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Above: Epping middle schoolers ski the hills of Burley.

COURTESY PHOTO

## The Secret of the Campfire Calzone *And other ATLAS winter adventures!*

A gentle snow falls at Burley Farms, adding a thin coat to the existing white cover. It's – finally – cold enough for your breath to puff out in hyper-cooled CO<sub>2</sub> wisps. A crush of footprints is visible on the Green Trail, which leads up to a forested enclave dotted by fire pits and rustic lean-tos. The site is active as groups of middle school students huddle around campfires.

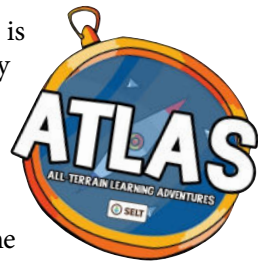
You've discovered an ATLAS outpost! And since it's also "Woods Wednesday," the site is all hustle and bustle as students from Epping Middle School have arrived for their weekly nature-based education adventure. They are taking part in an outdoor culinary lesson over the open flames. What's on the menu? Banana s'mores and calzones, which, as we all know, go great together (especially paired with hot chocolate).

This tasty endeavor was one of three options made available to the students before the session kicked off, the theme of which was "Autonomy and Adventure." They were given the opportunity to choose from Wildlife Tracking, Cross-Country Skiing, or Campfire Cooking.

"Autonomy is important for a number of reasons, especially working with middle schoolers," said Kristin Eberl, Program Coordinator and Lead Educator for ATLAS. "So much is prescribed in their lives, whether it's their school schedule or extra-curricular activities. With ATLAS, we really want it to be self-driven and self-directed."

This approach squares perfectly with the overall goals of ATLAS – and why the new partnership with Kristin and UNH Extension Youth Behavioral Health and Wellness/4H Youth Development makes sense in the context of SELT's broader nature-based education goals. Currently, SELT is partnering with Epping Elementary School, Epping Middle School, and Lamprey River Elementary School in Raymond.

"Our mission for ATLAS is to create the next generation of environmental stewards through inclusive, school-based, wild play programs," says Lizzy Franceschini, SELT's Education Program Manager. "There are three pillars on which our ATLAS programming is built: relationship with the land,



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# Completing a Conservation Puzzle in Stratham

The ingredients to a successful conservation project are opportunity, resources, and partnership. The Ross project in Stratham had been simmering on the burner for 20 years, with the Stratham Conservation Commission having long eyed this 17-acre property as a small-but-mighty piece of land important to the Commission's conservation vision. And, finally, all three elements have come together to produce a major win for everyone involved.

"I think this a huge thing for Stratham," said Dana Ross, who represents the family trust that owns the land and grew up on the family's dairy farm that has been located close to the tract. "It's a success for us and for the town."

Why was this modest-sized parcel so coveted? Simple: the Ross property represents a conservation connection point for multiple protected lands in town including Stratham Hill Park and Gordon Barker Town Forest.

The Ross tract will help protect the water supply for Stratham Memorial School, which operates the largest public water system in Stratham. In fact, this parcel is the largest remaining undeveloped, privately held property within its wellhead protection area.

With its close proximity to the Stratham Memorial School, the acquisition will also provide more town-owned real estate to host academic and recreation activities – something teachers and students have been able to use over the years. From erosion studies to nature-based physical education adventures, the property has been well-loved, and now it will be part of the town's land portfolio going forward.

"This addition will create one of the town's biggest contiguous pieces of conserved land," said Mark Connors, Director of Planning and Community Development for the Town of Stratham. "The Ross land connects to Stratham Hill Park and to the extensive trail system that is already on the property. In fact, most people who walk the Ross property think they're at the park."

Snapping this property into the town's recreation puzzle will officially add nearly 0.7 miles of trails for walking, biking and snowshoeing to the existing outdoor recreation network encompassing the 465 acres of Stratham Hill Park and the Gordon Barker Town Forest.

## The Mystery of Dead Fish Trail

One of the beloved trails on the soon-to-be-conserved Ross property is the bizarrely named "Dead Fish Trail." A well-liked narrow single-track (particularly enjoyed by mountain bikers), the Dead Fish Trail ends near Stratham Memorial School and is known as a great owl habitat.

But...why "Dead Fish" when this trail is nowhere near a pond or waterbody that could support fish?

"When the trail was being laid out, we came across a dead fish," Seth says "Our theory is that a bird had grabbed it from Great Bay and dropped it in the woods." An osprey's or maybe even a bald eagle's lost meal lives on in the naming of the trail.



The existing trails are enjoyed year round. SETH HICKEY

"It's such a valuable acquisition for the town and for the residents to have access," said Seth Hickey, Parks and Recreation Director for Stratham. "When I'm out there at the park, near the school there's always children and teachers getting out and exploring. Having this land conserved so close gives the kids a vested interest in the open spaces that are out there."

The Ross project is the third project that SELT and the Town have partnered on at Stratham Hill Park. Each of the prior projects – conservation easements on the Short property and Barker's Farm – supported continued public use and Town management of the existing trail network, which draws in people from all over the region for biking, running, and more.

Conservation outcomes do not always require SELT to be the legal owner or easement holder. For this project, SELT is playing an "assist" role, which means that SELT has facilitated the negotiations with the landowner and helped the Town secure a purchase agreement with the landowner, assisted in the grant writing, and is managing all of the acquisition due diligence on behalf of the Town. With assists, SELT has no legal interest in the property.

"SELT is an invaluable partner to us," said William McCarthy, member of the Stratham Conservation Commission. "SELT brings a lot of knowledge about how to execute easements, which easement language is appropriate, and what grant resources are available."

# Three Cheers to the Tree Clipping Dirt Workers

**2,400 hours.** That's 16 round trips to the moon. Or 32 viewings of the complete series of *Knight Rider*. For the SELT Stewardship departments, 2,400 hours represents the total time poured into land management activities in 2023 by our ace volunteer crew – or the equivalent of a full-time staff member plus some.

No one appreciates the horsepower provided by these committed nail-drivers, invasive-pullers, and brush-clearers or – as he likes to call them, “tree clipping dirt workers” – more than Yohann Hanley, SELT’s Trails and Community Engagement Manager.

“Our volunteers more than double my capacity for what I can get done,” he says. “The Stewardship team maintains roughly 70 miles of public and non-public trails and maintenance and access roads, plus all of the signage, bridges, benches, gates and parking areas associated with operating public trails.”

Prepping for trail season could be particularly onerous if not for Yohann’s force of volunteer land stewards. Walking the properties post-winter and documenting any infrastructure needs like damaged bridges, gates, or blazes or debris-strewn walkways is a time-consuming process – especially as SELT continues to grow its inventory of properties with trail systems.

“It takes a lot of maintenance to keep these trails and access roads open and would be an impossible task for me to do by myself,” Yohann says.

The benefits of SELT’s volunteer brigade go even further than work output; when it comes to specialty efforts that only

a handful of volunteers can provide, the windfall of saved dollars is immense. Case in point: the work done at Birch Ridge Community Forest by Mike Gelinas (NH Spirit of New Hampshire Award winner in 2021). Mike has been a stalwart volunteer for the wide array of land management work at Birch Ridge in New Durham.

His skills as an operator of heavy machinery (machinery graciously donated by Russ Weldon, another New Durham uber-volunteer) has saved SELT tens of thousands of dollars in labor and rental costs. (A special shout-out to the Powder Mill Snowmobile Club, who contributed over 600 hours of volunteer time maintaining the multi-use trails at Birch Ridge last year.)

As active as 2023 was, 2024 is shaping up to be a big-time bonanza for volunteer-powered stewardship. Aside from usual trail maintenance that kicks off the season (slated for April), five big projects are on the radar:

1. Completing the trail system at Harvey’s Kennard Hill Forest in Epping
2. Installing, signing, and blazing a new trail at Birch Ridge Community Forest that connects two high points on the western end of the property
3. Opening the trail system at the soon-to-be-acquired Covered Bridge Forest in Atkinson
4. Installing, signing, and blazing a new trail at Collin’s Family Forest that will connect to the Devil’s Den trail entrance
5. Resurfacing the accessible portion of the Black Gum Trail at Mast Road Natural Area

Anyone can be a tree clipping dirt worker.



There is plenty to do and plenty of space for volunteers of all skill levels.

“We have the capacity for anyone to be involved,” Yohann says. “There really is all sorts of work that needs to be done, from technical bridge design to cutting branches and dragging them off into the woods to hanging blazes on trees.”

Translation: anyone can be a tree clipping dirt worker.

To learn more about volunteering or to indicate your interest, visit [seltvolunteer.org](http://seltvolunteer.org).

A volunteer team from Lindt & Sprungli clearing invasives at Tucker and French Family Forest in Kingston. SELT STAFF



## The Legacy of Elisha Locke

*How one man went from the Civil War battlefield to the Barrington farm field, and charted a path to a contemporary conservation mosaic*

**D**ecember 18, 1862. Amidst the chaos and cannon fire of the Battle of Fredericksburg, Sergeant Elisha E. Locke stood shoulder-to-shoulder with his fellow New Hampshire Volunteers. One of 200,000 combatants in the battle, his regiment faced withering fire from a dug-in Confederate army led by Robert E. Lee and his Lieutenants Jackson and Longstreet.

A wound taken on the battlefield felled Elisha, permanently forcing him out of the Civil War. After recuperating in Providence he returned to his hometown of Barrington, NH, in March 1863. In 1869, he bought a farmhouse alongside Ayers Pond at the end of the road that today we call Route 202.

He developed a successful business selling grains to breweries, then had a profitable enough timbering business in the late 1880s, enabling him to enlarge the farmhouse in the 1890s. At the same time, the state promoted early summer tourism to help farmers stay in business.

For Elisha, the proximity to Ayers Pond and perfect for this business, and it also evened out his income. Timbering was done in the winter and sawing was done in the spring. Having summer boarders and renting cottages evened out his

income. He would meet the trains in Dover and then transport vacationers by wagon or automobile to the lake. By 1896, he was successful enough to double the size of the farmhouse, creating a classic New England connected farmhouse.

And that's how Elisha Locke became one of the founding fathers of the New England agritourism industry.



A look at Elisha's farmhouse in its 19th-century heyday.  
COURTESY PHOTO

Above: A wintry wetland at the Swain Road North parcel.  
© JERRY MONKMAN, ECOGRAPHY, LLC

“I grew up with conservation,” says Hilary Parkhurst, Elisha’s great-great-granddaughter. “For our family, it was always about keeping the land together.”

That commitment to protecting the legacy of this unique family tree reveals itself in the way Hilary relates the story of Elisha’s proto-AirBnB endeavors. She enthusiastically describes the experiences of the visitors (including the scenic, horse-drawn sojourns on bumpy New Hampshire roads) and the amenities that awaited them (an icehouse, a farm stand, and a cutting-edge central outhouse).

“He would add cottages and buildings over time,” she says. “North Barrington was a popular place for vacationing.”

The Locke, now Bedford, family lands are scattered throughout Barrington, with a large portion located adjacent to Ayers Pond and the family farmhouse. Now, nearly 150 years later, the lands that Elisha and his family had assembled are on their way to permanent protection.

SELT’s conservation journey with the Bedford family originally began in 2010, when the Strafford Rivers Conservancy (who merged with SELT in 2014), acquired 230 acres around Stonehouse Pond from the Bedford family. This land created the nucleus of SELT’s now-1,700-acre Stonehouse Forest.

The current Bedford project consist of three separate tracts that, when taken together (see map), add up to nearly 160 acres of critical habitat that fits snugly within SELT’s vision of connecting Leighton Forest and Stonehouse Forest into a contiguous corridor of conserved lands.

“Each of these tracts is important as stepping stones to linking large blocks of protected lands,” says Lori Sommer, SELT’s Coastal Watershed Land Conservation Manager. “They offer prime wetlands, habitat for threatened wildlife, and critical protection of stream corridors, which are core focus areas for SELT’s work in coastal watershed conservation. Adding them to SELT’s portfolio of conserved lands is also significant for realizing our vision for a healthy and thriving Great Bay watershed.”

As Hilary’s family began their estate planning, the protection of the Bedford parcels became paramount, and the importance of their addition to the Leighton-to-Stonehouse vision became a priority for SELT.

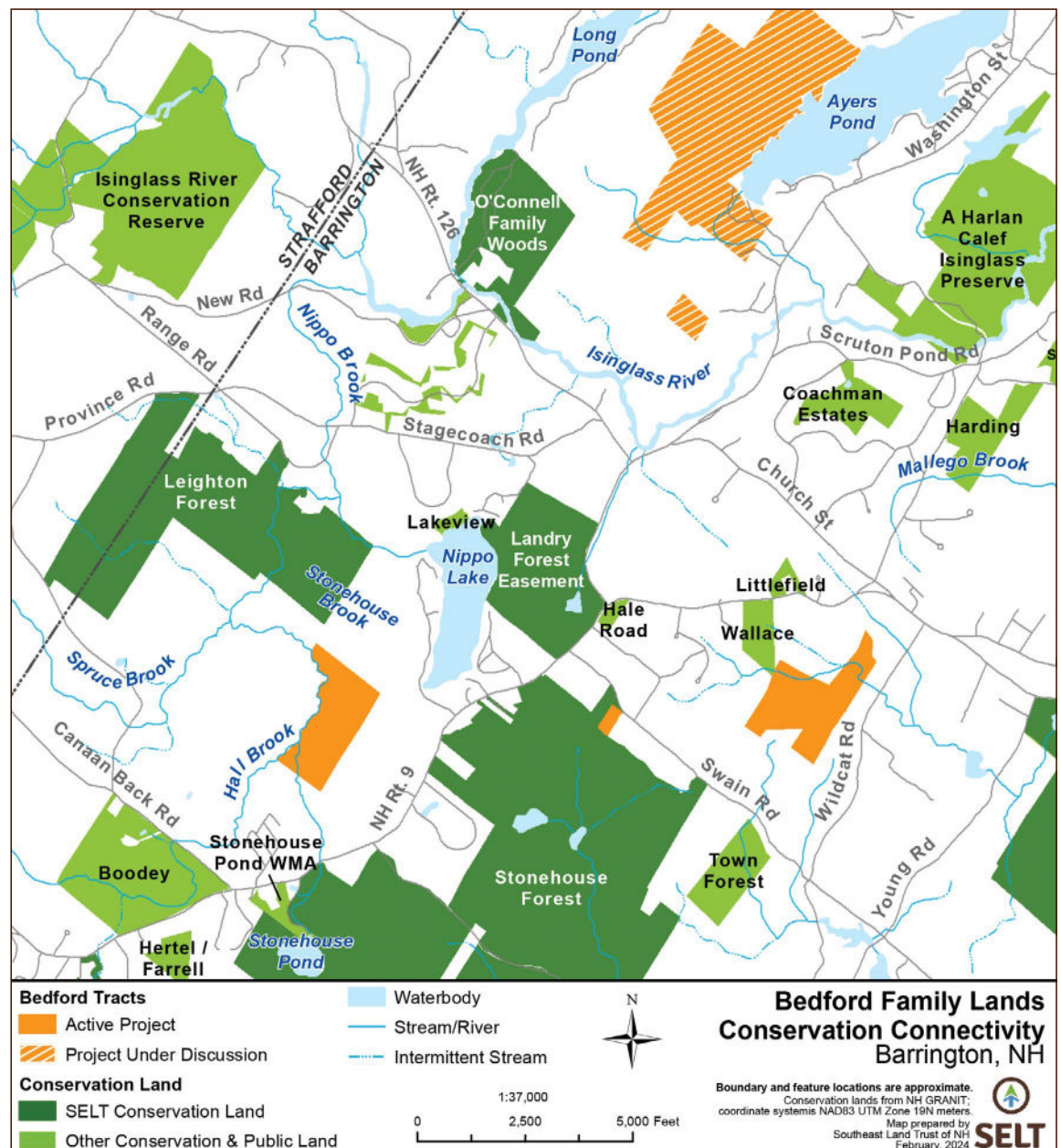
In addition to these three tracts, SELT continues to discuss the permanent

protection of the family’s core lands adjacent to and surrounding Ayers Pond. These promising discussions come on the heels of SELT’s January acquisition of the O’Connell Family Woods. SELT acquired ownership of this 140-acre tract, which abuts Long Pond and the Isinglass River and affords an opportunity to create a contiguous block of protected habitat of more than 800 acres from Long Pond to Ayers Pond.

In the face of the white-hot developmental pressure in Barrington, Hilary recognized that conservation was the best alternative – both for her family’s legacy and the importance of protecting the region’s natural resources.

“I just don’t think people understand the full value of nature,” she says. “Wildlife corridors need to be taken care of. I just don’t think there’s enough attention paid to these kinds of open spaces.”

Thankfully, a century and a half ago, a soldier left the horrors of war and found solace in the fields, forests, and waterways of New Hampshire. And in doing so, he created a legacy of caring for nature and connecting people to the beauty of the outdoors – a legacy shared by generations who followed, and protected for those yet to come.



## How to make awesome banana s'mores:

1. Unzip the banana from the middle out, carefully preserving a "pocket"
2. Add mini-marshmallows and mini-chocolate chips into the peel
3. Using either your bare hands or a naturally occurring blunt instrument like a rock or a log or an armadillo, crush the banana and its contents into a gooey, chocolatey, marshmallowy paste
4. Wrap it all in aluminum foil
5. Carefully place the banana into some smoldering campfire coals, using fireproof gloves or a stick to flip it occasionally
6. Unwrap the aluminum foil and dip graham crackers into the superheated, sugary morass
7. Enjoy!

## *The Secret of the Campfire Calzone continued from page 1*

relationship with self, and relationships with each other. For SELT and our partners, nature-based education is much more than outdoor adventures. We use the power of the natural world as a catalyst for academic and emotional enrichment."

It's a win/win/win: for SELT, ATLAS becomes an incubator for a future generation of outdoor-loving, environmental stewards; for UNH Extension, they are fulfilling their charge to support healthy choices in youth; and for the Epping and Raymond school district partners, nature-based education can be used to support New Hampshire work study practices.

"It has been wonderful to see the reaction from the students," Lizzy says. "Kids who have never in their lives strapped on a pair of ski boots are cross-country skiing. Others haven't cooked over a campfire and now they're preparing calzones and s'mores. They have chosen these experiences and adventures themselves, and having all this learning happen in the fields and forest of Burley Farms – you can't ask for a better classroom than that!"



Prepping a calzone to cook over the fire.  
COURTESY PHOTO

## Join us for the Wild & Scenic Film Festival!



**April 19, 2024 • 7:00 pm**

**The Music Hall  
Portsmouth, NH**

Get your tickets at  
[seltnh.org/wildandscenic](http://seltnh.org/wildandscenic)

Presented by



## Celebrating Pam Hall's Epic Match

Throughout last year, Board Member and super-SELTie Pam Hall put forward an amazing \$100,000 matching challenge. The Conserve Together, New Hampshire Forever campaign reached hundreds of people through Facebook, Instagram, e-news, in-person workshops and field trips, events like TrailFest and the Wild & Scenic Film Festival, and Giving Tuesday and NH Gives.

It was a full-court marketing press, worthy of Pam's generosity and now, after the dust has settled, the beans have been counted, and last checks have cleared, we are excited to share that Pam's matching challenge inspired \$136,550 of unrestricted donations from 364 households, 124 of whom were brand new to SELT.

This amazing response exceeded the original match of \$100,000 offered by Pam – and in yet another remarkable act of generosity, Pam agreed to contribute an additional \$36,550 to match all giving made in response to the matching challenge, bringing the grand total to \$273,100!



SELT STAFF

## Updates from the SELT Team

As the need for local conservation and responsible, forward-thinking stewardship grows, SELT has expanded its staff to meet that call. We are excited to welcome Emily Burns, Conservation Coordinator, and Katie Bates, Conservation Easement Steward, to the SELT crew.

Emily primarily supports the Land Conservation and Stewardship staff by developing maps, conducting geospatial analysis, and compiling reports for SELT projects. Katie monitors conservation easement properties and works closely with landowners to help them accomplish their land management goals.

"Something I appreciate about SELT's mission is the commitment to sustaining both people and nature alike," Emily says. "It is really motivating to work at an organization that views conservation holistically and uses it to strengthen communities and their relationship to the environment."

"One thing I love about SELT is that our mission includes creating spaces in nature to share with everyone and everything," says Katie. "Conserving more land gives wildlife the opportunity to continue to thrive in safe spaces."

This year SELT's staff will be growing further, increasing our capacity for conservation, stewardship, and outreach through additional positions. SELT is currently hiring three new positions, Outreach and Education Specialist, Seasonal Land Steward, and Conservation Project Manager, and filling one vacant position, Conservation and Farmland Project Manager.

This latter opening is in response to long-time staffer Jeremy Lougee's March departure for a position with the Land Trust Alliance as Program Manager for the Regional Conservation Partnership Program. Jeremy will be leading national efforts to improve land trust use of this important conservation program. Beyond the conservation of iconic places like Barker's Farm, Scruton Diary Farm, and Monahan Farm, Jeremy's contributions to SELT include connecting young farmers to available farms, creating our Option to Purchase at Agricultural Value (OPAV) tool to help maintain farmland as working farms, and researching and envisioning the future of agriculture at Burley Farms. Congratulations and thank you Jeremy!

Check out [seltnh.org/jobs](http://seltnh.org/jobs) for a current list of open positions and details.



L-R: Emily and Katie

### Board Members

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- Yohann Hanley** Trails and Community Engagement Manager
- David Johnson** Senior Communications Advisor
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- Lori Sommer** Coastal Watershed Land Conservation Manager

### Questions, Comments, Concerns?

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

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Website: [seltnh.org](http://seltnh.org)

*SELT VIEWS* is published three times a year and is the newsletter of the Southeast Land Trust of New Hampshire. Written by David Johnson. Edited by Jean Dill, Lizzy Franceschini, Beverly Shadley, 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.

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## The Secret of the Campfire Calzone

*see page 1*

## The Legacy of Elisha Locke

*see page 4*

## Get Outside!

*see below*

## Get Outside! Spring Events Sampler

Check out these events and more at [seltnh.org/events](http://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.

### The Magic of Monhegan: Maine's Birding Mecca with Dan Gardoqui

Weds., April 10 • 5:30 PM • The Mathey Center, Epping

Enjoy a photographic tour of this scenic island ten miles from the mainland. Dan will share the stories of the diverse birdlife of this remote fishing village with its many artist studios, scenic cliffs, and mossy spruce forests adorned with fairy houses.

### Harvey Kennard Adventure Hike

Sat., April 13 • 9 AM • Harvey Kennard Forest, Epping

Join us for a fun and informational hike up Kennard Hill in the Harvey Kennard Forest. This will be a four mile out and back hike, including some of SELT's newest trails.

Below: The sun breaks over one of the Bedford properties in Barrington. © JERRY MONKMAN, ECOPHOTOGRAPHY, LLC

