

Conservation grant will help protect Great Bay

PORTSMOUTH — A \$1 million grant has been awarded to the New Hampshire Chapter of The Nature Conservancy and a coalition of public and private conservation organizations.

Provided by the North American Wetlands Conservation Council, the grant is designed to bolster protection of the Great Bay Estuary and surrounding wetland and coastal habitats along New Hampshire's Seacoast.

"The Great Bay project offers an unprecedented opportunity to protect one of the state's most dynamic ecosystems," Cathy Doyle, acting state director for The Nature

Conservancy, said in a written statement released Friday.

"The grant provides a significant boost in our efforts to enhance waterfowl habitat within this irreplaceable estuary system," she said.

The grant will focus on the conservation of three of the Great Bay Estuary's most ecologically significant and threatened tributaries: Crommet Creek, Lamprey River and Piscassic River.

These tributaries link the larger Great Bay estuarine ecosystem with its upstream landscapes. These riverine systems were

identified as priority habitat areas by the Great Bay Resource Protection Partnership.

The funding is expected to protect 1,500 acres through fee acquisition of 13 sites throughout the Great Bay Estuary.

The grant was awarded to the Conservancy on behalf of the public-private Great Bay Resource Protection Partnership. Formed in 1994, the group is dedicated to the preservation of Great Bay's extensive mosaic of high-quality saltwater and freshwater wetlands, river corridors and associated upland buffers.

The Partnership also includes representatives from The Nature Conservancy, Audubon Society of New Hampshire, the Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests, the New Hampshire Department of Fish and Game, Great Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Ducks Unlimited Inc., the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Rockingham Land Trust, and the towns of Exeter, Newmarket, Epping and Lee.

The Great Bay region has experienced enormous growth pressures, putting many of the remaining unfragmented tracts of vital saltwater and freshwater wetlands and asso-

ciated uplands at extreme risk of inappropriate development.

All the project areas will be permanently protected from development, and wildlife-oriented recreation and educational opportunities will be made available to the public.

The grant is the third such allocation The Nature Conservancy has received from the North American Wetlands Conservation Council, which was established under the North American Wetlands Act of 1989. To date, the Partnership has protected more than 1,000 acres of land in the Great Bay Estuary.