WHAT’S INSIDE: Saving This Iconic View
Students & Teens Learn to Love the Land
A Last Wish for a Family’s Forest
Dear friend of the Valley,

Welcome to your new source of inspiration in the Valley—Your Valley. We are excited to bring you this re-envisioned publication to share stories of the important work your support of Kestrel Land Trust makes possible.

In these pages, we'll highlight the landowners, the volunteers, the partners, and the supporters like you who are the heart of the Kestrel community. You'll see how the land you love makes a positive impact in the lives of people of all ages and walks of life, and what you can do to be a part of it.

We'll also introduce you to some of the talented artists who get their inspiration from the land. For this premier issue of Your Valley, we chose Christine Labich’s original pastel of the land on South Maple Street and Moody Bridge Road in Hadley, because we have exciting news to share about the future of this iconic location (See page 4). Read Christine’s story below.

We’d be glad to hear what you think of Your Valley. Submit your comments through the “Contact Us” page on our website: kestreltrust.org/contact.

Thank you for being part of the Kestrel community!

Kari Blood
Communications & Outreach Manager

AMERICORPS/TERRACORPS 2017-18
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Christine Labich
Open Space (Norwottuck) PASTEL 12X18"

“I painted Open Space (Norwottuck) in the field at the corner of South Maple St. and Moody Bridge Rd., one of the treasures of the Valley. The sky there is big, and always has a lot to say. The hay fields, forests, and slopes of Mount Norwottuck are constantly changing color along with the weather and the season, bringing them into new relationships with each other each time I visit—thrilling for a painter, and for those of us lucky enough to live nearby.”

Christine Labich has received national and international recognition for her use of color to evoke feelings of light and space in the landscape. She paints, teaches, and is raising a family in the Pioneer Valley. Chris is a strong supporter of efforts to conserve the natural abundance of the Valley landscape. You can view more of her pastels, oils, and plein air work celebrating the beauty of the Pioneer Valley at christinelabich.com.
Connecting the Next Generation to the Land

UMass Students Take Action

OVER THE PAST THREE YEARS, STUDENTS FROM THE University of Massachusetts Amherst have been learning to understand and love the land through volunteer projects with Kestrel Land Trust and other area nonprofits. Professor Lena Fletcher’s “Environment & Society” fall semester course and her “Sustainable Living: Solutions for the 21st Century” course in the spring both have a civic engagement component. Between 130 and 160 students—from freshmen to seniors—take these classes each semester.

“It’s incredibly important for students to have opportunities to volunteer in the local community,” Lena said. “Students are often too nervous to get active on their own or they don’t know how. By incorporating volunteering with organizations like Kestrel, students can meet community members, get hands-on experience outdoors, and feel good about helping out.”

Since this collaboration began in fall 2015, more than 75 students have worked with Kestrel staff and AmeriCorps service members on a range of projects. They have participated in stewardship activities like clearing trails and installing kestrel nest boxes, as well as community engagement projects like creating “bike to hike” trail guides and volunteering as “trash talkers” at the 5K for Farmland Festival to help manage composting and recycling of waste.

These experiences can leave a lasting impact. Jessica Burks, a student from fall 2016, said volunteering with Kestrel made her more conscious about the importance of civic engagement for the environment. After Jessica graduated and became the HR Coordinator at Atlantic Furniture in Deerfield, she created an Employee Volunteer Program to encourage civic engagement among their staff—and she made sure they knew how to get out on the land to volunteer with Kestrel.

Helping Urban Teens Find a Path to Nature

IF YOU LOVE BEING OUTDOORS, IT’S easy to forget that there are many people in our region who don’t have that same comfort with—or access to—the natural world, especially youth in urban areas like the city of Holyoke.

Last fall, Kestrel began a partnership with Eagle Eye Institute, a nonprofit based in Peru, MA whose mission is to empower urban youth and people of color to care for the environment. Eagle Eye’s Program Manager Cass Pastorelle said, “Eagle Eye has always operated on the belief that nature is transformative. Something magical happens when we bring young people to places where they’re surrounded by nature, free to learn, have fun and explore.”

Eagle Eye has worked primarily with Boston-area youth, and will now have the opportunity to do more work in the Pioneer Valley. Kestrel is funding a part-time Eagle Eye education coordinator to work with Dean Technical High School students in Holyoke during the 2017-18 school year. The project builds on a relationship with Dean Tech established by Kestrel’s AmeriCorps Youth Education Coordinator in 2016.

Cass and education coordinator Joe Jewett are now working with Dean Tech teens to introduce ideas about nature and outdoor skills. Joe is planning after-school outings to conservation areas like Mount Tom State Park, as well as projects that will connect to the students’ in-class technical training. One of the first projects will involve students in the carpentry shop building benches for Kestrel conservation areas.
The Value of a View

An inviting wide-open field set against the backdrop of the Mount Holyoke Range: This iconic Valley panorama has a powerful emotional impact for local people.

This is the case for the view on the corner of South Maple Street and Moody Bridge Road in Hadley, which has inspired painters like Christine Labich and photographers like Stephen Gingold in the photo above.

So it was no surprise that when a “For Sale” sign suddenly appeared on this property in 2016, people from around the Valley began emailing and calling Kestrel’s office. One person wrote: “I’m heartbroken to see that this land is being sold to become a subdivision.” Another told us: “I almost drove my car off the road and into the field when I saw that sign. Gotta save that land!”

This picturesque 31-acre property is part of a mosaic of farmlands, grasslands, and riverlands that stretch from the base of the Mount Holyoke Range to the Fort River in Hadley. Not only is it at the heart of a scenic landscape that defines our Valley, but this land is also essential to drinking water protection, wildlife diversity, and recreational opportunities. In the last decade, Kestrel and our public partners have helped conserve over 500 acres of this area as forever farmland or as grasslands.

**Determination Pays Off**

Backed by the passion and generosity of people like you, Kestrel was able to make an initial purchase offer to the landowner, Eversource, a regional energy company. At first, the company had planned to sell the land for a housing development. Months later the “For Sale” sign came down, but this time it was because Eversource was pursuing plans for a major solar installation on the property instead. It seemed that this would be the end of the story for this land and its iconic view. However, Kestrel's staff was determined to find a way to save this land. Over the next 18 months, a more acceptable site was finally found in a commercial district in another town, and Eversource agreed to sell the land on South Maple Street to Kestrel to be permanently conserved. When it is finally protected this spring, this property will preserve critical open grassland habitat for birds and wildlife.

Voices from the community provided the energy needed to secure this special place, so that the view so many love will continue to inspire generations to come.

“The field at the corner of South Maple St. and Moody Bridge Rd. is one of the treasures of the Valley.”
— CHRISTINE LABICH, ARTIST

Save the Places You Love
Donate so that Kestrel can act quickly to save the places that matter to you.
kestreltrust.org/give/donate
One Couple’s Woodland Becomes a Forest for All, Forever

Thirty years ago, Amherst College Professor John “Jack” Pemberton and his wife Jane bought a home in Pelham that came with 11 acres of land.

Across the road, beautiful woodlands beckoned, and the Pembertons later purchased 52 acres of this forested area. “My husband roamed the trails on this land with our dogs almost daily for many years,” Jane said. “We named the trails after our grandchildren, who often joined him in enjoying the forest.”

The Pembertons recognized that in the future, when their land was passed on to new owners, it could be at risk for development because of its scenic views. So, in 2015, they started a conversation with Kestrel Land Trust to talk about the process of conserving this land that was so important to them.

Creating Critical Wildlife & Human Connections

In fact, this place was important to many others as well—human and wildlife alike. The upland forest of oak and hickory slopes down towards Arnold Road, and a rich wetland habitat, with a certified vernal pool, lies to the south. The wetlands provide breeding grounds for amphibians like wood frogs and salamanders, and the forest also has potential to offer prime habitat for the Eastern Box Turtle, which MassWildlife has identified as a species of special concern.

Just as important for wildlife is where this land sits on the landscape. It’s uniquely situated adjacent to several conservation areas, including Kestrel’s 78-acre natural area to the east, and the Town of Pelham’s Butter Hill Wildlife Sanctuary to the south. Conserving this land creates a critical link in a 475-acre network of protected lands, allowing far-ranging species like black bear, bobcat, and moose to move around the region without being boxed in by development.

For the human community, the Pembertons’ land provides an extensive trail network, connecting to miles of existing trails in Butter Hill Sanctuary, Harkness Road Conservation Area and Well Away Farm Conservation Area. The land also fills a critical missing link between Kestrel’s property—which has been landlocked without public access for years—and the town conservation areas.

A Last Wish Becomes Reality

Sadly, John Pemberton passed away before he could see his land conserved, but Jane forged ahead to see their dream become a reality. Between the summer and fall of 2017, all 52 acres were conserved in a partnership between the Pelham Conservation Commission and Kestrel Land Trust.

Jane Pemberton sold 36 acres to Kestrel and then donated the northern 16 acres to the Town of Pelham, all of which will be managed for wildlife habitat and public recreation. Funding was provided by a state Conservation Partnership Grant, private foundation grants, Pelham CPA funds, and donations from many generous neighbors.

“We did not want to see this beautiful piece of property developed with houses, and felt that Kestrel was the perfect partner for conserving the property,” said Jane. Fittingly, the newly conserved land is named in her husband’s memory:

“My husband roamed the trails on this land with our dogs almost daily for many years.”

— JANE PEMBERTON

PHOTO: NANCY CHURCH
A Close Encounter With the Cerulean Warbler
by Lee Halasz

Spring is an amazing time to be outdoors, and for a birder like me, May is the most exciting month: it's the peak of bird activity for the year.

On one particular May outing with my three-year-old son, I saw a bird that stole the show as he sported the color of the clear blue sky.

Most of us have probably seen blue jays and bluebirds. Perhaps you have even glimpsed an indigo bunting. But on this particular day, what we saw was an unusual sight in the Valley: a richly blue cerulean warbler.

My son and I had taken a loop walk around the summit of Mount Holyoke at Skinner State Park. As we approached the car to leave, I heard a song that I instantly knew was different from the huge variety of bird songs we had been hearing. It was a male cerulean warbler, singing with all his might.

By now, my son was low on patience, so I whipped out a lollipop, knowing it would give me a few extra minutes to enjoy this rare opportunity. Seeing this bird at such close quarters and hearing it sing so loudly made my day—and the lollipop made my son's.

Populations of cerulean warblers have declined by more than half in the last 50 years. But we can slow this decline.

Protecting the Right Places

Being on the Mount Holyoke Range, we were in exactly the sort of habitat that cerulean warblers use: ridge-tops and steep upper slopes facing south, dominated by big oak trees in large patches of forest. Sometimes finding wildlife is simply about being in the right place.

However, there is another “right place” for cerulean warblers: South America. In fact, while these birds spend just a few months in eastern North America, most of their time is spent in countries like Venezuela, Colombia and Ecuador. Twice a year, they spend a few weeks in migration traveling between the two continents.

Unfortunately, in the last 50 years populations of cerulean warblers have declined by more than half. Fortunately, there are things we can do to slow this decline. Scientists have found that targeted forest management in the United States and in South America can increase breeding populations. This effort benefits other declining songbird species as well.

By supporting Kestrel Land Trust’s efforts to conserve the forests on and around the Mount Holyoke and Mount Tom Ranges, as well as other forest lands around the Valley, you are helping to save vital habitat for migratory birds like the cerulean warbler. Perhaps this will give my son another chance to see one of these amazing little birds again during his lifetime—when he can better appreciate the experience without a lollipop.

Adapted from a blog by Lee Halasz published on the United States Fish & Wildlife Service Northeast Region website in 2016.
Michael Posner is a retired pediatrician from Northampton, and a member of our volunteer Stew Crew, giving his time as a property monitor.

I HAVE BEEN A VOLUNTEER FOR Kestrel Land Trust since the fall of 2014, after I took a map-reading and GPS workshop organized by Kestrel. I was motivated to get involved by Kestrel's expansion west across the Connecticut River [when Kestrel merged with Valley Land Fund in 2011.] I had previously thought of Kestrel as an Amherst organization that I didn’t need to know about—until I saw that they were active with the Mineral Hills Conservation Area in Northampton. Kestrel’s energetic protection of land west of the river in partnership with the city of Northampton has been heartening.

My major pleasure from volunteering comes from being out in the woods and having a purpose to justify my being there. Now that I’m retired, I have more time to put into getting out in the hills and showing younger people what excites me. It’s important for me to talk about the changes I’ve seen in our forests so the next generation will have the perspective to be more effective. Making those connections helps to keep me going.

As a volunteer with Kestrel I enjoy meeting like-minded people who care about the wild places of our Valley as much as I do. (Kestrel also throws great parties!) I actually feel like I get more back than I put in.
A Historic Brew Reborn: “Farm to Trail Ale” Benefits Farmland

CELEBRATE THE PIONEER VALLEY’S farming heritage with the rebirth of a historic craft beer that will support conservation of our farms and forests!

Beer begins with the land: healthy farm soils produce quality grains that make a great brew. Our new “Farm to Trail Ale” is a unique Roggenbier style of rye ale brewed by Abandoned Building Brewery in Easthampton, using a historic recipe created by Beerology in Northampton, and made from local rye and barley malted by Valley Malt in Hadley.

You can find Farm to Trail Ale at a variety of local retail stores, bars, and restaurants throughout the Valley. Abandoned Building Brewery is generously donating a portion of the proceeds from every pint or can sold to support Kestrel’s work to conserve the Valley you love, from the farm to the trail.

Visit kestreltrust.org to learn more about where to find Farm to Trail Ale, and for upcoming events to celebrate the farmland that makes a great beer possible.

Taste This Beer!
Find retail locations at kestreltrust.org/farm-to-trail-ale-available

COMING SOON
Spring Membership Drive
April 1 – June 30

Join us
Renew your support
Invite a friend

Love Your Valley, Love Your Land Trust!
kestreltrust.org