A New Era of Stewardship Begins in Northampton

An innovative partnership between the City and Kestrel Land Trust ensures the protection of 639 acres of CPA-funded conservation land.

The City of Northampton and Kestrel Land Trust have partnered to enhance the protection of 639 acres of conservation land that have been purchased by the City since 2008 with the help of funds from the Community Preservation Act (CPA).

In 2012, the City and Kestrel created a single, comprehensive Conservation Restriction (CR) to be placed on all of the City’s conservation lands that were purchased using CPA funds. CPA-funded open space is required by law to be protected with a CR, which is a legal agreement that allows landowners to permanently prohibit specific uses, such as development, while retaining ownership of the land. In many communities, there is a backlog of CPA-funded conservation lands in need of CRs. The innovative strategy Northampton devised was to include more than 30 properties—many of them non-contiguous—under one CR.

“It has been great to work with a municipality that is proactively seeking to follow through on protecting their CPA lands,” said Ben Wright, Kestrel’s Land Conservation Specialist, who has been working on the project over the last year. “The tricky parts were mostly in the legal language details of how to cover so many separate parcels in a single Conservation Restriction. The final document may not be a page-turner but it is I think it is fair to say that it is innovative in Massachusetts.”

Popular Recreation Areas Included

Many popular hiking locations are covered by this new CR, including the Mineral Hills Conservation Area, the Saw Mill Hills Conservation Area, the Mill River Greenway, and land around Fitzgerald Lake in the Broad Brook Greenway. These areas protect a wide range of public benefits and natural resources including scenic views, woodlands, and wildlife habitat, and they maintain large areas of unfragmented open space that help preserve the character of Northampton. The CR upholds the purposes for which the land was originally purchased, and supports the goals of City’s Conservation Commission, which administers the land.

This new CR also secures the public’s investment in conservation. The land will now be monitored annually by Kestrel, which will provide a supporting role in stewarding the land. Kestrel has secured roughly $55,000 from funds raised through the CPA, grants, and private donations to support the costs of perpetual stewardship of the Conservation Restrictions it holds on City lands.

“Northampton’s open space legacy preserves habitat, reduces flood risks, provides recreation, adds value to our homes, and encourages development that supports the community economically, not development that doesn’t pay for municipal services,” said Wayne Feiden, Northampton Director of Planning and Sustainability. “This Conservation Restriction ensures that this legacy is forever.”
New Board Trustees Offer Expertise and Dedication
Kestrel Land Trust is pleased to welcome four new talented professionals to its Board.

Jane Bryden. Professor of Music and former Music Department Chair at Smith College, Jane served on the board of the Massachusetts Cultural Council for several years. She lives in a restored nineteenth-century home adjacent to the Scarborough Brook Conservation Area in Belchertown, where she assists with land stewardship.

Scott Jackson. An Associate Professor in the Department of Environmental Conservation at the University of Massachusetts, Scott has been involved in local, state and national conservation work for over 25 years engaged in research, policy development and projects designed to protect and enhance natural resources. As a resident of Whatley, he has served on the Conservation Commission since 1995 and the MA Association of Conservation Commissions Board of Directors since 2001. He previously served as an associate member of the MA Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Advisory Committee.

Tom Jenkins. A consulting Forester with Bay State Forestry Service working with land owners to guide complex land use decisions, Tom comes from a farming family and was born and raised in Westhampton where he still resides. His connections and commitment to the land and his community run deep; for years, he has served on the Westhampton Conservation Commission, volunteered with the elementary school, the fire department and the Fall Festival Committee.

Robert Levite. Bob is an environmental attorney for the University of Massachusetts, providing education and facilitation to town boards, land trusts, watershed associations, non-profits, and state agencies, and he represents landowners who wish to protect their land. Bob served on the board of the Massachusetts Watershed Coalition, among other organizations, and has taught law school and graduate courses in land use and environmental law in Vermont, New Hampshire, and Massachusetts. He lives in West Brookfield.

The Lake Warner Dam in Hadley
As a result of the merger with Valley Land Fund in 2011, Kestrel Land Trust became the manager of the Lake Warner, LLC, which owns the dam at Lake Warner in North Hadley. Many older dams throughout the state are being carefully looked at by the Massachusetts Office of Dam Safety, and as a result, that office has issued an order to repair or remove the Lake Warner dam by the end of 2014.

Kestrel Land Trust appreciates Lake Warner’s value to the community of North Hadley as a historic landscape and recreational area, and we gathered input from the community at a dam information session in April. We have also learned that removing the dam could provide significant ecological benefits for aquatic life and the Connecticut River. Kestrel is currently investigating a variety of options to determine how to proceed, and we will continue to share information with the public and the residents of Hadley as it becomes available.

Thank You, Judith Eiseman!
After more than 30 years of dedicated volunteer service as a Kestrel Board Trustee, including holding positions of Chair and Secretary during much of that time, Judith Eiseman is taking a well-deserved sabbatical. However, she won’t be going far, as she will now lead Kestrel’s Advisory Council. From all the Trustees and staff: Thank you, Judy, for all you have done to conserve the land in this Valley.

PANCAKE BREAKFAST for PUFFER’S POND
Saturday, June 1
8:30 – 11 am
Mill River Recreation Area, North Amherst
Rain or shine!
All-you-can-eat pancakes & coffee,
$8 adults / $6 kids
Join us for multigrain pancakes made from ingredients donated by local farms. And, as usual, we’ll have real maple syrup, live music, fabulous raffle prizes, and tons of community spirit!
Four grills this year—no lines!
Kestrel Helps Belchertown Conserve More Critical Lands

The new Meads Corner Conservation Area provides 88 acres of forestland for wildlife habitat and recreation.

Kestrel Land Trust and the Belchertown Conservation Commission are pleased to announce the creation of Meads Corner Conservation Area on Gold Street in Belchertown. This land, sold for conservation by the Jackson Family, is located in Belchertown and Pelham and abuts the Cadwell Memorial Forest.

This new conservation area includes 88 acres of forestland and it protects drinking water, wildlife habitat, and recreational opportunities for the public. Kestrel Land Trust will hold a Conservation Restriction over the land in Belchertown to ensure the land is managed for these conservation purposes in perpetuity. The adjacent 20 acres in Pelham, which was part of the original Jackson Estate, will be held by Kestrel as conservation land. The Town of Belchertown acquired the Meads Corner Conservation Area for $500,000 with funding from the Massachusetts Local Acquisitions for Natural Diversity Program, the Town’s CPA Fund, and private funds raised by Kestrel Land Trust from individuals and foundations, including the Field’s Pond Foundation.

“This property was on the real estate market, and it could have been carved up into several house lots along Gold Street,” said Belchertown’s Conservation Agent LeeAnne Connolly. “As our town continues to grow, it is critical to conserve natural areas like this to maintain the rural character that our community values.”

This conservation acquisition marks the sixth of its kind in a long-term collaborative effort by Kestrel and Belchertown to permanently protect a wildlife corridor from the Quabbin Reservoir—the largest defacto wildlife sanctuary in Massachusetts—to the 3,000-acre Mount Holyoke Range in northern Belchertown. Other acquisitions over the last decade include the 290-acre Holland Glen Conservation Area, 70-acre Scarboro Brook Conservation Area, 220-acre Topping Farm, and a 300-acre portion of Ingate Farm, which was added to the Mount Holyoke Range State Park. Together these conservation areas permanently protect woodlands, streams, and wetlands for black bear, moose, bobcat, deer, turkey, otter, and other wildlife.

“Kestrel Land Trust is thrilled to have helped Belchertown create another public conservation area,” said Kristin DeBoer, Executive Director. “It is places like these that people—and wildlife—can enjoy all year round, forever.”

Volunteers Bring Their Passion to the Land

Conserving the lands we love requires much more than signing a legal document and moving on to the next project. It’s a permanent commitment to ensuring the land is treated well forever. That’s why Kestrel Land Trust is building its stewardship program by engaging volunteers to assist with regular monitoring of Kestrel’s lands.

In April, our AmeriCorps MassLIFT Land Steward, Christine Volonte, provided skills training to volunteer property monitors and to members of local Conservation Commissions who are charged with monitoring town properties. The training was offered on both the west and east sides of the Valley, and each had a classroom and field component to get volunteers practicing new skills right away. Volunteers received an overview of Kestrel’s monitoring process; an introduction to map, compass and GPS use; and field training focused on navigation and documenting a violation.

In addition to learning the fundamentals of monitoring conserved lands, participants enjoyed camaraderie and the chance to bond. “I set aside time for mingling, and people took full advantage of it,” Chris said. “In many cases, volunteers teamed-up during the course of the workshop and planned to do their monitoring together this year, which will help them learn by teaching each other, and also give them a hiking buddy for more fun and safety in the field.”

The participants found the trainings to be very beneficial and comprehensive. One of the town volunteers who participated explained, “I gained skills that I will use to promote, enhance, and conserve diversity at a local scale. [This event helped] to get the community involved in protecting the land they’re passionate about.”
Do You Love the Valley?
So do we. Help us conserve it.

Yes! I want to help protect meadows, marshes, and mountains in the Valley I love. Here is my gift of:  $50   $100   $250   other: $___

Name __________________________________________________________

Address _______________________________________________________

Phone ___________________________ Email __________________________

Upcoming Events

**National Trails Day Hike: Saturday, June 1, 9 to 11 a.m.**
Explore the recently completed East Leverett trail system with the Leverett Trails Committee. Please RSVP to office@kestreltrust.org or call 413-549-1097.

**SAVE THE DATE: 5K for Farmland & Farmers Market**
**Festival: Sunday, October 20, 2013**

Join our email list for timely updates, events, and more. Visit kestreltrust.org, click on CONTACT US, and submit your name and email address.

The Kestrel Nest Box Project Continues

Are the American kestrels raising young in the boxes we installed throughout the Valley?

Chris Volonte will tell us in the next issue of Valley Views!

Conserve the Valley You Love

Your Legacy: Giving for the Future

Kestrel is creating a new Legacy Giving program for those who wish to use their assets to support land conservation. We will periodically provide answers to frequently asked questions about financial planning and legacy gifts in this newsletter. If you have a question you would like answered here, contact Monica Green, Development Director, at monica@kestreltrust.org or 549-1097.

Who needs a will? If you wish to have a say as to how and to whom your assets are distributed after your death, you need a will. Without one, your estate will be divided according to the laws of the state in which you reside. A will offers the potential opportunity for you to minimize estate taxes, provide gifts in trust for minors, and/or leave a bequest for a charitable organization you care about. For more information about naming Kestrel Land Trust in your will, please contact Monica Green.

Now, Giving Online Is Easier Than Ever!
Try our new secure online donation system hosted by Network for Good:

• Designate a gift for a specific project.
• Make a recurring gift.
• Give in honor of a loved one.

Just look for these buttons at kestreltrust.org.