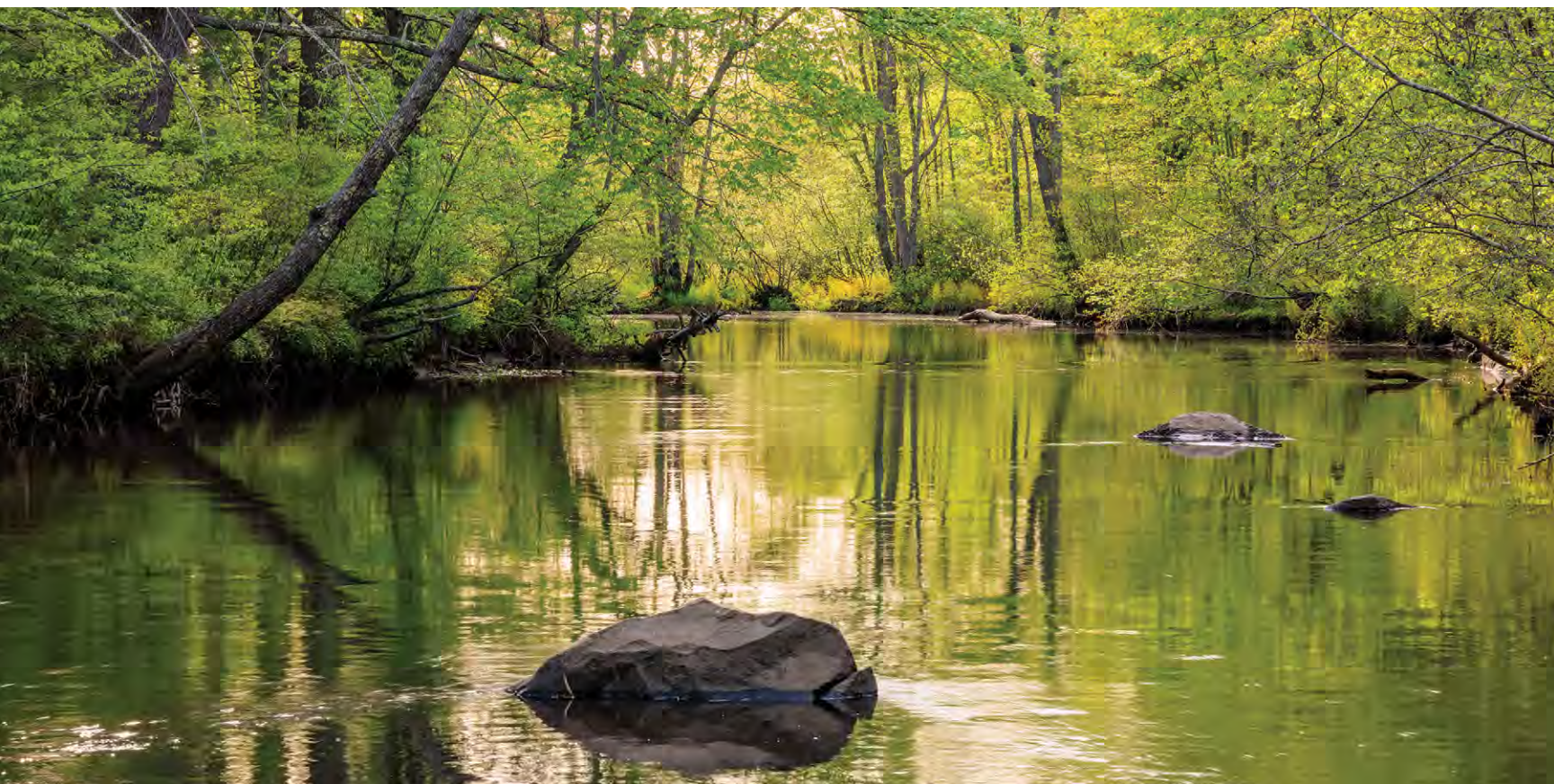




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A Legacy Along the Cocheco

The John G. and Cecilia H. Torr Wood Lot in Rochester Protects Wildlife, Recreation, and Drinking Water

Our story begins approximately 18,000 years ago. As the final glacier slid across the Granite State, its wake affected the landscape, carving out what would become the Cocheco River in what would become southeast New Hampshire.

Flowing nearly 35 miles from New Durham to Rochester to Dover (where it becomes tidal), the Cocheco is a tremendously important resource for three of SELT's biggest load-bearing conservation pillars: coastal health, clean water, and wildlife habitat. The Hallett Property in Dover, recently conserved by SELT, features 900 feet of frontage on the tidal portion of the Cocheco.

This theme continues with the coming conservation of the John G. and Cecilia H. Torr Wood Lot in Rochester. At 130 acres and featuring nearly a mile of frontage on the Cocheco, this project represents a rare opportunity to conserve forever a pivotal piece of land that safeguards this special river.

Consistently on the vanguard of the watershed approach to clean drinking water, Rochester sees the John G. and Cecilia H. Torr Wood Lot rightly

for what it is: immensely valuable land to protect the city's water supply. Making it even sweeter, the land abuts a 151-acre property already owned by the city (also conserved with a SELT easement).

The John G. and Cecilia H. Torr Wood Lot has a rare trifecta of drinking water conservation, being within the wellhead protection area of one of the City's water supply wells located just next door, sitting on a high-yield aquifer, and also within the watershed of the Salmon Falls River, which Somersworth and Berwick use for their water supply.

Helping filter drinking water is just one positive aspect of this remarkable land; the property features important wildlife habitat, significant wetlands and river frontage, and dry forested uplands, and is home to notable turtle, bird, and eel species. Add the nine vernal pools (four confirmed and five potential), and the Lot has a diversity of flora and fauna of all shapes, sizes, and rarity.

The land has a rich history that goes back 150 years (there is a cellar hole on the property

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Above: The Cocheco River in spring.

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ECOPHOTOGRAPHY, LLC

Sparking New Habitat

SELT's First Ever Controlled Burn Aims to Foster a Diverse Landscape

The weather was right. In a spring season characterized by rapid shifts from torrential rain to gusty winds to dew points so high you could slice off the humidity and spread it on toast; that day, the weather was right.

And when you're about to execute a controlled burn, nothing is more important than the conditions. Because no matter the precision of the planning – and the planning was precise – if Mother Nature is not in the mood to cooperate, it's time to pack it up and update the game plan.

Chad Fierros, SELT's Forest and Wildlife Habitat Manager, recalls the smattering of unease that would percolate when combing through the 10 day forecast. After all, the amount of advance work required to coordinate a controlled burn was voluminous; it was the first in several years for him, and it was a first for SELT. The area to be burned clocked in at just under 20 acres, located at the north end of Birch Ridge. High velocity winds or squirrely atmospheric conditions at that altitude would be an ignition non starter.

But that day the weather was right.

"The weather had looked pretty good for that week before," he says. "So we felt pretty solid. You want the right stretch of good weather leading up to it. All of those parameters were identified in the burn plan that was prepared last year, which indicates, for example, what range of wind speeds, wind direction, and relative humidity is acceptable. We spent several days in the weeks leading up to the burn preparing the site and establishing the fire line."

A fire line is an area surrounding the burn area that does not contain burnable elements. It's essentially a buffer between the burn unit and the excluded landscape.

Previously, an excavator had scraped around the target acreage deep enough to reach the soil, removing wood and vegetation that could catch fire.

In the past, Birch Ridge was burned for blueberry production every 2–3 years, which last occurred around 1965. The historic frequency of burning was important for commercial blueberry production, active at the time. Beyond the retail value of the blueberries from the barrens, this area provided important habitat that benefited bird species like ruffed grouse, whip-poor-will, chestnut sided warbler, and eastern towhee, which rely on blueberries for food and prefer taking shelter in the dense shrubs and grasses under a mostly open canopy.

"This is a chance for us to have a unique habitat that will be complemented by nearby young and mature forests," Chad says. "We'll get some plant species we wouldn't normally have and we'll have a different cover type that's much more open. And the blueberries will bring in insects and birds and other wildlife." And people (think *Blueberries for Sal*).

In concert with encouraging the blueberries, the prescribed fire opens doors for new trees and native grasses to populate the area, a stated goal in

the Birch Ridge Community Forest Management Plan. As is typically the case for SELT's stewardship goals, it's all about encouraging structural diversity, fostering forest resilience, and deepening the portfolio of natural growth to withstand the haymakers of shifting climate.

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Photo 1: Executing the controlled burn. Photo 2: The landscape following the burn.

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An Interview with Author (and SELTie) Joe Hill



COURTESY PHOTO

Joe Hill is the #1 New York Times bestselling author of *The Fireman*, *Heart-Shaped Box*, and *Strange Weather*. Much of his work has been adapted for film and television. When he isn't churning out stories, comics, and screenplay, Joe enjoys his Exeter community and the Seacoast surroundings with his family. A SELTie Circle member, Joe has been an active supporter of SELT's mission to save, share, steward, and sustain the lands we love. Recently, Joe partnered with Humble Bundle to offer a selection of his fiction at a great price with proceeds going to SELT. We took a moment to chat with Joe about what he loves about New Hampshire, why conservation is important to him and his family, and more!

What's your relationship to this region, to this area of New Hampshire?

I grew up in Maine and went to college in upstate New York. After I got out of college, I moved to Boston. I think almost every New Englander lives at least two years in Boston in their 20s. I think it's like by edict. In 2001, I moved to Exeter and have been there ever since.

With your tight ties to Exeter in particular and the region in general, how did that lead you to support SELT and conservation in your community?

I think SELT is the ideal vision of a local charity, a New Hampshire charity. They work so hard to protect green corridors for our wildlife, to protect wild spaces, which are precious to me.

SELT has saved family farms and ensured that a certain way of life and a certain kind of farm continue in New England for the foreseeable future. It's such a part of New Hampshire's character.

And SELT has preserved many of these wild spaces with recreation in mind. They haven't fenced them off from people. They've made them available so people can hike and bike and birdwatch and, you know, explore and experience what's so good about these places that are being saved.

Do you find creative inspiration from being outside, being in this community?

Every single thing I've written has been set in Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, or Massachusetts. I'm a lifelong New Englander. I know how people live their lives here. I know the way people talk. If I meet someone in New England and they talk to me for a couple minutes, I can tell a lot about who they are and what they say.

And for a guy who writes stuff about ghosts and road vampires and dragons, I know it's a lot to ask people to suspend their disbelief and jump into a story with some supernatural creature taunting our heroes. And, you know, that's a big ask, but the way I get people to go along with me is I use the granular details of life in New England.

If I can convince you that I'm telling you the truth about the weather and the roads and what schools are like and what jobs are like here—if you believe me on all that—maybe you'll also believe me when I bring a vampire into the story.

"I want my kids to be able to get out in the woods and run. And crash through a creek and get soaked. And pause somewhere and be able to study tadpoles. Or visit a family farm and feed one of the goats. I also think being outside is the antidote to your phone."

SELT is active in the farm conservation space. Why is that important to you?

I'll drive around with my wife and I still get excited when I see a farmhouse and a barn, and I'll know at a glance that it's 19th century. I know that I'm looking at a farm that has been preserved either by a private fund or by a family's stubborn persistence. It always makes me happy because I feel like I'm looking at history and that that history is still here with us.

As a dad, what value do you see in conservation and the outdoors?

I want my kids to be able to get out in the woods and run. And crash through a creek and get soaked. And pause somewhere and be able to study tadpoles. Or visit a family farm and feed one of the goats. I also think being outside is the antidote to your phone. I'm sure I'm sort of preaching to the choir, but you think about your kids and you think about

how many screens are in their life, and we know now how bad it is. It's like fracking the brains of our kids. One of the cures for that, as they say in the tech industry, is to touch grass—to get out, get away from the noise and the distraction, hit the outdoors, take a walk, and actually reconnect with your own thoughts for a couple seconds.

What are the big questions you and your family think about when it comes to philanthropy?

What can we do to help? How can we make an impact locally? My wife and I have looked more and more at how we can

use our funds and resources to benefit worthy causes in our backyard. SELT is the paragon of the local charity, the New England charity, where you feel every dollar you spend is going to go a long way toward doing something really good that's positive for people in this state.

For Joe Hill fans out there, anything coming up you'd like to tease?

My next book is called *Hunger*. It's set in the 18th century in New England and mostly takes place in Boston in 1776, but it gets outside and wanders around a little bit. In the course of writing that book, it gave me a chance to reflect on a history that I find especially vibrant and exciting. And I like that it hasn't been erased and hasn't yet been wiped out by strip malls. I think we've got to keep fighting for it because once it's gone, you can't bring it back. ■



Collaboration Extends the Conservation Canvas

For Dick, it's a simple proposition: when you care for something diligently and lovingly for over five decades, you don't want to see anything happen to it. When he and his wife Van first purchased their prized Durham property 50 years ago, he knew he had a gem. With a background in forestry, Dick saw its value, and for the duration of their ownership tended to it carefully and thoughtfully.

"I've taken good care of it," he says. "And we wanted to preserve it. When we first moved out here, there was hardly anybody around. And now there are million dollar, two million dollar houses all over the place. It's changed. The development pressure is intense. You could probably put three houses on this land."

His affinity for unspoiled nature in general, and his devotion to this land in particular, propelled Dick to pursue conservation. Understanding the importance of his property, SELT and The Nature Conservancy in New Hampshire collaborated to bring this project to fruition over several iterations and several years. This past June marked the completion of that journey, with SELT entrusted as the owner and steward of the 28.5 acre property – the organization's first permanent land ownership in Durham.

This project was made possible through a close partnership with The Nature Conservancy, which took the leadership role in working with Dick and Van to secure an agreement and continued collaboration with SELT to purchase the land from the Gsottschneiders. Collaboration like this doesn't just happen, it's intentional and at the heart of the Great Bay Resource Protection Partnership (GBRPP). Thanks to generous funding from several sources including Great Bay 2030 via the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation's Great Bay Watershed Fund and Piscataqua Region Estuaries Partnership, SELT hosts the position of Coastal Watershed Land Conservation Manager. This unique position facilitates and assists conservation organizations in the Great Bay Resource Protection Partnership

on priority projects in the Great Bay region. After The Nature Conservancy acquired the Gsottschneider property, the land was then transferred to SELT for management and long term stewardship.

"We think SELT does a great job managing property in the Seacoast area, so we're really happy that we're selling it to them," Dick says. "We love this land. We want to protect it."

What truly gives this land gold star status is its location near a huge block of conservation land that is a result of decades of work on the shores and uplands of Great Bay by the organizations that make up the Partnership. The tract is just one property removed from linking to nearly 3,000 acres of conserved lands in the Crommet and Lubberland Creek conservation areas that drain into the Great Bay system.

"Protecting this property is part of a larger conservation vision for the Great Bay watershed," said Lori Sommer, SELT's Coastal Watershed Land Conservation Manager. "It strengthens a growing network of conserved lands near Durham Point and builds on efforts like SELT's nearby ongoing Langley project [featured in the Understory 2025]. Together, these protected lands are helping create a connected network of conserved properties that will safeguard the ecological health of our coast for generations to come."

The Gsottschneider tract boasts a healthy forest dominated by upland oak pine, patches of wet meadow and shrubland, and early successional habitat. While just over 28 acres, it all adds up to a notably diverse landscape within a relatively modest envelope, making it a hub and a home for wildlife species like fisher, bobcat, fox, rabbits, and multiple species of turtles.

"This project may be modest in size, but its impact is meaningful," said John Plummer, Land Protection Specialist at The Nature Conservancy in New Hampshire. "Protecting

Above: Forests are full and healthy on the Gsottschneider land.
© JERRY MONKMAN, ECOPHOTOGRAPHY, LLC



Celebrating the conservation of the Gsottschneider tract. COURTESY PHOTO

this well managed forest helps connect existing conserved lands, supports wildlife habitat, and strengthens the long term resilience of the Great Bay watershed.”

From the regional view, the Gsottschneiders’ land is a forever treasure — another piece in the growing conservation puzzle within the Lubberland and Crommet Creek watersheds. But for Dick and Van, its protection has immense personal value.

“I have a strong sentimental attachment to it,” Dick says. “And though my wife is not as much into the forestry aspects, we’ve hiked and cross country skied on the property for years. And

we’ve seen almost every animal you can imagine: bear, deer, turkey, bobcats — and we’ve had more than a few skunk encounters. It’s all part of the natural world. It’s all special. And now it will be kept that way.”

The completion of this project would not be possible without support from the Land and Community Heritage Investment Program (LCHIP), the Great Bay Resource Protection Partnership, the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation – Great Bay 2030, the Town of Durham, the NH Moose Plate Grant Program, Val Shelton with Appledore Real Estate, TNC’s private supporters, and donors to SELT’s Conservation Acceleration Fund. ■

Sparking New Habitat, continued from page 2

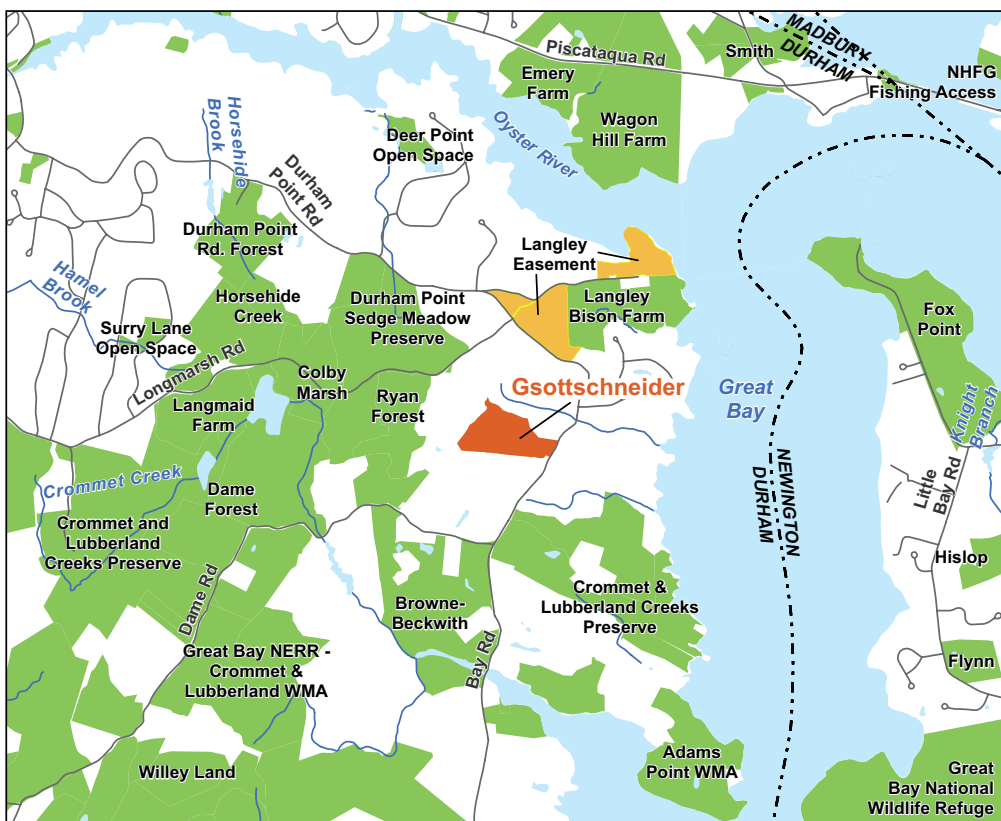
“Prescribed burning has been cited as the preferred method for maintaining the approximately 33 acre blueberry area since the original 2020 management plan for the community forest,” says Deborah Goard, SELT’s Stewardship and Land Engagement Director. “The plan was approved and guided by the BRCF Management Committee, which includes representatives from many groups, including individuals with professional backgrounds in forestry, wildlife management, and firefighting.”

April 27 was ignition day. With the conditions cooperating, the burn was on. Decked out in full body flame retardant gear, Chad, the Star Tree Prescribed Fire crew (who were contracted to lead the burn), and members of the New Durham Fire Department began their circuit around the burn area, lighting the fires using drip torches, which do pretty much what their name implies: dribble a lit mixture of fire with a gas/diesel accelerant.

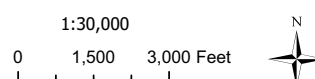
“Fire goes uphill faster than it goes downhill,” Chad says. “You want to back the fire against the wind and back it against the slope. We take the terrain and wind into consideration and try to take away any chances that the fire could jump over the fire line.”

All told, the ignition lasted approximately two hours with all corners of the burn area properly scorched, and the burn plan’s objectives fulfilled. The subsequent days and weeks saw multiple visits back to the burn area to see how the landscape was responding and regenerating. It is a stewardship process that will carry on for years.

But for one long day, with a perfect New Hampshire evening approaching, the last wisps of smoke dissipated, the crews pack up, and a reinvigorated ecosystem is born on a landscape of deep memory. ■



- SELT’s Gsottschneider Tract
- Pending SELT Project
- Conservation & Public Land



A Legacy Along the Cocheco, continued from page 1

that was the former home to a Torr ancestor). The property succumbed to The Fire of 1947, which burned large portions of Rochester and nearby towns. For the nearly eight decades since, the property has remained in relative ecological stasis.

For Bob and Kelley Torr, what compelled them to pursue conservation was the desire to establish a legacy that reflected how special their parents John and Cecilia were – both to them as their children, and to the greater Rochester community they had played such an active role in over the years.

Bob recounts that it was a regular occurrence to be approached by people expressing how much they appreciated John and how he would help them – often significantly and financially – without fanfare. A quiet changemaker, who impacted lives behind the scenes, John sadly passed away from heart disease in his 50s.

“Our father was one of one,” Bob says. “I recall his funeral was overflowing with people. It was like a town hall.”

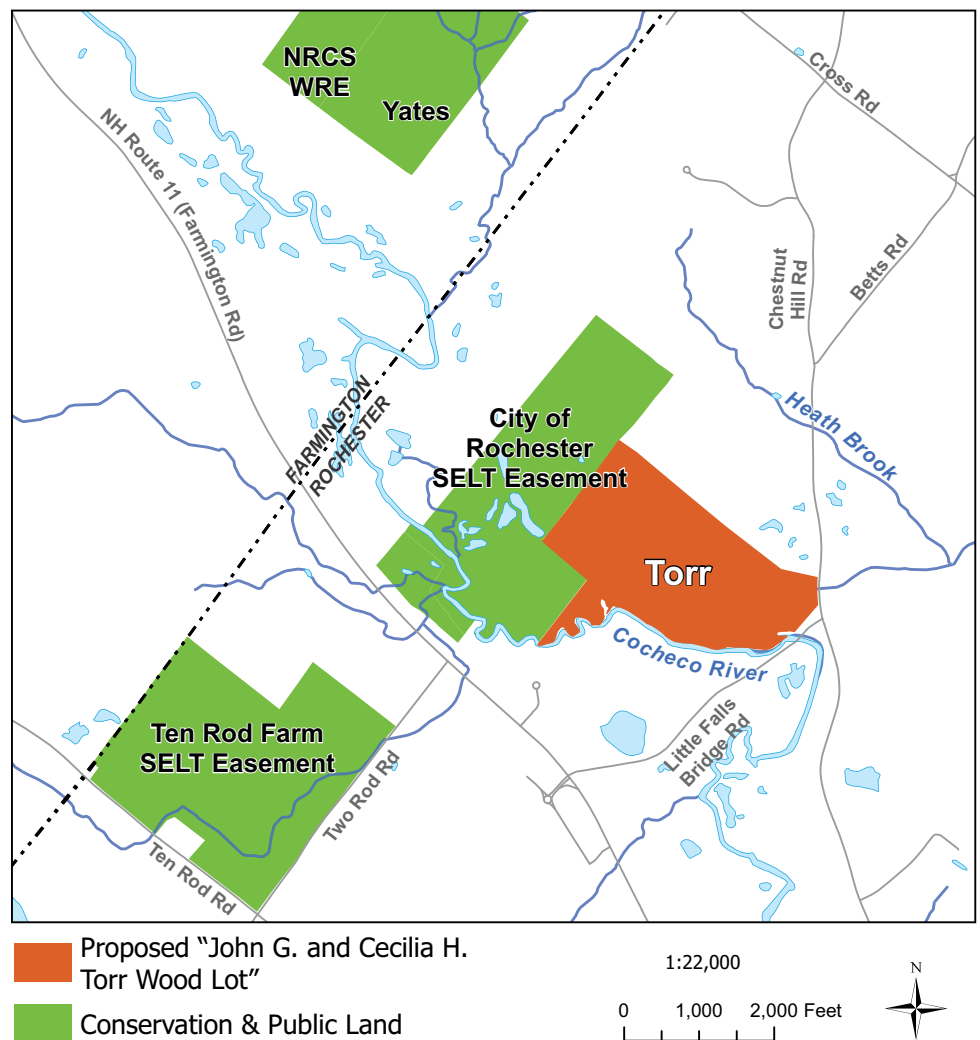
Following John’s passing, Cecilia and Kelley took on the mantle of shepherding and stewarding the family’s land. When Cecilia passed away in 2019, Kelley did the heavy lifting throughout the years to pinpoint the best future for the land. Development was an option, but Kelley and Bob ultimately chose conservation and have agreed to sell the land for considerably less than the property’s market value.

And soon everyone will have the chance to enjoy what the Torr family has treasured for so long. The existing network of woods roads are in good condition and with some minor improvements, these trails would offer a prime opportunity for outdoor recreation. The Cocheco River is easily accessible near the property’s entrance, serving as an ideal potential spot to launch a canoe or kayak.

“City ownership of the property could allow for management of this existing trail network if the City chooses to do so,” says Ben Engel, SELT’s Conservation Project Manager, “while SELT’s easement will ensure any improvements protect the fragile and important habitats on the property. The proximity of the trails to downtown Rochester, one of the state’s



The Cocheco River flows through the Torr Wood Lot. © JERRY MONKMAN, ECOPHOTOGRAPHY, LLC



largest cities, could also open the door for outdoor education and recreation opportunities for residents to explore this incredible property.”

“Both Kelley and I wanted to honor the legacy of the Torr family,” Bob says.

“And specifically, we want to recognize the efforts our mom and dad had put into caring for the property for all those years. We are pleased to be able to give it back to the city, so their legacy can live on.” ■

Trout and About at Stonehouse Forest

The early summer humidity hangs in the air of Stonehouse Forest. SELT's beloved Barrington property is a de facto destination for all types of explorers – especially anglers looking to snag a fish from the postcard-worthy, picturesque Stonehouse Pond.

At the mouth of the pond, a group of kids from Oyster River Middle School listen to a presentation about fish and habitat from a New Hampshire Fish & Game staffer. The teachers and students are rapt at the info blast they're getting. And they absolutely should be: this day is the culmination of a year-long science project.

"This school is part of the Trout in the Classroom program," Kayla Marshwood, Aquatic Resources Educator for NH Fish & Game. "The students work with us to raise brook trout throughout the winter, and then in the spring, early summer, they get to release them into an approved water body like Stonehouse Pond. During the winter they're studying the growth and development and learning about good trout habitat and what that means for other organisms and us as well."

A passing fisherman, prepping for a boat ride, notes to himself: "That's really great!"

Because he knows. He understands that engaging children in the outdoors will pay off big-time in the long-term. They are the next generation of anglers, hikers, and lovers of nature– and we're going to need them.

"Hosting schools for experiences like this on our properties is a win/win for everyone," says Zoe Graves, SELT's Director of Outreach and Education. "Seeing these students react with such enthusiasm to the importance of our natural resources, wildlife habitat, and local conservation efforts is inspiring. You just can't beat the experience of releasing trout you've raised from when they were eggs into the waters of Stonehouse Pond. That's how you create a new generation of conservation advocates."

"The kids absolutely love it," Kayla says. "They get to see fish develop in front of their eyes, and then they get this emotional connection when they release them. Hopefully as they become adults they will keep that connection to their local bodies of water and keep them clean and healthy."

And that's where the intersection between stewardship and education shines through. SELT's ongoing management of Stonehouse Forest and the watershed that drains directly into Stonehouse Pond has significantly contributed to this unique – and beloved – place becoming a primo destination for gallivanting proto-conservationists.

"SELT has worked closely with Fish & Game to embrace watershed concepts," Kayla says. "It's been a great partnership. We did some professional development programming with SELT to show local teachers what more they can do to get their students to be stewards."



Bidding farewell to the fish!

CREDIT: OYSTER RIVER COOPERATIVE SCHOOL DISTRICT

With that, it was time for the big release. The kids grab their coolers and buckets, wade into the shallows of Stonehouse Pond, open the lids, and, to a soundtrack of cheers, the fish dart away. And with the last of the trout gone into the murky deeps of Stonehouse Pond, the students bid farewell to a year's worth of science and stewardship, and head out to walk the trails of Stonehouse Forest.

It's time to explore. ■

*Stonehouse Pond is managed by NH Fish & Game as a catch and release, fly-fishing only trout pond. NH Fish & Game owns and manages the public access road from Route 9. SELT owns and manages the surrounding 1,769 acres around Stonehouse Pond, known as Stonehouse Forest, which includes miles of hiking trails. To learn more about Stonehouse Forest, visit seltnh.org and click on **Explore Our Lands**.*

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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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A Legacy Along the Cocheco

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Collaboration Extends the Conservation Canvas

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Trout and About at Stonehouse Forest

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Save the date!



Join us for Trailfest!

Saturday, October 17, 2026 | 10:00 am to 3:00 pm
247 North River Road, Epping, NH

New Faces at SELT

We are pleased to welcome several new faces to SELT! **Roseannah MillsGrassin** joins us as our new Donor Engagement Manager, playing a critical role in our advancement operations. **Shea Kelley** serves as our Seasonal Land Steward, where she will be supporting land management on SELT properties. **Anson Rodgers** is our new Farm Education Intern, who will be supporting our kid-focused programming in the education garden at Burley Farms. Finally, **Josie Jakobs** is an intern from the University of New Hampshire, joining us via the Small Family Fellowship program, and will work on trails and support SELT summer camp and our events

Great to have you all on the team! ■