$1.5 M Grant Propels Mt. Holyoke Range Conservation

First pieces of the puzzle are set in place to protect landscapes resilient to climate change.

In February, the Mount Holyoke Range Protection Project surged ahead with the announcement that the Commonwealth had awarded the project a $1,500,000 Landscape Partnership grant. This state funding combined with last year's generous anonymous donation of $350,000 will help conserve 1,000 acres of unprotected lands on the Mount Holyoke and Mount Tom Ranges.

This grant program was established by the Patrick Administration to protect large landscapes with high values for wildlife, drinking water protection, forestry, agriculture and tourism. Projects must include at least 500 acres, allow public access, and be implemented in partnership with other agencies and municipalities. Kestrel will partner with the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), the Department of Agricultural Resources (DAR), and the towns of Amherst, Belchertown, Granby, Hadley, and South Hadley on this important effort.

And the effort is well on its way. The first parcel slated for conservation was acquired by DCR in March with Kestrel's assistance. Forty-four acres were added to the Mt. Holyoke Range State Park, including a portion of the New England National Scenic Trail. By the end of June, Kestrel and its partners aim to conserve another 400 acres, with a total of 1,000 acres protected by the end of 2014.

**Conservation for Climate Change**

Today, the realities of climate change have given the conservation community more reasons to hasten protection of the Range. Conserving this region will not only protect recreational lands and prime farmland along the Connecticut River, but also a landscape that has been identified by The Nature Conservancy (TNC) as especially resilient for climate change adaptation. The mountain habitats of the Mount Holyoke and Mount Tom Range support more rare species of plants and animals than any other area in Massachusetts’ Connecticut River valley. In part, that's because they provide one of the largest remaining blocks of forest in the Commonwealth. And, geologists recognize the ancient volcanic activity that created the only east-west oriented mountain range in the Eastern U.S. This unique orientation leads to rare microhabitats, which are home to hundreds of plants and animals. Wide-ranging species such as black bear, bobcat, and migratory birds also call the mountains home.

In 2012, scientific research by TNC recognized the Range as a “resilient” landscape. Resilient lands are those that will be most likely to allow natural communities to adapt to changes in climate because of their complex landforms and physical connection between various habitats. The University of Massachusetts Conservation Analysis Priorities System (CAPS) also recognizes much of the Range as having the highest level of ecological integrity in the state, while the MA Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs “Biomap 2” report also identifies the majority of the Range as Core Habitat or Critical Natural Landscape.

No single organization can achieve large-scale protection goals on its own. As Kestrel has done in the past, the Trust will coordinate cooperative efforts with the state, municipalities, and landowners to ensure a strong future for the Range and achieve a shared vision for this treasured landscape.
New Land Steward Corps Looking for Volunteers to Get Outdoors

Do you enjoy outdoor work? Do you have some weekend mornings free? Kestrel Land Trust is developing a new Land Steward Corps: A group of volunteers to do the fieldwork needed to maintain our conservation lands. The Land Steward Corps would meet at scheduled times to help with:

- controlling invasive plant species
- posting signs and boundary markers
- trail maintenance
- trash removal
- bird nest box construction

Kestrel will provide equipment and training for the volunteers, who will work for half days in supervised groups. Members may join a work party when their personal schedules allow—come when you can, stay as long as you’re able. Not only will you be assisting Kestrel in valuable conservation work, you’ll be out on the land discovering new sites, enjoying the company of fellow land trust members, and getting some great exercise!

If you are interested in joining the Land Steward Corps, please contact the volunteer leader, Shirley Griffin at (413) 687-5441 or email sgriffin20@comcast.net.

Fundraising Begins to Repair the Historic Dam on Lake Warner

Kestrel works to preserve the special places that are part of the fabric of the Valley’s landscape. Often these are natural, relatively wild areas, but some landscapes have been molded by human hands for generations, and these places are valuable as well. Lake Warner, also known as North Hadley Pond, is one of these special places.

Lake Warner, also known as North Hadley Pond, is one of these special places.

Although Kestrel recognizes the ecological value of removing the dam to restore a free-flowing river, removal is not widely supported by the community because it would mean the loss of this historic millpond. After discussions with town residents, it became clear that the community’s preferred solution is to restore the historic dam in order to maintain the lake. Kestrel is now working with the Friends of Lake Warner & the Mill River, a local volunteer group in Hadley, to raise the funding needed for dam repair.

Kestrel has already spent and committed about 20% of the required funds totaling $75,000. The remaining $275,000 must be raised from a combination of private donations, and town and state funding. A request for $100,000 in CPA funds will be up for a vote at Hadley’s May Town Meeting. State funding of $125,000 for this historic restoration project has been requested and is making its way through the legislative process. The Friends of Lake Warner and Kestrel Land Trust are actively working to raise the remaining $50,000 from local residents, recreational users of the lake, and others who value this unique local landscape.

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

Hadley residents can vote “YES” on May 1 at Town Meeting to approve CPA funds for dam restoration. Lake lovers from around the Valley can also contribute to restore the dam. For more information or to donate, go to www.kestreltrust.org or call 413-549-1097.

Conte Refuge Marks a Milestone

In March, Kestrel was pleased to donate 19 acres of floodplain wetlands in Hatfield to the Silvio O. Conte National Wildlife Refuge. Andrew French, Refuge Project Leader, was even more pleased, as the additional land brought the Refuge’s total acreage over the 36,000 mark! The Conte Refuge now totals 36,006 acres. Congratulations!
Spring Town Meeting Votes Are Key to Conservation Success

CPA funding in Amherst and Belchertown will enable farmland and forest to be protected.

Late last year, the state awarded significant LAND grants for several projects Kestrel is working on with local communities. While this was a critical step toward funding the projects, there’s another piece that needs to be put into place. State LAND grants require a financial match from the community in which the land will be conserved. The most common source of funds comes from the Community Preservation Act in towns that have adopted it, but CPA dollars can only be used if Town Meeting approves. Two projects will be up for CPA funding votes this spring in Amherst and in Belchertown.

CREATE: Fort River Farm Conservation Area & Community Gardens, Amherst

The project known as Fort River Farm Conservation Area in Amherst would protect nearly 20 acres of prime farmland and wildlife habitat along this important tributary of the Connecticut River. The Fort River is home to the federally endangered dwarf-wedge mussel, among other aquatic species. In addition to conserving the land, the Town plans to create a unique integration of public community gardens, passive recreation, and agricultural education for children, adults, and new farmers, close to the village center. The land abuts other permanently protected farmland and is one of the last unprotected parcels in the area. Kestrel would hold a permanent Conservation Restriction on the town-owned land to ensure its protection in perpetuity.

EXPAND: 90 Acres to Jabish Brook Conservation Area, Belchertown

In Belchertown, CPA funds will enable the town to add 90 acres of unbroken upland forest to the Jabish Brook Conservation Area. This rolling terrain with mature oak and other tree species lies near the Quabbin Reservoir. Protecting this large tract of contiguous forestland would support wildlife habitat and provide a critical corridor from the Mount Holyoke Range to the 38 square miles of protected lands surrounding the Quabbin. Large mammals like black bear, moose and bobcat rely on this area. Conserving the land would also protect a critical watershed for three towns and one city. Jabish Brook runs through the property and directly into the Ludlow Reservoir.

State Tax Credit Enables Landowners to Donate Land for Conservation

One of the most valuable gifts you can give to future generations is protecting the land you love. While land or development rights can be sold for conservation, donating your land or a Conservation Restriction (CR) is a generous way to make the process easier and more likely to succeed.

The Massachusetts Conservation Land Tax Credit program was established in 2011 to encourage landowners to make this kind of donation. It provides up to $50,000 in tax credit for a donation of land for conservation purposes or for a CR that permanently protects natural resources.

This new tax credit program recently enabled Kestrel to assist two different landowners with conserving their land through donation. In South Hadley, a landowner donated a CR to the Town on 48 acres to protect woodlands, streams, vernal pools, and high-priority wildlife habitat in the Stony Brook watershed. A Mt. Holyoke College biology professor has conducted songbird research on this land for decades, as it has a rich diversity of species and habitats. Another landowner donated 15 acres as a gift to the Town of Belchertown to create the new Boncik Woods Conservation Area, a beautiful wooded property with a mix of upland and valuable wetlands. Conserving the property protects wildlife habitat while also providing public recreational and educational opportunities, and other benefits such as flood control. The state tax credit program made it possible for the family to donate this property in honor of their family member who enjoyed the woods.

“We’re very grateful for these landowners’ generosity and for the Land Tax Credit program provided by the Commonwealth,” said Ben Wright, Kestrel’s Land Conservation Specialist. “We hope more landowners will take advantage of the opportunity to make this kind of gift in years to come.”
Upcoming Outings

Visit kestraltrust.org for details each month.
Register by email: office@kestraltrust.org.

- **Saturday, APRIL 12, from 1 to 3 p.m.** Explore vernal pools at Fitzgerald Lake in Northampton with educator Brandon Abbott.

- **Saturday, MAY 10, from 9 to 11 a.m.** Celebrate International Migratory Bird Day with an expert-guided bird walk in Hadley, or from 8 to 10 a.m. in Northampton.

- **Saturday, JUNE 7, from 9 a.m. to Noon.** Explore the geology of the New England National Scenic Trail in Belchertown on National Trails Day.

Conserve the Valley You Love

A Simple Way to Leave a Beautiful Legacy

You can make the gift of a lifetime, without rewriting your estate documents. Make Kestrel Land Trust a beneficiary of your retirement plan. All that’s needed is written instruction to the plan administrator. Giving pre-tax retirement plan assets directly to Kestrel is generous, tax-smart, and helps protect the Valley you love, forever.

*(Check with your advisor to be sure the change complements your overall plans.)*

BEQUESTS * RETIREMENT PLAN GIFTS * LIFE INSURANCE * REAL ESTATE GIFTS * CHARITABLE REMAINDER TRUSTS

Please contact us for more information:
Monica Green, Development Director
at 413-549-1097 or email monica@kestreltrust.org

Special Note to Valley Land Fund Donors: If you have included Valley Land Fund in your estate plans, please revise the language to reflect VLF’s merger with Kestrel Land Trust next time you update your legacy documents. Thank you for your support!

New Events Coming Later This Year!

**Children’s Story Walk at Fitzgerald Lake Conservation Area:** Kids will learn about the animals in the forest by reading a story as they follow the trail. Opening event Sunday, June 1 with storytellers, guided nature walks, and more. Installation open through summer.

**Whole Foods Market Picnic Series:** Join Kestrel and Whole Foods for a guided tour of a conservation area and a picnic lunch. *June, July, and September.*

**Children’s Nature Photography Workshop:** Kids learn photography techniques while exploring local conservation areas. *July.*

**6th Annual 5K for Farmland & Farmers Market Festival:** October 19, 2014 at the Hadley Common. 5K Race, 2-Mile Walk, Music, Local Beer, & Fabulous Farmers Market!