WHAT'S INSIDE: Local Forests Are a Natural Climate Solution
Immigrants’ Dreams Take Root on Conserved Farmland
Bringing the Robert Frost Trail Into the Future
Finding Hope at Home on the Land

AS THE HEADLINES ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE grow more urgent, I am thinking about where we can really make a difference. If we’re not acting on a national or even a global scale, are our efforts worth it? It may seem insignificant to focus on the place we live, but I believe that acting here at home is the most hopeful thing we can do.

The Valley is our home. It’s where you feel connected to family and friends, but also to abundant forests, productive farms, beautiful trails, and all other forms of life that share this special place. Land conservation starts at home because this is the place we know best and love most. Conservation ensures that family farms and forests will continue providing clean air, water, food, and places to connect with nature.

And while it may feel as if little is being done to prevent climate catastrophe, don’t despair—something is in fact being done. Together, people like you are working with land trusts like Kestrel and their communities to protect the natural fabric of our homelands. We’re protecting forests to sequester carbon emissions, which can mitigate climate change. We’re conserving farms to sustain local food systems and ensure food security. We’re protecting wetlands to create resiliency to more frequent flooding and powerful storms.

What if each of us focused some of our efforts on conserving and caring for the place where we live? We can’t afford to wait for our national leaders to protect the planet we call home—and we’re not waiting. With your support, we’re at work fighting the impacts of climate change every day. Land trusts in every state across the country are conserving land at home—where we all have the power to make a real difference.

Kristin DeBoer, Executive Director

From The Heart of the Valley

Fire & Ice

by Robert Frost

Some say the world will end in fire,
Some say in ice.

From what I’ve tasted of desire
I hold with those who favor fire.

But if it had to perish twice,
I think I know enough of hate
To know that for destruction ice
Is also great
And would suffice.

First printed in Harper’s Magazine, December 1920

Community Helps Weather A Storm at Red Fire Farm

THE FIRST DAY OF AUGUST WAS AS PERFECT AS SUMMER days get: Sunny and warm with little humidity, just right for the Farm-to-Table Harvest Dinner at Red Fire Farm in Granby.

But just two days before, the scene was anything but perfect at Red Fire’s farm site in Montague. During a thunderstorm, a powerful microburst plowed across the farmland, raining tomato and pepper crops still heavy with fruit, knocking trees down across farm roads, and ripping apart protective crop tunnels.

Despite the damage and the significant cleanup effort underway, farm owners Sarah and Ryan Voiland graciously hosted the field-side dinner at their main farm, catered by Wheelhouse using Red Fire produce.

Kestrel and Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture (CISA) partnered on this special event to celebrate farmers and the land that sustains us all. Our organizations share twin goals of supporting local farms and preserving the farmland that’s the foundation of the Valley’s local food system.

Ryan and Sarah are CISA Local Hero members, and they have partnered with Kestrel in the past and again in 2018 to protect the land they farm in Granby. As dinner guests heard from the Voilands about their farm—and the recent storm damage—they were moved to help. Generous donations were made on the spot that evening, a sign of just how dedicated our community is to the land and its stewards.

Fighting for the Earth: A Legacy

WHO WAS ROBIE HUBLEY? HE WAS a teacher, scientist, lobbyist, political analyst, mentor and an activist who envisioned solutions, then figured out who should be on the team to get things done. The attitude he brought to every environmental fight was that living should be fun and full of laughter, music, wonder and hard work on things that really mattered.

He prioritized and strategized to help protect our mountains, our rivers, water supply, historic sites and views. The history of environmental activism in the valley for the last 50 years would be incomplete without Robie’s name and contributions. Along with his friends and colleagues—Alexandra Dawson, Terry Blunt, Lincoln Brower, and many others—together to protect the environment.
LISTEN: Greta Thunberg on Forests
"Right now, we are ignoring natural climate solutions. We spend 1,000 times more on global fossil fuel subsidies than on nature-based solutions. What should we do? It's simple. We need to protect, restore, and fund. You can be part of this. What you do counts."

– Climate activist Greta Thunberg

Learn More: Keeping forests as forests is a powerful step we can take locally to help avoid climate breakdown. Read about the power of our forests to sequester and store carbon at masswoods.org/caring-your-land/forest-carbon

Immigrants' Dreams Take Root on Conserved Farmland

For much of human history, farming has been a way of life around the world. It's never been easy work, and the challenges have only grown more complex in modern times. In the Valley, agriculture is embedded in our communities and in our landscape, but it's still difficult for new farmers to get started.

Getting access to good farmland is the biggest hurdle. This is especially true for immigrants coming from other countries seeking a new life. So, when Kestrel helped the City of Northampton protect an 8-acre farm field that straddles the town line with Hatfield as part of a larger Fitzgerald Lake/Broad Brook conservation project, an opportunity emerged.

The Pioneer Valley Workers Center (PVWC), whose mission is to build the collective power of workers and immigrants in our region, was looking for farmland to support a new cooperative farm to be run by families from Central America. The field now owned by Kestrel and the City of Northampton was offered to the PVWC as a pilot program with the hope of establishing a long-term agreement for farming the land.

Strengthening Communities Together

The six members of this new worker coop are primarily farmers from Mexico and El Salvador. With support from PVWC and All Farmers—an affiliate of CISA—their goal is not only to grow crops for their families, but to establish a farm business that operates collaboratively and makes decisions democratically. Despite the fact that all of the members work 6 days a week at other jobs, their first harvest this year was a great success.

The Cooperative produced over 1,000 lbs of local produce, selling some at the nearby River Valley Coop and sharing more with their communities, proving this is fertile ground for hopes and dreams to take root in a new community. Gabriella della Croce, a Lead Organizer with the PVWC, said, "We are tremendously grateful to Kestrel and the City of Northampton for their commitment to making land accessible to low-wage workers. Many of our members were subsistence farmers in their home countries, and bring decades of agricultural experience to their jobs on farms here.” Some of these farmers are already very familiar with local soils, having worked at other area farms.

"We are grateful to Kestrel and the City for their commitment to making land accessible to our members—many of whom were subsistence farmers in their home countries.”

Mark Wamsley, Conservation & Stewardship Manager at Kestrel Land Trust, said "Conserving local farmland is inherently about helping people and communities nourish themselves while reducing our collective impact on the planet. Some of these families came from areas of the world where droughts related to climate change have severely undermined local agriculture.”

A drought has decimated crops in Central America’s "dry corridor" along the Pacific Coast, impacting small-scale farmers. Droughts and other extreme weather events may continue to drive higher levels of migration from this and other regions of the world.

Fortunately, this small community of immigrants are finding a new home here in the Valley. Patti, one of the farm coop members, spoke with excitement about her long-term vision for the farm. "On this land we want to grow our own crops for our community. This will be land for us as Latinos, who come from other places.” She laughs as she watches her young son run around the open field and adds, "This will also be an opportunity to teach our children to love the Earth. So that they can see how food is grown and how from tiny seeds, something big can grow."
Preparing Our Trails for the Future

The Robert Frost Trail (RFT), named in honor of the poet and long-time Amherst college professor, was designed for serious wandering. It was conceived in 1982 by Pete Westover, then Director of Conservation for the Town of Amherst. While many short trails existed then, Pete envisioned a long-distance trail winding from Wendell State Forest to the Mount Holyoke Range. Over the years, with the participation of private and public landowners and the help of Kestrel Trust volunteers, the 47-mile trail became a reality.

Passing through 11 towns, the RFT has become a well-known fixture connecting people and places in our region, and it is one of the five longest trails in Massachusetts. However, time has taken its toll on this beloved route—and so has a changing climate. Downed trees, water run-off, and wetter conditions impair many sections of the trail. To address these problems, Kestrel and the Town of Amherst were recently awarded a Recreational Trails Program grant of $50,000 to restore the RFT and prepare it for the challenges of the next 50 years.

A New Normal for Trails

Pete recently counted 80 trees down along the northern third of the trail. “We’re getting a lot of blow-down. That’s going to be the new rule: bigger, more frequent storms and a lot of trees down on the trail.” Standing dead trees need attention too, before they create a hazard for hikers.

Trail erosion from storm run-off and standing water in places that used to be dry is also an increasing challenge. “Heavy use on wet ground by people or bikes or horses can cause permanent problems. As a trail gets wet, people walk outside that area and then gradually the trail widens,” Pete said. After that, storm run-off may take over and turn the trail into a stream, necessitating major re-routing.

Flood events are causing big problems, as well, according to Dave Ziomek, Amherst Assistant Town Manager & Director of Conservation & Development. “We’ve lost bridges like the one at Amethyst Brook Conservation Area, which was sheared off by flooding and ice. A 50-foot bridge like that is expensive to replace. Is it worth it? Will it get broken again? These are questions we need to answer.”

Funding is Critical

The labor and materials needed to restore and maintain trails in a changing climate have created a new reality: Towns and organizations need to focus more funding on this aspect of land stewardship. “I’m so glad Kestrel has taken the initiative to find funds to update and maintain this trail,” Pete said.

Work to upgrade the RFT will begin in 2020, and will be taken in stages, beginning with sections on public land and permanently protected private land. Planned improvements include bridge upgrades, storm damage cleanup, hazard tree removal, rerouting wet or eroded trails, and updating wayfinding features such as signs and trail blazing. Additional funding will be needed to keep the project moving forward, preserving enjoyment of the RFT for generations of Valley residents to come.

The Robert Frost Trail Needs You!

The RFT’s 47 miles of trails offer a wonderful range of outdoor experiences in all seasons, the numerous farms and wonderful local produce, the proximity of rural and more urban areas, the overall progressive attitude about people and the environment.

Share a memorable place Kestrel has helped to protect that you have enjoyed.

Amethyst Brook Conservation Area has been a magical place to take our children and our dog. We have spent endless days hiking, wading, breaking ice, taking in the views from Mount Orient, watching how the seasons change the brook, and so much more.

Join the Land & Trail Crew! 

Become a volunteer to care for our conserved lands and public trails!
Save the Date!

"Come to the Woods"
Da Camera Singers will present a benefit concert for Kestrel Land Trust

Friday, January 17, 2020 at 8 pm
Buckley Recital Hall, Amherst College

COVER ARTIST SPOTLIGHT

Robert Masla

Hope, OIL PAINTING

For 15 years, I have spent my winters painting and teaching at my Studios South on Mexico’s Pacific Coast. However, the New England Landscape is embedded in me on a cellular level, having painted it for nearly 40 years. This image is inspired from the view behind my Studios North and home in Ashfield. My landscape painting (often done en plein air) is based on recognizing the “Sacred” aspect of nature—the “oneness” that we are a part of, not separate from, Nature. I paint to experience my connection to Nature—the awe, beauty, and unique vantage of the finite within the infinite—and to share that vision with the viewer.

View Robert Masla’s artwork at R. Michelson Galleries in Northampton or at MaslaFineArt.com.

YOUR VALLEY

They want to know what you’re doing to fight climate change.

Do you have an answer?

Here in the Valley, you do.

With Kestrel Land Trust, you are part of the natural solution.

Join us. For them. For the land.

#GIVINGTUESDAY
December 3, 2019

See the entire image on the front cover!