



IN THIS ISSUE

- 1 Conservation for Migrating Marshes in a Changing Climate
- 2 Returning to Our Roots
- 4 An Interview on the Updated *State Wildlife Action Plan*
- 5 Conservation as Common Cause
- 6 Patterned Panes
- 7 Welcome New SELT Staff
- 7 Get Outside! SELT Events Sampler
- 8 Wild & Scenic Film Festival

Conservation for Migrating Marshes in a Changing Climate

The salt marsh is the most threatened habitat in New Hampshire—and one of the most important.

Salt marshes are the offensive linemen of the New Hampshire ecosystem. They protect us from encroaching tidal rushes, absorb constant pressure and keep the shoreline safe, and quietly do the hard work that keeps the whole system alive and allows the players to thrive—fish, birds, oysters, and grasses. Without salt marsh, the whole team falls apart.

“Salt marshes are really important for coastal resilience,” says Cory Riley, Manager of the Great Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve. “They absorb flood water, naturally filter sediment, nutrients, and pollutants, store carbon, and offer important aesthetic and wildlife habitats for New Hampshire.”

Sturdy as they may be, salt marshes face increasing pressure from rising sea levels that push them inland. Already, the sea level off our coast is up to 7 inches higher than it was in 1950, and the rate of increase is projected to grow by 1 inch every decade. Instead of staying fixed in one place, a healthy salt marsh shifts landward over time to stay within the narrow elevation zone

where it can survive. This phenomenon, known as salt marsh migration, requires a shrinking coastal resource: open space. With the surge of coastal development, the elbow room required for salt marshes to retreat and remain viable continues to diminish. Finding conservation opportunities within the coastal watershed to accommodate salt marsh migration is a top priority for SELT and our partners in the Great Bay Resource Protection Partnership.

“When it comes to our coastline, there is no status quo,” says Lori Sommer, SELT’s Coastal Watershed Land Conservation Manager. “Sea levels are constantly changing, and our response must change with them. We owe it to future generations to ensure our limited inventory of salt marshes—and the biodiversity they provide—have the space to migrate and persist. They are simply too vital to ignore.”

Sea level rise causes the lower edge of the marsh to begin to drown, the upper edge to become saltier, and the marsh to gradually retreat

continued on page 3

Above: Thriving salt marsh at Squamscott Fields.

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Returning to Our Roots

When Farming Meets Forestry, Time-Tested Agricultural Practices Flourish

Linh Aven and her husband Brian Fluharty are in year five of operating Dandelion Forest Farm, their beloved agroforestry enterprise in Nottingham. Born of a passion for sustainable crops yielded by natural, regenerative practices, the farming Linh and Brian pursue represents both a new and very old way of agriculture.

“I never set out to farm,” Linh says. “I was a scientist and a chef first, but I was becoming more aware of the state of our conventional agriculture and what that was doing to the land. So, I started learning about traditional, Indigenous regenerative farming practices and wondering why they weren’t more widely practiced.”

Leveraging her skills as a researcher, she dove into the concept of agroforestry, a systemic approach to farming that, as she says, “is the integration of annual crops, perennial crops, and animals.”

Her epiphany came from a tree in Sicily.

“Estimates are that this chestnut tree has been around for 2,000 to 4,000 years,” she says. “It blew my mind. That one tree every year is producing so much wonderful food that falls to the ground. That was the kind of farming that I wanted to do.”

Her dream was realized when she and Brian were able to purchase Dandelion Forest Farm, an effort coordinated by SELT following the bargain sale of a conservation easement by the prior owners. Since then, Linh’s agroforestry journey has paid dividends; their trademark farm-to-table dinners are consistently sold out, and she has leveraged the New Hampshire turf in new ways, bringing unique flavors to the community sourced from an organic bounty that includes kale, elderberry, chestnuts, and much more (you should try the pine syrup and give your short stacks a kick).

Agroforestry isn’t anything new, of course. Indigenous communities that lived in the same areas for thousands of years cultivated an intricate knowledge of what the surrounding woods can provide. Centuries of experimentation, fine-tuning, observation, and cultivation became a compendium of eco-wisdom passed down from forebearers. Today, this approach to complex, system-based agriculture is enjoying a resurgence. According to a recent survey from the professional journal *Agroforestry Systems*, the number of farm operations with agroforestry increased by 6% nationally between 2017 and 2022. New Hampshire was the third-ranked state in terms of highest percent increase of farms reporting at least one type of agroforestry. (Kellerman, T., Feibel, S., Smith, M.M. et al. *Agroforestry across the United States: Results of the 2022 Census of Agriculture*. *Agroforest Syst* 99, 34 (2025))

SELT itself is poised to embark on its own agroforestry adventure in 2026 in partnership with the University of New

Hampshire. Burley Farms, with its fields and forests punctuated by the 40+ acre beaver pond and its associated wetland systems, provides a diverse milieu where agroforestry could thrive.

SELT was approached by the University of New Hampshire (UNH) to join the Adaptive Agroforestry Principles and Teaching (ADAPT) program. ADAPT’s goal is “to develop climate-smart strategies for expanding New England agricultural production while supporting forests’ ecosystem services, farmers’ economic opportunities, and community health.” (colsa.unh.edu/agroforestry). ADAPT is a collaboration between UNH, Dartmouth, and Yale.

“Burley Farms is an appealing site thanks to the favorable conditions that are relatively rare across SELT’s lands,” said Chad Fierros, SELT’s Forest and Wildlife Habitat Manager. “Our vision for agroforestry is to reestablish forest

biodiversity and foster a connection to the land and model ways that other landowners can engage with the land.”

What does that mean in practice? There is the research angle, where SELT’s stewardship team can determine the specific practices that complement land management activities and encourage sustainability for crops like wild ginger, hazelnuts, pawpaws, Solomon’s seal, and bloodroot. And the practical side, where these plantings can become seed sources for future sites—and the community at large.

ADAPT is working with twelve “Cooperators” across New England, which includes farmers, landowners, and land trusts who are cultivating agroforestry. As a Cooperator, SELT will open its properties to researchers for field trials and studies. In addition, SELT will feed data to ADAPT to help fine-tune and advance agroforestry, as well as offer its lands as a venue for field trips and educational demonstrations.

“SELT and UNH have enjoyed a mutually beneficial partnership for years, and we thought this would be a great way to continue that connection,” said Deborah Goard, SELT’s Stewardship and Land Engagement Director. “Agroforestry represents an exciting path for stewardship and sustainability, and in tandem with UNH, SELT can help determine how agroforestry could be used in our corner of New Hampshire as well as throughout New England.”

SELT’s agroforestry destiny intersects fully with that of farmers like Linh: to revitalize practices that sustained humans while benefiting local plant and animal communities for generations.

“We want our trees to also survive for thousands of years like that tree in Sicily,” Linh says. “What an unbelievable legacy that will be.” ■



Linh Aven introduces a young observer to agroforestry.
SELT STAFF

Conservation for Migrating Marshes, continued from page 1

inland, transforming the soil into turf more suitable for marsh vegetation and habitat. Salt marsh migration only works if there's space to move into.

"Things are always changing," says Cory. "One of the consequences of climate change is that the slow process that normally would happen for the natural world to adapt is compressed. The reason why that's tricky is because we've built so much, so close to the edge of the current salt marshes that we have. Because this is happening quickly, the marshes could drown before that natural process has a chance to happen."

And that means coastal conservation has become a race for salt marsh survival.

Looking at 2026, SELT has several projects on the front burner that directly address the need to preserve salt marshes and the upland space needed for their migration. The nearly 91-acre Squamscott Fields conservation easement, slated to close by the end of the year, will protect significant salt marsh acreage in Stratham. The property adds over one mile to an impressive 3.4 miles of tidal frontage already conserved on the Squamscott River, plus over one mile on Mill Brook. The Great Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve has identified the mouth of the Squamscott River as one of the most critical areas for salt marsh conservation within the Great Bay watershed (and, by extension, within the New Hampshire seacoast).

A recent grant administered by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), combined with funding from the Town of Stratham, has brought this project closer to completion, following many years of work.

"Successfully securing the Squamscott Fields easement will have a cascade of benefits for people and nature," says Lori. "It will protect the tidal shoreline and the buffer along the river

to maximize flood storage, safeguard the community from extreme weather events, and open up critical space for salt marsh migration in the future."

Meanwhile, further into the Great Bay watershed in Dover, the Hallett Family has generously agreed to donate a conservation easement on their 10-acre property on the Cocheco River, which offers its own slice of salt marsh protection. Building on the legacy of Ashton Hallett, founder of Strafford Rivers Conservancy (now part of SELT), and an earlier easement donated by the family, this new easement protects 1.3 acres of salt marsh and allows space for that salt marsh to migrate. Of course, that doesn't account for the additional swath of salt marsh that exists along the nearly 900 feet of frontage on the Cocheco River, right where it joins the Salmon Falls River. Regional models predicting how salt marsh will react to sea level rise show the Cocheco River will see the highest percentage of salt marsh lost by 2100, so every bit of conservation counts in this critical area.

"The Hallett property is small but mighty and packs a punch when it comes to conserving salt marsh habitat," says Kaitlin Deyo, Conservation Project Manager for SELT. "The forested buffer on the Hallett property complements the salt marsh and ensures space for its future migration. This will add another puzzle piece to the conservation lands that safeguard both the New Hampshire coastline and the wildlife that depends on it."

"Anytime you're conserving land, you're conserving multiple ecosystems at once," Cory says. "Land conservation is the multi-tool of environmental health in a community. With every piece of land that is protected, SELT is giving nature the space to do what it needs to do, because nature can take care of itself better than we can take care of it." ■

The Hallett property features valuable salt marsh.

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An Interview on the Updated State Wildlife Action Plan

New Hampshire's *State Wildlife Action Plan*, produced by the NH Department of Fish and Game, provides a roadmap for conserving all wildlife in the state. Recently, the plan was updated, laying out new focus areas through 2035. SELT leans heavily on the *Wildlife Action Plan* to help guide its conservation priorities and land management strategies.

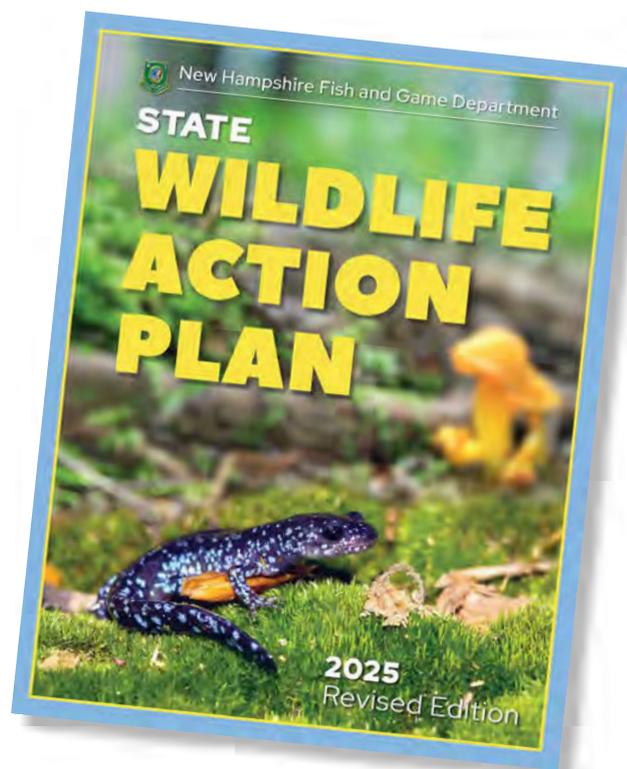
We spoke with Michael Marchand, Nongame and Endangered Wildlife Program Supervisor, NH Fish and Game, to get his view of the updated plan and its importance for local conservation. The revised plan is available online at www.wildlife.nh.gov/wildlife-and-habitat/nh-state-wildlife-action-plan.

What are the big takeaways for the revised *Wildlife Action Plan*?

Reflecting on the last 10 years, I think we had a lot of successes and were able to implement a good percentage of the work that we had identified in the previous plan. So, great progress on species recovery, land protection, habitat management, and all those areas. We've also added 188 plant species to the plan, all of which have profiles, so that's brand new. Also, a major focus is to bring in new partners to help us implement the plan. SELT and other land trusts have been critical partners since the start of the early *Wildlife Action Plans*. We can't possibly do all the work ourselves, so we depend on long-term partners like SELT.

Are there any updates for specific NH wildlife species?

Bald eagles continue to recover statewide and are no longer considered a rare species. Their population continues to expand, and it's a great success story for the state and the country. We have added some shorebird species to the concern list, largely because of regional and global declines. Blanding's turtle is a species that SELT has done a tremendous job helping to maintain. I know we worked with you on some turtle nesting habitat enhancement on some of your properties. The Blanding's turtle's survival depends on the conservation of large undeveloped blocks of land.



How about habitats and landscapes? Any new focus areas?

We definitely integrated marine and coastal habitats to a greater extent than we have in the past, breaking them up into in-shore, near-shore, and off-shore. We divided the habitats to consider those species that are in deeper water versus closer to the shore. And we included marine fish for the first time.

This points to the importance of SELT's focus on coastal watershed conservation efforts then?

Yes. Currently, there are a number of actions that are really important on the coast, whether it's from a water quality perspective or just protection of land. Obviously, we're not making more land, and so there are also some huge challenges associated with it in terms of opportunity. When you're talking about species like Piping Plover on our sandy beaches, which are tremendously popular from a recreational perspective, there's no place else for those species to go. The opportunities to enhance habitat are a lot more limited, so we have to work in partnership on the areas that we have. ■

The *Wildlife Action Plan* is an invaluable resource for SELT's conservation and stewardship efforts.

"We use the plan often in our work," says Chad Fierros, SELT's Forest and Wildlife Habitat Manager. "We use guidance from the plan to inform our approach to habitat management and restoration. We use the conservation status of various species listed to help determine focal species for management."

"For every land conservation project we consider, an evaluation of the habitat ranking under the *Wildlife Action Plan* is a critical factor in our decision making," adds Duane Hyde, SELT's Land Conservation Director. "In some cases, the ranking in the *Wildlife Action Plan* can be a pivotal tipping point in our decision making. We are looking forward to familiarizing ourselves more with the new updated plan so we can dig deeper into understanding why the habitat is ranked the way it is."

Conservation as Common Cause

The Protection of an Important Strafford Property Brings Three Organizations Together

Collaboration is a cornerstone of conservation, especially in a small state like New Hampshire, where conservation organizations openly communicate about priorities and challenges in achieving shared goals. And in the Blue Hills of Strafford, such collaboration is building on decades of success.

Take the forthcoming Blue Hills Foundation Easement, an approximately 165-acre piece of land in Strafford that offers significant connectivity to large swaths of conserved land. Such large, unfragmented parcels are the conservationist's ideal, providing massive benefits for wildlife transit and habitat.

The entire property sits within the NH Department of Environmental Services (DES)-designated Outstanding Resource Watershed area, lying 1,200 feet north of Bow Lake. As such, it is home to several threatened and endangered species of birds and reptiles. A rocky ledge sits on the property as well as a large wetland, providing diverse habitat for multiple species.

In context to long-term efforts, this property abuts a block of over 7,600 acres of conserved lands centered on Evans Mountain in Strafford.

In August of last year, the Blue Hills Foundation reached out to Bear-Paw Regional Greenways to partner on the project, which builds on a legacy of more than 100 transactions by the Foundation that have protected over 7,800 acres. Established in 1986 by conservation pioneers George and Westy Lovejoy, the Blue Hills Foundation is a private not-for-profit operating foundation dedicated to the conservation of land in Strafford and Belknap Counties of New Hampshire. These lands are sustainably managed for forestry, agriculture, wildlife, and scientific research. (Note: current Blue Hills Foundation Board President Philip Lovejoy also serves on the SELT Board of Directors and has recused himself from any discussions or votes on the SELT Board regarding this project.)

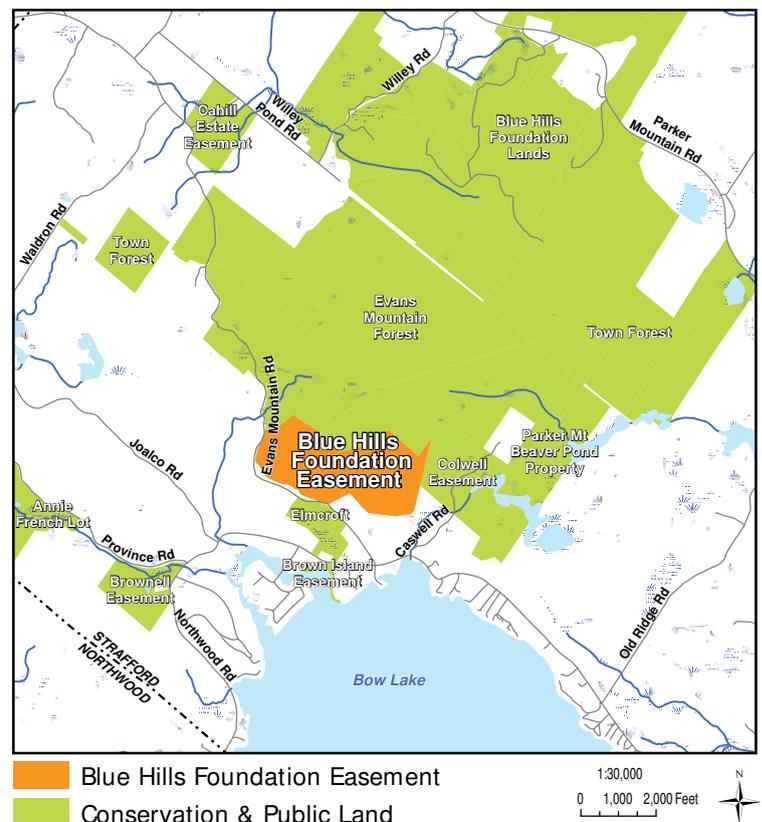
Due to limited capacity to bring this project to fruition on its accelerated timeline, Bear-Paw and Blue Hills asked SELT to serve in an "assist" role. This means SELT will undertake and coordinate project management with Bear-Paw and the Blue Hills Foundation (which has a contract to purchase the property). SELT will hold no legal interest when the ink dries on the project's completion. Rather, when completed, the Blue Hills Foundation Easement will be owned by the Blue Hills Foundation, and Bear-Paw will hold and manage the conservation easement.

"Assist projects like the Blue Hills Foundation Easement truly show the power of partnerships in conservation," says Duane Hyde, SELT's Land Conservation Director. "By working collaboratively, SELT, Bear-Paw, and the Blue Hills Foundation can conserve a property that has long been recognized for its conservation value. Together, we are able to achieve an outcome that protects critical wildlife habitat and clean water while expanding a large, unfragmented landscape that supports a wide variety of species. Assist projects allow SELT to accelerate conservation in a region that faces intense development pressure and share the long-term stewardship obligations with other conservation groups."

"This project shows what's possible when conservation organizations work together for the good of the whole

community," said Krystal Balanoff, Executive Director of Bear-Paw Regional Greenways. "Protecting the Blue Hills Foundation Easement means protecting land in a place that people already love and that wildlife deeply depends on. With nearly 7,600 acres of nearby conserved and public lands, including the Evans Mountain easement held by Bear-Paw, this effort strengthens important habitat areas in the region, while keeping trails, views, and traditions like hiking and blueberry picking part of everyday life in Strafford."

This project is set to close later this spring. ■



Conservation Collaboration in Focus

Blue Hills Foundation will own the protected land, while Bear-Paw Regional Greenways, as holder of the conservation easement, will be the legal entity responsible for stewarding the easement, including monitoring of the property. In its assist role, SELT will hold no ownership or legal interest, but is contributing its capacity and expertise to complete the Blue Hills Foundation Easement project.



Patterned Panes

A Generous Gift Underwrites Bird-Friendly Enhancements

Thump.

It's the queasy sound of a bird strike on a large window, the unfortunate byproduct of a grand view and regular applications of Windex.

When birds hurtle headlong into glass, it's typically the result of two optical illusions that play havoc with their senses: transparency and reflection. The former creates a misleading thoroughfare, especially when windows sit across from each other, fooling the birds into thinking there's a clear flight path before them. The latter tricks the birds, reflecting the surrounding sky and landscape and creating an illusion of a contiguous environment; birds just don't possess the ability to discern the glass as a barrier.

According to the United States Geological Survey, up to two billion birds are killed each year in the United States due to collisions with glass. (www.usgs.gov/labs/bird-banding-laboratory/science/bird-window-collisions)

The SELT offices are not immune. The Nan and George Mathey Center for People and Nature was designed to present a panoramic view of the beauty of Burley Farms. The larger windows in the Pratt Family Community Room in particular had been installed to showcase the surrounding conserved land.

Sporadic bird strikes since occupancy in 2022, however, prompted action on finding a way to offset those optical

illusions that lead to avian collisions. In the short term, SELT lowered the blinds on problematic windows, eliminating the risk and the view. Inspired to help solve this problem, long-time member and passionate birder Patience Chamberlin offered to fund enhancements to the Mathey Center to solve the bird strike problem.

Her generous donation made it possible to purchase a sophisticated film manufactured by Feather Friendly. This film is adhered to windows and, after removal, leaves just a pattern of dots under 2" apart in all directions. This pattern and spacing are shown to greatly reduce bird strikes, informed by an analysis by the American Bird Conservancy.

In 2010, the Conservancy, in collaboration with architects, developed the Threat Factor (TF) measurement, which charts the effectiveness of materials in repelling bird strikes. The TF scale is 1–100, and the lower the TF score the better.

After reviewing three different products, SELT weighed the pros and cons and decided on Feather Friendly's product (which has a great TF rating of 18). It offered the best balance of bird safety and maintaining views of Burley Farm—views that include northern harrier dive-bombing rodents, a near-daily event this past summer and fall. The installation was completed for the Pratt Community Room this past November, with another application scheduled for the spring for the large windows in our entryway.

Since then, the number of bird strikes has fallen to 0, helping SELT and the Mathey Center reduce the impact of the building on our feathered friends.

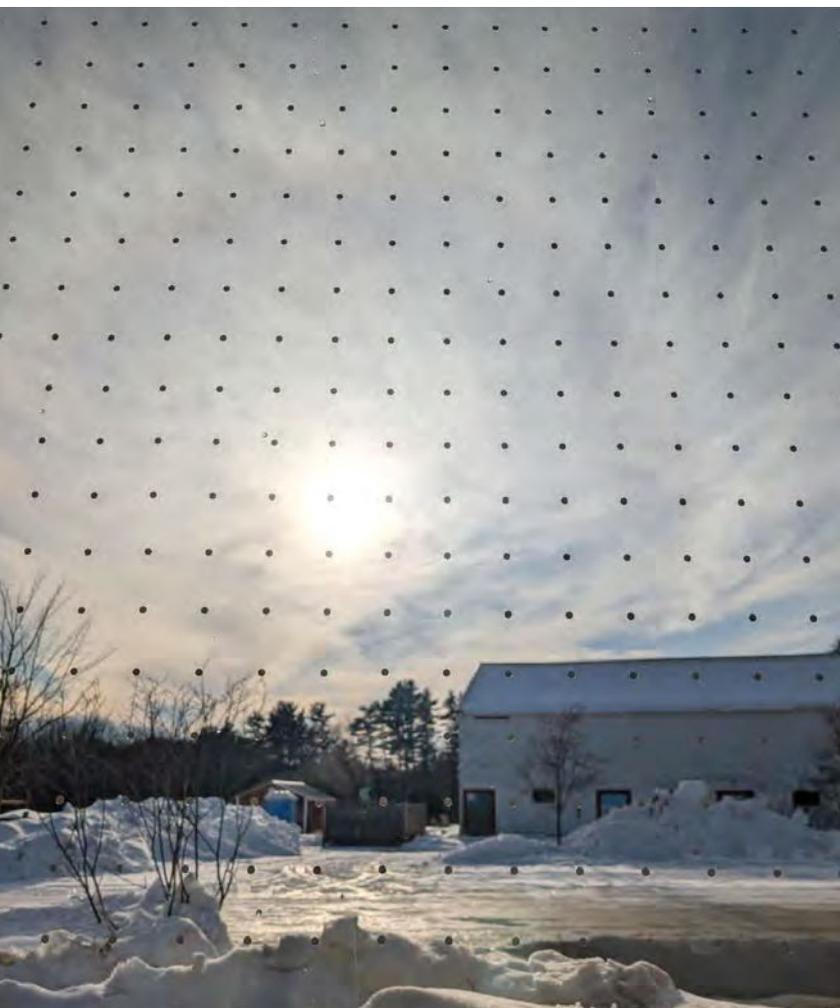
"We are so grateful to Patience," said Brian Hart, SELT's Executive Director. "Her love of birds, combined with a truly generous spirit, allowed us to both maintain the amazing views of the natural world that surround us while also protecting our friends in the skies."

"I'm happy to help SELT and the Mathey Center set an example for other commercial buildings," says Patience, "and hopefully inspire homeowners and businesses to use these products in their own spaces. Millions and millions of birds are killed due to window strikes each year in North America alone. With declining bird populations, we need to do everything possible to prevent window strikes, including in our own homes. Bird window treatments that are proven effective can keep birds from striking problem windows."

While SELT had these products professionally installed due to the scope, size, and location of the windows, homeowners can install Feather Friendly or other products themselves. Patience's advice: make sure the product is endorsed by the American Bird Conservancy, Audubon, or the Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

"We are so grateful to Patience for stepping up and helping us do this right and well," said Brian Hart, SELT's Executive Director. "Her love of birds, combined with a truly generous spirit, allowed us to both protect our friends in the skies while maintaining the Mathey Center's amazing views of the natural world."

Interested in learning more? Visit featherfriendly.com or abcbirds.org. ■



A look through the newly treated window. SELT STAFF

Welcome New SELT Staff

We are excited to welcome back **Sam Hereford**, who joins us as a Conservation Easement Steward, supporting our easement monitoring efforts and working closely with our conservation team on upcoming projects. **Kerry Landry** joins in a new position as our Finance and Gifts Entry Associate, playing an important role supporting SELT's business operations.

In addition, **Kathe Barlow**, **Kimberly Cote**, **Sara Jamback**, **Kristi Lockhart**, **Loralise LoDolce**, **Amanda Rei**, **James Rosa**, and **Pat Weisberg** have joined us as ATLAS Educators. ■



Above: Sam Hereford, left: Kerry Landry.
SELT STAFF

Get Outside! SELT 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.

Dover Pottery Studio at SELT

Wednesday, April 22 • 5:30–8 PM • The Mathey Center, Epping

Join SELT for a fun and unique experience making pottery at SELT. We will begin with a short 30-minute walk into the forest at Burley Farms to get natural items to use in making imprints on the pottery and then Kim Hanson, owner of The Dover Pottery Studio will lead a 2-hour pottery making session.

Birding at Tucker & French Family Forest

Tuesday, May 5 • 6:30–9 AM • Tucker & French Family Forest, Kingston

Birders everywhere look forward to spring when migratory birds head north to their breeding grounds in droves, bringing a beautiful diversity of species through our very own backyard! Join birding enthusiast Roger Stephenson as he ventures out in the wee hours of the morning to see who's passing through. The best way to learn your birds by sight and sound is with experienced birders! This BYOB (bring your own binoculars) walk will be fun for all skill levels!

Spring Birds, Bugs, and Plants Walk

Tuesday, May 12 • 8–11 AM • Glen Oakes Conservation Area/Spruce Swamp Conservation Area, 78 Andreski Drive, Fremont, NH

Join avid birder and expert bug enthusiast Steve Mirick for a spring bird, bugs, and plants walk through Spruce Swamp Conservation Area. This walk will start at the end of Andreski Drive in Fremont. Participants should wear appropriate footwear, be prepared for wet trails and bring insect repellent and binoculars.



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Derrick Trent Events and Outreach Specialist

Questions, Comments, Concerns?

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

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Conservation for Migrating Marshes in a Changing Climate

see page 1

A Generous Gift Underwrites Bird-Friendly Enhancements

see page 6

Join us for the Wild & Scenic Film Festival!

see below



Join us for another blockbuster event!

Celebrate the wonder and the beauty of nature at The Music Hall in Portsmouth for the 16th annual Wild & Scenic Film Festival. Tickets now on sale!

The 2026 slate of nature-themed films features exceptional filmmaking, breathtaking cinematography, and compelling storytelling to inform and inspire about the power of the natural world. Attendees can expect award-winning films about

nature, outdoor adventure, conservation, wildlife, environmental issues, agriculture, and more.

SELT's volunteer film committee has hand-picked a program from the award-winning films curated by the South Yuba River Citizens League (SYRCL) and national Wild & Scenic Film Festival and we cannot wait to share it with you!

Buy your tickets at seltnh.org/wildandscenic.