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Protecting Wildlife and Significant Habitat in Coastal New Hampshire

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Protecting Wildlife and Significant Habitat in Coastal New Hampshire

*Final Report
for activities conducted between
April 2002 – April 2003*

*Submitted
May 14, 2003*

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INTRODUCTION

The Great Bay Resource Protection Partnership (“Partnership”) consists of organizations and agencies that are committed to protecting the important habitats of the Great Bay area. The Nature Conservancy has contracted with Dea Brickner-Wood of Blue Sky Associates to serve as the Coordinator of the Great Bay Partnership. The Great Bay Coordinator provided services to the overall operations of the Partnership, as outlined below.

PROJECT TASKS

1. Communication, Outreach and Education

1) Serve as a liaison between Principal Partner organizations and a central clearing-house for Partnership communications.

Principal Partner Quarterly meeting

The Coordinator organized and prepared for each quarterly Principal Partner meeting. The Coordinator’s work included preparing an agenda and supplementary information including updating the comprehensive data spreadsheets of Partnership’s protected and match properties. Quarterly meetings were held in: June 2002, September 2002, December 2002, and March 2003.

Provide Monthly Written Progress Reports

Throughout the project period, the Coordinator provided written monthly progress reports to Principal Partners summarizing landowner contacts, outreach meetings, land protection projects, coordination with local community partners, and grant development and reporting. In addition, the Coordinator developed a Year-end Work Program Summary for 2002 and a Work Program for 2003. The Work Program was endorsed by the Partnership, and approved by The Nature Conservancy in early 2003.

Presentation –Display Board

The Coordinator researched, purchased and designed a presentation-display board for the Partnership. The board was displayed in the exhibit hall at the NH Coastal Watershed Forum. The Coordinator also updated the brochure, map and other Partnership handouts for distribution.

Landowner Books

The Coordinator worked with the GBNERR to acquire copies of *Cross Grained and Wiley Waters*, which will be distributed to landowners working successfully with the Partnership to protect land.

2) Serve as a liaison to constituents in the region by providing information about the Partnership's activities and conservation issues and options

Great Bay Conservation Roundtable

The Coordinator organized and facilitated lunch meetings of the Great Bay Conservation Roundtable in Newmarket. Roundtable meetings were held in October 2002, January 2003, and March 2003. The purpose of the roundtable is to provide a forum for Strafford and Rockingham County land conservation practitioners to discuss significant natural resource areas and conservation projects with regional and local land trusts, planners, and other conservation professionals operating in the Great Bay region.

Great Bay Resource Protection Partnership Information Requests and Provide Information to Other Constituent Groups

The Coordinator routinely responds to information requests regarding the Partnership and conservation options for communities and landowners. In addition to responding to individual requests, the Coordinator represented the Partnership at numerous presentations / meetings including:

- **Smart Growth Conference (2002):** Attended conference sponsored by the Office of State Planning and the NH Estuaries Program on seacoast smart growth issues.
- **Community Partner Support:** Provided phone assistance to and/or met with representatives from the following communities / conservation groups regarding conservation issues and activities: Town of Durham, Town of Newmarket, Town of Madbury, Town of Rye, City of Portsmouth, Seacoast Land Trust, Lamprey River Advisory Committee, Rockingham Land Trust.
- **Senator Gregg.** The Coordinator developed and provided a summary of partnership activities in the field to a staff person from Senator Gregg's office.
- **Other.** The Great Bay Coordinator was a presenter at the Great Bay Watch Annual Meeting, provided a display at the NH Coastal Watershed Forum, and attended the Great Bay National Wildlife Refuge's 100-Year celebration. The Coordinator represented the Partnership at the EPA's Environmental Merit Awards in Boston, during which Bob Miller, TNC's Great Bay Project Director, received the Lifetime Achievement Award.

II. Land Conservation

3) Facilitate and assist with grant and funding development and administration.

NAWCA 2002 and 2003 Applications: Great Bay Estuary, Phase 5: Lamprey-Piscassic Watershed the Piscassic Watershed Study (NH Estuary Program) and selecting Project Areas.

The Coordinator worked closely with The Nature Conservancy, Audubon Society of New Hampshire, and NH Fish and Game to develop and submit grant applications to the North American Wetland Conservation Council. Applications were submitted in July 2002, and March 2003. While the March '03 application – Great Bay Estuary Phase 5 Lamprey-Piscassic Watershed Project - was similar to the unsuccessful proposal

submitted in July 2002, the application form and certain other substantive circumstances had changed, requiring a complete rewrite. Activities included:

- Facilitated a meeting with partners to review the application, and to assign research, writing, and map development tasks;
- Drafted sections of the application;
- Reviewed and edited the technical assessment question drafted by partners;
- Coordinated the development of maps and appendixes with The Nature Conservancy;
- Met with and/or communicated with Community Partners (including the Towns of Durham, Newmarket, Exeter, Barrington and Newfields, the Lamprey River Advisory Committee, Rockingham Land Trust, Rockingham County Conservation District) to explain proposal and receive support.
- Secured \$2.4 million in match for the \$1 million grant proposal. Match was provided through the value of conservation easements, land in fee, cash and in-kind services. Coordinated letters of support from 13 participating partners (Principal and Community Partners and a landowner). Required attending meetings, and follow-up communications for support letters.
- Submitted final application, maps and application packet;
- Provided copies of application to parties; and,
- Communicated with partners and provided NAWCA with dates for a site visit.

We expect to learn about the status of the March proposal within the next three months.

***North American Wetland Conservation Act Grants (NAWCA) Phase III and IV
Great Bay Estuary: Crommet Creek, Piscassic and Lamprey Rivers, NH.***

The Coordinator collaborated on implementation of the NAWCA Phase III & IV grants with The Nature Conservancy's Great Bay Project Director, including:

- Accompanying a request by the Partnership to the Rockingham Land Trust to hold the easement on four Tuttle Swamp properties, provided information to the Executive Director and Board on the properties;
- Provided routine updates to Principal Partners on the status of land transactions; and,
- Continued ongoing communications with Community Partner representatives, including the Lamprey River Advisory Committee, National Park Service, Towns of Durham, Newmarket, Exeter, Portsmouth, Lee and Epping, and the Rockingham Land Trust.

USDA, Farmland Protection Program

The Coordinator completed two successful USDA Farmland Protection Program applications on two priority farms in Durham. The Grant awards, totaling \$837,000 are matched 1:1 with other sources of funds. Work including the following:

- Coordinated information needs with the Natural Resources Conservation Service staff Rick Ellsmore, Principal Partners, Community Partners and landowners to

- develop the farmland protection proposals. Work included information gathering, map development, match requirement; letters of support; legal review and revisions.
- Follow-up contact work on the awards. Work involved coordinating communicating and meeting with the above noted representatives.
- The Coordinator has continued discussion with TNC and NRCS on the implementation of the two successful Farmland Protection Program grants.

4) Participate in landowner contacts and other Partnership conservation needs in Project Areas.

Partnership Land Protection

The Coordinator has played an active role in the land protection activities of the Great Bay Resource Protection Partnership. The Coordinator has:

- Assisted in contacting landowners of properties under consideration for land protection (~40 priority properties during the period of this grant);
- Set up and conducted site visits with landowners, community representatives and Partner organizations;
- Obtained and provided information for appraisal reports, and reviewing conservation easement documents; and,
- Worked in close cooperation with TNC's Great Bay Project Director to help ensure the land protection activities are well coordinated.
- Communicated with other partners on the status of landowner projects and partner activity and communication materials.

Between January 1995 – March 31, 2003, the Partnership has protected a total of 2,440 acres of land representing 32 properties located in the communities of Durham, Newmarket, Stratham, Greenland, Newington, Portsmouth, Exeter, Newfields and Dover.

From April 2002 – April 2003, The Nature Conservancy closed seventeen land protection projects on behalf of the Great Bay Partnership. The newly protected properties include nearly 600 acres of critical habitat, and are located in: Crommet and Lubberland Creek, Little Bay and Great Bay shoreline, Packer Bog, Tuttle and Ash Swamp, Bellamy River, and Johnson and Bunker Creek.

In addition, Partnership organizations have individually protected 28 match properties during this time, totaling 1,622 acres. Including these match properties, the Partnership has helped to protect a total of 4,062 acres of land in the region since January 1995.

Land protection efforts are currently focused in the following Project Areas: the Great Bay shoreline, Crommet Creek Watershed, the lower Lamprey River, the Piscassic River watershed, and Tuttle Swamp. An estimated 1,500 acres of significant habitat lands are presently under negotiations or are being considered for appraisal and negotiations, representing 18 properties. Funding support for the Partnership's land protection work

has been provided by North American Wetland Conservation Act grant funds, NOAA appropriations, USDA Farmland Protection Program grant funds, and local sources.

III. Ownership and Management of Partnership Lands

5) Assist the Principal Partners in identifying the management and ownership issues, and stewardship plans on lands protected by the Partnership.

Organize and Facilitate Management and Ownership Committee

The Great Bay Partnership Principal Partners consider management and ownership issues using conservation science, current ecological field information, and the Goals, Objectives, and Strategies of the Partnership to guide management and ownership decisions on lands protected by the Partnership. The Management and Ownership Committee is comprised of Partnership organizations that will own land, and Partner staff who have expertise in land management. Currently, the Management and Ownership Committee of the Great Bay Resource Protection Partnership includes:

- Dea Brickner-Wood, GBRPP Coordinator
- Doug Bechtel, Bob Miller, TNC
- Paul Doscher, SPNHF
- Flip Nevers, Audubon Society
- Peter Wellenberger, Rachel Stevens, NHFG – GBNERR
- Ed Robinson, NHFG

Additional Partner Staff:

- Beth McGuinn, NHFG
- Krista Helmboldt, Duane Hyde, TNC

The Coordinator facilitated five Committee meetings during the period of this grant, and provided information prior to and following the meetings. The key management and ownership issues addressed were as follows:

- *Data Base:* Developed a current data base of Partnership properties.
- *Ownership and Transfer of Properties:* Determined Partnership property ownership, conservation easement holders, and MOU's for protected properties. Discussed schedule for transfer from TNC to Partner organizations.
- *Property natural resource inventories:* Identified data needs; established subcommittee to deal with issue and report back to Partnership.
- *The Nature Conservancy's new Great Bay Stewardship Ecologist position:* Discussed the position and provided input on work plan priorities for the Partnership.
- *Property Management Plan:* Reviewed responsibilities, costs, timeframe for completion of plans on protected lands, and development of template.
- *Partnership signs.* Collaborated with The Nature Conservancy and the Society for the Protection of NH Forests to design a Partnership sign. Addressed sign issues including sign placement and maintenance responsibility, and the naming of Project Areas.

- *Conservation Easement language.* The Coordinator has worked closely with The Nature Conservancy, Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests, and New Hampshire Fish and Game Department to develop a template conservation easement that would be placed on lands initially acquired by the Conservancy on behalf of the Partnership and then transferred to another partner. The easement must reflect the goals of the Partnership, the natural resource values of the protected property, any restrictions arising from the funding source, and the mission of the recipient organization. The template is essentially complete, and is being utilized in a batch of transfers taking place in June 2003.
- *Conservation Easement Entities:* Communicated with Community Partners regarding the transfer of conservation easements on selected properties.
- *Volunteers:* Helped to coordinate stewardship volunteers.

Produce and Distribute Great Bay Partnership Signage

The Coordinator collaborated with The Nature Conservancy to develop and produce Great Bay Partnership signs for protected properties. The Conservancy ordered the signs, and has provided them to the Coordinator and other partners to post on Partnership protected lands. A copy of the sign is included with this report.