

LAND TRUST NOTES

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WHERE THE BEARS ARE

Some of us remember the days when the transfer stations were called “dumps” and one of the evening activities might include a visit to the dump to get a glimpse of our native black bears. Fortunately those days are gone and today we can enjoy seeing black bears in their more natural setting.

Black bears are amazing and interesting creatures. They are distant relatives to our pig and wild boar. They are omnivores, meaning they eat a wide range of foods including nuts, berries, grasses, insects, fish and carrion. They rarely hunt and are more likely to forage for their dietary needs. Their behavior can vary from total avoidance of human interaction to frequent visitations to your backyard bird feeders. Their eyesight is very poor but their sense of smell is famous for locating potential food sources such as the sunflower seed stored in an air tight container in your garage. Bears are very smart and learn quickly where food may be found or how to avoid being trapped.

The black bear is our largest mammal second only to moose with the largest males approaching 500 pounds. They are powerful enough to run 35 miles per hour for short distances, tear apart logs and stumps or climb 40 feet to the crown of a beech, oak or sugar maple tree. I have witnessed large bears descending such heights on several occasions. Imagine a 350 pound or more house cat and you know how it is done. They rapidly back down a tree by releasing their grasp, dropping several feet and often sending bark in all directions as they slow their decent with a powerful “bear hug”. Like your cat, they jump the last few feet to the ground but with more dust and noise and less grace than the ever self conscious “tabby”.

Bears have many interesting behaviors. Males are solitary with larger home ranges than females. Females are the caregivers to offspring. They give birth in the winter in the den. Cubs emerge in the spring and begin to learn everything from their mothers. They spend the next winter with her in the den. Mother bears often have designated “cub sitters”. She will encourage the cubs up a tree when she sense danger or “needs a break”. Well behaved cubs remain with their sitter until mom returns and signals them down.

Most of us are familiar with the bear adaptation of hibernation. However, I find a unique reproductive adaptation to be the most fascinating. Mating occurs in June, with conception occurring months later in autumn. I believe this is critical for survival as mating expends energy resources needed for hibernation. Early summer mating ensures both males and females have adequate time to forage and develop the fat resources needed to survive

the winter. In contrast, male moose can begin winter at 20-30% less in weight than before the fall rut. Such lose of energy reserves would doom an adult bear.

The GLLT has several properties capable of supporting seasonal and year round needs of black bears. As such, we incorporate management strategies and practices that encourage their use and presence. We encourage beechnut and acorn production by managing for vigorous, large crowned oaks and beech trees. We create forest openings that support blueberry and blackberry growth and abundance. We protect grassy wetlands and forest seeps critical in supplying early spring nutritional sources of vegetation. We create or retain large woody debris to rot and support abundant insect life. We leave large dead and dying trees as potential den sites and brush for use in den construction. These are all practices commonly undertaken by forest landowners on individual tracts that can benefit bears across their home range.

The GLLT is uniquely suited to meet the black bears foremost need: its preference for large tracts of relatively undeveloped forest and wetlands. The trust can utilize conservation easements or fee ownership to link important habitats across multiple ownerships. This strategy, known as connectivity, is a valuable approach to maintaining habitat integrity especially for species with large home ranges. A good example of this is the 32 acre Sucker Brook—Wing Preserve at Horseshoe Pond. This property provides superb spring habitat for bears emerging from hibernation. It is just south of the White Mountain National Forest, in an area favorable to winter den sites. The GLLT linked the two habitats through its purchase of the Bishop Cardinal Property. This 69 acre property provides a corridor from the winter den sites to the early spring grasses associated with the wetlands at sucker Brook and Moose Pond. Additionally, the forest of the Bishop Cardinal property is rich in beech and red oak, providing significant fall forage for the bears as they prepare for hibernation. This connectivity project was achieved by fee ownership, but could have been equally successful with conservation easements, or a combination of conservation tools.

The trust is pleased to report that our management efforts have been fruitful. Bears have been frequently sited this summer at Flat Hill, Heald and Bradley Reserve, Bishop Cardinal and the Chip Stockford Reserve.

Tom Henderson



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N. CONWAY

A MEMORABLE WALK

It was a beautiful morning in early October and my wife, Jeannette, and I had planned to take a short hike on the blue trail in the Chip Stockford Preserve. The morning mist and fog had not yet cleared. There was still moisture from the colder past night dripping gently from the trees and breaking nature's silence. Nevertheless, it was a quiet morning, interrupted by just a few bird songs and a woodpecker, but otherwise it was a still forest. Yet it was a pleasure--the air was so fresh, and best of all, there were none of the annoying mosquitoes and noseums so common earlier in the year.

We approached the top of the hill—still surrounded by trees, and decided to take the red trail off to the southwestern view site where the Chip Stockford memorial bench now resides. At first the fog obscured any distant view. Gradually, as we looked out the mist cleared and we could see Mt. Kearsarge in the distance, and a part of the quiet Lower Bay came into view. Then Jeannette noticed that across the clearing, perhaps a hundred or more yards away, there was a big black hulk high up in a beech tree. He had been looking at us, and we suddenly realized it was a good sized black bear. He peered at us for awhile, and then turned his face away—obviously the beech nuts were more important to him than we were. What a pleasure this was for us just to see him enjoying himself on these preserved lands.

We lingered awhile. Then, as we retraced our steps we came to a clearing and saw some very recent moose and bear tracks as well. It was indeed a rewarding short hike.

Sometimes I wonder why for twenty years I have been working so hard to preserve and conserve the environs of Kezar Lake. That short hike on the Chip Stockford Preserve, that beautiful morning in the woods, and the contented bear in the tree gave me a clear affirmative answer.

Howard Corwin

PLEASE BEAR WITH US

Our house is in the Northwest Cove of the Lower Bay, just under the Chip Stockford Preserve. It was recently stained and looks quite suburban. All except for a small area under the kitchen windows, that is, and the two bird feeders extending from above them. That location now shows the rural area code of two black bears that tried to climb the side of the house to reach the bird feeders. They were successful, tearing off the screens and bending the iron rods holding the feeders. They depleted the feeders and dragged a trash bag to the edge of the clearing, but left their claw marks and a lot of mud on the side of the house. I'd wash off the mud and stain-over the claw marks, except I'd risk spoiling the excitement of our suburban grandchildren who look to see bears when they come to visit. And, besides, mud and bear tracks are part of the habitat around here.

George Westerberg

DEER

In the next "Land Trust Notes," Tom will talk about White Tail Deer. If you have a deer story, somewhere in Lovell, Stoneham or Stow, you are invited to send it to the GLLT office. Please confine it to one column. Space is tight!

THE GREATER LOVELL LAND TRUST is a 501 © (3) tax exempt organization that seeks to preserve wildlife habitat while encouraging the traditional industries of sustainable forestry, working farms and outdoor recreation in the region. The Land Trust invites your gifts of property, conservation easements and direct financial support. Address inquiries and send contributions to Tom Henderson, Director, P.O. Box 181, Center Lovell, ME 04016 or call 207-925-1056.