

A photograph of a female cardinal perched on a snow-covered branch. The bird has a prominent red crest, a bright red beak, and reddish-brown wings and tail. The background is a soft-focus winter scene with snow on the branches.

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*Promoting research, education
and stewardship throughout
the Great Bay Estuary*

It Has Been a Great Ride



This is my last official article as manager. By the time you read this, I will already have left state service and become involved in a new effort.

It is no easy task summing up the past twenty-one plus years. There have been many successes, a few failures, and lots of wonderful memories. The highlight has been working with so many great people who are committed to protecting Great Bay and improving the environment.

I first learned about Great Bay after Aristotle Onassis proposed the oil refinery for Durham back in the early 1970s. It was unbelievable to me that anyone could even conceive of placing an industrial facility in such a fragile ecosystem. Fortunately, the citizens of Rye and Durham had the common sense to say no to the project. However, the fact that it almost happened led Evelyn Browne and others to propose that Great Bay become a National Estuarine Research Reserve site.

The Reserve was designated in October 1989 and I was hired as manager the following June. The first few years were spent hiring staff and our first education program involved leading fifth and sixth grade students through the salt marsh down at Sandy Point. We then opened the Great Bay Discovery Center in 1996, which allowed us to have greater interaction with the general public. The Hugh Gregg Coastal Conservation Center was then completed in 2006. This facility provided much needed meeting space

While many people around the Seacoast have benefited from attending

programs at our facilities, the real conservation work has occurred all around the estuary. Thanks to the tremendous success of the Great Bay Resource Protection Partnership, we have been able to significantly increase the number of acres of conserved land. This is especially true in the Crommet Creek area where Mr. Onassis first proposed building his refinery. Nothing gives me more satisfaction than knowing this area will be forever preserved.

Of course, it is always harder to talk about your failures. Despite our best efforts, we have not been able to rally the public at large to support cleaning up the Bay. As a result, our waters were declared impaired by EPA and the eelgrass is disappearing. While the Reserve has been a leader in monitoring the water quality, we have not had the resources to sway public opinion to support reducing point and non-point sources of pollution.

I hope that will change. To that end, I have accepted a position with the New England Conservation Law Foundation (CLF) to serve as the Great Bay-Piscataqua Waterkeeper under the auspices of the Waterkeeper Alliance. I am very excited to accept this new position to build greater consensus for protecting and managing the estuary.

So while I will no longer be writing my manager's corner column, I plan to work hand and hand with the Reserve, Fish and Game, and the Great Bay Stewards to insure the long-term protection of Great Bay for generations to come. The ride has not ended; I will just be wearing a different hat.

Peter Wellenberger
Great Bay Piscataqua Waterkeeper



GREAT BAY
NATIONAL
ESTUARINE
RESEARCH
RESERVE

Great Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve (GBNERR) is an estuary comprised of 7,300 acres of tidal waters and 2,935 acres of coastal land. Acquired through land purchases and conservation easements, GBNERR was designated on October 3, 1989 to be preserved for the purposes of education, research, and resource protection.

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Volunteers Who are Worth Their Weight in Gold

In the Field

I'm a history buff, and the history surrounding Great Bay does not disappoint. I recently watched twenty-year-old videos featuring folks who were instrumental in the earliest of Great Bay's conservation and stewardship endeavors (many names come to mind and their stories are well worth looking into). I also read through many of the very first issues of Great Bay Matters and Great Bay Newsletter (published by the former GB Estuarine System Conservation Trust who later merged with the Great Bay Stewards). In terms of stewardship history, two things became very clear to me: the push for conserving and protecting Great Bay and its resources has been ongoing for a long time, and the people who volunteered their time and services – and continue to – are worth their weight in gold.

The importance of these volunteers might at first glance go without saying. Back issues of the aforementioned publications are full of compliments and commendations. However, having recently completed more than 100 hours of water quality testing on the Winnicut River this summer with volunteers who

matched that amount of time, I am newly and wholly appreciative. Without the citizen volunteers who stepped up to help, my efforts would have been stymied. Every person mattered a lot.

As of 2009, the Winnicut River became Great Bay's only tributary that flows, unimpeded by dams, into Great Bay. With a stewardship grant from the NHDES Coastal Program, the Winnicut River Watershed Coalition—an initiative of the New Hampshire Rivers Council—was able to conduct water quality testing at eleven sampling locations throughout three towns whose lands drain to the Winnicut River: North Hampton, Stratham and Greenland. A second year of sampling will commence in late spring 2012. Without the volunteers who helped the Coalition with this stewardship, perhaps only half of this work would have been achieved. To those who helped, thank you. Together we made a difference.

If you're wondering what options are available for stewardship volunteerism, they are endless. Since wrapping up a degree in Environmental

Empire Building

One of the things I am most proud of is having teamed with Peter Wellenberger to protect and steward conservation land throughout the Reserve. Peter was one of the visionaries behind creation of the Great Bay Resource Protection Partnership and was a leader in securing funding, primarily through then Senator Judd Gregg. Through his, and others' efforts, over 5,800 acres have been protected in perpetuity around Great Bay. Thank you for helping "build an empire" for wildlife. You have been a mentor and I wish you all the best in your next endeavors. It will be good to still have you in the neighborhood.

~ Rachel Stevens

Conservation at UNH in 2008, I have participated in more than 400 hours of natural resource conservation and land use planning workshops, symposiums and conferences. From 'Conservation Subdivision' and 'Climate Change' to 'Saving Special Places' and 'Wildlife Habitat' (I am particularly fond of the NH Coverts Project), I have learned a lot about protecting NH's rich, diverse, and valuable landscape, as well as, the wildlife and people who are so dependent on it (the history of which is beautifully taught during the Reserve's Educational Program in fall—another love of mine). I am thankful to have such enrichment available to me, and encourage you to call the Great Bay Discovery Center, or UNH Cooperative Extension, to learn of upcoming opportunities.

By Jean Eno: Project Director, Winnicut River Watershed Coalition, NH Coverts Cooperator and new member of the Great Bay Stewards Board of Trustees



Nate Hazen (Greenland) and Kathy Grant (No. Hampton) test for water quality on the Winnicut River with NHDES VRAP intern Jasmine Schonwald and NHDES Coastal Program intern Andy Gould.