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## Maine Audubon Center in Falmouth spreads its wings with expansion project



The Ann and Jim Hancock Education Center is one of two buildings under construction at Maine Audubon's Gilsland Farm in Falmouth. PHOTO / TINA FISCHER

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[Wright-Ryan Construction](#) has two large buildings underway at Gilsland Farm in Falmouth which will significantly expand education and stewardship capabilities for the state's largest year-round Maine Audubon Center.

The largest of the builds – 4,560 square feet – will house the Ann and Jim Hancock Native Plants Education Center, which will host classes and gatherings.

“The new building will nearly double our public educational space in service to conservation efforts around the state, and will be used by people of all ages as they learn about native plants through hands-on activities,” Kate Lewis, development director, told Mainebiz.



Lewis said that the education building is one component of a multi-phase plan to upgrade and add new facilities to the 65-acre sanctuary, which gets 100,000 visitors a year and serves as home base for more than 40 year-round staff and close to 100 in summer.

The 2,330-square-foot Annex, also under construction along the center's entry road, will house equipment and gear for statewide efforts in conservation and sanctuary stewardship.



A second building at the center, the Annex, will house gear and equipment. PHOTO / TINA FISCHER

The cost for the education center and stewardship annex is \$5.2 million. Lewis said Ann and Jim Hancock made a “generous donation” to get the project off the ground, and Maine Audubon is fundraising to secure additional resources, primarily through gifts from individuals, corporations and foundations.

Both buildings are projected to open this spring.

## **Barn swallows and bird nests**

An original barn on the property could no longer be used and had to be dismantled to make way for the new buildings.

Ryan Deane of South Portland-based Down and Back Wood Salvage, handled the dismantling. Some of the wood he was able to salvage is being incorporated into the education center.



The circa 1830s structure was also home to generations of barn swallows, which the Audubon team worked to protect by creating alternate nesting structures.

Andy Beahm, the center’s executive director, said the future building will incorporate exterior nest shelves, so that birds can continue to make Gilsland Farm their home.

Other pieces of the overall project will include a new accessible trail adjacent to the visitor center along with updates to the center itself to improve energy efficiency, upgrade bird-safe glass and increase capacity for summer day camp programs.

Wright-Ryan, which is based in Portland, is managing construction for the project, in coordination with Portland-based [Kaplan Thompson Architects](#). [R.J. Grondin & Sons](#), based in Gorham, handled site work.

Additional team members include Aceto Kimball Landscape Architecture and [Acorn Engineering](#), both of which are headquartered in Portland.

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