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Above: Cattle countenance at Great Bay Farm

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Great-Great-Great-Great-Great Bay Farm

The iconic dairy farm in Greenland, passed down for generations since the 19th century, is on the verge of being conserved forever.

There's history. There's heritage. And there's Great Bay Farm in Greenland, which embodies all of it. A family-owned farm that has been passed down generation to generation since the 1800s, Great Bay Farm is as iconic as it gets. One of the few remaining working dairy farms in the Seacoast, the sprawling property is as rich in cultural and community cachet as it is in conservation value – and that's saying something as both are colossal in their quantity.

It's late morning in Greenland. Intermittent snow patches dot Great Bay Farm. Mainly it's just petrified mud tracks and slush, the signposts of a winter that has traded precipitation for icebox temps. Two generations of Smiths circle around: Cynthia (the matriarch) and two of her sons, Allen and Steve. There's a lot of character and personality at play here, and the Smiths are quick to crack jokes laced with their vintage acerbic wit. They're New England farmers through and through.

And those values, hewn into their DNA for six generations, are what led them to this point: the decision to conserve their legendary property for all time.



It all started in 1899. Originally owned as a summer residence by a doctor from Boston, the property was purchased by Cynthia's great-grandfather, who moved his modest cow-milking operation from Pittsfield, literally marching his herd down the turn-of-the-century New Hampshire back-roads to Greenland.

What awaited these sojourners was a one-story house sitting on a vast property just a stone's toss from Great Bay. (That house would eventually get jacked up and a new first floor slid under the original first floor, creating an idiosyncratic Jenga-like two-story farmhouse, which exists today.)

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The Berg property.
SELT STAFF PHOTO

The Bergs' Eye View

Wally and Florette Berg have spent nearly 50 years watching wildlife use their land for transit – and now, thanks to their generosity, their thoroughfare isn't going anywhere.

Wally Berg personally attended two nuclear detonations at Area 51. When he put his hands up to cover his eyes, the light from the blast was so intense he could see his own bones through his skin.

If you were to drop that story while at a dinner with friends, you would become a first ballot entrant in the Hall of Legendary Anecdotes. But here's the thing about Wally Berg – that story probably wouldn't even crack his top 10.

At just a few years shy of his 100th birthday, Wally boasts a biography that would make a Hollywood producer do a double-take. He served in three wars – World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War – and rose to such a high rank he was personally responsible for the oversight of the United States' nuclear arsenal in eastern Europe during the Cold War.

His military career eventually brought him to Portsmouth, where he wrapped up his service at the Pease Air Force Base, retiring in 1976. He and his beloved wife Florette (a former Air Force flight nurse whom he met in Kansas, a stone's throw away from Air Force General Curtis Lemay's residence) put their roots down in neighboring Greenland, selecting an eight-acre plot of land on Post Road on which to build their home (complete with an atomic fallout shelter fed by a natural spring – of course).

For years, the Bergs were in contact with SELT about conserving their property and recently have graciously agreed to donate the conservation easement, and with extra generosity they have agreed to provide funding for the project costs. That is how strongly they feel about preserving the place that they have called home for over 40 years.

Located along Norton Brook and adjacent to I-95, the Bergs' property has important conservation attributes. It sits on a productive aquifer and the water supply well head protection area for the City of Portsmouth well, helping protect public drinking water.



In addition, the Bergs' land is part of a significant wildlife connectivity corridor, which was identified in the Connect the Coast study.

A science-based study prepared by The Nature Conservancy of New Hampshire, Connect the Coast provides data to help guide conservation efforts and the best opportunities to strengthen and create the geographical corridors that support wildlife movement throughout the coastal watershed. SELT is a key partner in the Connect the Coast project and the Berg property – specifically the Norton Brook corridor and the large culvert under I-95 – offer a significant puzzle piece to a regionally significant wildlife travel corridor.

“Both Wally and Florette have already given so much to our country with their military service,” says Duane Hyde, SELT's Land Conservation Director. “And this conservation easement donation exemplifies their commitment and generosity to the community and their passion about ensuring wildlife will continue to thrive in our region.”

“We want to see as much land protected as possible,” Florette says. “We want space for wildlife.”

Which isn't a surprise, as few people have had the sort of front-row seats to wildlife thoroughfares as Wally and Florette. Over the years they have taken great joy in observing the deer, bobcats, foxes, and many more species move through their property, taking full advantage of the corridor their property provides.

The great news? The Bergs signed their conservation easement on February 18, 2022, ensuring that Wally and Florette's dream of protecting their treasured land is now a reality. For them, service, sacrifice, and duty have been the hallmarks of two careers in the military, and now they leave another gift of legacy and permanence, one that will help sustain the natural world they hold so dear.

The Tree Fort Winter Spectacular

The first snow of the year draped the Epping Elementary School grounds in three inches of powder and the resulting winter chill has given the terrain that familiar underfoot *CRUNCH* when walked upon. Soon enough, another familiar winter sound echoes: the *SWOOSH SWOOSH SWOOSH* that can only be made by the friction of kids walking in giant snow pants.

A gaggle of fourth graders soon follows. A lone figure awaits them at the field entrance: Anthony, an outdoor educator for White Pine Programs, bundled up, toting a backpack filled with backup knit hats, gloves, mittens, and more.

Four classes in total, led by Miss Berry, Miss K, Miss Nelson, and Miss Holland and their classroom aides gather around Anthony. A hush falls over the audience – a small miracle! – and with frosty, bated breath they listen, ready to learn what outdoor adventure awaits them.

White Pine Programs, a nonprofit based in York that provided outdoor learning adventures to over 50 communities in 2021, has partnered with SELT for special programming at Burley Farms prior to working with Epping Elementary – a brand new initiative and part of SELT’s emerging nature-based education strategy.

“At Epping Elementary School, we’re launching what we hope will be a larger-scale nature-based education outreach effort,” says Bev Shadley, SELT’s Deputy Director. “With our friends at White Pine Programs providing their experience, we’re excited to see the joy that comes when children are able to get outside, enjoy nature’s playground, and learn, hands-on, in tandem with their classroom curriculum.”

Nothing is more indicative of that joy than the day-long adventure the fourth graders are about to embark upon. As the group listens, Anthony outlines the day’s itinerary: they will be heading deep into the woods that lie behind the school, navigating off the beaten path and setting up in the thick of the forest. Their task: to construct shelters using only what is available to them in their surroundings. Following a teaching moment about the power of pollinators (a tie-in to the ongoing classroom science

lesson), the classes split up and head into the trees.

And, like that, the magic happens.

There wasn’t any milling about, no aimless meandering, no time wasting. Like ants in an anthill, the kids descended into a buzzsaw of activity. Dead sticks were snapped, brush was scavenged, locales were scouted (must be near a water source!),

and they were off. Anthony circulates around to each enclave to offer light guidance and the occasional dry mitten replacement, but the kids are largely left to do their own thing and overcome the challenges on their own.

Beyond the snow and bark and pine needles, a new dimension emerges from the activity: new skills begin to surface. Arguably, the most important skills. Leadership. Encouragement. Mindfulness. Teamwork. All those social and emotional soft skills that forge young personalities and create the bedrock for fine young people

Organically, junior project managers emerge, groups separate into builders and gatherers, and everyone works together. Whatever social strata the children may have or have not occupied outside of the woods has evaporated; everyone is working together, under the patient and encouraging tutelage of their teachers, focused on a single goal: creating an awesome tree fort.

The work takes a break for lunch, and then it’s back into the woods for the home stretch. As the school day ends, Anthony takes the whole group around to each completed shelter and each class’s spokesperson (voted on by their peers) outlines the construction process, the strategy, the engineering, and the curveballs, which, for one erstwhile group, involved an infrastructure collapse and an emergency relocation.

And with that, the group makes their way out into the woods and back to school, stopping here and there to roll down some snowy hills. Mittens were soaked, water bottles were emptied, and despite the frosty stiffness of cheeks, high-wattage smiles were plastered over small faces as far as the eye can see.

Magic.



Above: an Epping student fashions his fort. Below: Anthony from White Pine Programs outlines the adventure.

CREDIT: SELT STAFF

Student Sound-bites

“Miss Nelson. I need help. Snow fell down my back!”

“There’s a stick team and a building team. There are only three of us on the building team and look what we accomplished.”

“Eat the snow no one has walked on yet.”

“If we were lost in the woods, I think we would eat the first graders first.”

“We’re stick soldiers!”



Great Bay Farm continued from page 4

And that's how Great Bay Farm was born: 15 dairy cows producing local milk and an apple orchard producing apples sold to Frank Jones Brewery to make hard cider. The next 100+ years saw the farm expand its herd and transform into a full-fledged milking operation: and one of the few dairy farms to remain standing in the region.

Because, let's face it, being a dairy farmer is not the easiest way to make a living. Just ask Allen Smith.

"What's the challenge of the day?" he says. "I was an electrician this morning, then I was a plumber, and then I had to weld something. The other day was bitter cold, so I went inside to do paperwork. I'd toss wood in the stove, do paperwork, toss more wood in the stove, do more paperwork, and so on."

One of the main reasons so few farms remain in the region is the unyielding economic pressure that comes with the dairy industry.

"Costs keep going up and the price of milk has pretty much been stagnant for 40 years," Allen says. "You have to creatively think of ways to save a buck or two here or there."

Recently, Allen transitioned the farm from strictly a milking operation to a hybrid dairy and beef operation. Four years ago, he sold his main dairy herd and began to raise Holsteins crossed with beef breeds like Herefords and Angus. Milking continues at Great Bay Farm however, generating milk primarily for local specialty artisan cheese shops.

But beyond its agricultural (and nutritional!) value, Great Bay Farm offers even more when it comes to conservation and cultural resources, and this is why its forever preservation with a SELT conservation easement represents an incredible, opportunity.

In addition to the 154 acres of their own land, the Smith family also manages an additional 235 acres of productive fields in the surrounding community, many of which are owned by New Hampshire Fish and Game and managed for wildlife habitat. Add to that, Great Bay Farm connects to more than 1,740 acres of existing protected land, including the nearby Great Bay National Wildlife Refuge.

"Great Bay Farm features an incredible array of conservation benefits," says Jeremy Lougee, Conservation Project Manager and Farmland Coordinator for SELT. "Besides the idyllic fields with their backdrop to Great Bay, the farm sits on prime agricultural and forest soils, provides critical wildlife habitat for migratory waterfowl and native species, and helps to protect the public water supply for Pease Tradeport and the Town of Greenland."

With its proximity to Portsmouth, Interstate 95, and commuter access to the metro-Boston and Portland employment centers, Great Bay Farm is highly sought after for its development potential. In fact, a conceptual development plan in 2020 showed the potential to build 79 house lots or





168 units of age-restricted housing on this property, as allowed under the existing zoning in Greenland. This is especially concerning given the closeness to Great Bay and the Piscataqua-Salmon Falls watershed, which the US Forest Service has identified as the third most threatened watershed in the nation due to projected increases in housing density.

“There’s a misconception sometimes about farms, that they’re adding too much waste into nearby water resources,” Jeremy says. “But when you step back and look at this property, with its forested buffers along waterways and careful management of their waste, and instead, picture this land filled with houses and pavement, fertilized lawns, vehicles dripping oil, and public sewers catching all that waste – well, all of that could actually be much worse for the long-term health of Great Bay.”

And then you have the intangible community values of the farm. As a stalwart piece of Seacoast civic culture, Great Bay Farm is adored as a destination for a multitude of audiences.

It’s also worth mentioning that both Steve and Allen Smith have served as superintendents of Stratham Fair, a destination for residents from the Seacoast and beyond. People like to see cows and to interact with the hardworking farmers who put food on their table.

“Almost every kid in town used to come here on a tour with the school,” Allen says. “Twice a year, vet tech students come over for practicums, checking temperatures, listening for

heartbeats, you know, actually seeing what a cow looks like in person!”

“There’s not much of that around,” Steve adds. “Where else are they going to do it?”

And he’s right. There’s not much of that around. Farms have blinked out of existence in New Hampshire at an alarming rate. Since 1925, the state has lost over 90% of its farmland. Great Bay Farm represents just one of four commercial dairy farms remaining in Rockingham County.

“Protecting Great Bay Farm would help to secure prime farmland necessary for local food production in one of the state’s most rapidly developing regions,” Jeremy says. “The importance of maintaining some of our landscape for agricultural production cannot be overstated.”

Allen puts it a slightly different way: “If you want to have your sliced cheese come from California, go for it.”

By the time this newsletter hits your mailbox, Greenland residents will have voted on a warrant article to contribute Town funds to support the purchase of a conservation easement on Great Bay Farm. The Town’s investment would be matched 6:1 with grants from USDA’s Agricultural Land Easement program, NH’s Drinking Water & Groundwater Trust Fund, and LCHIP. Check out seltnh.org for up-to-date info!

Above: A day’s work at Great Bay Farm.
Left, L to R: Steve, Cynthia, and Allen Smith



Mathey Center at the Finish Line

By the end of March, the SELT crew will have completed the Big Move and working out of the brand new Mathey Center for People and Nature. It has been an incredible journey and we are so close to realizing this vision for a community and conservation meeting place in the very Center of the Universe (that would be Epping of course).

A few reminders for all of our SELTies out there as we bid farewell to our old office in Exeter and start the journey in our new location:

- The physical and mailing address for The Mathey Center is 247 North River Road, Epping, NH 03042.
- Our phone number will remain the same: 603-778-6088

Thank you again to everyone who has helped make The Mathey Center a reality!

Save the Date for our Annual Conservation Celebration on Saturday, June 11.

Stay tuned for more details!

Save the date!

Linking Lands: Proposed Mathes Acquisition to Link Lamprey River Wildlife Preserve to Burley Farms

A long-pursued project has taken on new life in 2022: SELT is under contract to purchase the Mathes property, which abuts Burley Farms and is another critical link to the vision of creating the Pawtuckaway to Great Bay Greenway.

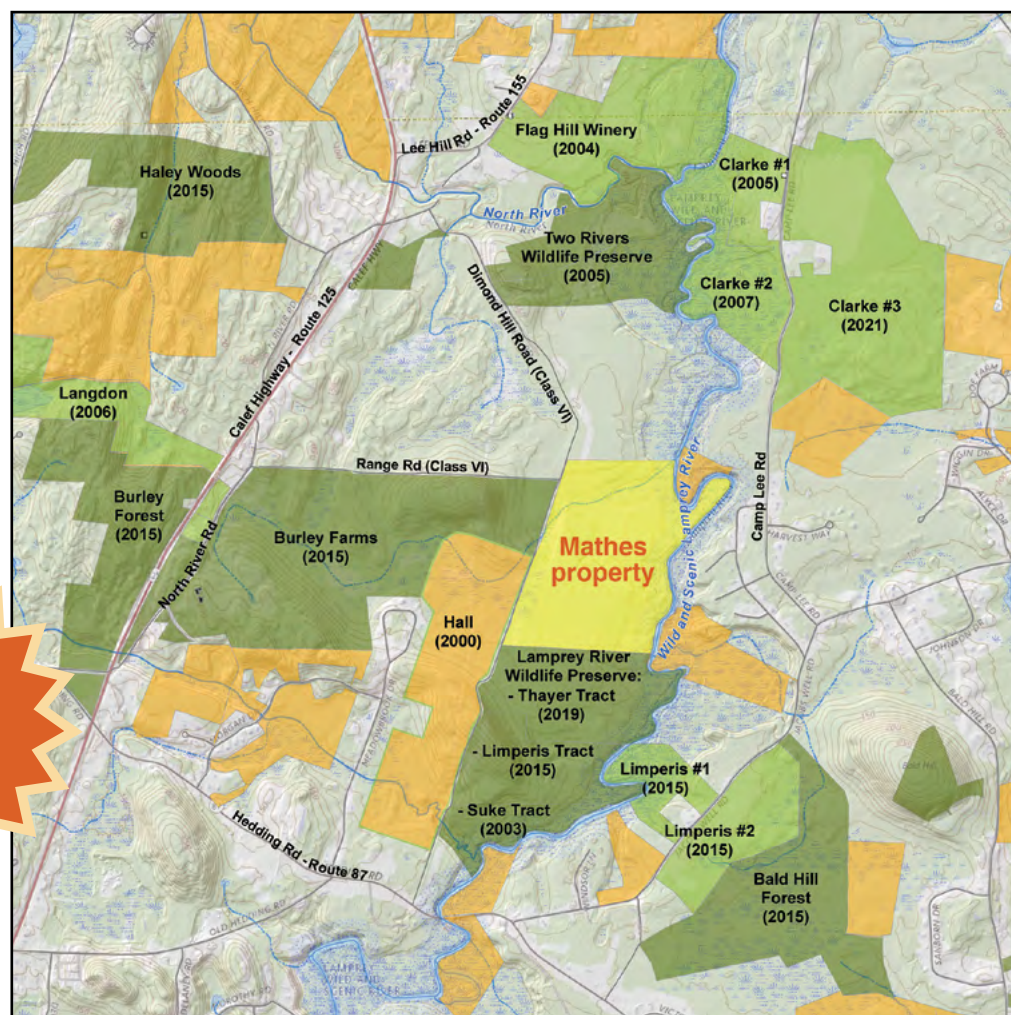
At over 130 acres, this incredible land offers a laundry list of conservation values and features. Perhaps most important is its nearly mile of frontage on the federally designated Wild and Scenic Lamprey River. Here the river flows and meanders in ox bows and floodplains, creating habitat for multiple threatened and endangered species and a priority for conservation in the New Hampshire Fish and Game's Wildlife Action Plan.

Like many projects to link and protect larger landscapes, the Mathes Tract builds on decades of work that SELT

began with the creation of the Lamprey River Wildlife Preserve back in 2003.

Its acquisition and protection will link the Lamprey River Wildlife Preserve to Burley Farms, a combined reservation of more than 550 acres. This size offers potential outdoor recreational and educational opportunities, especially given its proximity to The Mathey Center.

In February of this year, this effort got a big boost from our long-time partner, the Lamprey River Advisory Committee, who committed just over \$131,000. These funds, coupled with other public grant funds, leave just \$200,000 remaining to raise. Over the coming months, SELT will share more about this place and you how you can help ensure its permanent protection.



Shown on map: SELT conserved lands and the dates they were conserved.

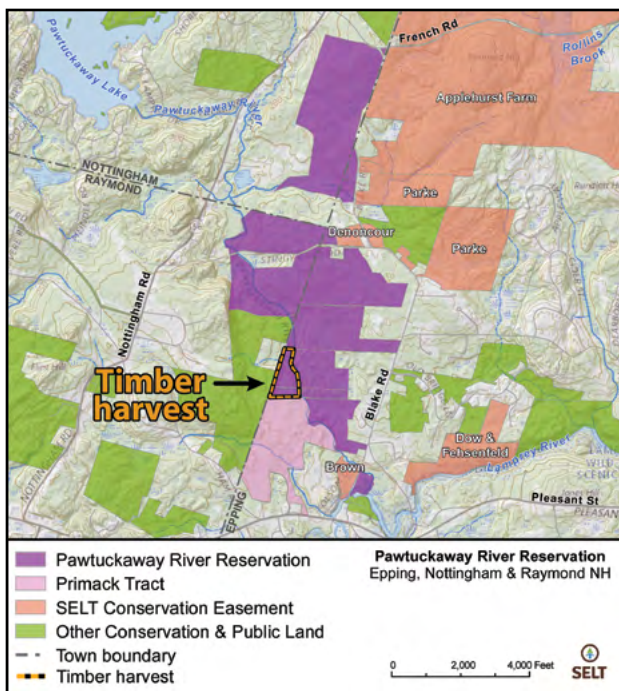
Good Neighbors Make Good Stewardship

When neighboring landowners work together to achieve shared goals, that is great stewardship in action. Last year, Phil Primack, neighbor of SELT's Pawtuckaway River Reservation in Epping, informed the Stewardship team of an upcoming timber harvest on his property and asked if we would like to manage our abutting land at the same time. We quickly said yes.

"We thought it was a great opportunity," says Deborah Goard, SELT's Stewardship Director. "Coordinating our harvest with Phil's provided us the access we needed and the chance to create a healthier, more diverse, more resilient forest."

SELT worked with licensed forester Charlie Moreno for the harvest, which was guided by the property's management plan. The work began in December and was completed at the end of January. The area that was cut was a small portion of the Reservation, and has particularly challenging, limited access as it sits on the west side of the Pawtuckaway River. The Pawtuckaway River Reservation is over 673 acres, acquired through nine projects over the last 30 years, and initiated through easement donations to SELT and Bear Paw Regional Greenways from Phil Primack and fellow abutters Cody Cramer and Dan Zulager.

Before the harvest, the forest had a heavy component of hemlock trees, with very little understory growing underneath. The hemlocks were in decline due to the infestation of an invasive insect, the hemlock woolly adelgid (HWA). The hemlocks were targeted for removal, though forested buffers were left along the Pawtuckaway River. While the hemlock population within these buffers will continue to decline due to HWA, for now they will still provide a benefit by keeping the water temperature lower thanks to the shade they provide.



"Our goal was to thin the forest to give the trees left more room to grow, as well as to create small openings to encourage seedling regeneration," Deborah says. "This will ultimately result in a richer understory, greater diversity of tree species, and a layered forest canopy of short, medium, and tall trees."

Small openings will allow more sunlight to reach the ground, diversifying the forest with more oak and pine seedlings. This mix of species will benefit wildlife (for example, more oak means more acorns as a food source for animals like deer and turkey). The thinning will also

allow more herbaceous ground cover to come in immediately following the harvest to provide wildlife food (like berries) and places to hide from predators, until the canopy fills back in again. Some seedlings will also provide browse for deer and moose.

As seedlings return and grow, they will provide a more diverse canopy structure, which will benefit wildlife, including different species of birds, who prefer a variety of tree heights. In addition, the trees that remain in the overstory (the tall trees) will have more space to grow more vigorously.

"More diverse canopy structure and tree species will help with the overall resiliency of the forest," Deborah says. "With a more resilient forest, when pests come that are specific to one tree species, there will be other tree species in all layers of the forest that are still around to carry the forest into the future."

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Questions, Comments, Concerns?

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peak design
presents

WILD & SCENIC® FILM FESTIVAL
where activism gets inspired

SYRCL's

**FRIDAY,
APRIL 22, 2022 • 7-9 PM**

**VIRTUAL AND IN-PERSON
AT THE MUSIC HALL**

Learn more and buy tickets at:
seltnh.org/wildandscenic

Get Outside!

Spring 2022 Events Sampler

Check out these events and more at seltnh.org/events. Please register early; our events fill quickly. Registration closes at noon the day before the event. Suggested donation is \$5 per person or \$10 per family.

Forest Fridays for Kids

April 15 • 10 am–12 pm
Mast Road Natural Area, Epping, NH

Double Loop Hike

April 30 • 9 am–12 pm
Piscassic Greenway, Newfields, NH

