Criteria to Assess Parcels for Forever-Wild Protection

Landowners can preserve mature forests to sustain the complex web of life and maximize carbon sequestration to mitigate climate change. Is your forested land a good candidate for forever-wild conservation? These criteria can help determine the answer:

**STRUCTURE**
How long have you owned your forestland? When was the last time it was logged? We can do a site visit to help assess the forest’s age. Larger dominant trees and later forest successional conditions can sequester the most carbon. Forests that have not been harvested recently or have only been minimally harvested, or have not otherwise been disturbed for long periods are more likely to be currently storing and be immediately capable of sequestering larger quantities of carbon.

**SIZE**
The bigger the better! Kestrel seeks to conserve forests on a landscape scale to maintain wildlife habitat for species that need thousands of acres to thrive, like black bear, moose, and bobcat. The size of your parcel will be a factor as we consider the best candidates for forever-wild conservation.

**SOILS**
Have you ever wondered about the soil beneath the forest? More fertile growing conditions yield forests with a greater capacity to sequester carbon through encouraging more rapid tree growth. And much of the carbon that is stored in a forest is stored in the rich soils. We can map the parcels of land that you own to see if they have “Prime/Important Forest Soils” greater than 50%, which is ideal. Soils that have never been plowed are likely to be currently storing more carbon than soils with land that was historically plowed.

**SURROUNDS**
Is your land surrounded by other protected land? The more a parcel is embedded in conserved forest, the more resilient it will be over the long term. While the status of surrounding forestland will not affect the carbon sequestration benefits, it will help protect the forested landscape as a whole. We can map your land with priority systems developed by UMass Amherst, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, and The Nature Conservancy to see how it ranks in our ecological priorities systems.

**STORIES:** Do you love your forest and have a passion for wild nature? The more motivated you are, the more motivated we will be to help you permanently preserve your forest forever.

Learn More About Conserving Your Forest Land
Visit kestreltrust.org/conserve/process or call (413) 549-1097 to speak to one of our conservation specialists.

How to Donate to the Monica & Bob Leverett Forever-Wild Conservation Fund
Mail a check payable to Kestrel Land Trust with "Leverett Forever-Wild Fund" in the memo line, to PO Box 1016, Amherst MA, 01004. Or contribute online at kestreltrust.org/give/donate.
Imagine stepping back into New England 400 years ago. The landscape is dense with trees of all sizes—some of them are giants. There's a lush, green understory of ferns, wildflowers, and mosses sprouting from a thick, spongy layer of duff on the forest floor. This rich structure is the old-growth forest that coexisted with native peoples.

In the 1700s, European settlers moved in and most ancient forests were soon lost to their axes, one tree at a time. Much of New England was transformed from old-growth forest to open pasture. As farmers moved westward in the 1800s, the forests grew back, but eventually many were cut a second time.

Generations later a Southerner with a love of documenting big trees began exploring Massachusetts. In the 1980s, Bob Leverett was hunting for large white pines when he started seeing areas that differed from typical New England forests.

“What I was seeing were physical characteristics that looked like the Smoky Mountains region where I grew up,” Bob recalled. Old-growth forests are much more common there, and Bob thought he had seen a number of sites like this in New England. “I realized then that we probably had small patches of bona-fide old-growth forests here.”

Researchers, including Bob, have now found that less than 1/10 of one percent of all forests in the state are in fact old growth. Recent studies also suggest that the largest trees provide critical benefits that smaller trees don’t, including stabilizing the surrounding ecosystem and storing large amounts of carbon. This is an area of research that is only now coming to fruition.

**A Fund for Conserving Forests as Forever-Wild**

For the past 35 years, Bob (and more recently with his wife Monica Jakuc Leverett) has championed the benefits of old-growth and mature forests. These benefits include “supporting the complex web of life, carbon sequestration, water quality, and the restoration of the human spirit.” For this reason, the Leveretts have made a generous commitment to help Kestrel Land Trust conserve forested wildlands in the Pioneer Valley.

“We have established the Monica and Bob Leverett Forever-Wild Conservation Fund at Kestrel Land Trust to encourage the preservation of our mature forests into the future.” With a gift of $10,000 to Kestrel in 2018, yearly contributions, and a bequest planned for the future, this new fund is dedicated exclusively to conserving forests as “forever-wild, leaving the woods alone to develop as nature so masterfully designed them to do,” they explained. Management of these forests will be permitted only to remove invasive species, control insects or pathogens, and create hiking trails.

“Our goal is to preserve wildlands that are on their way to late-successional status in order to capitalize on their ecological benefits, and to maximize their advanced rates of carbon sequestration in order to mitigate climate change.” The Fund will also support Kestrel’s creation of education materials and programs to build awareness about the benefits of “forever-wild” conservation options for landowners.

“As residents of the Connecticut River Valley for decades, we want to pass on a legacy of stately, inspiring forests,” the Leveretts said. “We hope that others will join us in this mission.”

**Bob Leverett determined that this black birch tree is at least 200 years old.**

**“We have created a ‘Forever-Wild Fund’ at Kestrel to encourage preservation of our mature forests into the future.”**

— MONICA & BOB LEVERETT

Bob Leverett is the co-founder of the Native Tree Society, President of Friends of Mohawk Trail State Forest, and chairperson for the MA Dept. of Conservation & Recreation Forest Reserves Science Advisory Committee.

Monica Jakuc Leverett is a pianist and Elsie Irwin Sweeney Professor Emerita of Music at Smith College, where she taught from 1969 until 2008.