

A STREAM OF WILDLIFE WITH NO BORDERS: COLLECTIVE CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT

AN INTERVIEW WITH SHELDON PENNOYER AND PENELOPE BEAL

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Conservation is a neighborhood and family tradition for Sheldon Pennoyer and Penelope Beal of Greenfield. In 1999, the couple found themselves looking for a rural area to raise their two sons. They left Essex, Massachusetts, to move their family to their 120-acre hilltop farm in Greenfield, New Hampshire. The next step for them? Placing a conservation easement on their land with the Monadnock Conservancy. "I had always been involved in conservation easements in one way or another," Sheldon explains. "My father and grandmother put an easement on their Long Island land in 1971 in an effort to stop the state from putting a bridge across Long Island Sound." Sheldon and Penelope wanted their boys to have the same experience they did—spending free time cutting firewood and making trails, rather than staying inside.

As it turns out, others in Greenfield had the same vision. When Sheldon was considering purchasing the land in Greenfield, he called an abutter and ended up talking for hours about their hopes and dreams for their lands. It was these initial conversations that spurred a neighborhood effort to create "a stream of wildlife with no borders," linking their lands together through concerted management planning and making their intentions permanent by granting conservation easements on those lands. They called their initiative "Keeping the 'Green' in Greenfield." Today, their lands add up to a 900-acre block of unfragmented wildlife habitat and open space that is also managed for forest products, recreation, and agriculture. "We really thought about properties without borders, so we began to look at the properties as a whole, even though we might have slightly different goals in our management plans," Sheldon says. "Our neighbor, Jeff Timmons, was looking at grouse habitat, more cleared areas—his land was perfect for that—and we were looking at a broad spectrum of overall forest health and wildlife management; more of a general management plan."

Keeping with their neighborhood goals and their family history of multi-generation conservation, Sheldon and Penelope donated a conservation easement on their land in 2001. Their two sons, Pier and Chase, were engaged throughout. "They were very involved in the easement writing, we talked to them a lot and involved them. They will never forget it. They really liked the process, and they really understand what that easement means now. They come home [from college] and see how this whole area hasn't changed."

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After completing the conservation easement, the Pennoyer family immediately began working with a licensed forester at FORECO (a forestry consulting firm) to develop management goals and implement them. Their first timber harvest removed some of the high-grade oak in 2002, in order to raise some needed funds for a new septic system and some house renovations. During that harvest, they developed a network of mountain bike trails on the property, with help from the Greenfield Trails Association. This enabled the neighborhood, kids included, to “get out there and use the land” right in their backyards. After this initial harvest, Sheldon continued to harvest firewood for the family, improving their forests in the process.

“There’s responsibility with owning any piece of land,” Sheldon says, explaining why he felt compelled to develop a management plan for his family’s land. Regarding the management planning process, Sheldon encourages other landowners to think about how they would like to use the land in the future, and how other generations might use it as well. “Go into it with an open mind and have a good time at it. Keep all the options open that you think you want on that property, especially involving recreation,” he says. “Have fun with it! It’s a very wonderful process.”

The best part about conserving and managing their land, Sheldon and Penelope agree, is that their land will stay the way it is forever. “We know this property will stay as it is and be managed responsibly, because we know the Monadnock Conservancy is involved and we have complete faith in them and their ability to look over this property and its landowners as it has done for the last ten years.” Thanks to these families in Greenfield, the “stream of wildlife with no borders” will be stewarded, and enjoyed, forever.