



Old field site on conserved Sprucewoods property overlooking the Oyster River

Photo: Courtesy of Jerry Monkman at Ecophotography

## NRCS Easement Programs Protect New Hampshire's Greatest Resource

New Hampshire prides itself on our scenic vistas and working landscapes. These open spaces provide residents with direct economic and recreational benefits, along with clean air, drinking water and many other ecosystem services. Our working lands generate a sustainable flow of food, energy, and forest products to our region and beyond. Tourism, the state's leading industry, owes its existence to the wise use and stewardship of these shared natural resources. At New Hampshire USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), we recognize the connection between a healthy environment and sustainable economy, and we aim to protect these resources for future generations.

Nothing illustrates this commitment better than a recent conservation project in Durham, New Hampshire where three adjoining properties were protected by NRCS. Using funding from the Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP) and the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP), NRCS placed an easement on 210 acres, buffering nearly a mile of the Oyster River which is under imminent threat of development. As a major tributary to the Great Bay Estuary, the Oyster River provides drinking water to both the Town of Durham and the University of New Hampshire. Great Bay is home to more than 150 rare species and 55 exemplary natural communities. Much like critical missing pieces of a puzzle, these newly conserved properties add to a larger area of 2,200 acres of conserved land, including a National Natural Landmark immediately to the west known as Spruce Hole Bog.

Early on, NRCS and its local partners recognized the importance of using two different easement programs as a way to protect specific resource targets. Under FRPP, precious agricultural soils will remain dedicated to growing healthy foods. Across the river, WRP will restore and enhance critical wildlife habitat, where biologists are excited about improving 25 acres of early successional habitat for the New England Cottontail, a candidate in danger of being listed as a federal endangered species.

Working together with partners such as The Trust for Public Land and Southeast Land Trust, New Hampshire NRCS ensures that communities like Durham can maintain a sustainable supply of clean drinking water, abundant recreational opportunities, fresh local foods, and unique wildlife habitat. A strong local economy demands a balance between open space and development, and here in New Hampshire, we respect that balance with a robust conservation ethic.

To date, New Hampshire NRCS easement programs have protected:

10,374 acres under the Wetlands Reserve Program  
 8,082 acres under the Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program  
 478 acres under the Grassland Reserve Program  
 ...for a statewide total of 18,934 acres!