WHAT'S INSIDE: Celebrating the Success of the Promise to the Valley; Lathrop Community Makes a Commitment to the Land; Robert Frost Trail Revival in Action
AMIDST DAILY NEWS STORIES about the entire community of life suffering in some way from the climate crisis, it can be difficult to find good news about the environment. That’s one reason I was motivated to work in land conservation 20 years ago: Every forest or farm protected is tangible progress on the ground.

While we must continue to save our most precious lands and waters, conservation alone is not enough. That’s why the poorly named “Inflation Reduction Act” (IRA) passed by the U.S. Congress this August—with its deep investment in a broad range of climate solutions—is real progress to celebrate.

Through tax incentives and direct investment totaling almost $370 billion, the IRA is the most significant federal initiative to address the climate crisis. Communities across the country will now have opportunities to implement transformative solutions: from improving energy efficiency of homes and buildings, to decarbonizing transportation and energy systems with renewable energy, to creating just and equitable ways of living with nature.

The IRA will also provide land trusts with more incentives for private landowners to conserve and restore forests and farms, including:

➤ $20 billion for Farm Bill conservation programs
➤ $700 million for the Forest Legacy program
➤ $450 million for small-forest landowners to carry out climate mitigation projects

According to the Land Trust Alliance, “This is an unprecedented investment in voluntary private land conservation and the work of land trusts across the country to protect our irreplaceable farmlands, forests, ranches and wetlands.”

Of course, the law is far from perfect. For example, oil and gas leasing will still be permitted on some federal lands for 10 more years. But the other climate provisions are expected to offset this compromise, reducing carbon emissions 40% by 2030.

With your support, we will leverage this new federal investment to expand the Valley’s natural climate solutions—saving the land you love and addressing the climate emergency we face together.

Kristin DeBoer, Executive Director

“Let’s move forward with love, not conquest; humility, not righteousness; generous curiosity, not hardened assumptions. It is a magnificent thing to be alive in a moment that matters so much. Let’s proceed with broken-open hearts, seeking truth, summoning courage, and focused on solutions.”

From All We Can Save: Truth, Courage, and Solutions for the Climate Crisis, co-edited by Ayana Elizabeth Johnson and Katherine K. Wilkinson
Revive Outside: Opening Minds to Nature’s Gifts

There’s no prescription that can improve physical and mental health at the same time better than simply spending time in nature. That was the spark behind Revive Outside, a new program launched earlier this year.

Kestrel volunteer and newly retired psychologist Michael Hutton-Woodland worked with Becca Feidelson, TerraCorps Youth Education Coordinator (2021-22) to create the pilot project. Building on Michael’s professional connections to area youth-service organizations, they planned a series of sensory exploration walks at local conservation areas for families with young children from the Northampton Parents Center and the Northampton/ Hadley Family Connection, as well as teens and young adults from Community Action’s Youth Council.

Michael said, “Becoming comfortable in nature is a developmental process. I love seeing children, parents and young adults open up to the wonder of nature, and feel how restorative it is to just breathe in the scents and listen to the sounds in the woods.”

Revive Outside is opening a pathway outdoors for families who otherwise don’t get out into nature, allowing parents to be with their children in a new way. “We weren’t rushing to get to a destination, but walking at a pace to observe and take in beauty,” Michael said. Parents commented on how engaged and calm their children were, and how much stamina even the youngest ones had.

Staff from Community Action said that the program provided their group with a restorative, fun outing to get to know each other in person after a year of Zoom gatherings. It was a first experience in the woods for some. “There was a sense of adventure, joy, and connection during our trips. None of the youth had visited these conservation areas before, and they were able to experience them as resources to support their mental, physical, and emotional health.”

Nearly all the youth and families who participated in Revive Outside said they look forward to returning to these nature areas. The program will continue in the fall offering more opportunities for youth and families to experience the healing power of nature.

Welcome New TerraCorps Members Jabbar & Callahan

This September, Kestrel welcomes two new TerraCorps service members for our 13th year in the AmeriCorps program.

Jabbar Wali Muhammad will serve as our Youth Education Coordinator. He is from Indian Orchard in Springfield and graduated from Framingham State University in 2021 with a B.S. in Biology. He spent four years with the nonprofit Gardening the Community in Springfield, a farm that focuses on food justice and youth development. Jabbar says: “I have a big passion for wildlife biology, and I hope to pursue it as a career in the near future. I’m excited to be a Terracorps member and I look forward to the opportunities to work with other people in nature.”

Callahan Murphy will serve as our Land Steward Coordinator. She is from Longmeadow and received a B.S. in Natural Resource Conservation from UMass Amherst this May. Callie says: “I am very excited to start my year with Kestrel and use my degree to care for some of our area’s most beautiful lands. I can’t wait to get out in the field with Kestrel’s volunteers and hopefully give back a portion of what Western Massachusetts has given me over the years.”
A lively celebration of the Valley affirmed a serious commitment to the land.

IT WAS AN UNUSUALLY COOL, WINDY day in mid-June when 200 Kestrel members came together at Park Hill Orchard in Easthampton to celebrate the successful conclusion of our Promise to the Valley Campaign. More than 400 generous members contributed more than $5.6 million in gifts and pledges—exceeding our goal and providing a launching pad for our next 50 years of service to the region.

Executive Director Kristin DeBoer shared her thoughts on the significance of this moment:

“When we were first dreaming up this campaign, we searched for the right name, but it didn’t take long. The idea of making a promise to the Valley came easily. Our tag line was already ‘Conserving the Valley you love,’ and promises are best born out of love. But we’ve all heard the advice, ‘Don’t make promises you can’t keep,’ and when the future seems uncertain, it’s hard to keep a promise for a particular outcome.

Yet, because of the generosity of every individual, business, and organization that joined with us to make a Promise to the Valley, Kestrel now has the resources to work toward our pledge to conserve 5,000 acres of wildlands, woodlands, and farmland in 5 years. It won’t be easy, but we take this promise seriously.”

Your support of the Promise to the Valley Campaign has already begun making an impact through our Conservation Opportunities Fund, Special Places Fund, and Valley Trails Fund. Below is a sample of what our team is working on right now, in partnership with landowners, towns, and state and federal agencies. Up to 10% of the costs of these projects will be supported by campaign funds.

As we continue conserving forests and farms, and creating trails, we’ll update you on what your promise has made possible.

KEEPING THE PROMISES WE MAKE

FORESTS: 760 ACRES TO BE CONSERVED FOR WILDLIFE, CLIMATE, WATER QUALITY & RECREATION

➤ We’re working on more than 10 projects with 12 landowners in 7 towns to protect forests. This includes 250 acres in the Brewer Brook area in Westhampton, 225 acres in the Saw Mill Hills of Northampton, 163 acres in Southampton, 125 acres in Shutesbury & Leverett: and smaller parcels on the Mount Holyoke Range and Mount Toby.

FARMS: 430 ACRES TO BE CONSERVED FOR LOCAL FOOD & WILDLIFE HABITAT

➤ Three critical large farm projects in progress: 210-acre Lauzier Farm in South Hadley, 120-acre Vollinger Farm near Fitzgerald Lake in Northampton, and in Agawam, a special project to secure 100 acres for immigrant and refugee farmers with our partner, All Farmers.

PARKS & TRAILS FOR PUBLIC RECREATION

➤ The stewardship team is making new places available for hiking and recreation. Projects include Kestrel’s new nature retreat at Ames Pond in Shutesbury with an accessible trail and boardwalk; Robert Frost Trail Revival, with trail and signage improvements (see page 6); and assisting with creation and expansion of municipal parks in Holyoke (Anniversary Hill Park), Easthampton (Mt. Tom North Trailhead Park), and Amherst (Hickory Ridge).
Lathrop Community Is Committed to the Land

WHEN BARBARA WALVOORD and her wife Sharon Grace first moved to the Lathrop Community (a Kendal affiliate) in 2014, they started to explore the land around the Easthampton senior-living campus. “There were forests, and meadows and streams and vernal pools, and we thought, ‘Wow, this is beautiful.’ We began to realize this was an extremely important piece of land.”

It wasn’t long before Barbara and Sharon helped to establish a Land Conservation Committee with other volunteer residents, and Barbara took a leadership role. In part, because of their passion for the land—and their diligence in learning about it—the place they came to love has been permanently conserved.

A 78-acre matrix of woods, meadows, and streams on the 175-acre campus was permanently protected this spring with a Conservation Restriction (CR) held by Kestrel. It’s the latest piece in a long-term collaborative effort to conserve lands around Park Hill in Easthampton. (See sidebar.)

Many Voices, Many Hands Protected the Land

This project is an example of what’s known as “mitigation” conservation, in which developers are required by the city or town to conserve land in compensation for land that they disturb or build on. It’s a land-use planning tool that municipalities can use to balance development needs with protection of natural resources.

Many passionate Lathrop residents provided their well-informed input as the CR document was drafted, collectively spending hundreds of hours on the project. The CR even highlights wildlife habitat that was significantly improved by the residents’ successful clearing of invasive plants from 50 acres of now conserved woods.

Kamala Brush, Vice President of the Easthampton Residents’ Association, said the effort “brought together Lathrop residents, management, and board, public officials, and Kestrel … in a shared commitment to conservation.” Barbara said, “Kestrel was our choice to hold the CR. Every interaction with Kestrel’s staff has been informative, warm, and collaborative. We are very lucky to be working with Kestrel.”

The newly conserved private land on the campus includes 20 acres of fields federally classified as prime farmland, and farmland of statewide importance. The Bassett Brook crosses through the area, which includes several acres of wetlands and multiple certified vernal pools. It also supports the local aquifer, providing drinking water for the wider community, and protects valuable wildlife corridors and habitat for species like salamanders, foxes, and likely even box turtles.

“We understand the relationship between the land on which our homes are built and the conserved land as one ecosystem that must be managed with care for all living things,” Barbara said.

The Big Picture at Park Hill

In 1998, Valley Land Fund (VLF), which merged with Kestrel in 2011, and Pascommuck Conservation Trust (PCT)—a volunteer land trust serving Easthampton—began a collaborative initiative to protect the Park Hill area: 1,000 acres of fields, farms, and forests. Today, more than 500 acres are protected, including the most recent CR at Lathrop. The largest pieces initially conserved with the City and state were the 124-acre Park Hill Orchard and 55-acre Micka Farm in 1988 and the 165-acre Echodale Farm conserved with The Trust for Public Land and PCT in 2008.

Thanks to a restricted gift for Easthampton, as part of the Promise to the Valley Campaign, Kestrel will continue to work collaboratively to protect lands on Park Hill and other key parcels in the City. READ MORE AT KESTRELTRUST.ORG/BLOG
The Robert Frost Trail (RFT)—named for the poet and Amherst college professor—winds through the heart of our Valley.

From the Mount Holyoke Range to Wendell State Forest, the RFT traverses both public and private lands, rewarding users with a full picture of the local landscapes: rugged ledges and ravines; streams and ponds; forests and farmland. From challenging summit treks to rambles through wooded neighborhoods, the trail is beloved by hikers, trail runners, mountain bikers, horseback riders and more.

Established in the 1980s by then Town of Amherst Conservation Director Peter Westover with support from volunteers with The Kestrel Trust, today the trail is as appreciated as ever. However, over the past four decades it has begun to show its age.

As part of Kestrel’s commitment to natural recreational trails in the Valley, our stewardship staff is teaming up with public and private landowners to ensure the longevity of the RFT through trail maintenance and revitalized community involvement. The project is called the Robert Frost Trail Revival.

A Foundation for All Farmers in Springfield

To help “grow” nonprofit All Farmers’ first community garden for immigrant farmers, several Kestrel staff members joined forces with 20 volunteers in West Springfield in July. This beautiful, fertile 6-acre farm field along Paucatuck Brook on Dewey St. was purchased and conserved in a partnership between All Farmers and Kestrel, with funding from Eversource for a mitigation project. 120 native trees and shrubs were planted along a wetland buffer strip in preparation for the garden plots that will provide local immigrant and refugee farmers a place to grow their own food. Being near a bus route makes the area far more accessible to those without their own vehicles. It’s an important effort to integrate food justice and land conservation in our region.

Highlights from the Robert Frost Trail Revival Project:

➤ Expanding: One of the five longest trails in Massachusetts, passing through 11 towns, the RFT now has grown to 42 miles. With funding support from an RFT enthusiast, a 5-mile trail extension was newly designated through Skinner and Mt. Holyoke Range state parks between Rts. 116 and 47, in collaboration with MA Dept of Conservation & Recreation, Amherst College, and a private landowner. This brings to fruition the original vision for the RFT route from the CT River to Wendell State Forest.

➤ Maintaining: With Mass Recreational Trails grant funding, Kestrel coordinated community volunteers to fix some trouble spots along the RFT in Mt. Toby State Forest and the Town of Leverett’s Ruth McIntire Conservation Area. A trail reroute, drainage work, and corridor clearing are nearly complete. In collaboration with Appalachian Mountain Club, we secured an additional grant for regional trail maintenance on the RFT and New England Trail on the Mt. Holyoke Range in 2023.

➤ Enhancing: Thanks to a joint Recreational Trails Grant with the Town of Amherst, and additional private funding raised by Kestrel, the Town has completed the installation of new bog bridges along the RFT on Town conservation lands, from Lawrence Swamp to North Amherst.

➤ Securing: We’re working to secure a trail license from the Massachusetts Dept. of Fish & Game to maintain the trail on state Wildlife Management Areas in Montague and Sunderland.

➤ Creating a New Identity: With Town of Amherst and other partners, we are creating an RFT visual “brand” that will be reflected in upgraded trailhead and directional signage, mapping, and a revised trail guide online and in print.

➤ Re-energizing Volunteers: Kestrel and Town of Amherst have launched a Trail Adopter program engaging local volunteers in trail monitoring and maintenance on public lands.
**Volunteer Voices**

David Mullins

David (left) is a retired high school math teacher who taught in both Amherst and Northampton schools. He lives in Amherst and also volunteers his building skills with Habitat for Humanity and Amherst Community Theater. (Kestrel volunteer Jon Lord also pictured at right, with Julian’s Door in the background.)

**NetLogix Gives Back to the Land Through Technology**

While Kestrel’s mission is focused on land and nature, our work wouldn’t be possible without the tools of technology. For almost 10 years, the Westfield-based business NetLogix has served as our remote IT department, and recently the company became a leadership business supporter as well.

NetLogix provides our staff with critical computer network support, and their friendly team is always there when we need them. Founded in 2004, the business has grown to a staff of 15 in its Westfield office. In 2021 the company opened a satellite office in Boston. It now serves 85 clients throughout New England, in legal, insurance, healthcare, construction, municipal, non-profit and other sectors, and the staff monitors more than 5,000 network devices—including all of ours!

**AS A VOLUNTEER ON KESTREL’S Woodworking Crew, my first project was in December of 2020 at their new Whately Center Woods nature retreat. Initially, I got involved because a good friend, Chuck Dauchy, the prior owner of the Whately Woods property, worked with Kestrel to conserve his land. Chuck told me that they could use my carpentry abilities, so I reached out to Kestrel’s stewardship team and was enlisted to design and build gates to block off private woods roads. I assembled a crew of skilled helpers to assist on the project.

Since then, I have worked on several other projects, including a minor renovation in the new office, reorganization of tools and material storage, building a new signpost for Kestrel’s hanging street sign on Bay Rd. I’ve also helped install kiosks and build the boardwalks at Whately Woods.

The most memorable project, though, was renovating Julian’s Door earlier this year. This was a deteriorating art installation built by the late Julian Janowitz at Ames Pond in Shutesbury, on the land he left to Kestrel. We had to move the freestanding door structure 3 feet away from the tree that was growing into its roof. We set up a system of ropes and temporary scaffolding to raise up the entire structure and pull it in the direction it needed to move while it was suspended off the ground. With several pulls on the rope using a block and tackle, the entire structure inched its way slowly over to align with the new foundation we had set in place. It was surprisingly exciting and satisfying, even though it took 5 hours!

I enjoy staying active in my retirement, and since I have skills that are needed to move stewardship projects forward, I’m glad to do my part to support Kestrel’s mission.

**Business Partner Profile**

NetLogix founder Marco Liquori expressed interest in joining Kestrel’s business sponsor program last year. “As we say in our own mission statement, NetLogix has the courage in business to do the right thing for the right reasons, going above and beyond, even when no one is watching. Supporting Kestrel’s mission to protect the natural resources in our region felt like the right thing for my business to do,” Marco said.

NetLogix is a valued business partner in Kestrel’s work to conserve and care for the Valley’s forests, farms, parks, and trails, and we are grateful for their generous support.

Share Your Valley Story! kestreltrust.org/connect/share/
Get Your Trail Shoes On!
Support Kestrel’s Mt. Tom Fund with this exciting, rugged race route on Mt. Tom State Reservation.

➤ 25K solo/relay OR 50K Ultra course
➤ Start/finish/party at Millside Park, Easthampton
➤ Food & local beer by New City Brewery
➤ Commemorative pint glass & lots of fun prizes

Details and registration at kestreltrust.org/events
Presented by Beast Coast Trail Running

UPCOMING ONLINE EVENT

Occupying Massachusetts: Layers of History on Indigenous Land

How do people occupy land and make it their “home”? How are these stories of occupation told? How can we engage with difficult histories? Photographer Sandra Matthews and Indigenous activist David Brule will speak about these questions and their newly published photobook.

LIVE ONLINE: Sept. 22, 6:30-7:30 pm
Register at kestreltrust.org/events

COVER ARTIST SPOTLIGHT

Martha Brouwer
Tuesday Morning, ACRYLIC PAINTING

On my daily walks, it is the New England landscape that sparks my creative ideas. This particular painting is more of an idea than a specific place. It was inspired by fall in the Valley and it’s about the feel of grabbing the last bit of summer while anticipating the colors of autumn.

Painting is my passion. I enjoy layering many coats of paint to create texture. My recent work reflects this interest in contrasting color and texture, and it incorporates local settings or ideas inspired by these places. I strongly support Kestrel’s mission to conserve and care for the lands of the Connecticut River Valley.

See Martha’s work in a group show with Sally Dillon & Judy Novak in December at Jones Library’s Burnett Gallery, or visit marthabrouwer.com.