



The Kestrel Trust
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Valley Views

The Newsletter of
The Kestrel Trust
Fall 2007



Amherst • Belchertown • Granby • Hadley • Leverett • Pelham • Shutesbury • South Hadley • Sunderland

Make an Annual Investment that Will Last a Lifetime

The Kestrel Trust is dedicated to preserving the heart of the Valley—the farms, forests, and fields that define our landscape and contribute immensely to our quality of life. As a small organization with a big responsibility, we count on you to help us protect the best of what remains before it is too late. By making a donation to Kestrel's annual fund drive, you can help us initiate conservation projects near you, leverage public funding for land acquisition, and run our lean organization. Make an investment that will last a lifetime. Thank you!

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Governor Proposes Major Increase in Conservation Funding \$50Million Annually for the Next 5 Years

Energy and Environmental Affairs Secretary Ian Bowles announced in August that Governor Deval Patrick's five-year capital spending plan includes at least \$50 million per year for land conservation, beginning with the current fiscal year, which began July 1, 2007.

"What we preserve is just as important as what we build," said Governor Patrick. "We need to leave for future generations a legacy of nature, beauty, and serenity, along with a legacy of commerce and prosperity. That makes land preservation a worthy investment for the Commonwealth, now and in the future."

The funding represents a 65 percent increase over annual land protection spending during the previous four years, and 24 percent over annual spending from 1993 to 2003, adjusted for inflation. In only one year since 1993 (\$59.9 million in 2002) did inflation-adjusted spending from the Commonwealth's capital accounts exceed the \$50 million minimum Governor Patrick has pledged for each of the next five years.

"Governor Patrick has made an historic commitment to land conservation," said Secretary Bowles. "This is an investment that will pay enormous dividends to the Commonwealth and its citizens for generations to come."

Governor Patrick also identified three top priority areas for land spending in the coming years:

- * Commonwealth Urban Parks - visionary new large urban parks in 10-15 cities located in neighborhoods with few existing parks, as well as new or expanded urban parks in all 51 of our cities over the next four years. These investments in many cases will also take advantage of the Commonwealth's streamlined approach to cleaning up contaminated "brown-field" sites for new parks;

- * Commonwealth Habitat Reserves - working with land trusts and with municipalities, protect at least 10 premier large, unfragmented ecosystems across the state to protect our most unique large habitats for future generations and as destination attractions to boost our emerging "green tourism" industry. These 10 landscapes include mountain tops, wilderness areas, sustainably managed forests and forest reserves, and wild rivers.

- * Commonwealth Working Landscapes - prime agricultural and forest lands that support local, sustainable agriculture and forest industries,

which together contribute over \$1 billion per year to our rural economies. Expanded funding is slated for innovative programs including the Agricultural Preservation Restriction Program, the Farm and Forest Viability Programs, the Forest Stewardship Program, and the new Working Forest Easement Program. These programs purchase land protection easements, covenants, and agreements that keep farming and forestry vibrant in our rural regions.

"With Governor Patrick's extraordinary five-year commitment, the Commonwealth has an opportunity to encourage development where communities want it, but also to provide, on a permanent basis, parks for city residents, working lands for rural industries, and large wild areas for critical habitat for future generations," said Secretary Bowles. "Never before has the Commonwealth devoted this level of funding, over a sustained period of time, to the critical goal of land preservation."

In addition to the minimum of \$50 million from the state's capital budget, Secretary Bowles expects a commitment of roughly \$7 million from the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority for land acquisitions in the Quabbin and Wachusett watersheds for the current fiscal year, up from an average of \$1.7 million per year over the last five years. Bowles serves as Chairman of the MWRA.

Land protection in the areas that feed the reservoirs with clean drinking water has saved MWRA ratepayers from a federal requirement to build a water filtration plant, at a cost of \$220 million. The current land acquisition program - a partnership of the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) and MWRA - calls for the protection of 4,000 acres identified as top priority by DCR's nationally acclaimed watershed land model. Funding is derived from MWRA bond funds.

Plus, the Commonwealth garners an average of \$1.5 million per year for land protection from hunting and fishing licenses under the Land Stamp program and receives \$5 million to \$10 million from federal Department of Interior and Agriculture land programs. All together, spending by the Commonwealth on land acquisition and preservation should exceed \$65 million to \$70 million in each of the next five years.

INSIDE:

Farms Protected
in Hadley and Pelham

Federal Conservation Laws
Affect Region

Board Profile: LeeAnne Connolly

LeeAnne Connolly, the Town of Belchertown's Conservation Administrator, is the fighting spirit on Kestrel's Board of Directors. Her tireless efforts, always marked by good humor and a can-do attitude, have been key to purchasing and protecting over 400 acres of public water supply watershed, as well as critical forest, farm and recreation land parcels in the past seven years. Townfolks jokingly call her the "Swamp Cop," for her commitment to enforcing the Wetlands Protection Act and the town's wetlands bylaw,

Through the Kestrel Trust or other town groups, boards and commissions, LeeAnne has gone well beyond her job description—raising funds from townspeople, writing grant proposals, negotiating with landowners and coming up with new projects each time the current one is nearing completion. Land protection has become her passion.

She has developed management plans for rare species and conservation land and negotiated agreements with all sorts of user groups—steadfastly opposing inappropriate uses while finding ways to accommodate nearly everyone's needs. She has capitalized on the town's increased awareness about the need for land protection and helped move them to act on it.

Her irrepressible sense of humor and perspective in the face of obstacles, her optimism and generous spirit have won her many friends and much admiration. Thanks for all your hard work, LeeAnne!



Kestrel Updates

40 acre Pelham Homestead Protected

Thirty years ago Peggy and Peter Hepler purchased a historic 40-acre farm in the rural northern part of Pelham. The circa 1835 house and barn and its setting had an undeniable New England charm — old sugar maples, stone walls, an apple orchard, a serene meadow surrounded by expanses of forest, running brooks, and wetlands. As the decades passed, a lot happened on the Hepler homestead. Children grew, departed, and grandchildren appeared to explore the farm. Native grassland plants spread in the meadow, which was mowed each year. Vegetable gardens and fruit trees were planted and crops harvested. Clapboards were painted and outbuildings repaired. Fallen trees were cut, split, and stacked for firewood. Fortunately, one thing didn't change too much—the rural quality of the land. Stewarded by landowners who care deeply about the historic landscape and the ecological health of the living systems that surrounded them, the land has been sustained.

This year the Heplers decided to make a bold move to ensure that their property would remain a rural respite for generations to come. They are donating a conservation restriction to The Kestrel Trust that will protect the land in an undeveloped state in perpetuity. That means forever.

A main motivation for the Heplers was to maintain a sense of continuity with the past—to preserve the land as a working homestead in a sustainable balance with its natural environment, as their place has been since Scots-Irish immigrants settled the town of Pelham in 1740. The property's special attributes include:

- A historic field cleared for more than 250 years, containing the terraces of a typical Scots-Irish potato field and rectilinear mounds which may be related to the original farmstead in this location settled in 1740 by John Gray, one of Pelham's original Scots-Irish settlers and Selectmen. Today, the Meadow provides a native open grassland habitat for birds and other critters, an increasingly rare land type in Pelham.

- A largely undisturbed mixed hardwood and evergreen forest with an understory of native woodland plants supporting nesting sites for such birds as pileated woodpeckers, barred owls, scarlet tanagers, ovenbirds, and hermit thrushes and providing habitat for mammals such as fox, coyote, black bear, moose, porcupine, opossum, and raccoon, all of which have been observed on the land.

-Undisturbed riparian and wetland habitat along Buffam and Gates Brooks and along an intermittent stream west of Buffam Brook, all tributaries of the Fort River, which contribute to the health of the area's water quality.



The owners of this homestead are donating a conservation restriction to Kestrel.

The landowners' secondary motivation was to take advantage of a one-time experimental tax law that increases the financial incentives for landowners who are in a position to donate the development rights on their property. Known as the conservation tax law, it will only remain in effect until the end of 2007, unless it is reauthorized this fall (see other article on this page). The law allows landowners to take full advantage of a donation by increasing the allowable annual deduction and by spreading it out over 15 years.

Not least of all, another reason the Heplers were convinced a CR was the way to go, was the fact that taking this measure did not mean compromising their privacy. Like many farmers who have sold agricultural preservation restrictions to protect their farms in the Valley, the Hepler's homestead will remain privately owned and enjoyed by their family. By donating the CR, they found they could contribute to a broader public goal of protecting wildlife habitat and a historic landscape without opening their land to public use.

The Kestrel Trust is very grateful to the Heplers for this act of generosity. Their land is an important piece of a larger puzzle that connects private lands and public conservation areas from the Pelham Hills to the Quabbin Reservoir, including Amherst watershed lands. By following the Hepler's example, we hope other landowners in the area will be encouraged to consider their conservation options as well. Together, we can maintain the relatively unfragmented expanse of land in this area that is at the heart of the Valley's forestland.

Bay Road Farm To Be Conserved by an Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR)



This summer, Kestrel set out to raise \$30,000 to help jump start several land acquisition projects in a 2,000 acre rural area at the foot the Mt. Holyoke Range in the Fort River Watershed in Hadley. We are thrilled to announce that we exceeded our goal and raised close to \$50,000--a testimony to how important this area is to many Valley residents. Thank you for your generous contributions!

A portion of this funding, along with a grant from Valley Land Fund and from a dedicated gift in honor of Margaret Marsh, was used this September to secure an option to purchase an APR on a 50-acre parcel of prime farmland along Bay Road in Hadley. This will protect the land until the state Department of Agricultural Resources (DAR) can purchase an APR to protect the land in perpetuity in the next 1-2 years. The balance of the funding raised through Kestrel's summer appeal will help secure other critical parcels in this area in collaboration with Valley Land Fund, Trust for Public Land, the Conservation Fund, the US Fish and Wildlife Service, DAR and the Town of Hadley. In partnership with these other conservation groups and agencies, we can build enough momentum to conserve this stunning area that is at the heart of the Valley's farmland.

Conservation News

2007 Federal Farm Bill

The Northeast and Mid-Atlantic states have unique needs when it comes to farm and food policy. The region typically has smaller farms, more varied crops and soils, and greater development pressure on farmland than other parts of the nation. The region's population density is four times the national average with many low-income households facing hunger. Existing farm and food policy does not adequately address these needs.

Many of the region's stakeholders and legislators are supporting the comprehensive Farm, Nutrition and Community Investment Act soon to be introduced by Rep. DeLauro and Rep. Gilchrest. The bill will help organize the regional delegation around a broad range of farm bill priorities including:

- Funding for value-added farm products, direct-to-consumer marketing, and the infrastructure needed to support regional food systems;
- Expansion of working lands conservation programs and an improved farmland protection program;
- Strengthening the federal Food Stamp Program, and expanded consumer access to fresh fruits and vegetables;
- Increased focus on energy efficiency and on-farm renewable energy production; and
- Support for the region's dairy producers.

The Northeast and Mid-Atlantic region has historically been underserved by federal farm programs. Dairy farmers, fruits and vegetable producers and those raising livestock lack a sufficient safety net. While commodity payments in some states top over 15 cents for every dollar in farm sales, the Northeast/Mid-Atlantic region receives on average less than two cents. Programs of particular importance to the region's farmers and its residents—including those that fund conservation and farmland protection, energy efficiency and renewable energy projects—are woefully under-funded. The 2007 Farm Bill will help Northeastern farms address these needs and increase funding for farm protection in the region. For more information contact American Farmland Trust at www.farmland.org.

Conservation Tax Law Up for Renewal

The federal legislation creating enhanced tax benefits for donors of Conservation Restrictions will expire December 31, 2007, unless Congress enacts H.R. 1576 to extend it. The 2006 change in the tax law to increase the deductions farmers and other modest-income landowners can take for making such a valuable gift is very important to protecting the natural resources and working landscapes of Massachusetts.

With the change in majority control in both the Senate and the House, the Massachusetts delegation has increased legislative influence and is in a key position to help with the passage of this bill. The Kestrel Trust is pleased that Congressmen John Olver and Richard Neal have both recently signed on as cosponsors legislation to make the 2006 change permanent. With their help we can add this tool to the growing list of ways land trusts can work with landowners to increase the pace of conservation in the Valley and around the country.



More than a few times every week, I kick myself for not carrying a camera with me on the farm. The spectacular sun-rise, the bald eagle gliding by, the truck full of colorful food and smiling crew.... Wouldn't it be nice to capture all of this on film? Then reality sets in and I realize that my relationship with a camera would last about ten minutes before I destroyed it with dirt and grease, or ran over it with a tractor.

The attached picture was taken by a staff photographer from Johnny's Selected Seed of Albion, ME. He just happened to be visiting our farm that day when he and I stumbled upon a Kestrel perched on the seat of our 1949 Farm-All C tractor. We thought maybe the bird was trying to start the tractor and make off with it. Kestrels are the smallest members of the falcon family. They like farms and open fields where they can swoop high and low in search of small rodents, or snatch large bugs out of mid-air.

As the photographer was snapping the picture, I began to think about a different kind of Kestrel, one that is closely linked with agriculture and open spaces: The Kestrel Trust. This group has been instrumental in saving thousands of acres of farmland, wetlands, and forests in the valley. When an important parcel of farmland comes on the market, it takes a certain amount of skill and timing to put a deal together to buy the land before a developer grabs it. Often the Kestrel Trust must swoop in like a falcon to buy the land and protect it forever.