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"Eco" Tourism Gets a Boost with a New Wildlife Area

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Le region's tourism industry is expected to be one of the beneficiaries from the establishment of the new Burrage Pond Wildlife Management Area in Hanson and Halifax. The 1,638-acre preserve will become a jewel for outdoor recreation and wildlife management, and help attract many "eco" tourists visitors interested in ecology and nature - to Plymouth County.

"What we're doing is investing in future generations," said Environmental Affairs Secretary Bob Durand at the dedication of the wildlife management area last year. "Lands such as Burrage Pond will become as valuable as Plymouth Rock and Walden Pond in the future."

The outdoor recreation potential for the property is considerable given the extensive wetlands, grasslands and overall size of the area. Tourists interested in viewing wildlands and wildlife up close will be especially interested in the Burrage Pond Wildlife Management Area.

The property was acquired by the Office of Environmental Affairs last August from Northland Cranberries, Inc. At a special ceremony, Durand presented a \$4 million check to Andrew Reitz, Northland's Division Vice President, marking the official transfer to the state.

Divided evenly between Halifax and Hanson, Burrage Pond Wildlife Management Area provides much-needed open space for public wildlife conservation in a part of the state feeling development pressure. Some 272 acres are actual bogs, 103 acres of which were actively used by Northland Cranberries.

The remaining property is made up of Upper and Lower Burrage Ponds, which include 200 acres of fishable waters, extensive uplands, cedar swamps and a wellmaintained network of roads and dikes providing pedestrian access. Property management is the responsibility of the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife (MassWildlife). The area is open to fishing, trapping, hunting, wildlife viewing and other passive outdoor recreation activities.

Mark Primack of the Southeastern Wildlands Trust called the acquisition a victory for the South Shore. "You won't find another 1,600 acres of land like this so close to Boston," he said. "Somehow this region has managed to escape the suburbanization that sucks the character out of our communities."

Birders voiced approval of the diversity of habitats protected at Burrage Pond Wildlife Management Area. Kathleen Anderson, avid birder and Chair of MassWildlife's Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Advisory Committee, is pleased.

"This area is famous for the first documented nesting of Great Egrets in Massachusetts, as well as for its rails, bitterns, ducks and other interesting birds, she said. "For the South Shore Bird Club, it was a favored field-trip destination at all seasons of the year."

Local legislators expressed support for this project. Senator Robert Creedon said, "Some of these land acquisitions are very complex with many players and concerns. The process often requires support of a nonfinancial nature. I'm happy to assist the community-and the agencies involved in any way possible. I have always been supportive of the Environmental Affairs land acquisition initiative and bond bill."

Added Representative Tom O'Brien, "With Southeastern Massachusetts being one of the fastest growing regions in the Northeast, it is important that we continue to protect the natural resources vital to our quality of life and historical aspects of our community."

Funding for the acquisition was provided by the environmental bond and the sportsman-sponsored Wildlands Fund. MassWildlife will be partially reimbursed under the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act of 1937. Better known as the PittmanRobertson Act after its principal sponsors, funding is derived from an 11 percent federal excise tax on sporting arms, ammunition and archery equipment and a 10 percent tax on handguns. The act provides funding through a costreimbursement program to states for the selection, restoration, rehabilitation and improvement of wildlife habitat, wildlife management research, hunte r education and the distribution of information produced by the projects.

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