

YOUR VALLEY

CONSERVE | CARE | CONNECT

FALL 2020

**KESTREL
LAND TRUST**

*WHAT'S INSIDE: Race, Justice, and the Land
Our Mountains Matter: Saving the Valley's Uplands
Most Successful Kestrel Nest Box Season—Ever!*



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An Outpouring of Generosity

“WE GIVE BACK TO OURSELVES AND TO EACH other when we preserve this region.” This wise observation came from a supporter who responded to our recent member survey. It’s a fitting reminder of how important it is to give back to our community during difficult times. While many nonprofits are facing serious financial challenges, I’m so heartened that you—our members—stepped up this spring with an outpouring of support for the land that sustains every community in the Valley.



Because of your generosity, our first Give Back to the Land Day was a huge success. This 24-hour online giving event—organized with three other regional land trusts—raised more than \$35,000 for land conservation throughout western Massachusetts. Many donors made an additional gift to support local food security, contributing nearly \$4,400 to the Food Bank of Western MA, when the need has never been greater.

This Earth Day giving event launched our most successful Spring Membership Drive yet. More than 400 supporters renewed their membership or joined Kestrel for the first time to help conserve the Valley’s forests, farms, and waterways.

Our members were also generous with their ideas about what’s important to them and what we can do better. We received nearly 500 responses to our survey from members and others who care about the land. We’ll use this feedback to make land conservation more meaningful to you.

Your engagement and support is so important, especially during this challenging time. Thank you for being an integral part of Kestrel’s community.

Kristin DeBoer, Executive Director



Jane Yolen, the author of 389 books for children and adults, is a city girl who went to Smith College and fell in love with the Valley. She has lived in Hatfield for 50 years, where she raised a family with her late husband David Stemple, a well-known Valley birder. Jane says, “David and I first became part of the Kestrel Land Trust through another Valley children’s book writer, Robert McClung, who became a dear friend.”

FROM THE HEART OF THE VALLEY

The Path the Moon Shines On

by Jane Yolen

*I do not see it as a path,
 but the vixen, her tail a rudder,
 runs along it, never a false step.
 She is plush in her summer clothing,
 faded reds and gold.
 Out shopping for chicken, I suppose,
 or possibly a slow, plump dove.
 Maybe a vole. I have seen her leap
 like a hungry parenthesis
 over a lump only she sees,
 or hears beneath the ground,
 its death tolling like a bell.
 Her kits will be happy.
 She never goes back home
 without a mouth full of dinner,
 and a story to tell.*

Race, Justice & the Land: A Message From the Board

PROTESTS AGAINST SYSTEMIC RACISM ACROSS THE country this summer have focused attention on the ongoing and urgent need to transform our society into one that is more just and equitable. Kestrel Land Trust stands in solidarity with people of color and those who condemn the acts of bigotry, bias, and violence against them.

Like land trusts across the country, Kestrel's board and staff realize that we all have a shared responsibility to serve rural, suburban, and urban communities alike, including people from all socioeconomic backgrounds and racial identities. As a member of the national Land Trust Alliance, Kestrel Land Trust is committed to building a land conservation community that understands, values, and embraces diversity.

Our work together to protect land is deeply rooted in the

Share Your Experience With Us

We want to listen and learn how to better support the diversity of communities in our region. If you care about the Valley's lands and have personal experience or professional expertise related to equity and inclusion, please email your thoughts to kari@kestreltrust.org.

Thank you for helping us build a future in which all people are able to enjoy the benefits of the land.

Virtual Learning With the Land

GETTING OUTDOORS TOGETHER TO explore a local forest, field, or stream and learn something new is one of our favorite things to do. During the pandemic, we must put the health of our community first, so instead of holding in-person events, we're providing a safe way to explore and learn virtually.



Thanks to our generous local naturalist experts, we've created a series of "Learning with the Land" videos that you can access anytime on our website or YouTube. And, there will be more to come!

 **Meet the Trees** with Michael Wojtech: Fascinating facts about local tree species. (8 min.)

 **Go Deep into Vernal Pools** with Molly Hale & John Body: Many creatures rely on these short-lived pools. (28 min.)

 **Mature Forests, Carbon & Climate** with Bob Leverett: The role local forests play in mitigating climate change. (11 min.)

 **Birds of the Valley** with David Peake-Jones & Mike Locher: The lifestyles & habitats of the Valley's birds. (34 min.)

 **Forest Bathing** with Lori Benoit: The benefits & techniques of this meditative practice. (16 min.)



CONNECT

belief that everyone should have access to the land for health, happiness, recreation, and basic human rights like clean water and healthy food.

There is much we need to learn and do to achieve this goal, and we commit to examining our priorities and practices as a board and staff, and to seek out and listen to those marginalized people who have not been heard in the Pioneer Valley and around the nation. We hope this act of listening and introspection will help us ensure that there are parks, conserved forests, farms, riverways and trails throughout the Valley that are relevant to all communities and meaningful to everyone's life.

Scott Jackson, Chair
on behalf of the Kestrel Land Trust Board and Staff



Watch the Videos!

Go to kestreltrust.org/connect/events. You'll also find these and other interesting videos when you go to [YouTube.com](https://www.youtube.com) and type **Kestrel Land Trust** in the search field to find our channel.

Our Mountains Matter: Saving Uplands in the Valley

PHOTO BY JAMIE MALCOLM-BROWN

The hills and mountains of our region define the Pioneer Valley: Without them, there would literally *be* no valley. Mountains—even little ones—live large in our lives.

From Mount Toby to the north, the Mount Holyoke Range and Mount Tom to the south, the Westhampton hills to the west, and the Pelham hills to the east, your support is helping to conserve these vital uplands.

The topography of mountains and hills provide a wide range of wildlife habitats and microclimates and support a diversity of plants and animals that are more resilient to climate change. Uplands host thousands of acres of forests, which store carbon and provide a natural means of fighting climate change. The fresh water we rely on for drinking has its source in the headwaters and brooks that flow from the highest elevations. And, of course, our hills and mountains provide many of the trails we love for hiking, mountain biking, and other recreation.

Take a look at how you're helping to conserve the mountains you love:

MOUNT HOLYOKE RANGE

Amherst, Hadley, South Hadley

Status: 586 acres nearly complete

The Mount Holyoke Range is the Valley's iconic scenic backdrop. And it is a perfect destination for recreation, with hundreds of local trails from five towns, and a long section of the New England National Scenic Trail that knits it all together on the ridge.

Over the past year, Kestrel has been working proactively with state and town partners and private landowners to permanently protect 586 more acres on the Range, building on the momentum of 1,000 acres conserved in 2015. This includes 456 acres of woodlands off Chmura Road in Hadley, 125 acres of woodland and active farmland in South Hadley, and a five-acre trailhead to expand the Sweet Alice Conservation Area in Amherst.

These projects are expected to be completed by the end of August. Check our website in the fall for a map to show you all the newly protected trails and forests on the Range.

FENNESSEY FAMILY FOREST

Pelham Hills

Status: 45 acres conserved

The Fennessey family lived in Pelham for over 70 years. Don Fennessey, who celebrated his 100th birthday this year, bought the family's house on Daniel Shays Highway in the 1940s. It was one of only two homes that remained on the east side of the road after the Quabbin Reservoir was created, so over the decades, Don appreciated watching the forest grow up around them. He also owned two woodlots in the western Pelham Hills.

These two diverse upland forest parcels are now permanently conserved, thanks to Don and his family. With steep slopes, bedrock ledges, and cool stream corridors, this area offers habitat for a wide range of wildlife. Totalling 45 acres, the land is part of a large undeveloped expanse of forest that provides a connection between the Quabbin Reservoir and conservation land in Amherst. The area also hosts headwaters for the Heatherstone Brook—a tributary of the Fort River—and Amethyst Brook, helping to safeguard drinking water quality.

The newly conserved land owned by Kestrel, with a conservation restriction to be held by the Town of Pelham, will help maintain connections to the Robert Frost Trail, as well as a network of other hiking and mountain biking trails.

MOUNT TOBY

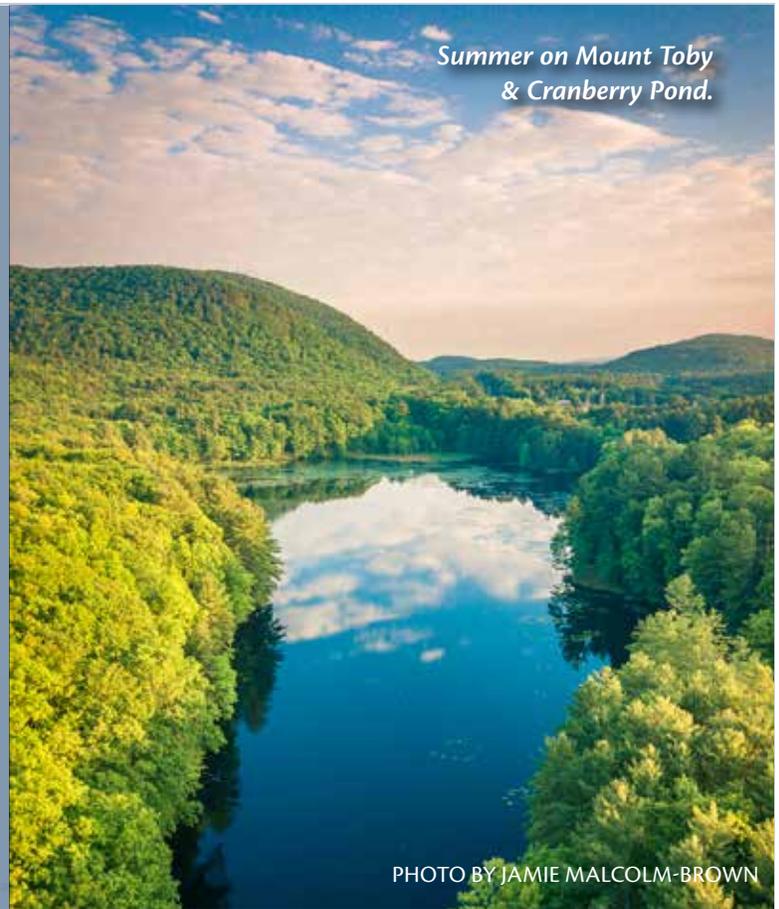
Sunderland

Status: 40 acres in progress

Mount Toby is the highest summit among a cluster of forested low peaks and cliffs that stretch across Sunderland, Leverett, and Montague. With its rocky ledges, waterfalls, and ponds, this upland is home to many rare plants and animals, including 16 species of special concern, like the Leafy White Orchid and the Jefferson Salamander. It's one of the most biodiverse areas in our region.

While some of the mountain is conserved, at least 600 acres are still at risk. As a statewide conservation priority, Kestrel is working with the Town of Sunderland to save this ecologically important mountain beginning with a 40-acre woodland parcel that contains a stream and groundwaters vital to Sunderland's drinking water quality.

Though small, Sunderland is growing because of its close proximity to Amherst and Northampton. Protecting this land will help curb future development on the mountain. Once this area is conserved, public access for passive recreation, such as hiking, snowshoeing, and wildlife viewing will be allowed.



*Summer on Mount Toby
& Cranberry Pond.*

PHOTO BY JAMIE MALCOLM-BROWN



*A mother bear needs at least
10 square miles of forest habitat.*

PHOTO BY MARK LINDHULT

A LONG-AWAITED VICTORY FOR LAND & WATER:

This summer, the Great Outdoors Act was made into law, guaranteeing annual funding of the federal **Land & Water Conservation Fund (LWCF)**. A surcharge on the oil and gas industry provides \$900 million a year for protecting natural lands and waters nationwide. In the Valley, LWCF funding will make it possible for Kestrel to conserve woodlands west of the Quabbin and grasslands in the Silvio Conte National Wildlife Refuge in Hadley. It will also provide access to state grants that help communities create parks and trails. We are grateful to Senators Warren and Markey and Congressmen McGovern and Neal for working to pass this critical law.

BREWER BROOK FOREST

Westhampton/Williamsburg

Status: 1,000 acres conserved & Phase 2 Beginning

Last year, Kestrel Land Trust, Hilltown Land Trust, MassWildlife, and the towns of Williamsburg, Westhampton, Chesterfield, and Northampton, collaborated to protect 1,000 acres of land as part of the Brewer Brook Forest Conservation Project.

Brewer Brook Forest is one of the largest areas of unbroken forest in the Pioneer Valley. This area connects an enormous block of protected lands, from Gilbert Bliss State Forest, Hiram Fox Wildlife Management Area, and Knightville Dam and Recreation Area to smaller protected areas like Dead Branch State Forest, Brewer Brook Wildlife Management Area, and the Marble Brook and Mineral Hills Conservation areas in Northampton.

This vast landscape provides an important wildlife corridor that stretches from eastern New York to southern Vermont. In fact, a bear could walk through the Brewer Brook Forest for 9 miles and only cross one road!

Kestrel and Hilltown Land Trusts are inviting landowners to help launch the second phase of this project, expanding and connecting existing conserved land in Brewer Brook Forest.

Learn More: Watch a short video about the Brewer Brook project and how you can get involved at kestreltrust.org/brewer-brook-forest-phase-2-video/

One of this season's unprecedented
52 American kestrel chicks.

A Year of "Firsts" for the Kestrel Nest Box Project

IN JUNE, WHEN CONSERVATION and Stewardship Manager Chris Volonte and Board Trustee Anthony Hill set out to visit American kestrel nest boxes, it was clear that this was going to be an unusual year—and not just because they had to wear masks and ride in separate cars. In an unusually condensed two-day trek around

prior breeding seasons.

2020 is the 8th year of the Kestrel Nest Box Project. The effort aims to support the Pioneer Valley's American kestrel population by providing nesting sites in their preferred grassland habitat, much of which has been lost to development. Three new boxes joined the project at Quonquont Farm in Whately this year, for a total of 21 boxes at sites throughout Amherst, Hadley, Northampton, Easthampton, Holyoke, and Westhampton,

the Valley to check nest boxes for chicks, what they found was extraordinary: They observed more kestrel chicks in one day than they had seen during any of the seven

Since 2013, Chris and Anthony—who are both trained and certified—have "banded" every kestrel chick with lightweight ID cuffs around their legs. They also collect data on each

bird to share with the Massachusetts State Ornithologist for a statewide study to learn more about how to increase kestrel populations.

"Every year we track successful versus unsuccessful boxes—successful meaning eggs laid and chicks hatched and banded," Chris said. **"This was an unprecedented season for our nest boxes with the highest number of boxes hosting kestrels since we started the project.** Even better, all those boxes were successful. This is unusual, since often at least one kestrel pair encounters misfortune in their attempt to raise chicks."

With twice as many boxes holding successful nests as any prior year, they banded a total of 52 chicks, almost doubling the previous high of 27 chicks in 2017. They also banded one adult female—often a challenge to catch—at the Silvio O. Conte National Wildlife Refuge in Hadley. And, in another first this year, all four of the boxes along Moody Bridge Road on the Refuge were occupied by kestrel pairs. In previous years, never more than two of those boxes were occupied in a given year.

Volunteers who monitor nest box activity and landowners who host the boxes on their properties are a critical part of the project. Allison Bell, co-owner of Quonquont Farm, is a new volunteer who is doing both. Allison used her skills to set up our project's first nest box camera in one of three boxes hosted at the farm and orchard. The camera gave Allison constant data to share, as well as beautiful images of the kestrel family carrying out their daily activities.

See How They Grow: kestreltrust.org/blog

View more photos in the complete 2020 season report and watch Allison's videos of chicks being banded and growing day by day in the nest.

The Greenberg Conservation Area Needs Your Help

AS WITH MANY PUBLIC TRAILS AND PARKS this spring and summer, Kestrel's Greenberg Family Conservation Area in Westhampton has seen a big increase in visitors as people needed to get outdoors. This is exactly the kind of community resource Kestrel hoped to create. The recent increase in use, however, has had some damaging impacts on the trails and streambank that now need to be addressed.

To protect the trails and improve your hiking experience, we need to add bridging over muddy areas in several places. **We're grateful that some Westhampton neighbors have already sent donations to help with the repair costs, but more funds are still needed!**

If the Greenberg Family Forest is important to you, **please consider making a tax-deductible gift online or by check earmarked for "Greenberg Trail Repairs."**

Thank you for helping keep our trails safe and enjoyable!



“ I am leaving bequests to my younger family members in my will. My hope is that each of them will use it to enhance their lives in some way.

I am leaving a bequest to Kestrel for the same reason: to enhance life for everyone in the Valley. I passionately support Kestrel's mission and values, all that it does and stands for. Now more than ever, we need local farms, fresh water, cool forests, and places to get out to for exercise, relief, and peace.

By conserving land and all that's a part of it, we make life more liveable for us humans, as well as for the animal and plants with which we share this little patch of earth. It gives me joy to know that my gift will extend to the generations to come. ”

ANN HALLSTEIN, KESTREL BOARD TRUSTEE
AND RETIRED CHURCH PASTOR



GIVE BACK

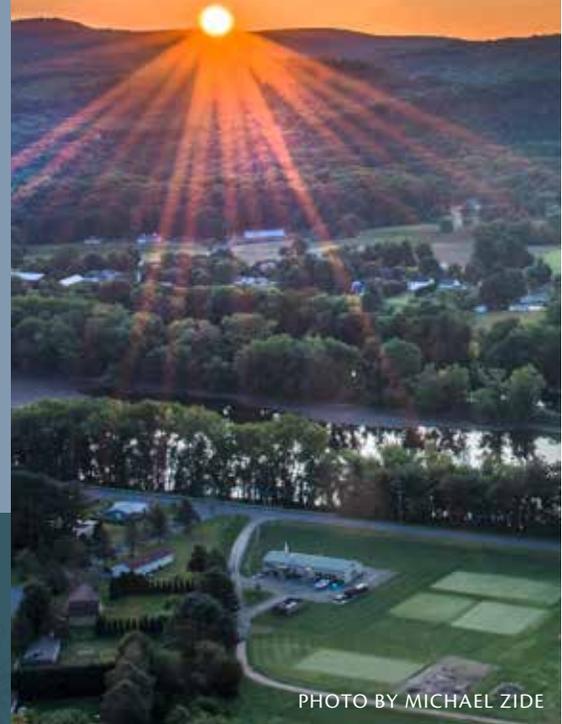


PHOTO BY MICHAEL ZIDE

What Will Your Legacy Be?

Learn more about opportunities to support land conservation at kestreltrust.org/give/legacy or contact Monica Green at monica@kestreltrust.org or (413) 549-1097.

VOLUNTEER VOICES

Susan Haff



Sue is retired but she is always busy!
She lives in South Deerfield.

AFTER RETIRING FROM THE BOSTON area in 2014, I returned to Western Massachusetts to be closer to my children. I've been interested in the environment for many years, and the opportunity to support this cause in retirement played an important part in my decision to come back to the Pioneer Valley.

I attended Kestrel's annual New Year's Day walk in 2015 and innocently asked whether there were ever any opportunities to assist with Kestrel events. The next thing I knew I was "observing" a meeting of the Outreach Committee and became a volunteer. That was more than 5 years ago!

In my past, I had run the programming at a living history museum. With this background, I help Kestrel coordinate community events to connect people to

the land. It never gets old.

Last winter, I volunteered at a Kestrel walk on identifying trees by their bark. Among the adult participants was a boy about 8 years old. After a few trees he began to lose interest, but our eagle-eyed leader called the boy's attention to a fresh track in the snow. They examined it closely and pondered who/what could have made the imprint. That was the boy's magic moment: he now had a mission to identify every track he saw.

Unanticipated discoveries! That's the hook: Once we really begin to see, smell, hear, wonder, and study—in the woods or other pristine place—we are, indeed, hooked; now we care! Caring is the start of doing our part to protect the beautiful Valley in which we are privileged to live.

Learn About the Kestrel Volunteer Crews!
kestreltrust.org/give/volunteer



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"Night, Night Valley!"

The Story Walk is open at the Greenberg Family Conservation Area, Westhampton. Written by local author Jennifer Page and illustrated with water-color paintings by local artist Rachel Chapman. The Story Walk will be in place through fall 2020.



*See the entire image
on the front cover!*

COVER ARTIST SPOTLIGHT

Robert Masla

Look Up & Listen, Again OIL PAINTING

Though I travel a lot and paint wherever I go, I have a special affinity to the New England landscape—especially around my home in Ashfield. This piece is part of a series that I began 25 years ago and add to every few years, inspired by the lush Massachusetts fall scenery and a game I used to play with our kids. We would lay silently in the grass beneath the maple trees, looking up and listening, and softly call out the things we heard: a bird chirping, rustling of the branches in the wind, a distant dog bark, or the sound of our hearts beating.

"Gratitude," a solo exhibition of Bob Masla's paintings, opens Oct. 1 at R. Michelson Galleries in Northampton. Details at rmichelson.com.