

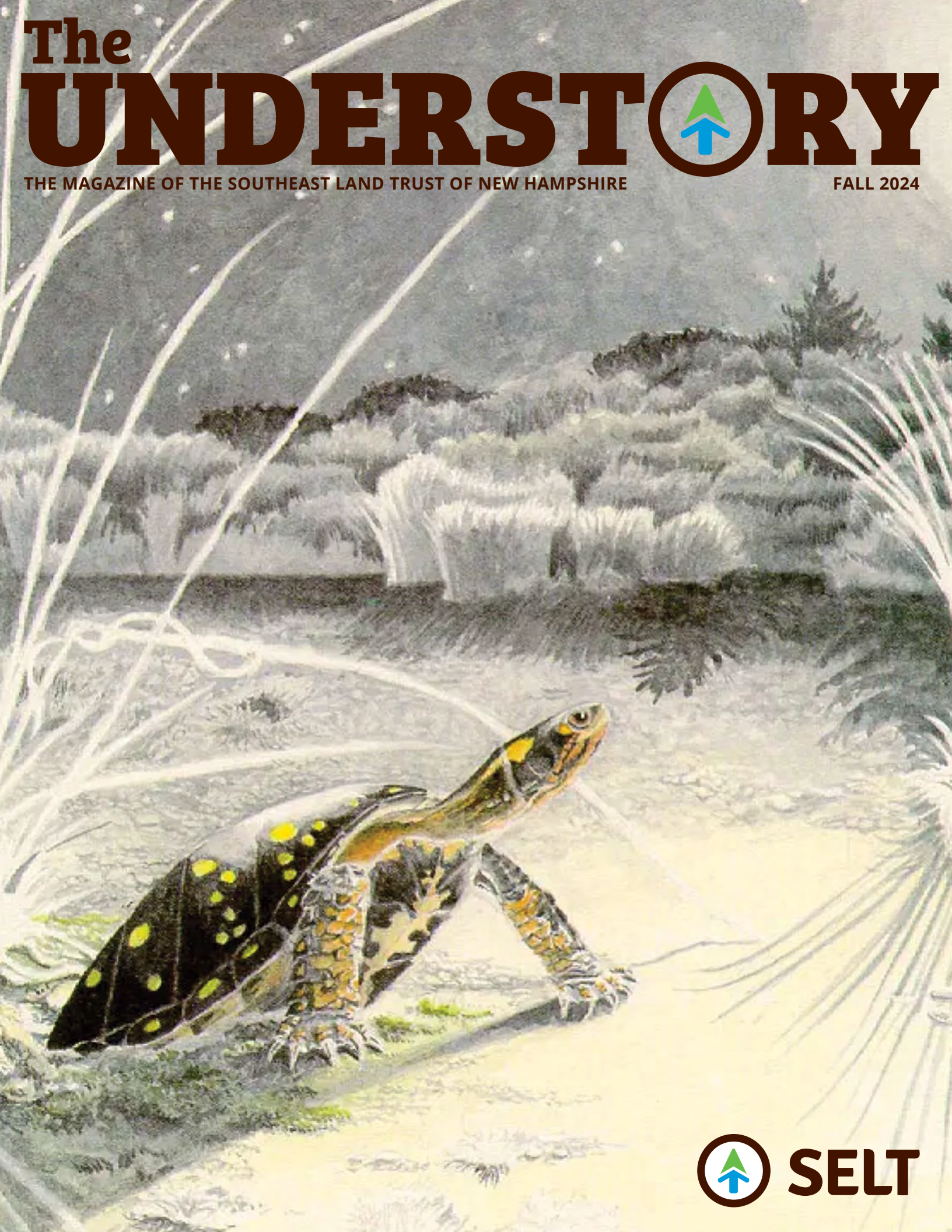
The

UNDERSTORY



THE MAGAZINE OF THE SOUTHEAST LAND TRUST OF NEW HAMPSHIRE

FALL 2024



SELT



The Southeast Land Trust of New Hampshire (SELT) saves, shares, and stewards land for the benefit of people and nature in southeast New Hampshire. SELT serves 52 towns and cities of greater Rockingham and Strafford counties and has conserved more than 27,000 acres since 1980, including nature preserves, hiking trails, farmland, and scenic vistas.

SELT relies on its annual contributing members, committed Board of Directors, talented staff, and dedicated volunteers to keep advancing critical conservation initiatives in our region.

Our Mission

To protect and sustain the significant lands in our communities for clean water, outdoor recreation, fresh food, wildlife, and healthy forests.

Our Vision

Conserved lands in every community, sustaining people and nature.

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The Understory is the annual magazine of SELT, the Southeast Land Trust of NH. Written and photographed by David Johnson, Jerry Monkman, Paul Wainwright, and SELT staff. Designed by David Johnson and Cathy Arakelian. Edited by Brian Hart and Lizzy Franceschini.

Schafer Woods in Atkinson. PAUL WAINWRIGHT
COVER: Spotted Turtle Nesting in Moonlight. DAVID CARROLL

Relationships Are in Our Nature

Relationships are the currency of conservation. It seems appropriate that the words "conservation" and "conversation" are separated by the placement of just two letters. Because most, if not all, conservation projects begin with a dialogue.

A landowner looking to protect a beloved family property that has been stewarded by the lineage for decades. Or a municipal official who sees an opportunity to add a desirable parcel to the town's portfolio and dials the number of Duane, our Land Conservation Director. Or maybe one person knows another person who conserved their property, and the word spread about the benefits. An email exchange leads to a cup of coffee, leads to a site walk, leads to a ribbon cutting.

Relationships are critical to saving, sharing, stewarding, and sustaining the lands we love. However, the vital connection between people and nature can be tense. It can be rejuvenating. It can be distressing. It is fraught with challenges and opportunities.

At SELT, we talk about our mission as being for people and nature, and it is all too easy to focus on what people need first. But sometimes we need to put our relationship with nature second to the unknown, unseen relationships within nature. In other words, putting human wants secondary to what nature needs. The featured interview with David Carroll reminds us that is certainly the case for turtles.

Thriving habitat. Fresh air. Healthy forests and fields. Wetlands, uplands, woodlands. These are the parcels SELT prizes and prioritizes. And when we can string together these conserved lands, creating contiguous blocks of open space, natural relationships amongst wildlife can bloom.

Clean water flows, wildlife traverse without obstruction or having to make a white-knuckle dash across a highway – now that is connectedness that will impact our communities for generations to come.

Thank you for supporting SELT. Thank you for being part of a relationship that will last forever.

Warm regards,

Brian Hart
Executive Director, SELT

for the turtles



Young Painted Turtle on Water Lily DAVID CARROLL

"Hello?"

"Yes, hi! Is David there?"

"Oh, he's not in right now. He's out with the turtles."

That was my first call to the Carroll household. David Carroll's wife, Laurette, politely requested I call back as her husband was out and about in "The Digs," the turtle habitat just a click or two away from their home in Warner, NH..

Following a call back that afternoon, David and I made plans to chat at his house. My pitch: I was working on a story for SELT's annual magazine, focusing on turtles. People loved any and all turtle-related social media posts and any turtle-focused SELT workshop was always well-attended. Let's give the people what they wanted!

Prior to booking the sit-down, David made sure I knew "what I was getting into." Amiably, he noted he was not interested in waxing poetic about the magic of turtles and nature and how people should do whatever they could to find them. Quite the opposite, actually; the less human incursions into habitat, the better. Would I be fine with that?

I assured him that I would and five days later I was pulling into a nondescript driveway just off Route 89. If I didn't see the sign for the David M. Carroll Studio I might have missed it. David emerged from his studio, waving me over, trademark headband fixed to his head. The studio (which he shares with Laurette) is rife with creation: prints of flora and fauna (mainly turtles), some framed, some not, some displayed, some tucked behind rows of other prints; a canvas on an easel; a painting in mid-form; stacks of books (many written by David himself), buttressed by assorted naturalist publications. This is a studio, a gallery, and an archive.

After reading up on David's biography and publication history, his grant awards (including the prestigious MacArthur Foundation Fellowship), and his standing in the field of turtle research and advocacy, it was obvious this was someone who had clout. He'd certainly prefer a sojourn to "The Digs" instead of reciting his views and life story for the zillionth time, right?

Nope. David Carroll was happy to chat and since I knew my paraphrasing wouldn't do him justice, I hit the red button on my recording device and sat back.

He began.

"I was born in Altoona, Pennsylvania, a railroad town in south-central Pennsylvania. I lived just out of the main urban part of Altoona, but it was all row houses. I didn't know anything, really, except sidewalks, and maybe a ballpark and a few streets. It was a totally human environment. I had no connection with nature.

We migrated 400 miles to the Groton-Mystic-Noank area of Connecticut. It was a housing project, a lot of Navy people, some civilians. And I kept looking out over the roofs and in the not terribly far distance, I could see the tops of trees.

And I would just stand there looking. I can remember thinking that I had to go there. I don't know. I was called. I just had to go.

And I walked beyond the limits of the houses and I followed a chain-link fence past a huge parking lot and then a baseball field, and on the other side of the fence were these woods and I was entranced. I followed along until I came to an open field-like area. And then I walked. I just kept walking and I came to a brook, a little stream. There were stones there. As if they were set up for my crossing. So, I went across those and



Courtship Spotted Turtles DAVID CARROLL

I was in this grassy kind of place and I came to a little marsh and I was seeing frogs, dragonflies, just a whole world that I never imagined or thought of. And then, as I was staring into the water, I saw these movements in the burweed. I watched and I didn't move because I didn't want to scare away whatever it was. And this spotted turtle glides along the bottom in a clear open water section.

And I see that turtle with those spots and the orange markings on the side of the head. I just thought, how can this be? How can there be such a thing?

I was shaking all over. Shaking like crazy. So, in I went, shoes and all. I just had to pick up the turtle. And I did. And I just looked at the turtle and looked at its eyes.

It was as though I was holding life itself in my hands. And the turtle just became a touchstone with that constellation of spots.

Whatever my mental vocabulary was at the time, I just knew that I had found what I really needed. I had found an opening to not just a world, but a whole new universe that I had to be in. It was a passkey out of a world I knew I had to leave, a world that was made up of human concerns, and human constructs, by, for, around, and under people.

I was just a kid looking at a turtle. And from then on, I just had to get to the swamp. I had to be there. I had to go there. No matter what was going on in my life I needed to be out there."



"I was just a kid looking at a turtle. And from then on, I just had to get to the swamp."

ABOVE: David Carroll in "The Digs." COURTESY PHOTO CARROLL

There's just something about turtles. It is hard to nail precisely why they seem to have a near universal approval rating.

"The turtle is so turtle," David says. "Turtles have cachet. I mean, if I had written my first book, *The Year of the Aardvark*, I'd still not be heard of. No offense to aardvarks."

He says: "Turtles have tenure. They have 248 million years or so of residency. And they're evolutionary conservative. They have changed almost zero. They got it right and they stuck to it. They've really adapted to living in any part of the world that isn't permafrost. They're in oceans. They're in deserts. They're in mountains. They're in streams, ponds, rivers, fields, woods."

One question David gets repeatedly: do you keep any turtles as pets?

"No, I don't need a turtle to go fetch my evening newspaper," he says. "It wouldn't anyway and that's the thing I love about them."

Perhaps that's the key. The turtle is ambivalent to our peering gazes, to the squeals of delight from young onlookers. Turtles are turtling and if the spotlight shines their way, it's adios muchacho, and into their shells they withdraw. In the person/nature dynamic, the turtle meanders on a one-way street. They play hard-to-get.

"There is nothing transactional about our relationship with the turtle," David says. "The turtle is so separate. He just wants you to clear out so he can get on with his business. He's thinking 'I've got to find a mate. I've got predators everywhere. I've got things to do. Life is short.'"

SELT's shorthand mission tagline is "Saving land for people and nature." Of the two direct objects in that phrase, the former can often get more shine than the latter; As SELT's communications guy, I am guilty as charged, since, frankly, it's easier to spill ink in service of a cool human interest story rather than conjuring compelling prose about upland soils and vernal pools.

The turtle serves as a stout reminder of the importance of not losing sight of that second piece. Protecting land on behalf of nature, and the wildlife that rely on these conserved spaces, is paramount. Of the 45 properties that SELT owns and manages, 32 do not have public trail systems on them. Granted, SELT-owned lands are open for people to explore, but, much like David's pre-adolescent vision quest, those outdoor endeavors would require real effort, and not a small amount of bushwhacking. These lands can host the occasional visitor, but make no mistake: they have not been conserved for humans.

"There is nothing transactional about our relationship with the turtle. The turtle is so separate. He just wants you to clear out so he can get on with his business."



Spotted Turtles & Red Maple Leaves DAVID CARROLL

"Functional, healthy ecosystems rely on the interconnectedness of all parts," says Chad Fierros, SELT's Forest and Wildlife Habitat Manager. "Habitat loss/fragmentation is one of the leading causes of population decline and species vulnerability in our region and globally, so habitat protection is one of the most important roles of land conservation organizations like SELT. Humans are part of the ecosystem and, as such, we have a responsibility to do right by the other species we share the landscape with."

Turtle habitat is an especially sensitive subject. Nearly all of SELT's public-

facing turtle content has location-specific content scrubbed, to keep interlopers at bay. The endangered Blanding's turtle is at particular risk, currently ranked as "critically imperiled" by New Hampshire Fish and Game.

As a victim of both willfully malevolent foes (poachers) and the hazards of human development (mortal road crossings, destruction of habitat), coupled with its deck-stacked-against-it-biological-idiosyncrasies (late age sexual maturity of 15-20 years for females and an average of 13 eggs a year output), the Blanding's crawls on a tightrope

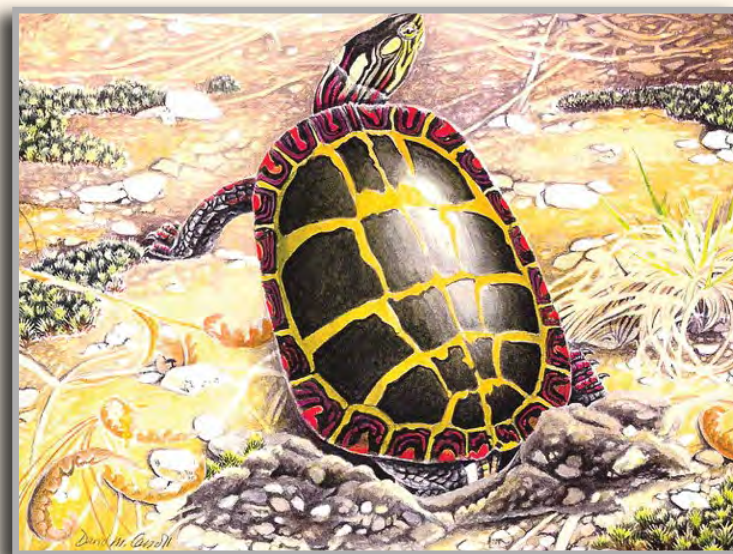
of “extirpation,” when a species completely vanishes from a specific region.

“Because Blanding’s require large mosaics of wetlands and upland habitat with relatively limited development, they are an important umbrella species for wetland habitat and species protection in the Northeast,” said Lori Sommer, SELT’s Coastal Watershed Land Conservation Manager. “Our coastal strategy has been focused on connecting parcels with intact forests, vernal pools, streams, and wetlands that are important for dispersal and travel. Large blocks of contiguous, conserved lands are critical for a thriving habitat for various wildlife species, especially one as nomadic as turtles.”

“SELT tries to conserve and protect important, high-quality wetlands while also creating or restoring important habitats,” says Chad. “This involves creating nesting sites, which are areas with sparse vegetative cover and sandy soils within a few hundred feet of wetlands. We have also worked to restore sites that have been previously cleared or degraded, like sand or gravel pits, which have been degraded by intensive uses, but can be restored to provide great habitat relatively quickly.”

“Does a turtle live a solitary life?”

I ask this to David, while taking a bite out of some cosmically delicious homemade bread that Laurette brought in for us, along with butter and organic honey.



Nested Painted Turtle DAVID CARROLL

David takes a beat and regards the question, before answering:

“I tend to think so,” he says. “They’re not a big social animal. They get together at mating time, but that’s pretty much it. The mother lays her eggs and that’s her thing. Her commitment is over. When the babies hatch, they scatter and hide.”

David grins. He draws the parallel. He is a man known for his commitment to defending turtle habitat and voicing his opposition to avenues of future encroachment – even if it’s something as popular as a rail trail – and those kinds of stakes in the ground can foster irritability from various corners of the community.

But that’s who he is, and has been since that encounter in the swamp over 70 years ago, when he saw a message in the spots of the turtle shell. It is a message he has dedicated his life to sharing.

He says: “From the minute the baby turtles get up and open their eyes above the earth, they’re on their own. And they have all the knowledge they need.” ■

How to Be a Good Turtle Neighbor



courtesy of

NEW HAMPSHIRE
TURTLE RESCUE

www.nhturtlerescue.org

Help Turtles Cross the Road

If you find a turtle who is in the road or looks like they are about to cross, helping them across the street can save their life. Your personal safety is paramount. When it is safe, pick up the turtle and get them to safety.

Then place them on the side of the road in the direction they were heading. We should only move turtles across the street. Turtles are intimately tied to their local environments and should never be relocated. Report your sightings to NH Fish & Game who monitors their populations, and do not share locations online to prevent poaching.

Watch Pets Outdoors

Closely monitor pets when they are outside during nesting season (May-July). To dogs, turtles can seem like bone chew toys, which can result in fatal injuries to a turtle.

Never Release Pet Turtles

Releasing pet turtles has been linked to the spread of deadly diseases and mass mortalities in turtle populations. It’s also cruel to that turtle. Always work with a rescue to re-home pet turtles.

Keep Wild Turtles Wild

It is critical to the long-term survival of our native turtle species that individuals never be taken from the wild.

See NH Turtle Rescue’s [#keepwildturtleswild](#) posts on social media to better understand the many reasons why, or you can always call us for more information. If you think a turtle needs help, call a licensed wildlife rehabilitator right away.

Let Turtles Nest In Your Yard

During nesting season (May-July), you may find a turtle nesting in your yard. It’s vital she be given the space to lay her eggs. Turtles are very particular in their nesting requirements, and if she is forced to move on, she is likely to travel far across roads, to find a new location to lay her eggs.

Keep pets away and give her space to lay her eggs, and she will be on her way home. Hatchling turtles do not receive parental care, so she will not be back this year.

Find a Wildlife Rehabber

Take injured turtles to a licensed wildlife rehabilitator. Turtles are incredibly resilient and very important to the ecosystem, so it’s vital to rehabilitate wherever possible.

Contact New Hampshire Fish & Game for a list of rehabilitators that can take in turtles, use the Animal Help Now app, or call NH Turtle Rescue at (603) 417-4944.

The Forest by the Sea

If you weren't looking for it, you would more than likely motor right past Joe Cavaretta's driveway. Especially if you're beach-bound, heading east on Elwyn Road, waves and sand on the brain – the nondescript, unpaved entrance would barely be noticed.

Besides, what could possibly be down that road? A house, surrounded by more houses, which are likely surrounded by more houses? This is, after all, the New Hampshire Seacoast, one of the most desirable residential destinations in the Milky Way.

But, no, that's not what lies beyond. In fact, after a half-mile of driving down the dirt road, flanked by thick forests, with all signs of thickly-situated suburbia ebbing away, an odd feeling may come across you. What is this place? Where am I?

Eventually a modest home and a sign of life will come into view but not before mild disorientation has set in. If it wasn't for the occasional wisp of seabreeze that punctuates the wooded stillness, you'd think you had been teleported 200 miles northwest and deposited in the middle of the North Country.

Welcome to the 100-Acre Woods.

An aerial look over the Cavaretta property. JERRY MONKMAN – ECOPHOTOGRAPHY

It was when Joe Cavaretta nearly died that he knew he needed to make a decision.

The year was 2007, and he had been admitted to the hospital with a mysterious heart malady that even baffled the doctor.

“He was really pessimistic,” Joe recalls. “I said, ‘I’m going to come home, aren’t I?’ He replied, ‘Well, I hope so.’”

They never did figure out what the issue was – an unidentified virus of some sort was the leading candidate – but the experience left an indelible impact on Joe (“I really started to think about my own mortality,” he says).

At the center of that epiphany was the place he called home, his modest house sitting upon a staggering 100 acres of forest – the largest privately-owned, undeveloped, unconserved tract of land in Portsmouth. Unsurprisingly, this swath of prime real estate had been an object of desire for more than a few developers; a steady cascade of inquiry letters has filled Joe’s mailbox over the years. In 2012, there was a near-hit when a conversation with a developer had progressed beyond pleasantries, but the talks stalled.

It was right around this time that Joe began to have another discussion, this one focused on an alternative route from development. In the summer of 2012, Joe called SELT to inquire about a conservation easement.

The Cavaretta family has been a fixture in Portsmouth for generations. Joe’s parents owned the beloved Foye’s Corner Market, once located at the Route 1A roundabout (where the current Atlantic Grill sits), a regional nexus for decades, a place where you could grab a loaf of bread and the latest community scuttlebutt all in one visit. Joe grew up in that store, working from a young age and learning the nuances of the societal fabric through making change and sweeping floors. (One example of a Foye’s Corner Market maxim: *Be there first thing in the morning to open the store for third shift sailors from the Navy Yard already waiting in line for their beer and cigarettes.*)

Those Portsmouth roots grew deep, and he would eventually find himself attached even closer to the community when, as a 23-year old fresh out of college, he moved onto his Uncle John’s property as a caretaker. John originally bought the parcel in 1949, and eventually opened a game farm on it, supplying many local restaurants with quail, pheasant, and other game birds.

“I was just out of college,” Joe recalls, “just started in masonry, and moved there all at the same time. It was a big change of life.”

Thankfully, the transition wasn’t completely alien. He had been coming to the woods for years, helping his father and uncle cut wood or running chores on behalf of the game birds. Other family members had balked at the thought of moving on to the property because of its isolation, but Joe didn’t mind. He was, after all, just starting out on a post-graduate life and his career was



Marsh marigolds in bloom next to Berry’s Brook. JERRY MONKMAN - ECOPHOTOGRAPHY

nascent enough that options to purchase elsewhere were limited, and for someone interested in accumulating DIY skills, there was no better learning annex to be found. (“I basically learned how to do a lot of little home repairs, like solder pipes and fix wiring because I had no money to call a contractor,” he says.)

Little did he know that at the time these early life decisions would yield a conservation opportunity with major implications over 40 years later.

Joe’s property is more than a real estate oddity. An untouched swath of Portsmouth land this size is rare, but scarcity doesn’t begin to encapsulate the value proposition of the 100-Acre Woods.

For the City of Portsmouth, this land is a top priority, informed by its 2020 Open Space Plan, and supported by multiple other science-based, data-driven conservation plans on the regional and state level. It is rife with ecological benefits, including habitat and transit corridors for common and threatened wildlife, protection for the water quality of Berry’s Brook, wetlands that slow and store flooding and capture pollutants, and climate change resilience.

“The 100-Acre Woods is an identified top priority for conservation under the City’s Open Space Plan,” said Samantha Collins, Chair of the Portsmouth Conservation Commission. “After walking the property and seeing first-hand its significance and quality, the Commission

knew it was worth permanently protecting and partnering with SELT to acquire a conservation easement.”

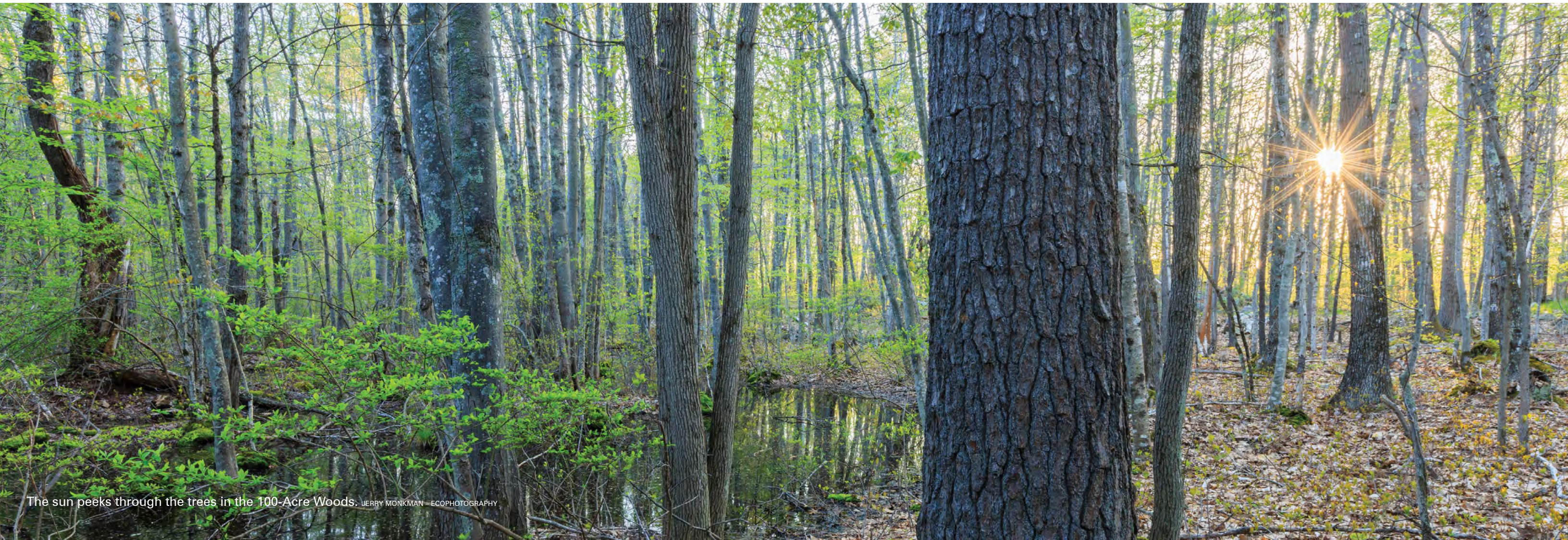
Beyond the cache of nature-centric treasure, the 100-Acre Woods presents a compelling option for future community use. Dispersed public access is a requirement for LCHIP funding being pursued, and with the land’s proximity to two public schools – Portsmouth’s Dondero Elementary School and Rye Elementary School – the potential for outdoor education and recreation is real and tantalizing.

But all that lies in the future. Now is all about the process, forging forward on the path to permanent protection. A major step happened in September

when the Portsmouth City Council unanimously approved the Conservation Commission’s recommendation to contribute up to \$1 million from the City’s conservation fund to support the 100-Acre Woods project.

“We are watching Mr. Cavaretta make a different choice for Portsmouth,” said Portsmouth Mayor Deaglan McEachern. “It’s fantastic that he’s doing it, and it’s fantastic that SELT has built up the trust with Mr. Cavaretta.”

Said long-time Portsmouth resident and retired attorney Peter Loughlin: “We are at one of those very rare moments in the modern history of Portsmouth where we have a landowner interested in protecting land forever and is willing to make an



The sun peeks through the trees in the 100-Acre Woods. JERRY MONKMAN – ECOGRAPHY

incredibly generous financial contribution to promote the public good.”

There's a guitar sitting on Joe's kitchen table. It's a Fender Stratocaster, clutched firm in a variety of restraints. Next to it lies a collection of tools, most of which are fine and could pass for surgical instruments.

Repairing and tuning electric guitars is Joe's go-to-hobby (especially since the cardiac event disqualified his more athletic pastime of tennis). Joe has always been compelled by pursuits that blend art with craft, which is what drew him to masonry in the first place; a chimney has to function properly of

course, but there is a creative flair that goes into the stonework, which makes every one of his creations unique. The same applies for guitars: there is science, but you don't really know if the strings will sing until a musician actually plays it.

Joe unhooks the clamps, picks up the guitar, and takes it outside. He sits in front of the old barn that he used to work in as a child.

The sun is out and there is a faint smell of salt in the coastal wind as it blows through the trees. He strums a few chords, tightens a string, and plays again.

There is still work to do, but it feels right and is sounding better by the day. ■

Learn more and get involved at seltnh.org/100acrewoods



Joe Cavaretta strums his Stratocaster. SELT STAFF

The Open Space

When Norma met John, she knew he was the man for her. The two crossed paths in downtown Exeter amidst a shared group of friends.

Though young, Norma knew precisely what kind of man she was looking for – and looking to avoid. Loyalty, commitment, hard work, decency, temperance: these were the characteristics she demanded in a counterpart. They were married in 1955.

“I'll tell you,” Norma says, “I've never met a person as good as he was.”

The breeze rolls smoothly off the recently hayed fields of the 28-acre Fuller property on Pickpocket Road in Brentwood. Invisible tendrils of refreshing cool air – so appreciated during this recent July hot spell – snake through the property, finding their way to a front porch, lightly battering the screen door against the entrance jamb.

It's a snapshot of Americana: a lazy summer day, a classic farmhouse, a field splayed out to a horizon of sturdy oak trees, various antique farm equipment sitting dormant in their outbuildings.

Through the screen door, into the living room, sits Norma Fuller. She is in her 80s, but is whip-smart and friendly, eager to talk about the story of her property and what it represents: the culmination of hard

work, considered land management, decades-spanning house-hopping, and 64 years of marriage.

This land is laced with more than just memory and history; it is a hub of coastal watershed protection, mature hardwood forests, diverse wildlife habitat, and farm-ready soils, all of which abuts conserved parcels.

But that's not what John and Norma were thinking when they first moved. For the young couple (at the time), it was all about finding a place to build a future. Their quest took them on an intra-Brentwood hopscotch to different locations, until they finally

landed at their Pickpocket destination. At that time, it was far from the postcard-like canvas it would eventually become, but there was potential.



ABOVE: John Fuller astride one of his tractors. SELT STAFF



The Fuller property on a still summer day. SELT STAFF

It just needed some good, old-fashioned hard work. And John and Norma were up to the challenge. The two would often be found in the woods, with John operating one of his many pieces of power equipment (his passion was collecting, tinkering, and operating a variety of vintage farm tractors) and Norma was on brush-burning duty.

“I helped him all the way,” she says, pointing out the door. “This field was not a field. It was all woods right there. He would cut the trees, and I would gather the brush and tend the fire.”

Eventually, painstakingly, the once-wild land transformed into a mosaic of field

and forest, and the Fullers realized the potential they had envisioned so many years ago.

They had found their home.

Potential. That’s what made John and Norma’s property so attractive to SELT and the Town of Brentwood’s Conservation Commission, a key partner providing the majority of funds to purchase the easement.

As it stands now, a bounty of natural resources lies within these 28 acres: prime wetlands, aquifer and drinking water supply protection, threatened flora

and fauna habitat, and connectivity to additional conserved, unfragmented land.

But just as when Norma and John first set eyes on the wooded lot so many decades ago, there is even greater value just beneath the surface. And that is literally true in this case: the potential can be found in the dirt. The rich farmland soils, combined with the rolling open space, tees up the property to be a prime working farm one day.

Recognizing this, SELT has pursued an OPAV (Option to Purchase at Agriculture Value), a unique variation of conservation easement that provides the best chance for the land to be purchased by a farmer.

The Fuller land sits within a network of other farms, making it more likely to survive as an agricultural enterprise in the future due to the mini-ecosystem of services that are more likely to be available to future farmers.

“Protecting farmland for the future is one of our key conservation goals,” said Ben Engel, Conservation Project Manager for SELT. “The real estate market can provide an insurmountable barrier to farmers looking to own land, so the OPAV is something we can use to make a property like the Fullers’ far more accessible. Thanks to Norma and John’s careful management of their

land, it is a prime candidate for a future working farm, something, unfortunately, we are seeing fewer and fewer of in our communities.”

There is a sweet harmony here: one day, perhaps, farmers on a quest for their own property may find themselves working the soil on the land John and Norma built a life upon, the ultimate



The woods out back, carefully managed by the Fullers. SELT STAFF

destination of their shared adventure that began over half-a-century ago.

John Fuller passed away in 2019.

“I’ve been dealing with it ever since,” Norma says, her voice trailing off for a moment. “I can’t stand it.”

The phone rings. It’s the plumber. Norma quickly pivots to business mode, negotiating a needed visit to address a water issue in the house. Whatever the future may hold for the Fuller homestead (perhaps farmstead someday), there is still work to do today. To offset some of the costs required to maintain the property, Norma has undertaken a new task – one that she has been dreading. She is selling John’s farm equipment.

“It broke my heart because he never wanted to part with any of his equipment even after he got older,” she says. “He just loved it.”

But she also knows John would have wanted her to do it. Would have expected her to do it. Whatever was needed to protect the land they had worked so hard to transform into a home. Now permanent protection is the threshold, forever enshrining a lifetime of memory sewn into its soils.

Norma gestures to an empty chair, in the corner of the living room, just a few feet from her: “That is where he always used to sit,” she says, quietly.

On this magnificent land, there is no open space more precious to her. ■



Norma Fuller, in her home. SELT STAFF



Back to the Greenway

Wayne’s return to the Greenway was nothing short of overwhelming. This wasn’t something that he considered doable. The 64-year-old Newfields resident has always held an abiding love for all things nature and the great outdoors, but a tragic accident decades ago had turned his life upside down – making trail excursions a towering barrier.

He was 21 when it happened. Just starting a career as a firefighter, Wayne suffered a horrendous fall during a standard training session, and he broke his back, leaving him paralyzed from the waist down. It took three years of intense therapy to regain motor activity in his lower body, after which he was able to lead a fairly active life. As he aged, however, his ambulatory ability deteriorated; today, Wayne relies on braces and canes to get around. Negotiating even moderate trails is a near-impossible proposition.

But then he connected with Northeast Passage, the accessible recreation program out of the University of New Hampshire, and discovered

a conveyance that allowed him to reconnect with his love of the outdoors.

“It’s called a TerrainHopper,” said Sam Wang, Program Specialist for Northeast Passage. “It’s an all-terrain device that is able to go wherever people can walk, so it’s legally allowed to go on trails because it’s a personal mobility device. It’s got a 10-inch clearance on water, rocks, roots, anything you can think of, and can go up to a 45-degree angle on any slope. People with spinal cord injuries, amputees, or anyone with muscle tone weakness or imbalance issues can use it to experience the outdoors again.”

Music to Wayne’s ears. He first gave the TerrainHopper a test drive in March at the Northeast Passage offices. But it wasn’t until September when he was able to put the device into action, and return to one of his all-time favorite places: the Piscassic Greenway.

The event? SELT’s “Geology Tour of Piscassic Greenway field trip,” a free public outreach event that brought users in for a guided tour of this beloved trail

ABOVE: Wayne accompanies the group for a tour of the Piscassic Greenway. SELT STAFF

system in Newfields. Thanks to the TerrainHopper, Wayne was able to visit the trails for the first time in 12 years (the very trail system he had helped SELT create through advocacy and financial support).

“Everybody deserves a chance to be on the trails and outdoors,” Sam says. “It’s just so important to always think about accessibility.”

Accessibility is an important component in SELT’s drive to bring as many children, adults, and families as possible closer to nature through a variety of outreach and stewardship initiatives. A collaboration with Northeast Passage like this (and in the future), represents just one avenue to engage under-represented communities.

“We want to welcome all people from all backgrounds and circumstances to SELT’s mission,” says Zoe Graves, SELT’s Outreach and Education Director. “Working with organizations like Northeast Passage, Indonesian Cultural Connect, and Black Heritage Trail New Hampshire helps SELT better understand the communities in our service area while working to ensure that nature is accessible for everyone.”

For Wayne, his trip back to the trails held particular significance, above and beyond the technology that helped make it happen. Along the way, the group explored the Mraz

Trail leg of the Piscassic Greenway, which was named after his good friend Will Mraz, who died in a car accident in 2006.

“It meant a lot,” Wayne says, emotion in his voice. “I haven’t really spent that much time out there until the Northeast Passage came into my life. It was a dream come true.” ■

*“It was a dream
come true.”*



Wayne and Sam take in the Greenway views. SELT STAFF

A Closer Look at the Land

An Interview with (Super) SELTie Kate Dumas

SELT supporter and volunteer Kate Dumas offered her professional expertise (and world-class number-crunching) for a deep-dive analysis of SELT’s effectiveness at meeting the costs of easement stewardship. Working closely with SELT’s Easement Stewardship Team (Deborah Goard, Amanda Ellms, and Katie Bates), Kate went on easement monitoring visits, analyzed and summarized complex data, and presented questions for SELT’s Finance and Land Stewardship Committees to discuss. Kate’s work will help SELT understand the breadth of the funding needs to properly support our rapidly expanding portfolio of conserved lands. We took a few moments to ask Kate why she wanted to take on this unique project.

How did you get connected to SELT’s mission?

I’ve been donating to SELT for a few years, and I would see SELT property signs everywhere. We live in Rye and are familiar with properties like Awcomin Marsh and Charles Rand Forest, which we used during the pandemic. Getting out on the properties was really the first introduction for us. Nature is where I go to recharge and refresh, to ground myself and reconnect.

Tell us about your SELT volunteer experience.

There was an opportunity to do a unique project alongside SELT’s stewardship team. We looked at the true costs of easement monitoring, which was not something I had understood very well previously, and so it was great to get hands-on, go on some of the monitoring visits, and see the work live and in action. Then I translated that field work into numbers and data. It was a really great introduction because it gave me direct access to staff to see the knowledge they had, and the care that they give these properties. I then took my analysis to the SELT Finance Committee, to have a conversation about how this information is helpful and how it will be helpful for future planning. Ultimately, this went to the Stewardship Committee and the full Board.

What do you most enjoy about volunteering with SELT?

One of the things that I’ve loved about being able to volunteer is that I have been able to use my professional background in ways I wouldn’t have imagined or envisioned. I can take my expertise to the ground level, getting out into the land, going on monitoring visits, and seeing how it all works. It was really incredible. I have such an appreciation for Debbie and Amanda and Katie and the work that they do and I’ve really enjoyed meeting the other SELT volunteers.

What would you say to potential SELT volunteers?

It’s just a great opportunity to get involved in something that you feel very strongly about, and to know that you’re having an impact. You might be able to do things that maybe professionally you weren’t doing. Having that open canvas to try different things is so rewarding.

Interested in volunteering? Visit seltvolunteer.org.

RIGHT: Kate Dumas and Katie Bates on a monitoring visit. SELT STAFF



Cole & Keegan's EXCELLENT summer adventure



To say the fish were biting is an understatement. You could just toss a bare hook into the water, let out a whistle, and something would happily oblige and serve itself up on the line. Cast after cast, it was a bluegill and bass boon. Kids were reeling in catches and having a gonzo time doing it.

Cole and Keegan couldn't believe their luck. They've tried their hand at the rod and reel game before (Keegan was introduced to fishing last year by Cole), but aside from a sunfish or two the size of nitrogen molecules, their year-to-date bounty was largely sparse – until today.

And they weren't the only ones cashing in. Along the ridge of the Burley Farms beaver pond, other kids were finding equivalent success, many of whom were experiencing fishing for the first time.

Once they got past the relative grossness of worm impalements of course.

It was the first day of Camp ATLAS, and if this was any indication of what would lie in store for the rest of the week, Cole, Keegan, and the rest of the campers had five days of world-class fun ahead of them.

Spoiler: it was, and they did.

Nature and mindfulness. Those are the two north stars that characterize Camp ATLAS, the next evolutionary step of SELT's nature-based education initiative, All-Terrain Learning Adventures. ATLAS saw its genesis through putting down roots in nearby schools: first at Epping Elementary School, followed by Epping



LEFT: Keegan (left) and Cole (right) chill out in the UNH pool. SELT STAFF

ABOVE: The boys go ponding. SELT STAFF



Middle School and then Lamprey River Elementary School in Raymond. There, this unique learning curriculum-meets-wild-play collaborative flourished. Yellow school buses rolling into Burley Farms was a common sight between September and June; the surrounding forests transformed into open-air classrooms and tree-fort enclaves.

Building off the success of this initiative, and leveraging the new partnership with the UNH Extension Youth Behavioral Health and Wellness/4H Youth Development program – the programmatic partner in all things ATLAS – the vision of a summer day camp soon materialized.

“UNH Extension’s mission is founded in providing trusted knowledge, practical education, and cooperative solutions throughout New Hampshire’s ten counties,” said Kristin Eberl, Field Specialist for UNH Extension’s Youth Behavioral Health & Wellness program. “Camp ATLAS directly aligns with this by delivering engaging and accessible programming that falls within our 4-H Youth Development Model.

My 4-H Pathway focuses on youth mental wellness, which is why there’s an emphasis on holistic health baked into the Camp ATLAS mission.”

What makes Camp ATLAS unique among a smorgasbord of summer day camps? What could be the lane that SELT and UNH drive together? The answer was found in their shared values of inclusion and removing barriers to access.

“Our partner schools expressed a need for high-quality outdoor experiences to keep students engaged through the summer,” said Lizzy Franceschini, SELT’s Education Program Manager. “For SELT, we see this as yet another opportunity to foster a love of nature at a young age and encourage the next generation of conservationists who will be vital in protecting and stewarding the natural world in the coming decades.”

After exploring a few different options, the team determined that the most beneficial program would be a low-cost, full day summer camp venture. And its seasonal presence would open the door to kids from beyond the borders of Epping and Raymond.



beach, their surfboards sitting in front of them. Staff from Summer Sessions Surf Shop began leading the campers in some dry-land drills in anticipation of riding the waves of Jenness Beach in Rye.

The boys’ stomach butterflies eventually settled and anxiety turned into excitement and, ultimately, into elation, when after a few wobbly salt-soaked runs, they stayed atop the boards and cruised the crests into shore.

New experiences. Inching out of a comfort zone. Hanging ten. Connecting to nature. That’s Camp ATLAS.

“Watching all the different layers of learning at work was incredible,” Kristin says. “We engaged master-level educators as our mentors, UNH interns as our lead instructors, high school students as our counselors-in-training, and youth from around the state in nature-based activities that highlighted the importance of self-discovery through the safety of their community. That’s some powerful stuff!”

Each day brought a new summer blockbuster:

IT CAME FROM THE POND!

A group of curious campers went to the beaver pond with their nets, what would they find lurking below the water?

PADDLE POWER

When the Lamprey River beckoned, adventure-seeking kids answered, jumping into their kayaks (some for the first time ever) and setting out to explore the wild and scenic river with our partners, Seven Rivers Paddling.

“Not only does Camp ATLAS meet the needs of our partner schools, it also allows us to expand our reach to many other youth in our region,” Lizzy says. “Students came from towns all over southeastern NH to attend Camp ATLAS. Every kid deserves a chance to experience the magic of summer camp. Camp ATLAS makes that magic accessible to all.”

To increase the accessibility, Camp ATLAS offered scholarships, provided by a UNH grant, to those who were unable to afford the camp cost. Five families utilized the scholarship program, opening the door for their children to take in an epic week of outdoor ballyhoo.

How cool was it? Let’s hit the beach to find out.

“I was a little nervous,” Cole said.

“I had never done this before,” Keegan added.

The fellas squeezed themselves into their wetsuits and took their position on the

ABOVE LEFT: The Camp ATLAS crew paddles the Lamprey. SELT STAFF

LEFT: Campers huddle around a small critter. SELT STAFF

ABOVE: Cole hangs ten. SELT STAFF

THE GREAT UNH MYSTERY

What lies in the shadows of the University of New Hampshire Durham campus? Clues to a scavenger hunt – and these young gumshoes are out to untangle the enigma (and then maybe go for a swim at the campus outdoor pool).

CREATURE FEATURE

The Center for Wildlife has arrived at Burley Farms – and they bring with them beasts of the air and the earth to engage these inquisitive young minds.

“Amazing week, filled with fun activities and new friendships!”

“I wish we were able to do it for more than one week.”

“My favorite part of camp was all the amazing people that I got to meet and hang out with. I had a very strong relationship with everyone I met there.”

These were a sampling of the testimonials from campers who followed up on post-Camp surveys.

So how effective was the program in connecting students to nature and themselves?

Just look at the stats: Before camp, 53% of campers reported feeling a strong connection to nature. After camp, 88% of campers reported feeling a strong connection to nature. Every camper felt part of nature after attending Camp ATLAS and 88% of campers got to try at least one new outdoor activity that they had never done before, including surfing, kayaking, and ponding.

But enough facts and figures and data; let’s get our boys Cole and Keegan back here. Gentlemen, you both have gone to a variety of really, really cool camps all season, what did you think of Camp ATLAS?

“It was great,” Cole says. “I loved surfing. I had never done that before.”

“It was the best camp I did this summer,” Keegan says.

There you have it. Camp ATLAS: Cole-tested, Keegan-approved. ■

BELOW: It was a summer to remember at Burley Farms. SELT STAFF



Introducing Schafer Woods, a Hidden Gem in Atkinson, Conserved Forever

This summer, the Schafer family generously donated 141 acres to SELT. Beginning in the 1980s, Dr. Schafer gradually acquired a few acres at a time, until he owned the current contiguous acreage.

Assisted by friends and family members, Dr. Schafer built over two miles of trails on the property, setting timbers to prevent erosion, leveling the path, and depositing layers of sand, crushed stone, and gravel.

He also commissioned and assisted with the construction of the covered bridge straddling Hogg Hill Brook, and personally made all of the trail signage. Dr. Schafer was a member of the Atkinson Conservation Commission for several years, and in many of these endeavors he was assisted by his friend Chet Ladd, one of the founding members of the Commission.

The conservation significance of Schafer Woods has long been recognized by the Atkinson Conservation Commission, but its ecological importance stretches well beyond the boundaries of just the town. A well-managed forest system bisected by Hogg Hill Brook and its tributaries, Schafer Woods provides regionally significant wildlife corridors for animals moving between large blocks of conservation land. In addition, the conservation of Schafer Woods protects portions of well-head areas for nearby neighborhoods and businesses, safeguarding important drinking water supplies.

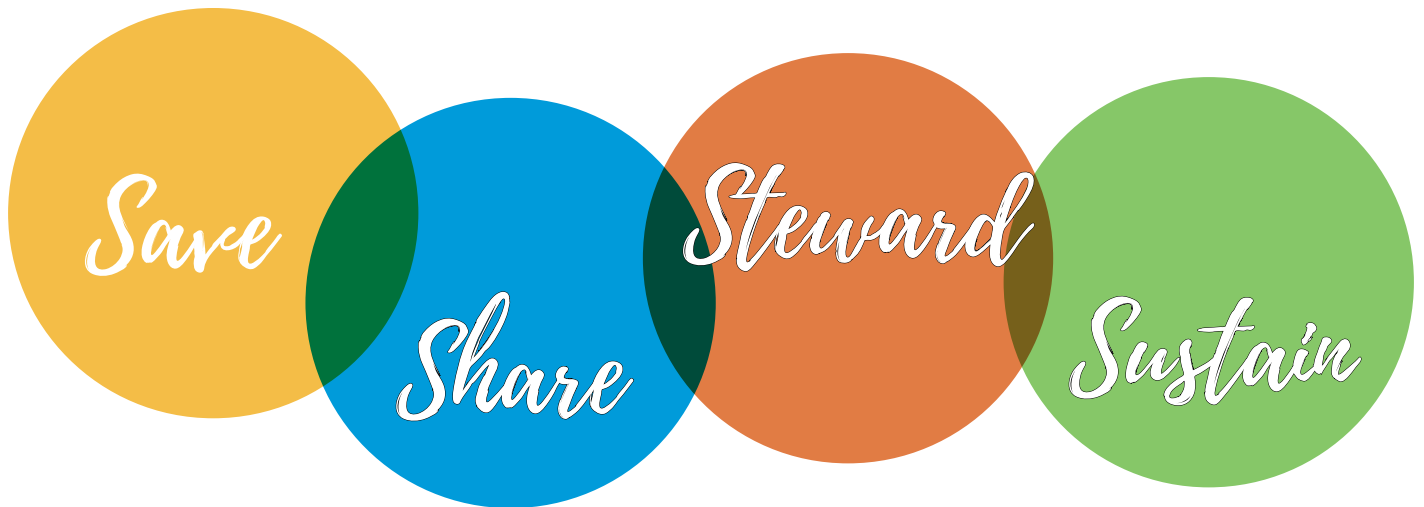
“Over time, the pressure to sell or develop the land intensified,” said family member Rebecca Schafer, “yet the family remained firm in our shared desire to protect the land, the natural resources, and the critical wildlife habitat it provides. The interest and funding provided by the Town of Atkinson and the Atkinson Conservation Commission, coupled with the stewardship and expertise of SELT, have provided the perfect pathway for us to preserve this land, as well as the legacy of Rick’s efforts over many decades. We are thrilled it remains in its natural state for generations to come for all to respect and enjoy.” ■

Download the trail map and guide at seltnh.org/trails.

BACKGROUND: An aerial view of Schafer Woods. JERRY MONKMAN – ECOPHOTOGRAPHY
 ABOVE: The iconic covered bridge on the Schafer Woods trails. PAUL WAINWRIGHT



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SAVE

SELT conserves the special places in our communities for clean water, wildlife habitat, healthy forests, local farming, and outdoor recreation.

SHARE

Whether it is the miles of trails, or the local farms producing food, or the water flowing from your taps, SELT's properties are protected for the benefit of everyone in our communities.

STEWARD

SELT's team of stewardship staff and volunteers thoughtfully manage and monitor our properties – all to ensure these lands are safeguarded so that they can be treasured for generations.

SUSTAIN

SELT is a healthy, thriving organization whose staff, leadership, volunteers, members, and community partners work seamlessly to support our mission.

CONNECT WITH SELT'S MISSION!

Join or Renew Today! Scan the code or visit seltnh.org

