Everyone Needs Friends—Even the Lands You Love

Neighbors are working together to care for special places in their communities.

Is there a special place near your home that you love? It’s likely to be a conservation area where you can take a nature walk, watch birds, or just enjoy a scenic view. Kestrel has helped protect many of these places, but after that, they need to be taken care of so you can continue to enjoy them.

That’s where friends come in. Neighbors and others who regularly visit a conservation area come to know it well. “Friends groups” often emerge when people feel this place needs help in some way, like keeping trails open or keeping the area clean.

This happened last summer with the emergence of the Friends of Mt. Pollux. Prompted by a news article raising concerns about the appearance of the Amherst conservation area, a group of neighbors and visitors came together to look for solutions. One of those neighbors was Thomas Johnson, who now co-leads the group.

“What makes Mt. Pollux unique is that it’s not a wilderness area or a public park, but something in between, with potential for many uses.” Thomas said. One use he witnesses often: “People come here to watch the sunset or sunrise, or to gaze at the stars. Lots of people came to watch the meteor showers recently.”

Creating Partnerships to Support Public Goals

Thomas said it’s important to the Friends that Mt. Pollux remain accessible for people to enjoy, with trails regularly mowed, and the scenic qualities maintained. Eventually they’d like to see educational signs and events, like a Mt. Pollux Day. Their interest in the conservation area prompted the Town of Amherst to develop a formal management plan, involving the Friends in the process. The Friends and the Town are drafting an agreement to specify management goals and define responsibilities going forward. Kestrel has agreed to be the Friends’ fiscal sponsor, enabling them to collect charitable donations to support their work.

Kestrel is also the fiscal sponsor for the Friends of Puffer’s Pond and the Friends of Scarborough Brook. We work with other groups around the Valley as well, including Friends of the Fort River, Mineral Hills, and Lake Warner. “We’re providing support for their efforts, which is key for a volunteer-led group,” said Kat Deely, Kestrel’s Community Conservation Manager. “That can include collaborating on public events or volunteer workdays or fundraising efforts.”

This spring, Kestrel brought together a few representatives from both new and long-established groups in recognition that they share common goals. After a lively discussion and cross-pollination of ideas, participants left inspired to try new strategies, stay in touch, and help promote each other’s places. More meetings are planned in the future, with the possibility of a Valley-wide Friends gathering.

“The beauty of a Friends group is that it helps create a strong sense of place in our communities centered around local conservation areas,” said Kat. “What better place to start than in your own backyard?”

To join or start a Friends Group, email kat@kestreltrust.org.

Easthampton: Help Save Land for Drinking Water

Southampton and Easthampton are partnering to conserve 25 acres of scenic forest and farmland in order to protect the Barnes Aquifer—the sole source of public drinking water for both communities. If you are an Easthampton resident, please encourage your City CPA Committee and city leaders to support the Cook-County Road project, which is scheduled for a vote this fall. Learn more at kestreltrust.org.
Falcon Chicks Flourish During 2016 Nest Box Season

Kestrel Land Trust’s namesake, the American kestrel, is the smallest falcon in North America. Like other species, it used to be a common resident of the Pioneer Valley, but over time its population has declined. While we don’t know all the reasons, one likely cause is the loss of the right kind of places to build their nests.

That’s why our stewardship team continues to provide new nest boxes specifically designed for the kestrels’ needs. Each spring, volunteers regularly observe 16 nest boxes throughout the Valley to see whether kestrels are using them. And, while this year’s Kestrel Nest Box Project season had its challenges, it was the most successful to date, as 20 kestrel chicks hatched: double the number from last year!

Read more about this year’s season and see pictures of the kestrel babies on our blog: “View From the Valley” at kestreltrust.wordpress.com.

UPDATE: Projects In the Works

South Maple Street, Hadley: The “For Sale” signs have come down from the land at the corner of South Maple Street and Moody Bridge Road in Hadley. While this is good news, the fate of these 31 acres is still unclear, as Eversource has not shared its plans for this land. Many thanks to all of you for your support of this effort.

We agree that this beautiful land—part of a mosaic of farmlands, grasslands, and riverlands between the Mount Holyoke Range and the Fort River—should be conserved to preserve clean water, wildlife habitat, and recreational opportunities.

Folks from all over the Valley have let us know how much they care about this scenic land and have contributed to help Kestrel respond rapidly when opportunities arise to protect special places, like this one, in perpetuity. We will keep working toward the goal of permanently conserving this land and will update you as progress is made.

Lake Warner Dam, Hadley: Repairing the dam to save Lake Warner is an important community project. To date, $225,000 has been secured from CPA funds and state budget funding for the reconstruction work. However, the total cost of repair will be significantly higher than originally estimated, requiring approximately $200,000 more to complete.

To fund this gap, Kestrel has applied to the Massachusetts Dam and Seawall Repair Fund. While we had expected construction to begin this summer, this state grant requires that no construction activity begin until after the funds are awarded. The new start date for repair is summer 2017.

The Friends of Lake Warner and Kestrel greatly appreciate the efforts of the town, state, and local citizens who are supporting this restoration effort to ensure that this historic millpond continues to benefit the community for generations to come.

Have you included Kestrel Land Trust in your estate plans?

If so, thank you! Please contact us so that we can recognize you as a founding member of Kestrel’s legacy circle.

Legacy gifts are an inspiring way to support land conservation in the Valley while providing for your own or your family’s financial security. Learn more at kestreltrust.org/planned-giving.php, email monica@kestreltrust.org or call (413) 549-1097.
En Plein Air: Painting the Valley From the Top of Mt. Holyoke

Artists celebrate land & history at the Summit.

The view of the Pioneer Valley from Mount Holyoke has inspired people for generations. In 1836, Thomas Cole hiked up the mountain, made some sketches, and later painted one of the most famous images of the Oxbow and our local landscape. Almost 200 years later, we can still enjoy the same view thanks to the early conservation movement inspired in part by the landscape artwork of Cole’s generation.

It was in this spirit that Kestrel partnered with artist Lewis Bryden and R. Michelson Galleries in Northampton for our first Paint Out at the Summit House in June. Lewis is a plein air painter (“in the open air”) known for his remarkable landscapes reminiscent of Thomas Cole and Winslow Homer.

More than 20 local artists of all levels joined Lewis to learn about his approach before finding a choice spot to begin their painting. Local ecologist and artist Christine Labich, whose work was featured in the July issue of Plein Air Magazine, was also on hand to offer novice painters guidance in composition. Non-artists were invited to take a guided hike up to the Summit to see the artists at work.

We expect this will be the first of many more chances to bring the arts to the land.

Meet Mary Lou Splain: Kestrel’s New Office Manager

I came to the Pioneer Valley in 2008 after briefly living in Arizona where, unemployed and looking for something to do, I signed up for a birding walk given by the local Audubon Society. I was hooked! I became an avid birder and loved exploring the Sky Islands looking for birds and any other critters. My interest in birding proved useful when I moved to Easthampton with my husband, as it provided a way to connect with other like-minded individuals in the Valley.

I was introduced to the world of land conservation when I volunteered for Kestrel Land Trust as a property monitor in 2013. My monitoring partner, Rosemary Arnold, called me when her all-volunteer land trust, Winding River Land Conservancy based in Holyoke, was looking for office help. And so began the journey that led to my new position with Kestrel managing our busy office!

Past lives have included stints as a paralegal, classroom assistant, and department coordinator at a small college in Vermont. In my spare time, I enjoy road biking, hiking, gardening, knitting, and weaving.

I am happy to join such a dedicated staff and Board, who are all working hard to conserve the Valley that I now call “home.”
Upcoming Events

Visit kestreltrust.org for details.

- **Sunday, September 18, 11 am - 1 pm, Hadley.**
  Annual Hawk Watch & talk with Dave King on the Mt. Holyoke Range.

- **Sunday, October 16, 11 am – 1 pm, Hadley.**
  8th Annual 5K for Farmland & Farmers’ Market Festival. (See below fold for details.)

- **Saturday, November 12, 1 pm – 3 pm, Leverett.**
  Ancient Stories in Stone with geologist Mike Williams. Co-sponsored with Rattlesnake Gutter Trust.

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Save Farms, Eat Food, Have Fun!

**5K for Farmland & Farmers’ Market Festival**

- **Sunday, October 16, 2016**
  - **11 am – 1 pm**

Help conserve the Valley you Love.

- **Scenic 5K Run or 2-Mile Walk**
  - Local Farm Products & Crafts
  - Great Live Music
  - Local Beer by Valley Malt
  - Tom Ricardi’s Live Birds of Prey
  - Entertainment for Kids & More!

Thank You! KESTREL LAND TRUST

**Register Online at** KESTRELTRUST.ORG

or download the mail-in registration form.

You’ll receive a commemorative pint glass & be entered into a drawing for great local prizes!

- Individual advanced registration: $23
- Day of Registration: $25
- Family Rate (2 adults & 2 kids): $45
- College / Grade-School Student: $15

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**Want to do more for the Valley You Love?**

Collect pledges to help save farmland! You could win a gift certificate to Northampton area shops & restaurants!

Register online to create your personal pledge page.