

Great Meadow's Story

From this platform you are looking at a natural sanctuary of statewide significance. It contains many wet zones, each one benefitting one or another species of animal or plant that call Great Meadow home. Some animals live here permanently; some utilize the meadow each year only during migration.

Geology: This 100-acre meadow is a legacy of the last glacier. During the process of melting mile-thick ice, vast rivers of melt-water scoured the land, carving out valleys where brooks and rivers would eventually flow.

Great Meadow lies in the valley of Buxton Brook, a stream whose headwaters are found close to the town line of Frankestown, some six miles to the northwest. This meadow is one of four in the Buxton Brook ecosystem. It is the last in line and the largest. Its waters empty into the Middle Branch of the Piscataquog River, one-half mile to the south.

Early Times: Indians were here for thousands of years before the first settlers arrived. Within one mile of this meadow there is an archeological site where lithic materials were found dating from 8000 BC to 2000 BC ! Later, Western Abenaki who represented tribal groups like the Nipmucks, Penacooks, Sokoki and Wampanoags (1600-1800) were all known to be close by. These natives must not be forgotten.

1734: Look to your right. The first European to settle on Great Meadow built where Bunker Hill Farm now stands. At that time the meadow was surrounded by forest. Before the soil could be worked, the trees had to be cleared and the stumps removed before any grass could be planted, grass needed to feed a milk cow and probably an ox. Where would feed for the livestock come from?

Great Meadow to the Rescue

Sometime during the 1500s, all the area's beavers had been trapped by both Indians and early fur traders for their valuable pelts. Without beavers, the meadow would not be flooded with water. When the first settlers arrived in 1734, only a ribbon of water flowed through this meadow. Across the expanse of wetland grew a variety of highly nutritious grasses. Knowing this, four of the area's earliest settlers obtained deeds to *both* land that bordered Great Meadow *and* land in Great Meadow. Its grasses fed their animals until land could be cleared and seeds sown.

A Dangerous Pasture

By the late 1700s many acres of land had been cleared, with crops being grown. Still, the native grass grew across much of the meadow. Livestock could smell those grasses and preferred those to what grew in those early fields. To keep the livestock away from the treacherous meadow muck, farmers built a stonewall along the border edges.

But, good meadow grass should not go to waste. Found hanging in the very barn still standing at the head of Great Meadow was the farmers answer to the problem; Bog Shoes. So valuable were the

grasses, the early families invented shoes that, once strapped to an animal's four feet, (like snowshoes), they prevented the heavy cows from sinking to their death.

Beavers Return

Not all of the meadow's surface grew grasses. The slightly higher surfaces grew trees, and in the middle 1800s trees, mostly Eastern White Pine, took root and grew. Beavers, long gone from this area, were re-introduced in the 1940s. A pair came to Buxton Brook, and 'read' its topography. A dam was built, the meadow was flooded once again, and a beaver family flourished in Great Meadow for the first time in around 500 years. All was well, except for the trees. They slowly drowned. By the mid-1950s, only the skeleton trunks were left as reminders of what was. A few of those dead pine trees still stand, now serving as handy perches for birds. Meadows change. They slowly fill in. Tomorrow will be a new story.

Wildlife at Great Meadow

Great Meadow is a sanctuary, recognized as an exemplary wildlife area by both New Hampshire Audubon and New Hampshire Fish & Game. Due to the meadow's many unique niches (zones), the numbers of wildlife species here is truly beyond listing. Suffice to acknowledge, migrating waterfowl come here on both ends of their long journeys. Some remain to nest.

The calls of the local aquatic waterfowl, along with the voices of Great Meadow's many songbirds, is pure pleasure for one's ears.

Many fish species thrive here. Bald Eagles and Osprey frequent Great Meadow's skies, as do the spirited Belted Kingfishers. Turtles abound, as do amphibians, with frog announcements spilling through the air here on warm evenings. Great Meadow supports the early stages of insect life in numbers uncountable and unknowable. When those insects become adults and take flight over the meadow, their flashing wings is a spectacular sight. They are often joined by hundreds of Tree Swallows.

One Special Zone

Of the many zones Great Meadow provides for its wild dependents, just in front of the viewing platform and to the right, is a zone of grass known as Cattail. It is the largest Cattail colony in the Piscataquog River Watershed. Redwing Blackbirds and Common Grackles live here. Muskrats swim here, constructing their small lodges of edible Cattail roots; they eat their houses during wintertime! Families of ducks, Mallards, Black Ducks, Pied-billed Grebes nest here, as do Canada Geese.

Hidden Nurseries

Unseen from outside the Cattail colony and protected from the prying eyes of predators, there are open-water spaces within the thickets of plants. It is in those secret schools where growing up lessons for ducklings and goslings are taught.

Great Meadow Holds Gifts For Us All

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Look.

Discover.

Appreciate.

Come back.

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