

PICTURING THE GREAT MARSH



By Kathy Leahy, Director, North Shore Advocacy

Move over, Yosemite! Celebrated in a new book of stunning black and white photographs, the North Shore's very own Great Marsh takes its rightful place in the catalog of distinguished North American landscapes honored by a great artist. Just as Yosemite's grandeur was famously illuminated for us by the photographer Ansel Adams, Ipswich native, conservation volunteer and master photographer, Dorothy Kerper Monnelly reveals a subtle, breathtaking beauty few of us have observed in *Between Land and Sea – The Great Marsh*.

As we turn the pages of this handsomely produced volume, we find ourselves at dawn gazing on a limpid spring tide surrounding a remote oak island. The morning mist rises, and at the end of a sinuous plank boardwalk straddling the marsh grass a dory rests on its tether. We explore a stark barrier beach tenuously protecting the salt marsh from oceanic surge, and then drift to the placid interior where the long reach of the tide meets the forests and fields that provide a modest, but important buffer between the marsh and busy, often-damaging human activities.

Pleased with her artistic accomplishment, Monnelly is equally enthusiastic about the conservation message conveyed by the book. "Of Tides, Mud and Marshes," an essay by Doug Stewart portrays the Great Marsh along with a gentle reminder of our role in determining its environmental future.

Mass Audubon and its partners in the Great Marsh Coalition have collaborated for years to enlighten North Shore residents about the surprising beauty, substantial history and ecological importance of the Great Marsh. Coalition members have produced a logo and a website (www.greatmarsh.org), a post card series, a car decal, a video ("Voices of the Great Marsh") and have promoted the marsh in countless newspaper and journal articles. Together with birding and kayaking trips, school education programs, volunteer projects, workshops and many more activities designed to bring people to the marsh, these efforts have been gratifyingly successful in raising local awareness and spurring action to protect the marsh's natural heritage.

When we started our project, Coalition members joked that we hoped the Great Marsh would someday hold the same place in North Shore hearts and minds as the Grand Canyon does in our national psyche. In this lovely book Doug Stewart writes, "Could any landscape be as timeless as the vast prairie of a salt marsh? Even the Grand Canyon is eroding, after all, but a healthy salt marsh is renewed with each rising tide." How lucky we are to live at the edge of this coastal treasure and to have the pleasure and inspiration of this very special book.