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Above: Brian Gennaco, owner of the Virgin Oyster Company, and a staff member sort oysters on his oyster farm in Little Bay in Durham, New Hampshire.

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Restoring and Protecting the Great Bay Estuary

Great Bay 2030 marshals the combined power of the local conservation community to protect and steward the eco-engine of the Seacoast.

It's a clear summer day on the New Hampshire Seacoast, and you've decided to walk a trail along the Great Bay. As you scan across the bright blue horizon line, you notice an osprey hovering about 40 feet above the water before it darts down into the water to snap up an unsuspecting fish. Luckily, you happened to have your phone out and you snapped a photo just in time. You take a look; not bad!

In the fraction of a second it took you to take the photo, your phone focused the lens, the aperture determined the amount of light that reaches the sensor, the shutter calculates how long the sensor is exposed to light, the sensor then captures the image, the phone's hardware processes the image by placing each pixel's readings in the correct spot and interpolating the missing values between the pixels. Voila - a cool photo of an osprey to share with your friends.

All those machinations under the hood are rarely considered, and the workings of modern-day technology can easily be taken for granted. On a far more analog level - but no less complex - is the ecology of Great Bay estuary itself, an infinitely sophisticated environment that features an intricate lattice of interdependent forces of nature (there's a saying in the conservation world: "Ecology, it ain't rocket science, it's a whole lot harder than that.")

The Great Bay estuary is one of the largest on the Atlantic Coast, and includes the Great Bay, Little Bay, the Piscataqua River, and many other bodies of water along the Seacoast. An estuary is where the salt water of the ocean meets the fresh water of rivers and streams, and the Great Bay watershed - the surrounding land where runoff water travels and eventually flows into the Bay, and ultimately, the Atlantic. This massive watershed covers 1,000 square miles in New Hampshire and Maine, and over 400,000 people reside in 48 cities and towns within the watershed.

"The Great Bay estuary is the whole package of social and ecological services," says Trevor Mattera, Habitat Program Manager for the Piscataqua Region Estuaries Partnership. "It is home to important habitats like eelgrass meadows, mud flats, and salt marshes, provides critical coastal resilience

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As SELT Renews Accreditation, Your Feedback Is Welcome!

SELT is pleased to announce it is applying for its third consecutive term of accreditation with the Land Trust Accreditation Commission. The accreditation program recognizes organizations that meet national quality standards for protecting important natural places and working lands forever. A public comment period is now open.

The Land Trust Accreditation Commission, an independent program of the Land Trust Alliance, conducts an extensive review of each applicant's policies and programs.

"At SELT, accreditation is valued precisely because it is a reflection of our values," said Brian Hart, Executive Director of SELT. "It is more than a logo on our materials. Accreditation is an expression and affirmation of the excellence we strive for in every conservation project, every stewardship activity, and every event that we offer to connect people to nature."

The Commission invites public input and accepts signed, written comments on pending applications. Comments must relate to how SELT complies with national quality standards. These standards address the ethical and technical operation of a land trust. For the full list of standards see: <http://www.landtrustaccreditation.org/help-and-resources/indicator-practices>.

To learn more about the accreditation program and to submit a comment, visit www.landtrustaccreditation.org, or email your comment to info@landtrustaccreditation.org. Comments may also be mailed to the Land Trust Accreditation Commission, Attn: Public Comments, 36 Phila Street, Suite 2, Saratoga Springs, NY 12866.

Comments on SELT's application will be most useful by May 20, 2023. Thank you!

Trails Are Our Happy Place

Be sure to get outside and get exploring on these new and updated trails!

SELT's Stewardship crew has been working hard at developing trails on two great properties: Spruce Swamp Conservation Area in Brentwood and Fremont, and Harvey's Kennard Hill Forest in Epping.

Spruce Swamp Conservation Area is a unique land, as it came together through the joint conservation efforts of the Town of Fremont and SELT, with support from a variety of other organizations and funding entities. In 2011, Patricia Kelliher donated the 129-acre Kelliher Memorial Forest, followed by Donna Garrison's donation of the 34-acre Victor Garrison Memorial Forest in 2014.

These tracts, combined with Fremont's Glen Oakes Town Forest, form the Spruce Swamp Conservation Area. Highlights of this feature-rich property include a vast wetland system anchored by a sprawling swamp - a thriving metropolis for diverse wildlife such as beavers, bobcats, fishers, minks, barred owls, great blue herons, and many more species.

Spruce Swamp Conservation Area is accessible via two trailheads: in Fremont off Andreski Drive and in Brentwood, directly off Route 125. Trails weave through SELT's and Fremont's ownerships and provide eyefuls of scenery and plenty of options to glimpse all manner of creatures.

"You will have a good chance to see some wildlife," says Yohann Hanley, SELT's Trails and Community Engagement Manager. "The Garrison Trail has a great viewing point into the swamp where you can see several bird nesting sites and a beaver lodge. Off the Barred Owl Trail, there's a great scenic view of an open field next to the swamp where people regularly see deer."

To download the Spruce Swamp Trail guide visit seltnh.org/trails. And be sure to stay tuned for a special event at Spruce Swamp for National Trails Day on June 3!

Heading north into Epping will bring you to Harvey's Kennard Hill Forest where SELT maintains a public trail system on this privately-owned forest. In 2015, SELT worked with the Harvey family to purchase a conservation easement of over 1,100 acres of the family's land in the rural northwest corner of Epping and southern Nottingham. This land is a key parcel in SELT's broad vision of connecting Pawtuckaway State Park to Great Bay through a corridor of conservation lands and trails.

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Spruce Swamp Conservation Area offers a serene walk and scenic views. SELT STAFF

Harvey's Kennard Hill Forest is a wildlife hotspot, as the diverse forest types found on the property offer varied habitats for different species, including deer, moose, field birds, and beavers, the latter of which have created many ponds on the property. Come spring, a menagerie of amphibians and reptiles will turn the wetlands into a bustling nature enclave.

"We are continuing to work on the long-term trail system," Yohann says, "which will include partnering with professional contractors, as well as our SELT volunteers and other community user groups. Our goal is to have everything finished before the end of the year."



Harvey's Kennard Hill Forest offers plenty of trails to explore in all seasons.

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Get Outside! Spring 2023 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.

Beaver Ecology Hike

April 26 • 9:30 AM–12:30 PM • Tucker and French Family Forest, Kingston

Have you noticed the changing landscape at Tucker and French Family Forest? Come learn more about how nature's engineers, the beavers, have altered the ecosystem and the landscape at Tucker French. Nature-based educator Kim Cote will lead you on a hike through the forest as you learn more about how and why beavers impact their ecosystems. Bring a picnic lunch to enjoy at the end of the trip. This program is for all ages.



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Birch Ridge Mountain Adventure

May 6 • 9:30 AM–2:30 PM • Birch Ridge Community Forest, New Durham

Join experienced SELT GOAT Volunteer Sue Mayotte for a mountain hiking adventure in Birch Ridge Community Forest. This hike will include climbing Mount Eleanor (out and back) plus Rattlesnake Mountain. The group will stop for a picnic lunch at the Birch Ridge Cabin. This hike will be a strenuous 6.5 miles and is for experienced hikers ages 14 and up.

protection, houses many species of birds and wildlife, and supports fisheries that we rely on. These are the kinds of resources that you may not notice until they're gone."

Which is why Great Bay 2030 was born. This broad, collaborative initiative is powered by \$12 million in philanthropic giving through the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation's Great Bay Watershed Fund.

The vision of Great Bay 2030 (see side bar) represents a full-court press of local conservation and coastal organizations to protect and steward the estuary. The pillars of the project are five-fold: foster a culture of stewardship, restore critical habitats, enhance water quality and quantity, adapt to climate change, and protect priority lands.

"Great Bay 2030 is an absolutely huge opportunity to move the needle on estuarine health for the ecosystems and the people residing in the watershed," Trevor says.

As a member of the Great Bay Resource Protection Partnership (Great Bay Partnership), SELT is a key partner in the Great Bay 2030 collaborative. In fact, a new position, funded in part by Great Bay 2030, will be joining the SELT team this year; that person's focus will be on the pro-active critical land conservation work within the estuary's watershed.

"In this watershed, SELT is the biggest regional land trust and one of the most important players out there," Trevor says. "The person who takes this position will work with all the partners to protect the priority parcels that help water resources, marsh migration, habitat continuity, and water quality."

"Although employed at SELT, the new land conservation position will really take their priorities and direction from the

nine-member Great Bay Resource Protection Partnership," says Duane Hyde, SELT's Land Conservation Director. "This is based on a model that was successfully employed in the early 2000's when hundreds of acres of critical Great Bay estuary watershed land were conserved through a concerted effort of the Partnership. We wouldn't be able to reboot this effort without the support of Great Bay 2030 through the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation, The Nature Conservancy, and the Piscataqua Region Estuaries Partnership."

Keeping the estuary's watershed quality intact prevents a cascade of catastrophes that can eventually eradicate important habitats like eelgrass, which provide the foundation for thriving plants and wildlife, scenic character, and economic opportunities.

Trevor says: "When it comes to what you can do to increase the health of your watershed and estuaries, land conservation not only protects critical terrestrial habitats, but it really is your best bang for your buck to protect water quality. That is why we need SELT at the table."

And so, the work begins. The science has been done, the goals are on paper, and the partners have been assembled. The major players of coastal protection have convened with a common goal: to protect one the region's most important natural resources, a circuit board of advanced ecological systems all working together - sometimes out of sight and often out of mind - but always in service of the health of valuable coastal lands.

"Great Bay 2030 is not top-down focused," Trevor says. "It is built from all partners around the table. We know each other. We partner together. And now it's time to get the work done."



The Vision of Great Bay 2030

Great Bay 2030 is a collaborative partnership focused initiative to promote clean water, accessible lands for recreation and education, habitat for fish and wildlife, climate resilience, and engaged communities that are committed to supporting the Great Bay estuary and its watershed.

The underlying vision was developed and proposed by five partners – Conservation Law Foundation, Great Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve, The Nature Conservancy in New Hampshire, New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services, and the Piscataqua Region Estuaries Partnership – that have been working with the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation on shared goals for investment and action in Great Bay since 2015.

The goal of Great Bay 2030 is to bring more resources to address five focal areas where collaboration and investment can make a big difference for the future of the watershed. These include:

- Foster a Culture of Stewardship**
- Restore Critical Habitats**
- Enhance Water Quality and Quantity**
- Adapt to Climate Change**
- Protect Priority Lands**

Through the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation's Great Bay Watershed Fund, a generous donor has agreed to make a \$12 million investment over the next five years that will boost these efforts. SELT is deeply grateful for this continued investment in Great Bay and the Coastal Watershed.



Eel grass is a critical estuarine habitat and a conservation priority. Above, L to R: A paddle worm peaks out from the floor of the Piscataqua River. A jelly-bodied nudibranch traverses the depths of the Piscataqua River. MATT WILLS

Stonehouse Forest: Ecological-Focused Land Management in Action

SELT recently completed a selective timber harvest for ecological management objectives on 140 acres of Stonehouse Forest, the first harvest done at the 1,700-acre property since SELT took ownership.

What do we mean by ecological management objectives? Essentially, the goal of this cut was to enhance wildlife habitat, increase forest species diversity and tree growth, and improve overall forest health.

Promoting regeneration was a major strategy as well, to encourage the growth of seedlings and saplings that were already living close to the forest floor (also called the forest’s “understory”) and provide them the opportunity to become the next level in the forest canopy (the “overstory”).

“These goals will benefit wildlife and improve the resiliency of the forest to the ongoing effects of climate change,” says Deborah Goard, SELT’s Director of Stewardship and Land Engagement. “This selective cut provides improved conditions for regeneration to happen by allowing more light to pass

through the forest canopy, and ensuring that more growing space is available for the next generation of trees.”

These management objectives were informed by the Stonehouse Forest management plan, which was completed in early 2022 and written by natural resource professionals and approved by SELT’s conservation partners, including NH Fish and Game. The plan provides SELT with direction for management activities regarding wildlife habitat, recreational uses, and conservation objectives for Stonehouse Forest. What can users expect when they take to the trails that weave through the completed harvest?

“There will be certain areas that are thinned out and a few noticeable gaps in the forest canopy to allow more sunlight to pass to the forest floor.” Deborah says. “New Hampshire’s forests are remarkably resilient – and in a short time, it will still look like the forest you know and love. With the timber harvest wrapped up, closed trails will be reopened and the renewal and regeneration of the harvested area will begin again.”



A look at a section of Stonehouse Forest, post timber harvest, featuring more open space and a thinner canopy. SELT Stewardship staff ensured that users were aware of the harvest and closed off affected trails for everyone’s safety. SELT STAFF

Give Creatively!

SECURE Act 2.0 Brings Changes, Benefits to Charitable Giving

Did you know? The newly implemented SECURE Act 2.0 has made some changes to retirement planning and charitable giving. As many of you may know, the qualified charitable distribution (QCD) provides a convenient way for donors 70.5 years and older to support organizations by transferring IRA funds directly to an eligible charity (like your friendly neighborhood land trust!); these transfers count toward satisfying the required minimum distribution (RMD) for the year.

So, what are the changes SECURE Act 2.0 brings?

Starting in 2023, taxpayers will have a longer stretch before taking a required minimum distribution as the minimum age rises to 73 (and by 2033 it will increase to age 75). However, for QCDs, the age remains at age 70.5 or older. This means IRA retirement income remains tax-free for an extra year before mandatory withdrawals hit. The additional gestation time for IRA funds can make estates more durable to topsy-turvy market conditions and pave the way for potentially larger charitable gifts.

Also new: taxpayers 70.5 or older can take a one-time tax-free distribution from their IRA up to \$50,000. This withdrawal can be used to form a charitable gift annuity (couples can create a two-life annuity up to \$100,000). Several SELT donors utilize the charitable gift annuity to create an income stream for themselves, while also satisfying the required minimum distribution.

Finally, \$100,000 has been the maximum annual QCD amount but the SECURE Act 2.0 provides for an inflation adjustment to that amount starting in 2024.

If you have any questions about QCDs or are interested in setting up a charitable gift annuity, please contact Brian Hart, SELT's Executive Director at brian@seltnh.org or 603-658-9717.



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Questions, Comments, Concerns?

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

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Now *This* is a Real Page-Turner!



Little SELTies Storytime shares The Mathey Center with the community, while connecting children and their families with SELT and the natural world. Led by SELT's Outreach and Education Specialist Lizzy Franceschini (pictured) and her puppet pal Burley Beaver, the morning starts inside the community room with nature stories, songs, and activities, then the group heads outside for a short hike and nature exploration in the forest. The feedback from the program has been overwhelmingly positive, with as many as 50 individuals attending and a waitlist forming. One parent wrote "Thank you for such a fun time and the best story time we have ever gone to!"

A Mark of Distinction

The accreditation seal **AFFIRMS** national quality standards are met.



- ✓ SOUND FINANCES
- ✓ ETHICAL CONDUCT
- ✓ RESPONSIBLE GOVERNANCE
- ✓ LASTING STEWARDSHIP

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**Restoring and Protecting
the Great Bay Estuary**
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Wild & Scenic Film Festival
see below



Film Fest Returns Live and In-Person!

Celebrate the wonder of nature and join us Friday April 14 at The Music Hall in Portsmouth for the 13th annual Wild & Scenic Film Festival!

This year's films combine exceptional filmmaking, beautiful cinematography, and first-rate storytelling to inform, inspire and ignite solutions and possibilities to restore the earth and human communities while creating a positive future for the next generation. Attendees can expect award-winning films about nature, community activism, adventure, conservation, water, energy and climate change, wildlife, environmental justice, agriculture, and more.

Purchase your tickets at seltnh.org/wildandscenic

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