

## **News Release**

**For immediate release**

**November 30, 2009**

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### **W.O.W. Initiative Gains Momentum**

In August, the Tamworth Conservation Commission and the Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests (Forest Society) initiated a campaign to acquire and conserve the 130-acre Gilman Forest in southern Tamworth. Now, more than \$100,000 of the required \$140,000 project costs has been raised.

“We’ve made great progress, thanks to contributions from the Forest Society, the Commission, \$27,000 from our Gilman Forest committee, and dozens of generous individual donors,” said Conservation Commission Chair Ned Beecher. “But we have to keep the momentum.”

To that end, several generous donors have pooled resources to create a challenge grant. Every dollar donated between now and January 31<sup>st</sup> – up to \$12,000 - will be doubled.

“It’s a good time to give, and donors can choose whether they want their tax-deductible contribution to be in 2009 or 2010,” said Beecher.

The Gilman Forest is located in the center of the Hackett Hill-Bunker Hill forest block, an area that provides essential wildlife habitat and connectivity for numerous wide-ranging species, such as bear, moose, and bobcat. Approximately one-third of the land within the forest block is already protected through conservation easements and ownership by various conservation organizations.

“Many factors point to this swath of land as deserving of protection,” explained Chele Miller, former Principal at Moultonboro Elementary School and current member of the the Gilman Forest committee. “The state Wildlife Action Plan found it to be habitat of the highest ecological value. It contains large, unfragmented forest blocks. There are few roads through it. Moreover, it is the shortest link between the Sandwich Range and the Ossipee Mountains.”

For several years, ecologists and land conservationists have been developing the concept of ensuring continued wildlife connectivity in this swath of land. State organizations like the Forest Society, NH Audubon, and NH Fish and Game have noted the importance of this special area since the 1990s. Sandwich Conservation Commission Chair Rick van de Poll noted the importance of connectivity to the Whites in his inventory of wildlife in the Ossipee Mountains. Now, as part of the Gilman Forest effort, 18 local and state conservation groups have added their names in support of maintaining habitat connectivity in Tamworth and Sandwich. “We’re all beginning to use the name ‘W.O.W,’” said Miller, “Whites-to-Ossipees Wildlife.”

Miller is also a member of the Bearcamp Trackers, a group of trained volunteers who have been collecting data on wildlife activity in the Tamworth area for the past six years. The Trackers have surveyed the Gilman Forest property twice this year, including in October. Signs of wildlife, such as tracks, scat, browse, and tree scrapes, have provided evidence, throughout the forest, of moose, bear, raccoon, otter, coyote, turkey, grouse, deer, bobcat, and smaller mammals. Several vernal pools were located that support wood frogs and salamanders in abundance.

“The Gilman Forest is a central piece of the W.O.W. connectivity mosaic,” said Beecher. “Its preservation helps ensure not only the continued health of wildlife populations, but also the overall ecological integrity of the area and the watershed that feeds the Ossipee aquifer. By carefully applying science in efforts to protect such resources, we hope to ensure the sustainable co-existence of the built communities of Tamworth and Sandwich within an intact natural ecosystem.”

Information about the Gilman Forest conservation project and W.O.W. can be found on the Tamworth Conservation Commission’s web site: [www.tamworthconservationcommission.org](http://www.tamworthconservationcommission.org). Tax-deductible contributions should be made out to the Tamworth Conservation Fund and mailed to Tamworth Conservation Commission, 84 Main Street, Tamworth, NH 03886. Specific questions can be directed to Ned Beecher at 387-7869, John Mersfelder at 323-7793, or Jack Savage (Forest Society) at 224-9945.

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