safely in hand, the bird sat calmly in Erica’s banding grip.

For each capture, she measured the size and determined the sex, health, and approximate age of the bird. The data is recorded by hand and a band applied.

The data is not just used for this research, it’s also submitted to the national database so that if the bird is recaptured, other researchers can learn about its presence as it was recorded in New England.

After watching this process for several birds, Erica taught me the banders grip to hold a black-capped chickadee. I was intimidated but excited for the opportunity. I don’t know



Juvenile American Robin, Sinotte Woodlands

what I expected, but it was simultaneously strong, delicate, and incredibly soft for such a wild little creature. I am grateful for the opportunity and thankful that research is being done to learn more about their habitats.

The study has researchers at each site six times throughout the summer. At the time of this writing, five visits have been completed for each site. It’s too soon to say what the study will discover, but the report hopes to inform land management practices for the future.

Brian Hart, Executive Director of SELT, is pleased with this contribution to research. “We’re encouraged to see our lands contributing to a body of research that leads to a better understanding of native birds and also future land management decisions for the state of New Hampshire and the region.”

If you are interested in learning more about bird identification, visit allaboutbirds.org. To see “who” was found at SELT properties visit seltnh.org.

New Trails to Enjoy

Piscassic Greenway Gets Elevated

This fall, weather permitting, SELT plans to install a 320-foot, elevated boardwalk at our Piscassic Greenway in Newfields and Newmarket. The boardwalk will allow for year-round access and use of the Byrne Spur Trail. It will also be the final piece necessary to create a loop on the eastern portion of the Greenway for hikers to enjoy.

Perhaps most importantly, the bridge will help prevent damage to the wetland habitat it crosses. It is designed so that sunlight reaches below to allow plant life to continue to thrive and provide the necessary habitats for critical species in the wetland. The boardwalk will be ADA accessible with a viewing area at the halfway point, allowing visitors to enjoy the view of the beaver pond and surrounding wetlands.

Changes at Stonehouse Pond

Stonehouse Pond in Barrington is a gem of a property that features a rocky shoreline around the clear fly-fishing pond. In the past, getting there could be a little bumpy – literally. The road was rutted and very challenging to navigate with two-way traffic to the popular fishing spot.

This spring, the road was regraded and now provides a smooth gravel surface to a new trailhead parking area where a temporary trail map, showing the trail system and the changes that are in process, can be found in a new kiosk. Ongoing changes to the trails include reroutes to keep all public trails on SELT’s land and off private land and to keep trails away from the shoreline based on new wildlife management guidelines for trails from the NH Fish and Game Department.

continued at right

A Yankee Promise Kept

What does it mean to really be from somewhere? So many people grow up and move to the next town, or a neighboring state. What happens to our connections to a place?

The Lewis brothers, Dennis and Dan, can trace their roots as a Candia family for generations. Their parents, Ralph and Norma, who are now deceased, first lived in the village and were very active in the community. His mother was a trustee of the town museum, “forever.” But, as development changed the pace of life and traffic, the Lewis parents opted to purchase land away from the village center to start their homestead in the mid-1960s. Beginning with a small lot of 4–5 acres, the family began to make a home for themselves. Over the next decade, the Lewis family acquired three additional lots, including a 100-acre timber lot, a 25-acre aging sugar bush, and another 3-acre field, all to prevent development.

According to Dennis, his parents really loved their homestead and wanted to keep the property intact and make sure that it was not developed. After all, the Lewis family is just the second owner of this land since the 1750s.

Dennis explained, “That was always part of the understanding. Before my mother passed away she reminded us often that she and our father wanted the land to be protected from development.”

Mrs. Lewis kept a daily walk routine along her favorite paths. She often told friends and family that was where she would pass away. And, one Sunday afternoon late last year, that’s just what happened. Dennis discovered her in a peaceful state on the path of her favorite walk.

Because they cherished the land and their hometown of Candia, the Lewis brothers felt it was important to keep their promise to their parents and protect the homestead from development now or in the future.

“With my work with SELT, I knew what the organization was doing to protect land and I liked what I saw,” notes Dennis. “I talked with Phil [Auger, SELT Land Manager] and he helped me get the ball rolling.”

This past June, the Lewis brothers fulfilled their commitment and donated a conservation easement on 124 acres to SELT. In addition to keeping a promise, this easement contributes to a



The 124-acre Lewis Conservation Easement, donated to SELT in July 2018. PHOTO: SELT STAFF

larger conservation area near Bear Brook State Park and helps protect an important portion of the North Branch River, a tributary to the Lamprey River and Great Bay estuary.

The transaction-related costs for this donated easement were funded through grants awarded from the Great Bay Resource Protection Partnership, the NH Department of Environmental Services Aquatic Resource Mitigation Fund and the sale of Conservation License Plates (Mooseplate) through the NH State Conservation Committee grant program.

Work will continue through the fall and will include some trail closures as well as the installation of a winter parking area just off Route 9/202. Along with the changes to the trail system, all trails have been clearly marked and blazed and three new bridges have been constructed. A new trail map showing the final trail system as well as signs at trail intersections will be installed when the trail work is complete. We invite you to check it out!

Updates at Stonehouse Pond

- Three bridges
- All trails blazed
- New kiosk
- Road grading and improvements
- Two new trails
- All boundaries marked
- New parking lot at the trail heads

Burley Farms

SELT staff and several very dedicated volunteers have spent countless hours this summer preparing SELT’s Burley Farms in Epping for TrailFest on September 22. A new kiosk with a map showing the trail along the edge of the hay fields is located on the woods road just south of the farmhouse and parking area. A walk along the trail provides a scenic view of the fields and beaver pond and is a great place for birders, with a chance to see American woodcocks, rose-breasted grosbeaks, prairie and yellow warblers, eastern kingbirds, bobolinks, great blue herons and red-tailed and red-shouldered hawks – just to name a few! Stop by to walk the trail anytime, or better yet, join us at TrailFest! Learn more at seltnh.org/trailfest.

What is a Community Forest?

First and foremost: community. When groups of people come together for the purpose of creating and managing a forest, it is considered a community forest. These forests can be owned by towns, or non-profits like SELT, and are managed with strong community input in goal setting and decision-making.

A “community forest” promotes conservation, community, and economic development through community ownership and management of land. To engage the community, the Partnership will be undertaking an inclusive public process to develop a community-informed and supported management plan for Birch Ridge. This process will allow concerned citizens to share their knowledge of the property and their goals, in areas such as recreation, access, wildlife habitat, and water quality. A community forest planning committee made up of community members is currently being formed. This planning committee includes local educators, trail users, hunters and fishermen, wildlife enthusiasts, snowmobilers, and residents. It’s designed to build support for the conservation and long-term stewardship of the Birch Ridge Community Forest. A schedule of public field trips and meetings will be posted at seltnh.org/birchridge.

Want to learn more about how you can be a part of the Birch Ridge Community Forest? Visit seltnh.org/birchridge or email info@seltnh.org.

Birch Ridge *continued from page 1*

Conservation Director Duane Hyde. “We saw the importance of this land for people and nature and the amazing enthusiasm of the MMLA, and knew we needed robust community engagement to succeed.”

With this in mind, SELT is leading a partnership of SELT, MMLA, and the local land trust, Moose Mountains Regional Greenways (MMRG). Each brings its own unique strengths to this ambitious initiative: the Partnership for Birch Ridge Community Forest. The sole goal of the partnership is to acquire and permanently conserve the property as a “Community Forest” [see inset article for more about Community Forests].

Currently owned by a logger, Birch Ridge is being heavily cut for timber. The NH Division of Forests & Lands is closely monitoring the cut to ensure it meets state regulations. With land, as you may know, it’s good to take the long view. Like the White Mountain National Forest in the early 1900s – which was heavily clear cut by timber barons – Birch Ridge will recover and rebound. Recent visits to the property show strong regeneration of oak, which is a good sign of recovery. The forest will rise again to create a healthy habitat for wildlife, maintain a good filter for the watershed, and provide continued opportunities for recreation. It is because of this that community members and groups with a variety of perspectives have come together with a unified vision for the Birch Ridge Community Forest.



Regenerating growth at Birch Ridge.

PHOTO: SELT STAFF

When speaking with SELT, Sullivan knew how rare such an ownership was in this part of New Hampshire. “Most large focus areas require years of work with multiple agencies, conservation organizations, and many private property owners to protect large acreage. It is wildly uncommon to find thousand-acre properties with a single private owner in [southeastern] New Hampshire. In fact, it’s so rare, that it’s been called an opportunity of a lifetime.”

The conservation attributes of the Birch Ridge property are wide and varied and the property is highlighted in the *NH Wildlife Action Plan*, *Land Conservation Plan for NH’s Coastal Watershed*, the Town of New Durham’s *Natural Resources Inventory*, and MMRG’s *Conservation Action Plan*. The land tickles the fancy of all who see it, from wildlife enthusiasts to snowmobilers to hikers.

Indeed, the Birch Ridge Community Forest is significant because of its size, the potential for educational uses, existing recreational uses (i.e., hiking, snowmobiling, etc.), and diverse habitat.

These diverse habitats, coupled with clean water and rich food sources, create a haven for wildlife. Common and wide-ranging species like moose, bear, deer, ruffed grouse, turkey, snowshoe hare, and bobcat thrive on the property. Smaller forest dwellers like salamanders and rare turtles utilize the property’s vernal pools, many streams, a 25-acre beaver pond, and Coldrain Pond, a popular fly fishing-only pond that is stocked annually with eastern brook trout and also hosts rainbow and brown trout. This land is a priority as a connector for wildlife that allows creatures to move freely throughout the uninterrupted forest.

This large property offers more than 10 miles of trails for hikers, cross-country skiers, and birders with wonderful views of the lake and all the way to Mt. Washington. The Powder Mill Snowmobile Club maintains 86 miles of trails in the area along Corridor 22, which runs through the Birch Ridge tract. Corridor 22 is the main

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east-west snowmobile corridor south of Lake Winnepesaukee that connects Maine to central New Hampshire. It allows riders to travel from the south all the way to Corridor 19 in North Conway.

As a forest, Birch Ridge plays a small role in supporting the local economy – including year-round recreational activities. “As summer residents pack up and leave the local businesses have hard winter months ahead – and are dependent on snow coverage to carry them through to spring,” explains Matt Murphy, an active member of the Powder Mill Snowmobile Club. “Local businesses survive when snowmobile riders purchase fuel, supplies, and frequent area shops and restaurants.”

Club members have been actively stewarding the trails in Birch Ridge for the last 50 years. Members maintain trails, repair culverts, replace signs, and brush out trails annually. This work is appreciated by more than just snowmobile riders. Area sled dog teams use the routes for training and the trails were historically open to everyone, all year long for hiking, cross-country skiing, and snowshoeing.

Murphy’s biggest worry is a loss of access to critical trails if the land is sold for development. He’s encouraged by the conservation effort and hopes that it gets more of the community involved and excited about the land.

To that end, the Partnership must raise \$2,950,000 with at least \$1.5 million of that in private funds to successfully establish and conserve the Birch Ridge Community Forest. Since that first meeting with MMLA in May, the Partnership has developed a solid fundraising plan that is now fully underway. SELT has applied to public grant sources, including the NH Land and Community Heritage Investment Program and the US Forest Service’s Community Forest and Open Space Program with decisions by December. If the Partnership successfully raises the necessary funds, these 2,000 acres of land will become the Birch Ridge Community Forest, managed and stewarded for the benefit of the community.

And those stunning views from the top? “They are incredible in every season,” Murphy notes. “There is a special place where blueberry fields are surrounded by a stone wall fence. Standing in the fields, looking through the gateway, Mt. Washington is perfectly framed. To know that same reverence for this land and the view was shared centuries ago brings us even closer together.”



A stream cascading through the property.
PHOTO: SELT STAFF



Moose in Beaver Pond. PHOTO CREDIT: JERRY MONKMAN, ECOPHOTOGRAPHY, LLC

Take in the views on an upcoming trip
(see Upcoming Events on page 6)
and learn more about Birch Ridge
Community Forest at seltnh.org.



Upcoming Events

View the full calendar and sign up at seltnh.org. Suggested donation is \$5/person or \$10/family. All donations benefit our public outreach programs. Registration closes at Noon the day before the event.

Learn Your Leaves

October 13 · 9–11am · Piscassic Greenway, Newmarket/Newfields

Join SELT and Hike It Baby Seacoast for an adventure with your kids! We'll hike the Piscassic Greenway and collect fallen leaves, learn leaf types, and make leaf rubbings to take home.

Moose Mountains Regional Greenways (MMRG) and SELT are hosting a series of events so you can get to know the proposed Birch Ridge Community Forest. Check the seltnh.org for additional upcoming events.

Birch Ridge Series: Foliage Hike

October 20 · 9–11am · Birch Ridge Community Forest, New Durham

Explore the proposed Birch Ridge Community Forest in New Durham and take in scenic views of Merrymeeting Lake in its full fall glory. On a clear day, views of Mt. Washington are possible. SELT is working in partnership with Merrymeeting Lake Association and MMRG to acquire and manage this 2,000 acre property.

Book Club

October 25 · 5:30–7pm · SELT Office, Exeter

Our fall read is *Bearskin* by James A. McLaughlin. Join other SELTies for conversation, local foods, and beverages to share! Remember – get your copy from Water Street Bookstore and 20% of the proceeds will be donated to SELT!



Stonehouse History Series: Archeology Hike

November 3 · 9–11am · Stonehouse Forest, Barrington

Local archeologists, Jessica Coefelice (Euroamerican specialist) and Jake Tumelaire (prehistoric specialist), will show us documented European-American sites found in the recent survey and discover why the natural resources of the area likely drew Native Americans to this beautiful but rugged landscape.

Stonehouse History Series: Geology Hike

November 10 · 9–11am · Stonehouse Forest, Barrington

Wally Bothner, Professor Emeritus of Geology at University of New Hampshire, and SELT Property Manager Phil Auger will lead a tour of the geomorphic features of Stonehouse Forest in Barrington. Learn about bedrock and surficial geology of the property, see a smattering of outcrops, and look at the landform development of Stonehouse Forest.



A couple enjoys the view from a rock wall.

PHOTO CREDIT: JERRY MONKMAN, ECOPHOTOGRAPHY, LLC

Birch Ridge Series: Timber Harvest 101

December 1 · 9–11am · Birch Ridge Community Forest, New Durham

What is timber harvesting? Andy Fast, UNH Cooperative Extension County Forester, and Emma Tutein, UNH Cooperative Extension Wildlife Biologist, will lead a tour of cut areas and teach us about the process of timber harvests. Why are they important for forest health? What state regulations are in place? How is the land responding now and how will it respond over time? We'll also talk about SELT's future plans for the property, and how we plan to manage it to benefit the forest and wildlife that call it home!

Above: A young SELTie learns how to identify a sassafras leaf.
PHOTO CREDIT: EMILY LORD

SELT Goes To School

If you have kids, you're probably settling in to the school year rhythms. You also know that young people are passionate about the people, places, and things in their lives. SELT is lucky to have a young member who is passionate about saving land and bringing that passion to her classmates: Caden Cole.

Before the end of the last school year, Caden meandered through a cluster of giant cinnamon ferns with SELT's Easement Steward, Dani Almeida. Dani talked about the flora and fauna as they navigated boundary lines in the Marsh Lane Conservation Easement in Hampton Falls. The property is owned by the Town of Hampton Falls and is monitored by SELT. You would hardly imagine that it is hidden less than 500 yards across a salt marsh from Route 1A. Caden said that the view of the marsh was her favorite part of the walk.

As they talked, Caden took videos and pictures with her iPhone to record their journey and create a short documentary-style film for an assignment. The goal was to design a project that would have long-term impact for her peers. She wanted her classmates to know about why saving land is important. The video was a big hit with her classmates. She added, "They thought it was super cool!"

Caden has been donating to SELT since she was nine years old, a habit instilled by her parents, who wanted her to understand the importance of giving. Her mother Carla explains, "We wanted to teach our children about the importance of giving. Each of our kids receives an allowance and they use it to fill three jars: save, spend, and gift. Caden has chosen SELT for her gift."

According to Caden, she gives to SELT because "I really believe that building on land is bad because we have enough building and demolition. If we keep building on the earth it will turn to ashes and we need to conserve what we can. We also need to protect wildlife and protect their habitats. It's not fair to take away theirs so we can make our own."

Caden is eager to help others learn about SELT and get involved, too. Keep an eye out for her, she's a young advocate with a good cause!



Caden and Dani exploring the Marsh Lane Conservation Easement in Hampton Falls. PHOTO: SELT STAFF

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Questions, Comments, Concerns?

To contact SELT, please call **603-778-6088** or email info@seltnh.org.

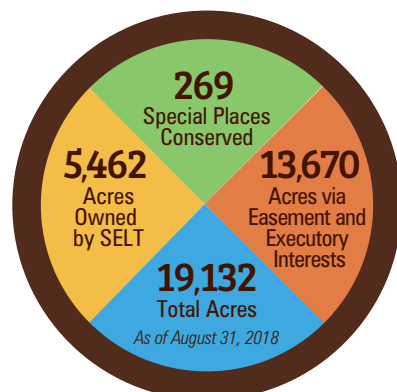
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HIKE IT. SAVE IT.

Birch Ridge Community Forest

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Birds of a Feather Flock Together. Or Do They?

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TrailFest!

Join us for TrailFest—September 22.
Register for the trail run or come just for the fun!

Ongoing Fun

- Throwback Brewery Beer Tent featuring “Enjoy the Sun,” a Brut IPA developed by Throwback Brewery and Revision Energy to benefit SELT!
- Food for sale from local vendors and seasonal taste testing with the Seacoast Area Mobile Market
- Hands-on exhibit of pelts, skulls, scat and tracks from 13 furbearing mammals native to NH, by the Natural Resources Stewards
- Self-guided scavenger hunt, face painting, body art, lawn games, and more



TrailFest Schedule

8:00 AM	Race-day Registration Opens
9:00 AM	Festival Begins
9:30 AM	5k Trail Run/Walk 5K runners and walkers will enjoy a course that traverses meadows, forest trails, and unpaved country roads. Registration is \$30. Participants are also encouraged, though not required, to set a personal or team fundraising goal. Sign up at seltnh.org/trailfest .
10:30 AM	Fun Run for Kids Make the day a family event: the 1K fun run for kids is free. Sign up at the event.
10:30 AM	Guided Tour of Burley Farms
11:30 AM	Guided Tour of Burley Farms Live Raptor Program with Jane Kelly, On the Wing
12:30 PM	Live Reptile Program with Zoo Creatures
1:00 PM	Mushroom Walk
2:00 PM	Festival closes