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Above: The sun peeks over the Mitchell property in Newmarket.

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The Next Horizon

When it comes to the world of SELT, I must admit, I have a fortunate sense of timing. Being part of the SELT world – as a leader, as a volunteer land steward, as a trail user – continues to be a tremendous honor.

And I'm particularly excited to be part of it at this time in our history! Following a 2023 that was a homerun for local land conservation, expert stewardship, and groundbreaking community outreach – all made possible by the support of you, our SELTies! – we are embarking on a new strategic direction for SELT, which will take us to into 2030 (and beyond). Our Strategic Plan charts an ambitious course that will see us accelerate and expand our mission of saving, sharing, stewarding, and sustaining the lands we love.

The Strategic Plan required your input. We asked you and other stakeholders for feedback, and your voices rang out loud and clear! You want us to act – and act swiftly in the face of rapidly dwindling open space.

As we move forward, our focus will be on throttling up our conservation, and ensuring excellent long-term stewardship and care for these special places. SELT will develop and implement dynamic and collaborative strategies to meet the challenges of quickening this conservation pace, safeguarding these lands, and sharing them with the community.

In the following pages you'll see examples of the four pillars of our Strategic Direction: save, share, steward, and sustain. To view the entire Strategic Plan, please visit seltnh.org/selt2030.

Thank you for accompanying us on the voyage to this point, and on the adventures to come. Take it from me: there is no better time to be a SELTie!

Brent Merriam
PRESIDENT, SELT BOARD OF DIRECTORS



SELT Strategic Plan: June 2024 – December 2030

Read the full Strategic Plan at seltnh.org/selt2030

SAVE	STEWARD	SHARE	SUSTAIN
Conserving Land for Nature and People	Caring for Our Lands Sustains Conservation Impact	Connecting All of Us to Nature – and Each Other	A Stronger SELT, Ready to Respond

The Clock is Ticking

Right before our eyes, our climate is changing while critical lands are lost forever. The best science from our partners presents a clear vision of what is needed to sustain the ecological functioning of our region: accelerate the pace of conservation. Working with partners, SELT will continue to focus on what we do best – protecting the lands that sustain people and nature.

New Approaches to Evergreen Needs

Conservation by traditional easements and ownership alone will not sustain our region’s needs for thriving green space and community engagement. On the horizon: The exploration of deeper partnerships with municipalities, the development of new conservation tools, and a deep dive into the possibility of harnessing zoning for non-traditional land protection.

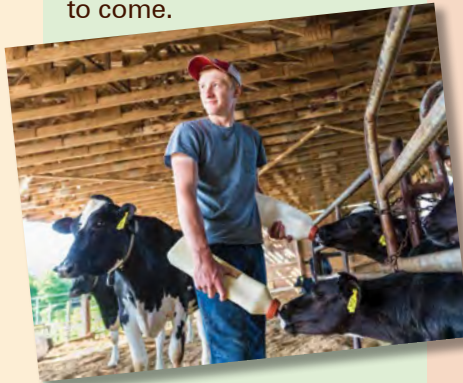
A Regional Block Party

Piece by piece, conserved lands must fit into a larger vision that inspires landowners and communities while achieving bigger goals. SELT will focus on linking large blocks of conserved lands to support healthy ecosystems and wildlife, mitigate climate change impacts, and support extended recreational opportunities.

The Big Picture

SELT owns 11,000+ acres (and growing!), which offers an ongoing opportunity – and responsibility – to have a meaningful impact on habitats and local ecosystems.

How do our lands fit into the larger canvas of conservation in the region? To answer this, SELT will establish a comprehensive land management philosophy to align our stewardship with conservation objectives and climate change adaptation. These management goals will drive decisions toward annual work plans and stewardship funding – now, and for generations to come.



Perpetuity, Upheld

With more easements added every year, SELT’s land protection promise grows annually. To fulfill this conservation covenant, SELT will ensure it has sufficient easement stewardship funding to uphold landowner relationships, fulfill easement monitoring, and undertake enforcement obligations.

The Outdoors are for Everyone

Nature welcomes all! SELT and the larger conservation community need to do more to make certain all people, regardless of their background, heritage, or physical abilities, find that to be true. Our lands and programs will be more welcoming, available, and accessible, leading to a greater diversity and number of people engaging with SELT.



Inspiring the Next Generation of Conservationists

Caring for our environment requires engaged citizens who understand and are connected to the natural world – and research

shows that repeated outdoor experiences at a young age kindles a life-long love of nature. That’s why SELT initiated a pilot program called ATLAS (All Terrain Learning Adventures), aimed at engaging kids ages 5–12 through frequent hands-on outdoor adventures. With a successful three-year pilot period concluded, SELT will now expand our immersive nature program to more communities and children.

Burley, Bigger and Better

The Nan and George Mathey Center for People and Nature and the greater Burley Farms are the beating heart of SELT. To fulfill their potential, SELT will plan for the highest and best use of the farm and surrounding landscape of over 1,000 acres.



An Evolving Organization

SELT has grown and adapted dramatically over the past decade, and the next six years offer exciting challenges that will require further growth and evolution.



Save

Strategy in Action: The Mitchell Tract will advance two primary strategic goals: protect 15,000 acres and expand the Pawtuckaway to Great Bay greenway.

A Lineage Conserved

Alan Mitchell built a museum in his barn. That's how much history is woven through his family's homestead. Perusing the collection is like stepping through a slipstream of space and time and emerging in the 18th century. A selection of wood-crafted hand tools – many branded with the family insignia – line the wide-planked walls: hefty stone sharpening wheels, crosscut saws the length of an adult man, and hammers that would make the God of Thunder blanch.

History and tradition are, obviously, prized by the Mitchells – which makes sense, when you consider their family tree has roots all the way into the early 18th century, when, in 1714, James Burley bought land from the Hilton Grant (granted by the King of England). That land would become, for generations, home to the Burleys, and, eventually, the Mitchells, when Alan's grandmother married into the Mitchell family.

Regardless of the surname, this much is true: heritage is a treasure. When the five Mitchell siblings gathered to make a decision to conserve the land that had been home to generations before them, the answer was obvious.

Yes. Because that is what our forebears would have wanted.

There is idyllic and then there is idyllic. The Mitchells' 140+ acre spread, largely in Newmarket with a very small bit in Epping, certainly falls into that second category. Green is everywhere, manicured lawns hug antique buildings, and, off in the distance, stout trees ring the property, guarding a wealth of natural resources that lies beneath their canopies.

This place has it all. Drinking water protection? Yes! The Mitchell property sits less than 2,000 feet from the Wild & Scenic Lamprey River and over 70 acres safeguards the UNH/Durham water system. Wildlife habitat is in abundance, too, as it is home to endangered and threatened species and features a rare wetland system associated with nearby Hilton Brook. The importance of the property to wildlife did not go unnoticed by SELT staff when visiting the property with the Mitchells. After seeing first-hand the extensive wetlands, field habitat and well-managed forest, SELT invited staff from the NH Fish & Game Department to visit the property. They too were so impressed that they agreed to partner to permanently protect the Mitchells' land.



Above: Alan and Judy enjoy a family memory. Below: The old slaughter barn, hooks and all. SELT STAFF



Even more exciting is how this place fits perfectly into a growing tapestry of nearly 5,000-acres of conserved land. The Mitchell land directly abuts 104 acres of land conserved by the Town of Newmarket, 64 acres of land owned by NH Fish & Game, and nearly 150 acres of SELT-owned properties. And here's the kicker: with the acquisition and conservation of the Mitchell property, SELT will own a critical connector between Burley Farms and the Piscassic Greenway.

The immense ecological value shows why meetings with the Mitchell family have taken

place since the 1990s. Organizations like SELT, The Nature Conservancy, Great Bay Resource Protection Partnership, and the Newmarket Conservation Commission have had ongoing conversations with the family about protecting their land – but they had never been quite ready to make that call.

Then, the five Mitchell siblings, all trustees of the family trust where the property was held, all cradling shared memories of growing up in the fields and forests of their beloved landscape, came to the unanimous decision: it was time.

Just behind Alan's house is one of the few remaining original slaughter barns left in New Hampshire. Inside, the lawn tractor and some contemporary tools are stored, while a glance above shows the original hooks and ropes and pulley system, used to hold the carcasses for butchering.

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Their father was clear to his kids back then: no one is allowed to play around the slaughter barn. Alan and his siblings were largely good, Yankee offspring – respectful of their parents and especially loath to irritate their dad. But that universal rambunctiousness hardwired into brothers and sisters would sometimes override their conscience and they would slyly use the slaughter barn for sundry adventures (Alan recalls being tied up by his brothers and hoisted to the barn’s ceiling, then left to dangle!). Dad would catch on, of course, and toss stones at the walls to shoo them away.

That was their family – generous helpings of outdoor tomfoolery, tempered with the reserved sternness of parents. This trait appears to have been hewn into the genetic code of the Mitchells (and Burleys before them): closeness, camaraderie, respect, good-natured ribbing, and an abiding love for the postcard-worthy backdrop they enjoyed for a home base.

“This house was always a big meeting area for our immediate and extended family,” Alan says. “We have a photo of 40 people at Thanksgiving dinner sitting at this long table in our dining room. This place is beyond the heirloom. It is connected to our heritage.”

“Nobody ever said let’s strike it rich and subdivide and sell these parcels,” says Judy, Alan’s sister. “It wasn’t just an unsaid rule. I would say it was unthinkable to split up this land.”

As the siblings grew older, they knew that the time was now to ensure that the unsaid rule would be followed in perpetuity.

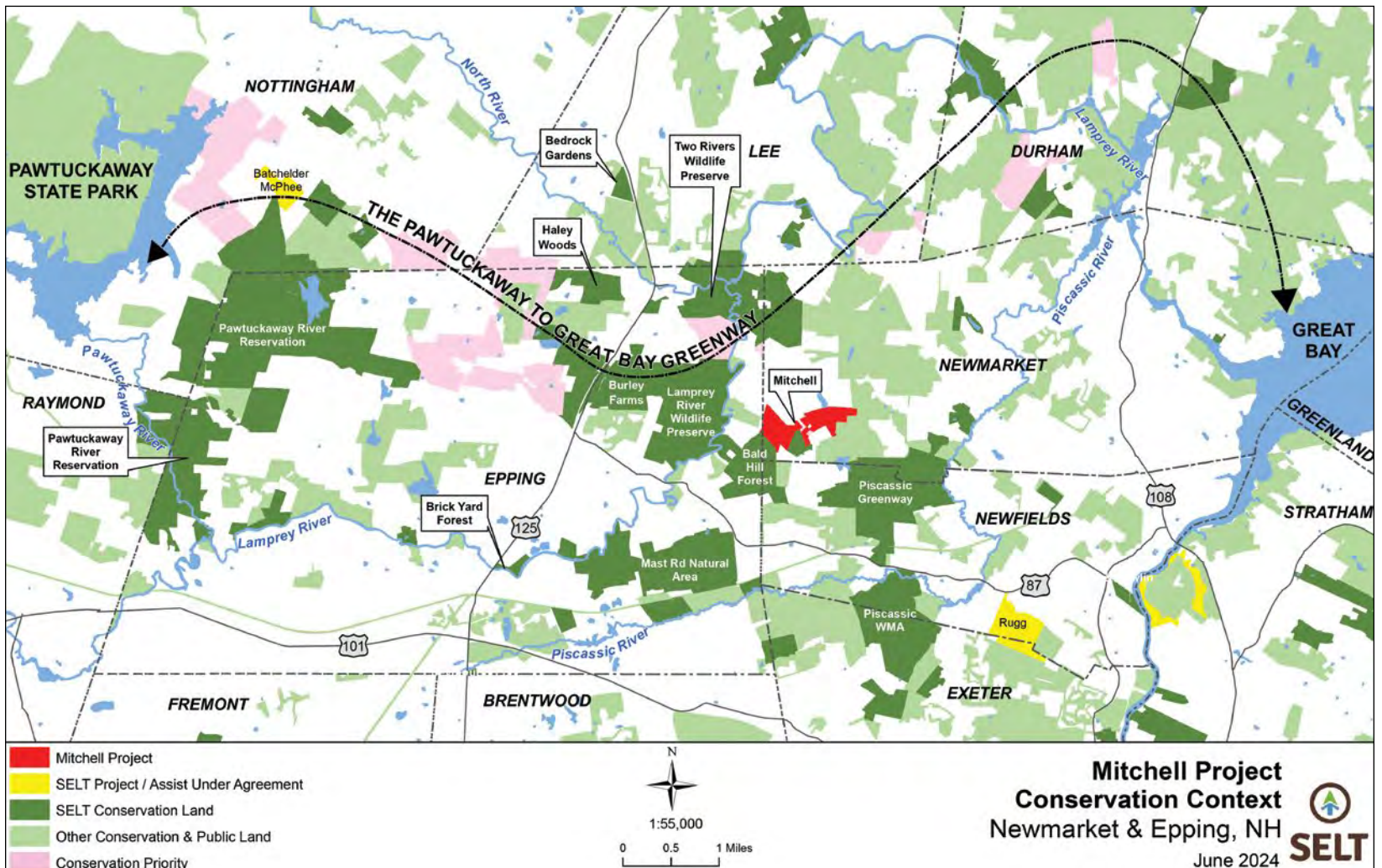
The five siblings – all of whom get along, and four out of the five live within walking distance from each other – made the decision to sell a large swathe of their property to SELT for future conservation. The structure of the transaction will convey 61 acres to New Hampshire Fish & Game and 71 acres to SELT (with Fish & Game holding a conservation easement).

“The five of us inherited the property as a trust from my dad and mom,” Alan says. “When we looked at the next generation, we realized that there were so many more people involved, and we felt that passing it to SELT made sense. In fact, it’s really more of a succession plan than anything else.”

Apropos, considering the property, up until two generations ago, and taking a cue from its regal roots, had been passed down to the eldest son along the Burley lineage.

Now it’s time to pass it down one last time. The memories, the history, the tradition, blended with the peerless value to the environment: raise your flagon to the Burley/Mitchell kin, stewards, caretakers, and protectors of the natural realm.

To fund this project, SELT will be looking to partner with LCHIP, the Moose Plate program, the NH Drinking Water and Groundwater Trust Fund, the Lamprey River Advisory Committee, and the Town of Newmarket (Newmarket residents please voice your support!). Look for a future update and your opportunity to directly support the conservation and stewardship of the Mitchell Tract and connect the Piscassic Greenway to Burley Farms.



Strategy in Action: SELT's stewardship of Birch Ridge Community Forest is guided by a suite of comprehensive management approaches, created through a collaboration with community stakeholders, and reflective of the broader goals to support thriving wildlife habitat and climate resilience.

Creating a Habitat Mosaic at Birch Ridge Community Forest

As the owner of 11,000 acres of land, SELT has the unique responsibility and opportunity to manage our lands within a broader context that achieves sustained conservation benefit. Each of our more than 40 ownerships offer varying options to support our wildlife habitat goals, and the Birch Ridge Community Forest is a prime example. At an already large 2,600 acres itself, the Community Forest lies within an interconnected block of conserved land that totals more than 8,000 acres.

How to describe the late May day at Birch Ridge Community Forest? It's warm. Clouds have since given away to a blazing sun. The last batch of spring bugs is zipping around. There is also a whole lot of activity – both human and animal.

On the human side: the gentlemen from Martin Forestry Consulting are in the middle of extensive land management work. They're using a brontosaurus mower head – which is as imposing as it sounds – to clear out densely forested space. The brontosaurus is a massive metal mulcher that attaches to the excavator's arm and can grind a tree from the top down to splinters (as the machine winds through the woods, it sounds like a brontosaurus lumbering about).

This heavy-duty forestry work has a very important purpose: it represents a key component of SELT's habitat management strategy, guided by the Birch Ridge Community Forest Management Committee (a group of New Durham community members, scientists, and other stakeholders). Early successional habitat is the name of the game here – a mini eco-metropolis crafted to introduce new growth and tree diversity to attract diverse wildlife.

“One of the driving wildlife habitat management goals for Birch Ridge is to promote a diversity in both composition and age structure of vegetative communities,” says Chad Fierros, SELT's Forest and Wildlife Habitat Manager. “These communities create and sustain habitats for a full range of naturally occurring wildlife populations, including species of greatest conservation need as identified in the NH Wildlife Action Plan.”

“SELT's management is looking at forest recovery,” says Charlie Bridges, Birch Ridge Community Forest Steering Committee member and wildlife biologist. “We're trying to allow the forest to recover from the heavy cutting that occurred prior to SELT ownership. That doesn't mean nothing will happen up here. There are times where we'll need to get in and do some management to set the stage for the future forest to come along.”

At Birch Ridge, these individual communities – located in both uplands and lowlands – are anchored by a habitat masterpiece: a 15-acre beaver pond created, managed, and manipulated by nature's engineer, and the “capital city” for the wildlife focus area.

One look across the water reveals activity aplenty, as herons and ospreys cruise the skies and splashes caused by some manner of pond-going creature echo throughout. There are big-time wildlife happenings going down here and combined with the emerging early



Above: The brontosaurus gets to work. Below: Chad and Kay from SELT pause to take in a view of the beaver pond. SELT STAFF

successional habitats, well, there is just one word for it:

“It's a mosaic,” Chad says. “The pond provides open water habitat and marsh habitat. The uplands produce different vegetation types and tree species that thrive in sandy, well-drained soils. And in the lowlands, the water table is going to be higher, so you're going to have associated species of vegetation that grow down in wetter areas.”

It all snaps together in a diverse, but contiguous habitat tapestry, allowing an incredible diversity of species of wildlife to live, forage, hunt, and breed in the lands that best suit them.

“Having it all together,” Chad says, “benefits numerous wildlife species that might use each habitat feature at different times of year and during different periods of their life cycles.”

Strategy in Action: When we engage people of varied backgrounds, abilities, and cultures – and ages! – we can reduce barriers, open the beauty of nature to new users, and, in this case, connect kids to nature.

Trailbusters!

These Fifth Grade Volunteers are Scary Good at Keeping Stonehouse Forest Ship-Shape

The throng of fifth graders looked on with wide eyes. The kids were a safe distance away, but the axe strikes still looked awesome. With each successive thwack, chunks of wooden chaff rocketed into the air as if they had been spring-loaded, eliciting *ooohs* and *ahhhs* from the onlookers. For those few moments at least, to these kids, Yohann Hanley wasn't just SELT's Trails and Community Engagement Manager. He was *Yohann, King of the Forest, Annihilator of Felled Trees, Protector of the Wilderness*.

He was also really, really, really sweaty.

The good news? He would have been a lot more wiped out were it not for the help of over 70 volunteers, most of whom are fifth graders from Oyster River Middle School in Durham. On this day, they were out in Stonehouse Forest in Barrington for their second straight year of trail work, and, regardless of their stature and still-developing triceps, they were getting things done in a big way.

"I've got 70 people for two hours," he says. "That's 140 person hours of labor, which totals out to three-and-a-half weeks of my time."

"We have a full day here at Stonehouse Pond," said Diana Pelletier, fifth grade teacher with Oyster River. "We've been working with NH Fish and Game for their "Trout in the Classroom" program and this morning we tested the water quality of the pond. And now we're working with SELT for some community service to help improve this habitat."

Their day was indeed full. Last year, the Oyster River volunteer crew helped open the new Boulder Trail at Stonehouse Forest, which connects the Stonehouse Pond kiosk to the "swimming boulder" area. This year? They're *busting* trails.

"They are helping me shut down illicit trails around the forest," Yohann says. "Stonehouse Forest is a big property. There are a lot of old woods roads and old trails that people either

don't know are supposed to be closed or have been reopened to be turned into shortcuts."

These "rogue" trails, whether they were activated with the best intentions or not, are frowned upon for good reasons. SELT's trail systems are designed to provide recreation while protecting sensitive natural habitats, wildlife corridors, and fulfilling the terms of any conservation easements held on a property. Areas around bodies of water, like Stonehouse Pond, are especially sensitive to human impacts and we work hard to contain those impacts to planned areas – allowing access while limiting environmental harm.

"Our trail systems are intentionally designed to limit the impacts of people to the surrounding ecosystem," Yohann says. "We need to steer users away from sensitive habits and away from wetlands, while keeping the trails to sustainable grades."

The kids were more than happy to oblige. They rolled huge logs and dragged dead tree limbs to obstruct the entrances and exits of the unauthorized trails and covered the footpaths with all manner of forest debris to send a not-so-subtle message of *HEY YOU, KEEP OFF!*

"The woods are our community," Chase, 11, said. "A lot of people like hiking and hunting so we want to keep it safe and clean for them to come out and have a good time."

"It's really cool that a lot of girls are coming out here to do the work," says Quinn, 11, (who was quick to note she is a Junior Maine Woodsman). "There are a lot of boys in our class too, and it's nice for all of us to come outside and be off our screens and working together and it's just way better for everyone."

See the Stonehouse Forest map of closed trails on page 7.



Sustain

To meet our ambitious conservation goals, SELT needs to evolve and expand and draw more people into our mission. How then to increase by 50% the number of SELT donors and SELTie Circle members? Pam Hall has an idea!

Ready, Set, MATCH!

Super SELTie Pam Hall Offers Generous Match to Strengthen SELT

SELT has grown dramatically over the past decade, and the next six years offer exciting challenges that will require further growth and evolution. A key pillar of SELT's strategic plan is that SELT must continue to be strong and stable, nimble and ready to respond to emerging needs.

Leading the charge is Pam Hall, who once again steps up! Pam is a Board member and SELTie extraordinaire who has led a long and distinguished career in the world of environmental sciences. As a passionate supporter of the natural world, she has used her talents and treasure to advance SELT's mission of saving, sharing, and stewarding the lands we love.

Pam says: "As SELT accelerates its land conservation, expands stewardship activities, and offers ATLAS and outreach events to more people, increased resources are needed to support operations. My hope is to inspire donors to invest today so SELT is prepared for the conservation challenges of tomorrow."

Last year, Pam's generosity powered the *Conserve Together, NH Forever* matching challenge, a year-long campaign that attracted a host of new donors to support SELT's core mission through unrestricted giving, something that Pam highly values.

This year, Pam has stepped up again! All gifts to SELT that were made during the 24-hour NH Gives statewide giving campaign were matched, totaling more than \$ 35,000. This donation-doubling will also happen on Giving Tuesday in November.

And to encourage more SELT supporters to become new SELTie Circle members, anyone who joins the Circle with a gift of \$1,000 or increases their annual unrestricted giving to \$1,000 or more will see their gift instantly matched through Pam's challenge. This challenge is active during the entire year.

"We are so grateful for Pam's steadfast commitment to invest in SELT, while we are growing and building for the future," says Beverly Shadley, Deputy Director. "Her generosity, combined with the support of like-minded SELTies, is a critical component of what will help build our organization to meet current and future conservation needs."

To learn more about becoming a SELTie Circle member and having your gift doubled, please reach out to Beverly Shadley at beverly@seltnh.org or 603- 658-9752.

"As SELT accelerates its land conservation, expands stewardship activities, and offers ATLAS and outreach events to more people, increased resources are needed to support operations. My hope is to inspire donors to invest today so SELT is prepared for the conservation challenges of tomorrow."

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Questions, Comments, Concerns?

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

247 North River Road, Epping, NH 03042
Website: seltnh.org

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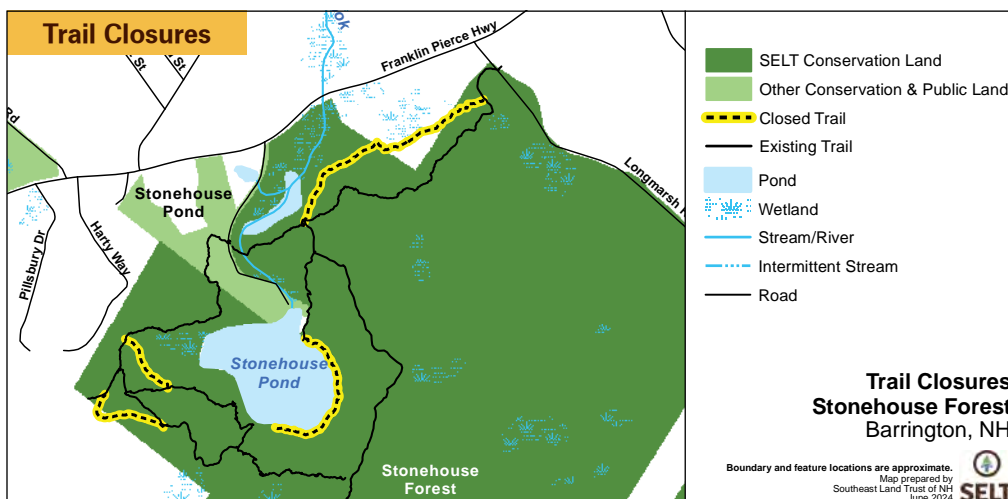
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The Next Horizon

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SELT Strategic Plan

see page 2

Get Outside!

see below

Get Outside! Summer 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.

Mountain Biking at Stratham Hill Park

August 29 • 4:00–6:00 PM • Stratham Hill Park • 270 Portsmouth Ave, Stratham

Join SELT's Land Conservation Director and avid mountain biker Duane Hyde for a mountain biking field trip at Stratham Hill Park. SELT helped conserve the Short Easement and Barker Easement which abuts the Gordon Barker Town Forest and includes parts of the Stratham Hill trail network.

TrailFest—Save the Date!

October 19 • 10 AM–3 PM • Burley Farms, Epping

Save the date for one of the largest free outdoor family events in the region! Come to Burley Farms for food, fun, live music, and a wide variety of nature-based activities and demonstrations!



**TRAILFEST
OCTOBER 19**

Family Fun!

SELT TRAILFEST

SAVE THE DATE!

SELT STAFF