Finding Your Way Into the Woods

Go farther and deeper into nature by following a new trail.

Some intrepid outdoor types love to bushwhack their way into the woods, ducking under branches and climbing over fallen trees, following their instincts and desire to explore. For the rest of us, a bit more guidance is needed to get us into the forest or other “wild” spaces. At its most basic, that guidance is simply a trail.

Trails provide a pathway into nature that encourages exploring, by assuring us that others have passed this way before. “A trail offers a sense of belonging for people in the natural world,” said Kat Deely, Kestrel’s new Community Conservation Manager and skilled trail builder. “Trails create a tangible relationship between you and your environment.”

Stewardship Manager Chris Volonte noted that trails provide opportunities for people to get a good outdoor workout, benefitting our physical and mental health. And, trails can benefit the health of the landscape by concentrating human activity along a single pathway. “Trails are a win-win—they inspire love for nature while protecting nature at the same time!”

Dorie Goldman Memorial Trail Opens Paths & Hearts

Since the 1970s, with community support Kestrel has long helped connect people to the land through trails on town conservation areas and other public lands. After the passing of our good friend and spirited hiker, Dorie Goldman, Kestrel was inspired to create a new trail in Pelham in her memory on one of our own lands. This half-mile loop connects to the Amethyst Brook Conservation Area trails that weave among the hemlocks. It also connects to the iconic Robert Frost Trail—which Kestrel helped create and manage in years past—as it heads up the hill toward Mount Orient. The trail offers a beautiful look out into the treetops and will be a favorite spot for birders come spring.

A hiking trail is such a basic element in a landscape that it’s easy to take it for granted. In fact, the better built it is, the less people think about it, said Kat.

But developing a trail that provides a good experience for many people over many years is a significant feat of design and hard labor.

Even with the relatively short new loop, it took three weekends and more than 30 volunteers to cut vegetation, dig stumps, and level the forest floor to create a solid and pleasing footpath. “I never thought about what goes into building a trail,” one UMass volunteer said. “Now I’ll never look at a trail the same way again.”

Many of the volunteers and passers by remarked on how much they appreciated the trails, and were glad to see a new one being created. Perhaps the first people to walk the finished loop were Dorie’s cousin and his wife. “Their faces were glowing—they thought the trail was absolutely beautiful and a fitting tribute to her,” Chris said. But they chuckled at the irony: Dorie knew all the trails, yet she was also the intrepid type who loved to bushwhack.

EXPLORE YOUR VALLEY:
Find new trails to inspire your next adventure: Visit connecticutriver.us and click on the “Hiking/Biking” tab.
Powerful Lessons From the Land Reach Asia’s Next Generation

The way nonprofits operate in our country is unfamiliar to them, said UMass Civic Initiative Director Michael Hannahan. In their countries, citizens do not feel empowered to work together for social change, nor to collaborate with their local or national governments. The hope is that by visiting the U.S., these students will bring home a new awareness of their own potential to make a positive impact on their communities.

Citizen Action: Students Learning by Doing

The following weekend, the YSEALI students were able to experience a different kind of citizen action when they joined Kestrel’s AmeriCorps MassLIFT Stewardship Coordinator at the Reed Conservation Area in Belchertown. The students truly enjoyed their volunteer experience on the land, helping with cleanup and trail maintenance. Though the work wasn’t glamorous, Michael said it was valuable as a team building and bonding experience. LeeAnne Connolly, Belchertown Town Conservation Administrator, said, “It was inspiring to see 22 young adults from so many different countries working so well together for a common cause.”

Kestrel’s Communications & Outreach Manager, Kari Blood, was similarly moved: “In talking with these young people about their experiences in a very different world, I learned as much from them as they did from us.”

Rallying for the Future of the Conte Refuge: A Plan for the Next 15 Years

The Friends of the Conte, including Kestrel, The Nature Conservancy, and the Appalachian Mount Club, recently hosted a “Rally for the Conte” in support of the Silvio O. Conte National Wildlife Refuge’s proposed Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP). A formal public hearing on the CCP proposals followed, with strong support expressed by citizens and conservation groups.

The preferred version of the plan would allow for conserving up to 197,296 acres in a wider range of focus areas throughout the four-state Connecticut River Watershed. It would also expand nature education facilities, including an urban initiative, while continuing to offer recreational access at all refuge divisions with more universally accessible options, like the Fort River Trail in Hadley.

The final plan will be released in the spring, with one more public review period.

Learn more at fws.gov/refuge/Silvio_O_Conte.
Not Just Another Boring Acronym

Don’t let the LWCF disappear: It’s the most important conservation tool you’ve never heard of.

Regrettably, Congress recently allowed LWCF to expire for the first time ever. Without this source of federal funding, our capacity to create and enhance conservation areas—from local parks to national parks—is in jeopardy.

This federal program also funds the Forest Legacy Program, which acquires easements to protect working forests that support sustainable forestry and ensure permanent access to hunting and fishing. This year, Kestrel Land Trust and the Massachusetts Department of Fish and Game have applied for a $4.95 million Forest Legacy grant to protect a vast area of woodlands west of the Quabbin. This project would permanently conserve roughly 2,000 acres within critical state and local watersheds, which provide drinking water to nearly half of the population of the Commonwealth. For this project to succeed, LWCF must remain in place.

Critical Funding for Conservation

At a time when our country is trying to curb its carbon emissions from fossil fuels to slow the impacts of climate change, LWCF provides a sorely needed counterbalance. If we must continue to use oil and gas while we make the shift to renewable energy, we can at least use some of those revenues to ensure the conservation of our most valuable forests and waters. The vast forests of the Northeast help in the climate change fight by capturing carbon, controlling flooding, and providing more resilient wildlife habitats in the face of an unpredictable future.

For 50 years, bipartisan support of LWCF has helped to meet a broad spectrum of conservation needs in the Valley and nationwide. Every member of the Massachusetts Congressional delegation has supported the full and permanent funding of LWCF. With so much at stake, Congress as a whole should reinstate LWCF without delay. The vital lands and waters that make our communities worth living in depend on it.

WHAT YOU CAN DO: Share this with friends and family outside of Massachusetts so they can tell their representatives to support LWCF. Go to www.lwcfcoalition.org/take-action

Saving a Historic Farm for the Future in North Amherst

Only a few miles from the center of downtown Amherst is a place with a rich history and a bright future. The North Amherst Community Farm (NACF) has its home on land that has been continuously farmed since before the American Revolution. Later, it was owned by relatives of Emily Dickinson into the Great Depression. And, by the early 2000’s it was one of the last working farms in North Amherst.

In 2005, Kestrel worked with NACF to protect this farmland forever with a state Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR), which extinguished the development rights. Once the APR was in place, NACF was able to acquire the land and lease it to Simple Gifts Farm to create a vibrant Community Supported Agriculture program (CSA), providing organic local vegetables and meats to over 1,000 local people.

Now, NACF is poised to finish the third stage of this project by purchasing the entire farm including the farmhouse and barns, which will ensure the CSA has a reliable distribution center and the space to train new farmers who work as apprentices on the farm each year.

Kestrel was pleased to offer a $10,000 challenge grant to finish the process of securing this community farm. NACF is well on its way to meeting its financial goals, making this farmland affordable for agriculture long into the future.
Upcoming Walks & Talks

Visit kestreltrust.org for details each month.

New Year’s Day, Jan. 1, 2016, from Noon to 2 p.m.
East Side: Wentworth Farm with Dave King
West Side: Fitzgerald Lake with John Body.

Sunday, February 7, from 10 a.m. – Noon.
Wildlife tracking in the Mineral Hills.

Saturday, March 12, from 1 p.m. – 3 p.m.
Trees by their Bark with Michael Wotjch, Whately.

Register by email: office@kestreltrust.org.

Conserve the Valley You Love

What Will Your Legacy Be?

Did you know that you can make a lasting contribution to conservation in the Valley while also providing for your family’s long-term financial security? Many types of planned gifts can offer you tax savings and other financial benefits. For more information, visit kestreltrust.org/planned-giving-php, or email monica@kestreltrust.org.

Generosity’s Many Benefits
Take advantage of the charitable gift tax deduction in 2015 by donating before midnight on December 31. Check out our “Giving Guide” at kestreltrust.org/donate.php

YES! I want to help Kestrel Land Trust conserve & care for forests and farmlands in the Valley I love.

Here is my gift of: $10 $25 $50 $100 $250 Other: $____

OR DONATE ONLINE: www.kestreltrust.org

Name ____________________________________________

Address __________________________________________

Email ___________________________ Phone _____________

☐ I would like to join Kestrel’s monthly giving circle and support conservation year-round. Use your credit card to give online at kestreltrust.org or return this form with your first installment.

Happy Holidays!

Thank you for helping conserve the Valley you love, this year and always.

FREE Info Session: Financial Planning & Conservation for Landowners

With attorney Elizabeth Wroblicka
Monday, March 14
5:30 p.m. – 7:30 p.m.
Forbes Library, Northampton

A light supper will be served.
RSVP required to monica@kestreltrust.org