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The Wooded Canvas

The proposed Leighton Forest is more than a piece of property – it is the reflection of a man who devoted his life to the caretaking of New Hampshire’s forested treasures.

You pull into the open field and park just off to the side of the wooded entrance. The sun is hot on this late August day in Strafford, New Hampshire, but just a few steps away sits a towering canopy and near-limitless shade. You double-time it over to the welcoming maw of Leighton Forest and begin your summer stroll.

The first thing you notice is the serenity. Though there’s an active country road just a few hundred yards away, any ambient tire-on-pavement noise is soaked up by the tree cover and dissipated into silence. You could be 10,000 miles away from any semblance of civilization. Such is the tranquility of Leighton Forest.

You make your way up the winding path, flanked by mature, majestic trees – white pines, red oaks, and hemlock trees, as you weave along an invisible boundary between Barrington and Strafford that the property straddles. Despite the extremely dry season, Leighton feels lush and green – though a glance around reveals places where bubbling streams would carve themselves through the landscape if the rain was more giving in 2020.

Still – the durability of Leighton Forest, even amidst drought conditions is a testament to conscientious and committed forest management. The forest’s black gum trees – some of which are estimated to be 300 to 400 years old! – have seen their share of adversity and weathered many seasons; this drought is just another annal in their growth rings. And if you knew Roger Leighton, who shares the namesake for Leighton Forest with his family, this should come as no surprise.

The name “Leighton” carries with it enormous historical weight in the Strafford/Barrington area of New Hampshire. The Leighton family was one of the earliest groups of settlers in Barrington, and that’s saying something since Barrington, settled in 1699 and incorporated in 1722, is one of the Granite State’s oldest towns.

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Happy autumn, SELTies –

As we wrap up three-quarters of 2020, I think it is fair to speak for all of us when I say this was not how we thought the year would go. We have all been impacted by the COVID pandemic in a variety of ways, and for SELT, our world has changed like so many others.

Our office was, and continues to be, eerily quiet. For the remainder of 2020, we've made the decision to give our staff the choice to continue working remotely – which most have selected. And while we miss the joy of regular visitors to our office, the SELT headquarters will remain closed for impromptu visits.

Programmatically, COVID has forced us to adapt. TrailFest became a virtual, choose-your-own-adventure 5K, spread out over two weeks in early September. Our field trips have been modified to maintain social distance. And our popular Wild and Scenic Film Festival will take a new virtual form to coincide with the 2020 experience.

Despite all of these changes, we continue to hear from many people how valuable our lands and trails have been for them; this news motivates us to continue our work. Many of SELT's public properties saw huge jumps in foot traffic; truly, there are few things as revitalizing as getting outside and spending some quality time with nature!

Lastly, as we have adapted, much has been delayed, including our membership renewal letters. To that end, please renew (or begin!) your membership in SELT and support our efforts to save, share, and steward the lands you love. Please visit seltnh.org and click on the Donate button to contribute – or use the enclosed envelope.

Thank you for your steadfast support!



Brian Hart
Executive Director, SELT

Thoroughfares of the Natural World

When wildlife is on the move – as they often are – creating corridors for safe passage becomes a crucial criterion for conservation opportunities.

You're a Blanding's turtle. You've got a nice system of streams, wetlands and uplands that you like to call home. Life is simple. Sure, there's the occasional raccoon or skunk that tries to turn you into a delicious pre-packaged meal, but a quick retraction of the lobes of your hinged plastron is often good enough to keep the forest's rapsallions at bay. Other than that, it's the usual: rooting around for small crustaceans and aquatic insects, and burrowing into the mud in the fall to stay out of the cold. All in all, not a bad way to spend 90 or so years on this planet. But then, one day, you look around your habitat and come to a realization: it's time to move.



Blanding's turtle. KASSANDRA PEARL

Wildlife corridors: the zig-zag routes that grant animals the passage they need to move between habitats. But in a world of interstates, rural highways, overpasses, culverts, and cul-de-sacs, a standard migration can quickly turn into a high-risk proposition.

"It's all about identifying the connection between habitat areas," says Peter Steckler, GIS and Conservation Project Manager for The Nature Conservancy in New Hampshire. "It's not as simple as finding the only green space as a thread connecting these areas. Our wildlife don't have GPS or roadmaps. They are instinctively following habitat features."

The risk for these animals-in-transit is when the habitat path suddenly feeds into a roadway with cars rocketing at 75mph and life turns into a real-world game of *Frogger* – with potentially disastrous consequences.

Even for wildlife with a keener sense of self-preservation – the bobcat for example, which has a home range at the lower end of approximately 10 square miles – impasses to travel corridors still pose existential problems. A bobcat may not chance the 50-yard dash across I-93 or turn back when it hears a barking dog at a nearby housing development, but its failure to leave its current habitat can have detrimental, cascading effects on both its life cycle and the ecosystem as a whole.

All of a sudden there is no way for a new bobcat population to establish itself, the bobcat's offspring stay put, inbreeding takes over and genetic diversity plummets, and with that the species will lose its resilience and ability to adapt to outside threats like pathogens and changes in climate.

Taken in the context of broader land conservation efforts, creating or preserving these wildlife corridors is particularly critical. The nature of conservation – especially in more-developed areas like the New Hampshire Greater Seacoast region – can lend itself to a more fragmented approach; which makes sense, as you can only conserve the lands that are available to conserve and not all parcels are contiguous to allow for wildlife connectivity.

"That is the challenge," Peter says. "How to conserve areas that wildlife will use and that are still available to conserve. What we're trying to avoid is having all these high priority conservation projects be a series of isolated islands."

In that respect, land trusts like SELT and other conservation organizations must often look at their easements and ownerships as a complex game of *eco-Tetris*. How can you creatively work to connect conserved lands? It cannot all be done through conservation and easements. Ideally, landowners and developers will work with local communities to design projects that keep these critical remaining wildlife corridors intact.

Pinpointing these linkages is a key factor in evaluating future SELT projects; and you don't have to look further than SELT's grand, illuminating vision of the Pawtuckaway to Great Bay Greenway, a sprawling conservation corridor that would connect two of the most important bodies of water in the Seacoast region – Pawtuckaway Lake and Great Bay. Wildlife protection and connectivity are major criteria for this – and other – SELT projects.

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The Rebirth of Birch Ridge Begins

The 4WD truck methodically rides across the old logging road, the suspension responding nimbly to the ups and downs of the pock-marked thruway. The road is a vestige of a widespread pre-acquisition timber harvest, which has left swathes of the Birch Ridge Community Forest landscape carved up.

After about three-quarters of a mile, the topography gives way to more lush scenery; grass and full trees offer welcome shade, and the forest grows thicker. A line of pick-up trucks soon reveals itself as the 4WD crests the last hill. It's a special day in the history of Birch Ridge Community Forest - the day when a brand-new trail system begins to come into focus.

On the hottest of days in August, a group of hearty volunteers descended upon Birch Ridge to participate in a trail design and construction workshop, led by Lew Shelley of SnowHawk LLC and supported by Parker Schuerman, SELT's Land Manager.

Topics included sustainable trail design and layout, trail tools and their uses, trail construction techniques (with an emphasis on hiking trails), risk management at the work site, and trail maintenance.

The effort launched work on one trail that takes hikers on a foot path up and over Mount Eleanor from Corridor 22, totaling 3,375 feet in length. And perhaps more importantly, 15 volunteers trained in the basics of trail creation and maintenance, ready to help steward their favorite SELT or community conservation lands. (Stay tuned for Birch Ridge trail guides and maps coming soon!)

"The Mount Eleanor trail allows hikers to experience the beauty of the oak woodlands found in the area previous to the intensive harvest," says Parker.

The new hiking trails are just the beginning of work undertaken since SELT's acquisition just over a year ago. A full Community Forest Management Plan has been adopted by

the Steering Committee, parking lots are being installed, a universally accessible trail is being designed, and so much more is underway.



Birch Ridge Community Forest volunteers (L to R) Grace, Owen, and Emily take a quick break from trail work.

LEW SHELLEY, SNOWHAWK, LLC

To learn more about Birch Ridge Community Forest and SELT's effort to protect Mount Molly and Expand Birch Ridge via the Keep Merrymeeting Clean initiative, visit keepmerrymeetingclean.org.

On the Horizon

Projects slated for completion in 2020

Ann Tibbitts Schulz Turtle Brook Preserve, Barrington

This well-managed 44.5 acre forest and wetland property is home to multiple species of wildlife as well as a stretch of public-accessible and scenic Barrington Trail, a trail that runs from the Isinglass River to the Smoke Street recreational fields.

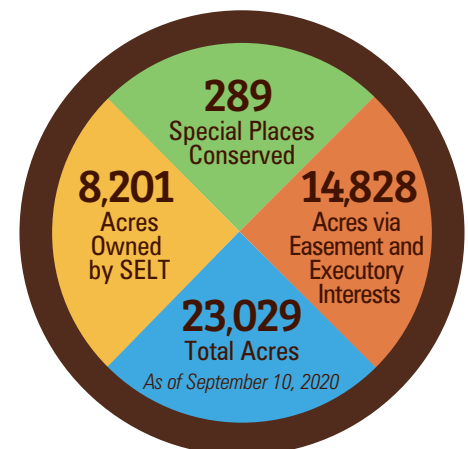
Brett Agricultural Land Easement, Fremont

This easement comprises nearly 30 acres of classic picturesque rolling agricultural fields that are part of a much larger conserved network of forest and wetlands. The farm currently produces hay for a local farmer, and with the easement the opportunity will remain for continued farm use.

Sanborn Easement, Auburn

Totaling nearly 215 acres, the Sanborn property sits along Dearborn Road and the Chester Turnpike in Auburn, and has been in the Sanborn family for six generations. The property has a mix of agricultural fields, forests, wetlands, and a reclaimed gravel pit, and its frontage along Murray Mill Brook will offer valuable protection of drinking water for Manchester, NH's largest city, and other nearby communities.

Land Conservation by the numbers





The Wooded Canvas continued from page 1

Roger was a walking repository of knowledge, a man known to have a tungsten steel trap memory and an encyclopedic knowledge of forestry. He was one of the original county foresters, starting his career right after World War II and serving as the county forester for Belknap and Strafford Counties. Prior to that he worked for New Hampshire Fish and Game, focusing on deer management.

“Roger was an amazing guy to work for,” says Phil Auger, forester and former Land Manager for SELT and a colleague of Roger’s when Roger was with the University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension in the 70s and 80s. “He was always coaching you on how to be a good county forester. One thing he would always tell us is you need to get to know the people, their kids, and their dogs – know the family situation. That was just as important as knowing their lands.”

It is a Yankee virtue chiseled into Granite State DNA and Roger tapped into it. For him, forest management and conservation was as relational as it was transactional; knowing what made a landowner tick was as critical as knowing boundary markers.

“Look at who owns land in New Hampshire,” Phil says. “It’s owned by regular people. If you didn’t get to know the people and get them to trust you to help them make decisions about their land, you were going nowhere.”

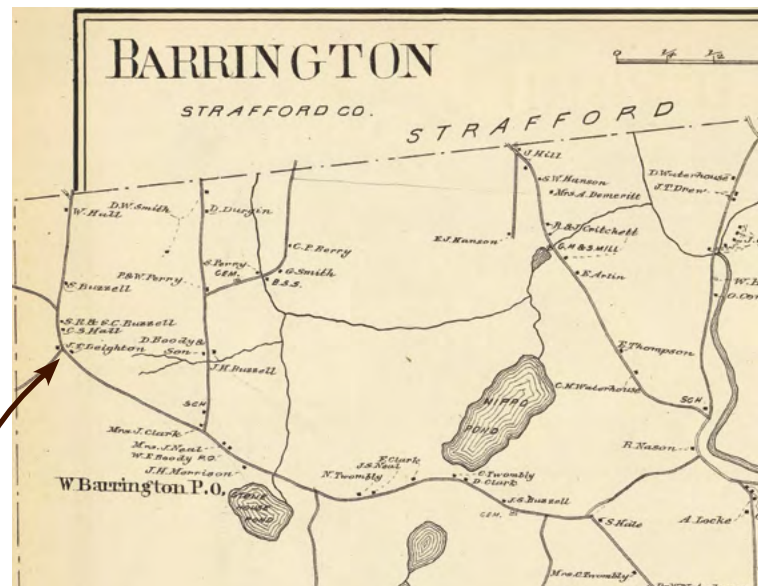
Case in point: Carl Siemon, a businessman from Connecticut who bid farewell to the rat race and moved to Milton Falls, NH into his father’s house. In 1966, he had the opportunity to purchase 18 acres of harvested timber land for \$18 an acre (!) and he immediately sought counsel from the country forester – Roger Leighton.

“Roger told my dad, you’re going to buy this land and become a tree farmer,” says Cynthia Wyatt, Carl’s daughter. “That was transformative for my dad and he absolutely loved being a tree

farmer. From that point on, with every huge decision Roger was there guiding him along. He was a great inspiration.”

For 42 years Roger managed the Siemons’ land and with his help the farm grew from three acres to 1,500 acres. In 1991 when Cynthia moved with her family to Milton Falls, Carl donated a conservation easement on all 1,500 acres (the third largest easement in New Hampshire at the time).

And over the next ten years, with Roger’s help, Carl added an additional 1,500 acres (and won several tree farming awards along the way). Such was the magnetic power of Roger; his passion for land and forestry was infectious and impacted everyone in his



1892 map of Barrington, NH. This map shows how far back the Leightons go. You’ll see their name in the top left of the map, right before the border of Strafford.

DAVE DAVID RUMSEY MAP COLLECTION, DAVID RUMSEY MAP CENTER, STANFORD LIBRARIES / MAP OF BARRINGTON, NH IN STRAFFORD COUNTY. (D.H. HURD & CO., BOSTON. 1892)

ABOVE: CREDIT: © JERRY MONKMAN, ECOPHOTOGRAPHY, LLC

sphere of influence. In fact, you could say the entire concept of the “Leighton Orbit” is a legitimate object of study for quantum physics; all who knew Roger and his wife Justine – a legendary regional figure in her own right and a well-known actor and theater advocate – could not resist their gravitational pull.

“They were just wonderful people,” Cynthia says. “If you were to talk to anyone in that town they would know Roger and Justine Leighton.”

And Roger probably knew them too.

“His memory was amazing,” Phil says. “He remembered things about people and land. You could go anywhere, maybe walk into a coffee shop and someone would say hi to Roger, and he’d ask them what was going on in every detail about their lives.”

Roger took this same Rolodex mentality to his personal land acquisition. Over the course of decades he would piece lands together when they became available, slowly building up Leighton Forest. Then Roger applied his lifetime of forestry know-how to properly manage the forest and turn it into a prime wood lot and wildlife habitat.

“Dad was a forester and a biologist,” says Steve Leighton, Roger and Justine’s son and one of their four children. “He knew there had to be places left untouched for wildlife and to grow timber. He loved to walk through the forest. He was always thrilled to see his deer.”

“It was his passion, it was his love,” says daughter Abby Aucella who lives adjacent to the family land. “For anyone that understands woodlands, he manicured it. And he never admitted it, but I’m pretty sure he named his trees.”

Roger passed away in 2016 at the age of 97. He had not made a commitment



Roger Leighton (standing to the left of the gentleman holding snow shoes) pictured with all of the County Foresters and assistants plus state specialists in late winter 1977. Roger was Cooperative Forest Management Supervisor at the time.

COURTESY PHOTO

to the destiny of Leighton Forest, opting instead to leave that decision to his family. In 2019, the Leighton children began working with SELT to explore plans for conserving the forest. It was their desire to see their parents’ legacy protected forever instead of being developed.

“Even through my dad didn’t live to see it happen, he would have wanted it preserved,” Abby says. “He knew the value of that land.”

The value is staggering: 400 acres of prime woodlands; nearly 10,000 linear feet of streams including Stonehouse Brook with its headwaters starting on SELT’s Stonehouse Forest a short distance away; and 13 vernal pools that are the engines of life for so many amphibians in the spring.

“I know he wants the forest left that way,” Steve says. “I am so thankful that our family thought the same way. It’s what he always wanted.”

Leighton Forest is filled with history, a tapestry of careful, considerate forest management practices, curated by a master of his craft. You sense this truth as you walk through this incredible property.

In the annals of Strafford history, Roger Leighton’s legacy has long been secured; in the tranquility of Leighton Forest, now – with your help - on the path towards being preserved for all time, you see that legacy laid out before you in the wood and the stone and the earth.

A Legacy to Sustain: Help Establish the Leighton Forest

SELT has big shoes to fill to sustain the value of the Leighton Forest. Future plans include continuing model management of the forest and its unique wildlife habitat while supporting modest public access. The Leighton family is a true partner in this effort, agreeing to sell the land for \$300,000 less than its appraised value.

But to secure that future, SELT must raise a total of ~\$1.1 million, which includes the purchase price of \$800,000, transaction and project costs of \$182,000, and funds for the land’s long-term stewardship of \$110,000. Numerous grant applications are pending with

state partners and both the Strafford and Barrington Conservation Commissions have made funding commitments.

“Even with support from all of these partners, generous private contributions will be needed to conserve the Leighton Forest,” says Brian Hart, SELT’s Executive Director.

Make your special gift to help acquire, conserve, and steward the Leighton Forest at seltnh.org or use the enclosed envelope, with “Leighton Forest” in the memo field. Thank you!

**You
can
help!**

Get Outside

Things look a little different, but we still have opportunities available to experience the outdoors, breathe in the fresh air, and, yes, virtually connect with SELT's mission!

Learn more about each event and sign up at seltnh.org/events-page. Suggested donation is \$5/person or \$10/family. Please register early – our events fill up quickly. Registration closes at noon the day before the event.

Mount Molly Fall Foliage Tour

**Saturday, October 3 • 9:30 AM–
12 PM • New Durham, NH**

Fall foliage, and hiking, and fresh air, OH MY! Take a 3.5-mile round trip hike up Mount Molly, with Land Conservation Director, Duane Hyde, and enjoy the foliage with sweeping views of Merrymeeting Lake and Birch Ridge from the proposed Collins Family Forest.



Leighton Forest Tour

**Saturday, October 24 •
9–11 AM • Barrington, NH**

Join Land Conservation Director, Duane Hyde, for a tour of the proposed Leighton Forest, a hidden gem tucked less than a mile northwest from the Stonehouse Forest and straddling the town line of Barrington and Strafford.



Stonehouse Forest Perimeter Hike

**Saturday, October 17 • 8 AM – 12/1 PM •
Barrington, NH**

Join GOAT extraordinaire, Sue Mayotte, for a hefty hike around SELT's Stonehouse Forest. Enjoy the scenery and explore one of SELT's largest properties. The hike will be on trails and is about 7 miles long with lots of hills – so be sure to come prepared with plenty of snacks and water while you enjoy the great outdoors under a canopy of gorgeous fall foliage!



Family Naturalist Series: Lichen!

**Saturday, November 7 • Virtual: Zoom Class
9–10:30 AM followed by Self-Guided Tour • Location TBD**

Gain the knowledge and skills to enhance your adventures in the natural world through our SELT Naturalist Series. The second installment in our series will be LICHEN! We will start our day in our virtual classroom, with a lichen self-guided tour to follow. Weather and health restrictions will determine the location. Multiple locations may be offered.



SELT Book Club – Heart Spring Mountain by Robin MacArthur

Thursday, December 3 • 5-6 PM • Via Zoom

The 2020 Fall book selection is *Heart Spring Mountain* by Robin MacArthur

It's August 2011, and Tropical Storm Irene has just wreaked havoc on Vermont, flooding rivers and destroying homes. One thousand miles away—while tending bar in New Orleans—Vale receives a call and is told that her mother, Bonnie, has disappeared. Despite a years-long estrangement from Bonnie, Vale drops everything and returns home to look for her.

We are still partnering with our friends at Water Street Bookstore in Exeter, who will donate 20% of the proceeds from *Heart Spring Mountain* to SELT – to order:

1. Give them call at (603) 778-9731, they can take your credit card over the phone and organize stoop pickup. They are also offering limited home delivery in the immediate Exeter area.
2. You can order through their website (www.waterstreetbooks.com) and get free shipping!



**Join us
for the VIRTUAL
Wild & Scenic
Film Festival!**

Friday, November 13
See the details on page 8

EASY MODERATE DIFFICULT

PHOTO CREDIT: © JERRY MONKMAN, ECOPHOTOGRAPHY, LLC

Generous support from the Center for Assessment makes these field trips possible. Learn more about our Get Outside sponsor at nciaa.org.



Donor Spotlight: Laney & Lu

When Jennifer Desrosiers started Laney & Lu – the inspired eatery! – five years ago, she imbued her intimate downtown Exeter eatery with the values she herself holds dear: being locally connected, focused on wellness, and giving back to the community.

And, of course, smoothie bowls.

“Our mission is to help people improve their holistic health and wellness, while building community,” Jennifer says. “We want to nurture our guests.”

The key aspect to accomplishing this mission is sourcing their food and ingredients locally. Laney & Lu is tapped into a formidable network of over two dozen local farmers and merchants, who provide everything from kale to honey to granola and everything in between.

“We try to source as locally and seasonally as possible,” Jennifer says. “It’s best for our own health and wellness to be eating from our own ecosystem.”

These values, combined with Jennifer’s personal loves of outdoor adventuring and connecting with nature, have made Laney & Lu a perfect match for supporting SELT.

“Wellness and adventure are my two biggest passions so contributing to SELT makes a lot sense,” she says. “To have an organization of like-minded people also supporting local business feels really good.”

Thank you Laney & Lu for your ongoing support of SELT!

Learn more about Laney & Lu at www.laneyandlu.com.



Jennifer Desrosiers, owner of Laney & Lu. DAVID JOHNSON

Thoroughfares of the Natural World continued from page 2

When this vision comes to fruition, parcel by parcel, the Greenway will create more than just wildlife corridors; there will be outdoor recreation opportunities as well as increased protection for water that feeds public drinking water reservoirs and drainage to Great Bay. And keeping habitats healthy and diverse will have far-reaching benefits to the investment value of the conserved lands.

“SELT, other conservation organizations, and the towns have done a great job conserving large areas of wildlife habitat in our region,” says Duane Hyde, Land Conservation Director for SELT. “But, to avoid these areas becoming biological islands, we need to act now to ensure there are habitat linkages for species to move between.”

SELT recently contributed to an expansive study from The Nature Conservancy, headed by Peter Steckler. The Connect the Coast study used advanced modeling techniques to identify the high-value lands that can serve as connection points for wildlife across the Piscataqua-Salmon Falls watershed and extending out into adjacent watersheds in Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Maine. The study offers valuable insight that can aid future conservation projects for SELT and other organizations looking to piece together these connectivity opportunities.

“Following the recommendations of Connect the Coast will help give us the opportunity for future generations to continue to see a diversity of wildlife,” Duane says. “Sightings of and observing wildlife bring so much joy to both young and old and help remind us of what a special place New Hampshire is to live for both people and nature.”



SELT, The Nature Conservancy, and Bear-Paw Regional Greenways are cooperatively working to conserve habitat for Blanding’s, wood, and spotted turtles. This work, including outreach to landowners with land identified by the Connect the Coast study, is supported in part by a grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and the US Natural Resources Conservation Service Working Lands for Wildlife initiative. Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the US Department of Agriculture.

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Questions, Comments, Concerns?

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

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The Wooded Canvas

see page 1

Virtual Wild & Scenic Film Festival: Friday, November 13

see page 8

Get Outside!

see page 6



Friday, November 13

Virtual Lobby: 6:30 pm • Show Starts: 7:00 pm



Join us for the *VIRTUAL* Wild & Scenic Film Festival and be inspired by short but mighty films that speak to the environmental concerns and celebrations of our planet. Pop your popcorn and pour yourself a frosty beverage, this year we will be enjoying the Wild & Scenic Film Festival from the comfort of our own homes.

Our volunteer film committee has hand-picked a program from the award-winning films curated by the South Yuba River Citizens League (SYRCL) and national Wild & Scenic Film Festival and we cannot wait to share it with you!

Get your tickets here: seltnh.org/wildandscenic

Note: If you bought tickets for the originally planned event in April, your ticket is transferable to the virtual Wild & Scenic Film Festival! We have sent coupon codes to ticket holders via email that can be used to register for the virtual event. If you did

not receive a code, that's likely because we don't have your email address in our records! Please call 603-778-6088 or email info@seltnh.org, and we will happily provide you with a coupon code for the updated event.

If you are unable to attend the virtual event but would like to donate the cost of your ticket to SELT, we thank you for your support! Tax receipts for such donations are available upon request. Refunds are available through The Music Hall Box Office and through SELT – please contact the organization where you made your original purchase to request a refund: SELT: 603-778-6088 • The Music Hall Box Office: 603-436-2400

Businesses or organizations that are interested in sponsoring the Wild & Scenic Film Festival should reach out to Zoe Aldag at zaldag@seltnh.org.

