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## The Cows Come First

**D**airy farming runs deep in some families, so deep in fact that you might think the blood of these farmers runs white with milk. While their work is often hard and unrelenting, their special connection to the land and to their cows is humbly passed down through the generations. And once rooted, this desire to continue their family's traditions only grows stronger through time.

Meadorboro Road in Farmington is home to Scruton's Dairy, now in its fifth generation of delivering fresh milk to the region. Stop for a second to think about that – this family has risen before dawn to milk their herd of Holstein cows, not missing a single day since 1926!

The farm is currently operated by fourth generation farmers, Jason and his wife Kerri. They returned to manage the farm in 2008 when Jason's father, Arthur, was tragically killed in a farming accident. The Scrutons work diligently to maintain healthy crops, nourish the land, reduce environmental impacts, and produce quality milk while still keeping their cows happy. They make choices that are good for the cows, good for the land, and good for business. But, according to

Jason, "The cows always come first."

On the other side of Farmington, Bob Hills is getting back into the dairy business, raising five Jersey heifers on his small start-up dairy fittingly named Chesley Mountain Farm. Bob grew up on a dairy farm, but his career took him down another path. Decades later, with a desire to return to farming, he and his wife, Denise, began to look for suitable land across the Seacoast and beyond: in Rochester, Deerfield, Dover, and even towns in Maine. His goal was to start a small dairy farm that could focus on producing quality milk, high in butterfat, for local cheesemakers.

It took five years to find a property to meet their needs and their price. During this process, tragedy struck as Bob's wife was diagnosed with a terminal illness. While caring for her at home, Bob also poured himself into the farm. Bottle-feeding the five young Jerseys became his therapy, helping to cope with the loss of his wife.

While the history and scale of these two dairy farms are vastly different, they each shared the universal challenge of finding affordable, suitable land to support their operations.

*continued on page 3*

Above: Jacob Scruton bottle feeding calves at his family's farm in Farmington.

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# Where to Go in the Snow

**W**inter is coming. Are you ready? Do you curl up with a good book by the fire, or do you prefer to bundle up and explore the wonders of the world in winter? While the former can enjoy a good book with the SELT Book Club, the latter may be interested in some tips for exploring SELT lands this winter.

SELT's properties are not closed during the winter, but some are easier and more enjoyable to access. According to Phil Auger, Land Manager, the following properties are most likely to be plowed out after a snowfall. They offer excellent places for walking, snowshoeing, and cross-country skiing.

- Tucker & French Family Forest, Kingston, 6.9 miles of trails
- Mast Road Natural Area, Epping, 3.4 miles of trails
- Piscassic Greenway, Newfields/Newmarket, 3.5 miles of trails
- Stonehouse Pond, Barrington, 2 miles of trails

Once you've decided where to explore, you get to choose how you explore! Some choose to glide over the snow on cross-country skis looking for a workout. Others, like Ellen Snyder,



Cross country skiers exploring SELT land.  
© JERRY MONKMAN, ECOPHOTOGRAPHY, LLC

a wildlife consultant who works with SELT, enjoy the silence of exploring on snowshoes. Ellen explains, "I like to find a quiet spot to sit for a while. When you stop to listen, you really notice the birds chirping, the icicles chiming, and the wind moving through the trees. Some days it's muffled with new snow. Other days, the cold crisp air heightens the sounds."

No matter how you go, observation is key! If you're lucky, you may find animal tracks and locate their winter hideaways. Ellen recommends looking for clusters of conifers, such as hemlock. They provide cover for animals in the leafless forest.

Some of the best observers are curious children. They may enjoy a trail-side snack and the book, "Over and Under the Snow" by Kate Messner.

Winter exploration offers a great way to escape the beeps and alerts of the modern age. But, if you happen to enjoy those connections, you can share your photos of your winter explorations with SELT on Facebook and Instagram. Tag @SELTNH and/or use the hashtag #SnowySeltie.

# Invest in Nature with Smart Giving Through Your IRA

**B**irch Ridge, as you may know, has long been a priority for the conservation community. No SELTie knows this more than, perhaps, Mike Speltz. Mike worked for the Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests during the first push to conserve the land a decade ago. Though it wasn't successful, Mike has remained confident that the project would happen someday. He likens that work in 2008 to planting seeds for the support the forest is getting today.

That long connection to the land – and the New Durham community – is why Mike recently made a gift to support the Birch Ridge Community Forest through a qualified charitable distribution from his IRA (Individual Retirement Account).

Asked about why he chose to give, Mike replied, "I wanted to help complete what I started AND thank the New Durham community for their long-time support of the conservation of Birch Ridge."

According to Mike, there are some benefits to getting older. If you're at least 70 ½ years old, he said, "A qualified charitable distribution from your IRA should be your first source of donated funds. In fact, the tax advantage allowed me to give more to causes that I care about – like Birch Ridge."

Federal tax law allows gifts of this kind to be made without a tax on the distribution – AND – it may be used to meet the Required Minimum Distribution of an IRA. Distributions are made directly from the account to the charity of choice.



Mike Speltz enjoys the view on Birch Ridge. COURTESY PHOTO

Each financial institution may have a different process. Be sure to talk with your advisor about making such a gift. In Mike's case, "It was very easy once I figured out how to complete the form. It only takes about 10 minutes. Then, they do the magic. It's really no hassle."

To learn more about qualified charitable distributions or other methods of giving, please contact Beverly Shadley, Deputy Director, at 603-658-9752 or [bshadley@seltnh.org](mailto:bshadley@seltnh.org).





Bob Hills' five Jersey cows graze in the pasture.

SELT STAFF

## The Cows Come First *continued from page 1*

The rising pressure of residential development in southeastern New Hampshire is undeniable; farmland in particular is sold at a premium, making it difficult for farmers to purchase or lease land for food production. According to Jason, "It's too expensive to buy our own land to hay. One of the parcels we use is currently listed for \$1M." Many people assume that scenic fields under the care of farmers are protected. The reality is that the vast majority of our farmland remains susceptible to development. These fields are kept open and remain scenic only because they are utilized by farmers, often leasing the land with a handshake and hoping that arrangement survives the relentless march towards subdivision and maximum profit.

In fact, the Scrutons manage well over 300 acres of land beyond their home farm to sustain their herd. As fragments are sold off, their options are shrinking. They now often travel 30 minutes or more to farm land in Madbury and Gonic, as much of the land near their own farm has been sold for development.

Bob can attest to that, too, "Forty to 50 acres of good fields just doesn't exist anymore. In the 70s there was a lot of land, especially in Dover. Today, there's nothing at all."

Jeremy Lougee, SELT Conservation Project Manager, explains the interconnection between our scenic rural communities and dairy farming, "We owe so much of our quintessential New Hampshire landscape to dairy farmers. Losing one farm may not seem like a huge loss, but it's important to recognize the ripple effect it may have. When fields are abandoned, houses often grow if no one is left to cut hay. NH's tourism-based economy relies on these open fields, smattered with grazing cows, historic barns, and even better, ice cream stands. Even moderate-sized dairy farms like Scruton's Dairy can have an outsized impact on the local economy, spending upwards of a million dollars a year on grain, energy, labor, and other bills that flow directly to local businesses."

That's why SELT is working to preserve quality farmland – to ensure these productive soils are available today and for the generations to come. While a conservation easement can't stop the cyclical and national economics of the dairy industry, it can help a dairy farm survive during these challenging times.

"My family has been farming this land since 1926. My great

grandfather, my grandfather, my father, myself, and now my son Jacob," reflects Jason. "We feel very connected to the land. Working with SELT to conserve our land will allow us to connect our past with our future. In this way, we can ensure that our land is available to farm for the next five generations."

Farmers are inherently hopeful people. Bob hopes the decision to conserve his land offers farmers of the future a better chance of finding quality agricultural land in southern New Hampshire. Plus, Bob adds "I like getting out into the woods and down to the river. There's lots of wildlife and history in these places. The family that once lived on this land – or at least the one that farmed the land – are buried in a family plot here. It makes me appreciate the connection to perpetuity."

When asked how SELTies could help local dairy farmers, Kerri replied, "Drink more whole milk – from Hood!"

In addition to buying local milk from distributors like Hood, SELTies can get a taste of local cheeses and dairy products at the Winter Market on Saturdays from

10:00 AM to 2:00 PM at Exeter High School and Wentworth Greenhouses (a rotating schedule).

Remember that New Hampshire dairy farms of all sizes need our admiration and our support ... imagine a world without cheese, yogurt, or (gasp) ice cream!

Learn more about SELT's work to protect farmland for the future visit [seltnh.org/promise](http://seltnh.org/promise).

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Aerial view of Scruton's Dairy with Baxter Lake in the background. © JERRY MONKMAN, ECOPHOTOGRAPHY, LLC



# From Ridgetops to Farms: Your Gifts at Work

## 1 Momentum for Birch Ridge

The ambitious vision to conserve the 2,000-acre Birch Ridge property in New Durham is quickly taking shape. While continuing to raise funds with Moose Mountains Regional Greenways and the Merrymeeting Lake Association, SELT and the Partnership for Birch Ridge hosted a community visioning session in November. More than 70 people attended, enthusiastically sharing their ideas about the future of this landscape exploring topics ranging from trails to wildlife to how to use the property's ridge-top cabin. This session, along with a community survey that has been mailed to New Durham residents and property owners, will provide valuable input as the Steering Committee plans the Birch Ridge Community Forest. And that future is looking bright, with more than \$2,300,000 raised, just \$625,000 remains to be raised. Two state programs are making final funding decisions as we go to press – check out [seltnh.org/birchridge](http://seltnh.org/birchridge) for updates!



A shelter? A warming hut? Just two of the ideas for the future use of the Birch Ridge cabin we heard during the Visioning Session. © JERRY MONKMAN, ECOPHOTOGRAPHY, LLC

## 2 Protecting Chesley Mountain Farm

It took Bob Hills valuable years to find the right farmland for his start-up micro-dairy. Now called Chesley Mountain Farm, he wants to save it for farmers of the future. This late October, through a generous bargain sale, Bob permanently conserved his farm – thank you Bob! See the cover story for more information on Bob and Chesley Mountain Farm.

## 3 A Model for Drinking Water Protection

As the City of Rochester grows to upwards of 30,000 residents, so does the need to protect the City's drinking water sources. Much of that water comes from Whaleback Pond and adjacent lands in Farmington. When SELT approached Rochester about a partnership to conserve an additional 200 acres of privately-owned land next to the City's water supply, the City Council strongly endorsed the project, providing \$122,000 in funding and donating easements on the City's land as a match for a state grant.

## 4 Farmland Receives a Boost

The 1772 Foundation, in partnership with the Land Trust Alliance, awarded SELT a \$150,000 grant to conserve Scruton's Dairy in Farmington (see the cover story) and the Kinney Hill Farm in South Hampton. This grant represents the third year in a row that The 1772 Foundation has awarded SELT funds to conserve farmland in southeastern New Hampshire, an indication of SELT's focus on saving quality, productive farms that are competitive throughout the northeast.

## 5 Cocheco Floodplain Conserved

Working with Waste Management, nearly 50 acres with more than 3,000 feet of shoreline on the Cocheco River in Rochester are now conserved. This easement protects diverse wildlife habitats including a rich floodplain forest; wetlands; and a hardwood forest including cherry, hornbeam, and many very large specimen trees.

## 6 Beyond the View

With its long dirt driveway and scenic hayfields, wetlands, and forests, the 206-acre Bedard Farm in Durham offers much more than a peaceful view along busy Route 108. As the year comes to an end, SELT and its partner The Nature Conservancy hope to complete the purchase of the conservation easements on the farm, safeguarding water quality, productive farmland, wildlife habitat, and unbroken landscapes between the Wild & Scenic Lamprey River and Great Bay. Gifts are still being accepted to save Bedard Farm – make your special gift today!

## 7 Getting Wild on the Lamprey River

Working in partnership with the Lamprey River Advisory Committee, the federally-designated Wild & Scenic Lamprey River is getting a little wilder with the purchase of more than 120 acres in Epping. These four properties expand existing SELT ownerships, including the Two Rivers Wildlife Preserve and the Lamprey River Wildlife Preserve, and will create a new preserve. Each of these lands is critical for threatened and endangered species and the water quality of the Lamprey River.

## 8 Coming soon: Brown Brook Forest

Since 1953, the Horsburgh family has stewarded more than 350 acres of forestland with important vernal pools, wetlands, and other wildlife habitats in Fremont. Against pressure to develop this unbroken landscape, the late Dan Horsburgh and his sister Bette Mari chose to continue their stewardship legacy. By early 2019, SELT will own this land, to be known as the Brown Brook Preserve, with a focus on managing it for wildlife.

## 9 Barker's Farm

Our partnership with Stratham to conserve this beloved local farm – and community staple – is nearing completion thanks to the generous support of SELTies and area residents. The farm's productive soils and wooded trails open to the public will be protected forever.

*continued on page 5*

## 10 Keeping Farmland Accessible

As land values climb and open fields become scarcer, farmers find themselves unable to compete with non-farmers for these “estate” type properties. Thanks to a generous grant from the Lewis Family Foundation, SELT will be developing an innovative tool to help keep farmland accessible and affordable to the next generation of farmers. This tool is known as an “Option to Purchase at Agricultural Value” (OPAV). Essentially, this tool gives working farmers the best chance to acquire a farm and greatly increases the likelihood that farmland protected by SELT will remain productive and available for agriculture into the future. With nearly one-third of NH farmers retiring over the next 15 years, the time is ripe to act now ... before it's too late.

## 11 Bringing Permanence to a Treasured Town Forest

With the assistance of SELT, the Salem Town Forest grew by 100 acres through a purchase. Due to that success, the Town agreed to permanently conserve the entire 343-acre town forest. The Salem Town Forest boasts an outstanding network of trails, important wildlife habitats, and the opportunity for a future water supply.

Map outlines SELT's Service Area (Rockingham & Strafford counties, plus the towns of Brookfield & Wakefield to the north.)



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Bob Hill's farm fields after recent haying.

SELT STAFF

# Thank You for Making Conservation Possible

SELT's tremendous conservation success is due to leveraging your private giving to secure limited local, state, and federal funds. The following state and federal agencies provided substantial grants to support the projects highlighted on this page. We thank them and most importantly you, our SELTies, who through your membership or contributions for special projects support SELT and make it all possible. Thank you!



NH Local Source Water Protection Fund  
Aquatic Resources Mitigation Fund



Merrimack Conservation Partnership







# Join us for a Bonfire & Owl Walk

January 26 · 3-6 PM · Burley Farms, Epping

Owl in flight following a release by Jane Kelly, On the Wing.

PHOTO CREDIT: BILL KRAMER

## Upcoming Events

**View the full calendar and sign up at [seltnh.org](http://seltnh.org).** Suggested donation is \$5/person or \$10/family. Please register early; our events fill quickly. Registration closes at Noon the day before the event.

### Winter Market

January 12 · 10 AM-Noon  
Exeter High School

Visit with SELT volunteers and learn more about our current projects!

### Book Club

January 17 · 5:30-7 PM  
SELT Office, Exeter

Join us for snacks, beverages, and warm conversation while we discuss “The Snow Child” by Eowyn Ivey.

### Bonfire & Owl Walk–Jane Kelly

January 26 · 3-6 PM  
Burley Farms, Epping

Cozy up by the fire, drink hot chocolate, and meet fellow SELTies! If you're game, bring your snowshoes and headlamps and leave the warmth of the fire to join local raptor rehabilitator Jane Kelly on a special evening owl walk! (Register separately for the owl walk; space is limited.)



The annual winter bonfire at Burley Farms. SELT STAFF

### Birch Ridge Series: Snowshoe the Wetland in Winter

February 2 · 9-11 AM  
New Durham

Snowshoe the Birch Ridge Community Forest with Mike Speltz, former Land Agent for the Forest Society. Hike to the largest open water wetland in the forest to see which animals are present, how the surrounding forest is recovering from the recent harvest, and why the “dead” winter landscape is anything but!

### Winter Tree ID

February 23 · 9-11 AM  
Newfields

Do you know how to identify trees without leaves? This all-levels fieldtrip, led by Phil Auger and Fred Broman, will teach you how using buds, branching, bark, and more. Register early before this fills up.



Children enjoying a story by the bonfire. SELT STAFF

### Wildlife Walk

March 2 · 9-11 AM  
Epping

Bring your snowshoes and join Emma Tutein, UNH Cooperative Extension Field Specialist, in search for signs of fox, coyote, fisher, mink, and more!

### Save the Date! Wild & Scenic Film Festival

April 12 · 8 PM  
The Music Hall, Portsmouth

Tickets go on sale in February! Don't miss this sell-out night of incredible movies showcasing wild people and landscapes.



Field trippers enjoy winter wildlife tracking. PHOTO CREDIT: EMMA TUTEIN

## Lasting Stewardship Affirmed

This summer, SELT was re-accredited by the Land Trust Accreditation Commission for a second five-year term through 2023, one of more than 400 accredited land trusts in the country. Accreditation is independent verification by national experts that SELT follows the best practices of the land trust community to ensure good governance, sound finances, ethical conduct, and lasting stewardship of our conserved lands.

It's that final phrase "lasting stewardship" that is probably the biggest challenge for any land trust going through the rigorous accreditation process – either the first time or for renewal. To be accredited, each land trust must steward all lands and easements entrusted in the organization, each year. Reaccreditation confirmed SELT's 10-year track record of monitoring 100% of our conservation easements as well as the stewardship of our more than 5,400 acres of fee-owned land.

To SELT's Stewardship Director Deborah Goard, who managed the organization's renewal application to the Land Trust Accreditation Commission, "It was truly satisfying to receive national affirmation of our commitment to keeping the promise of conservation." That commitment is made possible by SELT's professional stewardship department and a cadre of volunteers. Those volunteers helped monitor 30 of SELT's 195 easements in 2018 and improved or created trails and related access improvements on SELT's public lands, such as the Stonehouse Pond in Barrington.

But really, what is accreditation and what does it mean to you, as a SELTie?

"For donors, it should affirm that you can give to SELT with confidence," explains Brian Hart, SELT's Executive Director, "and know that your gift is making results that matter, right here in New Hampshire." Learn more at [landtrustaccreditation.org](http://landtrustaccreditation.org).



Volunteers with Accreditation Pennant.

STAFF PHOTO

### Board Members

- Samuel Reid** President, Portsmouth
- Ann Welsh** Vice President, Durham
- Ann Smith** Treasurer, Kensington
- Joan Pratt** Secretary, Exeter
- Roger Stephenson** Immediate Past President, Stratham
- Terry Coyle** Portsmouth
- Bill Campbell** Exeter
- Thomas Chamberlin** New Castle
- Dan Clapp** Madbury
- Pam Hall** Portsmouth
- David Kirkpatrick** Portsmouth
- Scott Marion** Rye
- Linda McGivern** Rollinsford
- Robin Najjar** Portsmouth
- Laurie Smith** Dover
- Rob Wofchuck** Brentwood
- Dan Wyand** Portsmouth

### Staff

- Zoe Aldag** Development & Outreach Coordinator
- Dani Almeida** Conservation Easement Steward
- Phil Auger** Land Manager
- Allison Bolia** Development Specialist
- Shaun Dillon** Conservation Coordinator
- Deborah Goard** Stewardship Director
- Brian Hart** Executive Director
- Duane Hyde** Land Conservation Director
- Jeremy Lougee** Conservation Project Manager
- Kylee Noga** Executive & Operations Assistant
- Jennifer Pribble** Communications Manager
- Bev Shadley** Deputy Director

### Questions, Comments, Concerns?

To contact SELT, please call **603-778-6088** or email [info@seltnh.org](mailto:info@seltnh.org).

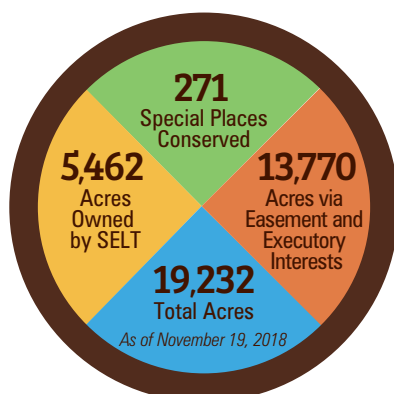
6 Center St., PO Box 675, Exeter, NH 03833  
Website: [seltnh.org](http://seltnh.org)

SELT VIEWS is published periodically and is the newsletter of the Southeast Land Trust of New Hampshire. Edited by Jennifer Pribble and Brian Hart.

Printed on recycled paper.

The Internal Revenue Service continues to recognize the Southeast Land Trust of New Hampshire as a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization, Tax ID number 02-0355374. Contributions are tax-deductible.

## Land Conservation by the Numbers



### A Mark of Distinction

The accreditation seal AFFIRMS national quality standards are met.







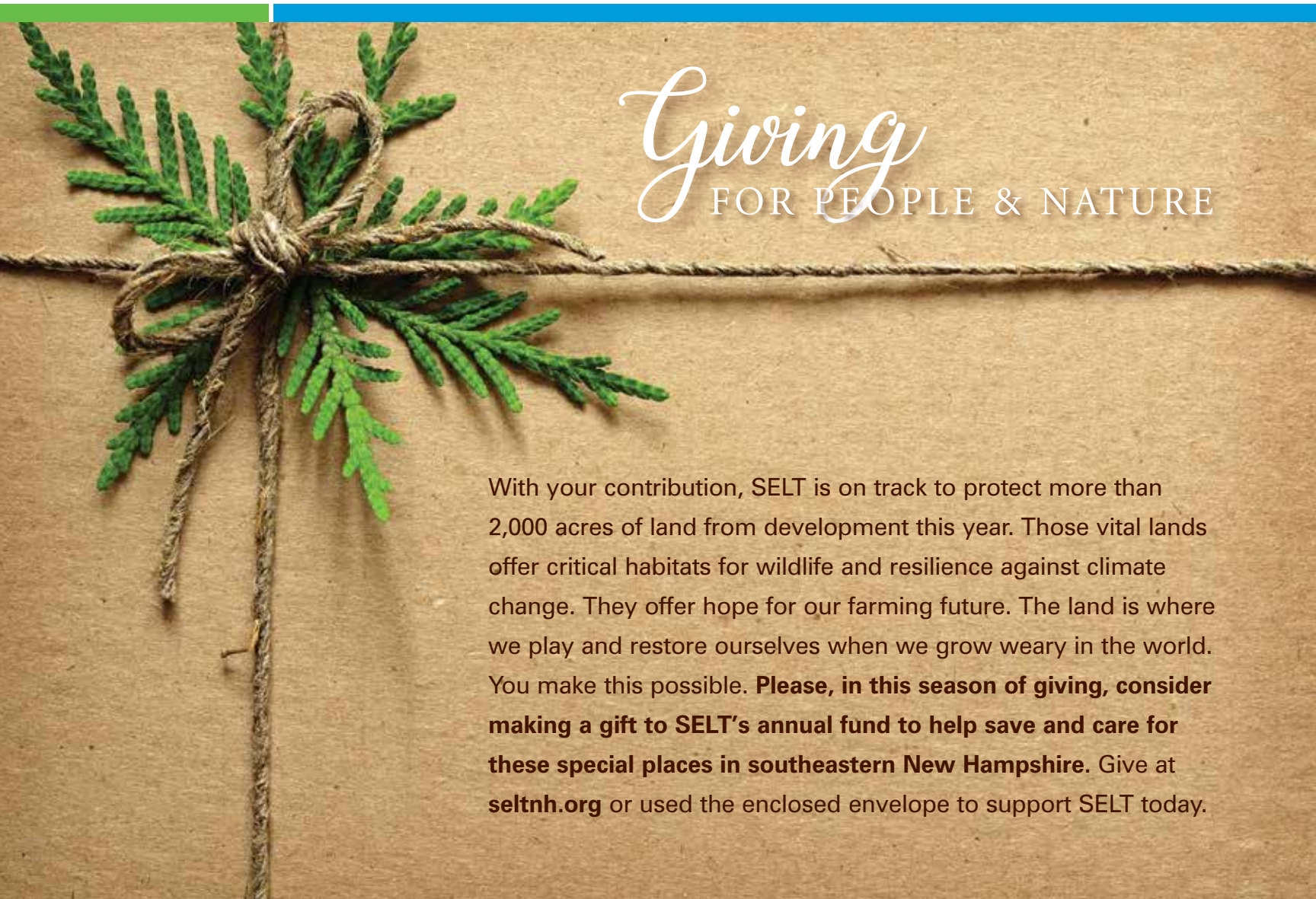
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# *Giving* FOR PEOPLE & NATURE

With your contribution, SELT is on track to protect more than 2,000 acres of land from development this year. Those vital lands offer critical habitats for wildlife and resilience against climate change. They offer hope for our farming future. The land is where we play and restore ourselves when we grow weary in the world. You make this possible. **Please, in this season of giving, consider making a gift to SELT's annual fund to help save and care for these special places in southeastern New Hampshire.** Give at [seltnh.org](http://seltnh.org) or used the enclosed envelope to support SELT today.