

***The William Furber
Ferry Way Trail***
at
**Great Bay National
Wildlife Refuge**

Welcome! Allow about one hour to complete this two mile-long, looped trail. Use this leaflet to explore and discover what is here; the bolded, numbered “stops” that follow correspond to numbered posts along the trail. Be prepared for wet areas along the trail, especially during spring and rainy periods.

As you pass through forest, field, and wetland habitats, enjoy the amazing variety of plants that grow here. Walk quietly and, with a little luck, you may encounter some of the wild animals that call this place their home. Along the trail you will find evidence of both past human presence and current refuge management practices that support wildlife and their habitats.

Stop 1: The area on the left (south) side of the trail was once a weapons storage area complete with heavily reinforced concrete bunkers – when this landscape was a part of Pease Air Force Base. From 1951 to 1991, Pease played a prominent role in the nation’s defense readiness, hosting long range bombers with nuclear strike capability. In 1992, at the urging of a coalition of local citizens and environmental organizations, a national wildlife refuge was created on a portion of the former base. The Cold War era

structures you see here will eventually be removed, allowing the area to revert to natural grassland, an important habitat type for several native species. Some of the old bunkers may eventually be converted to habitat for bats (man-made caves).

Stop 2: You are walking on the original road to the Furber Ferry launching point. As you walk along this path, you will view or walk through various habitats: oak/hickory forest, freshwater wetland, pond, and shrublands. Each habitat supports a variety of wildlife including beaver, fox, turkey, waterfowl, osprey and even the American bald eagle!

Stop 3: Due to beaver activity, a “water control structure” was installed in this pond to help prevent the road you’re standing on from flooding. While beavers are a natural part of the Great Bay ecosystem, their penchant for building dams and flooding land creates significant challenges for refuge managers. Beavers frequently block-up this structure, causing the pond to overflow (and giving you wet feet!).

Stop 4: You have come to the major shrubland habitat along this trail: the Ferry Way Field. This field is kept in its current state by mowing and through the periodic use of prescribed fire. It is an important feeding area for northern long-eared bats – a species currently in decline. In the near future it may be listed as endangered under the Endangered Species Act by the

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS).

One of the factors contributing to the decline in bat numbers is the loss of summer habitat. This is why it is so critical for the USFWS to provide undisturbed resting, nesting, and feeding areas for native wildlife species. It also emphasizes the importance of this refuge and the efforts being taken to restore, maintain, and protect this area for wildlife.

Stop 5: The hardwood forest you’re walking through, a type common along the New England coast, is dominated by oak and hickory trees. It comprises nearly a third of the refuge’s total acreage. This forest provides valuable food and shelter for the mammals and birds that live or spend time here.

Stop 6: In 1694, William Furber was granted a license to operate a ferry between Newington and Durham. This location was chosen because it was the narrowest point between these two settlements. The ferry transported people, goods, and livestock.

In front of you is Great Bay. The Bay is an estuary – a place where freshwater tributaries meet and mix with salty tidal waters. Estuaries are extremely productive ecosystems, supporting a high diversity of marine life – in this case, within the Gulf of Maine. For many generations, the Bay has also been an important source of food

and income for fishermen across Maine and New Hampshire.

The building you see across the water is the University of New Hampshire's Jackson Estuarine Laboratory. Researchers there study coastal and marine ecosystems.

Stop 7: The Great Bay region has a long history of human presence. All were drawn here by the Bay's rich natural resources and the navigational advantages provided by the network of rivers that flow into it. Native people hunted and fished here seasonally. Later, European colonists settled to farm the land and to establish a variety of industries related to fur, lumber, and fishing.

Over time, these same industries contributed large amounts of

pollution to the Bay, negatively affecting ecosystem health. Fortunately, an impressive collection of conservation groups, individuals, and public agencies (including the USFWS) banded together to help clean up the Bay and the surrounding watershed. Today, the situation is improving. Water quality is better, thousands of acres of conservation land (like this refuge) have been set aside, and bald eagles are once again nesting on the Bay after nearly a 70 year absence!

Stop 8: This wetland area is dominated by shrubs and, specifically, alder. Alder twigs are a great food source for beaver and its leaves provide food for white tailed deer. The nutrient rich soils associated with wetland areas encourage a

variety of plants which, in turn, provide food and shelter for songbirds and small mammals.

Managing for healthy wildlife habitat and biological diversity is a principle focus for the U. S. Fish & Wildlife Service, which now manages this area.

For more information about this refuge, please contact:

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Or, visit us on the web:
http://www.fws.gov/refuge/great_bay/

