HARDLY A WEEK GOES BY WITHOUT some startling news about the climate crisis. From hurricanes to fires to 70-degree November days in the Valley. Each is a stark reminder that the time is now to take action to avoid the worst effects of global warming.

Fortunately, technological solutions to the climate crisis are plentiful: electric cars, solar panels, wind turbines, energy efficient buildings. But there’s another critical solution to the climate crisis that also helps address the biodiversity crisis: Saving forests.

According to New England’s Climate Imperative, a recent report from the Highstead Foundation, “New England forests are a critical yet underutilized tool in fighting climate change.” The report outlines five pathways that would offer the biggest impact from our forests:

1. **Avoided Deforestation**: Each year, 28,000 acres of forests are lost to development. Reducing deforestation to 7,000 acres per year in New England would keep 74 million U.S. tons of Carbon Dioxide Equivalent (CO2e) out of the atmosphere by 2050.

2. **Wildland Reserves**: Less than 4% of our forests are currently protected as wildland reserves. If just 10% of New England’s forests are allowed to mature unharvested as wild forests, they would sequester an additional 50 million U.S. tons of CO2e by 2050.

3. **Improved Forest Management**: We all depend on wood products, and New England is a great place to grow trees. By changing forest management practices to maximize carbon sequestration, we could maintain timber harvest volumes while increasing carbon storage. If just 50% of logging operations employed climate-smart techniques, an additional 203 million tons of CO2e could be sequestered by 2050.

4. **Mass Timber Construction**: Trees are a valuable climate solution even when used as timber. Using trees as structural building material is much less carbon intensive than steel or concrete, and stores carbon throughout the life of the building. If 50% of new multi-story buildings used mass timber construction, an additional 15 million tons of CO2e could be stored.

5. **Urban and Suburban Forests**: Expanding tree and forest cover within our communities has enormous benefits even beyond carbon, including shade, clean air, clean water, and recreation. A 5% increase in urban tree canopy in New England could sequester an additional 17 million tons of CO2e by 2050.

By investing in Kestrel Land Trust, you’re supporting three of these five solutions: 1. protecting land from development to avoid deforestation, 2. conserving land as wildlands, and 3. working with landowners to ensure sustainable, climate-smart forestry.

At the same time, you’re saving wonderful woody and wild places that both wildlife and humans need to thrive. Thank you for making this important work possible.

Kristin DeBoer
Executive Director

Learn More: Read the full version of this post and download New England’s Climate Imperative report at kestreltrust.org/blog/
The Robert Floyd Gallery Celebrates Conserved Lands

NATURE AND THE LAND have inspired artists and photographers for generations. Throughout the last year, the Robert Floyd Gallery in Southampton generously sponsored a photography contest to benefit Kestrel. More than a dozen talented local photographers explored and photographed conservation areas in the Valley that Kestrel helped protect. Robert Floyd shared that he was inspired to encourage photographers to artistically express their feelings walking these conservation areas. As the photos will be provided for Kestrel’s use, he said, “The images shared will encourage the general public to visit the conservation areas themselves.”

Images were on view for a short time during the Floyd Gallery exhibit Celebrating Kestrel Land Trust: 50 Years and Going Strong sponsored by the Monson Arts Council at the Monson House of Art. Three photographers were selected for this special exhibit: Patricia Crutchfield, Steve Gingold, and Bob Solosko. Then in November, the Floyd Gallery presented an exhibit of Pat Crutchfield’s work, The Forest Floor: Intimate Landscapes from Kestrel Land Trust Conservation Areas.

“I wanted to capture and celebrate the diversity, color, and beauty of the landscapes and plant life throughout Kestrel properties,” Pat said. “They are a gift to me, and I wanted to share them.” Pat serves on Kestrel’s Board of Directors and is known for her annual social justice photography projects, including Communities of Hope: Gardening Through the Pandemic.

Kestrel’s Staff and Board of Directors Welcome New Members

TIM SILVA: OPERATIONS DIRECTOR

Tim first joined Kestrel in 2010, serving as the land trust’s first AmeriCorps Land Steward. He rejoins the team this year after a decade-long career as a public librarian most recently as the Library Director of the Ayer (MA) Library. His earlier careers as a field archeologist, landscaper, and 13 years as a land steward with The Trustees of Reservations will enable Tim to support our conservation and stewardship staff. Tim and his spouse, Andrea Freeman, recently moved back to Northampton.

ELIZABETH BLAYLOCK: BOARD MEMBER

Elizabeth is an experienced management consultant and coach, working with leading organizations, including the Center for Applied Research (CFAR), where she led the Academic Medicine and Strategy Practices. She has also served as a manager and leader in mission-driven organizations including Christiana Care Health System and American Board of Internal Medicine. Elizabeth has spent much of her life in New England and being outside has always been important to her. She lives in Shutesbury.

PETER CURTIS: BOARD MEMBER

Peter is a botanist and Professor Emeritus of Ecology at Ohio State University. His research focused on the ecological impacts of changing climate, land-use, and biodiversity. He also studies carbon sequestration in aging forests in the Northeast. He has served on editorial and scientific advisory boards and chaired the OSU Department of Evolution, Ecology, and Organismal Biology. He is an avid hiker, trail steward, and wild-seed sower. Peter lives in Northampton.
The future Valley Conservation Cemetery will require a unique location, still to be found.

**Imagine walking along a quiet path** through a meadow, the songbirds flitting between tall grasses and native wildflowers buzzing with pollinators. This place is familiar to you because you visit it often to honor someone who has died and is buried on this land.

This land is conserved by a land trust and it’s also a cemetery—a simple burial ground memorialized in nature and protected forever. In this cemetery, there are no upright granite headstones, no chain link or iron fences and no manicured lawns. There are no concrete grave liners or metal burial vaults below ground.

Conservation cemeteries are sacred places that offer friends, family, and the wider community a restorative place for experiencing loss, grief, and the healing properties of nature. As public interest in green burial grows, Green Burial Massachusetts (GBM)—a nonprofit champion of natural burial throughout the state for over 15 years—is working with Kestrel to create the Commonwealth’s first conservation cemetery in the Connecticut River Valley.

With experienced partners and strong public interest, we are confident that the vision of a conservation cemetery can become a reality. Generous seed funding from area philanthropists will enable Kestrel to purchase and permanently protect land for the future Valley Conservation Cemetery.

However, the search for the right parcel has been challenging. The Valley's topography with its abundant streams, wetlands, and rocky hillsides combined with the requirement to include buffer zones (750' from private wells) to protect water quality makes the search particularly formidable.

**Seeking the Right Place**

To help with this critical step in the process of creating the first conservation cemetery in our region, Kestrel and GBM have hired Christina Petersen, a long-time partner in conservation in the Valley. "I’m well acquainted with the land and ownership base of the Connecticut River Valley through my former job purchasing land for the MA Department of Fish and Game, so this ‘big search’ suits me well," said Christina.

We’ve also enlisted assistance from UMass Amherst Environmental Conservation students to use GIS-mapping technology to research potential parcels that could provide the right conditions. A suitable parcel of land would be between 20 and 50 acres in size with maintained road frontage, and have a mix of fields and forest with the right soils and limited wetlands. Ideally, it would also be near other conserved land to connect wildlife habitat, and provide an inspiring view. A fallow farm could be ideal.

Christina said, “That’s a challenging set of constraints, but we’re analyzing the towns one at a time and developing some good leads.”

Once the right parcel of land is found, the land will be purchased by GBM Cemetery (a private, non-profit cemetery organization) with a Conservation Restriction held by Kestrel. The cemetery will be available to everyone, and will provide a sustainable alternative to conventional burial by adhering to strict green burial standards, while protecting the land for its natural values and creating a sacred place for generations to come.

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**Green Burial: The Facts**

➤ Most conventional cemeteries do not allow natural burial: they require a burial vault or concrete liner.

➤ Bodies are not embalmed with chemicals, but are wrapped in a shroud or placed in a simple pine box. Cremated remains may also be buried.

➤ Burials are at least 3.5 feet underground, providing a “smell barrier” for both wildlife and humans.

➤ Burials don’t contaminate deep ground water & burial sites are set back from surface drinking water sources.

**Learn More:** conservationcemeteryMA.org.

If you know of land that might suit this project, fill out the contact form under the “Get Involved” tab.
Your Drinking Water: From Forest to Faucet

THIS PAST SUMMER’S SEVERE DROUGHT, which transformed normally free-flowing streams into mud puddles, focused our attention on something we often take for granted: Our drinking water. When we turn on the tap, most of us in the Valley can expect clean water to drink, cook and wash with. But where does that water actually come from?

The water we rely on often comes from the forest. In fact, forest lands provide over half of our nation’s drinking water supply.

Your drinking water can come from a public source like a reservoir or municipal well, or a private source like a household well. Reservoirs are surface waters, while wells pull from ground water that soaks into the soil, stored in underground aquifers.

Regardless of its source, drinking water is part of a larger cycle that includes the land it flows through. Forests act as natural sponges, collecting rain and releasing it slowly into streams and rivers, filtering sediments and pollutants from the water in the soil before it reaches a water source. This can produce clean water more cost-effectively than any human-made water treatment system. Tree cover in a forest also reduces evaporation, allowing more water to replenish underground aquifers.

Communities Must Work Together

Forest conservation is one of the most important ways to protect our drinking water, both its quality and availability, especially in the face of climate change. In our region, communities often conserve forests not only in their own town but in neighboring towns, specifically to protect their public drinking water sources.

These projects focus on watersheds—areas of land that drain through connected rivers and lakes. Watershed boundaries are created by mountains, valleys or ridges: They don’t fit neatly within municipal boundary lines.

Kestrel is currently partnering with the Town of Shutesbury to protect 34 acres of forest that contain the headwaters of Amethyst Brook along the Shutesbury/Pelham border. Amethyst Brook flows into the Fort River, whose watershed contains all the reservoirs for the Town of Amherst and is the longest free-flowing tributary of the Connecticut River.

This project has been funded partly through US Forest Service’s Forest Legacy program, which identifies protecting forests for “clean and abundant” drinking water as one of its main goals. This program also funded the Conservation Restriction by the MA Department of Fish and Wildlife in partnership with Kestrel that conserved 2,038 acres of land owned by WD Cows, protecting drinking water for the Atkins Reservoir in Amherst and Quabbin Reservoir.

The water stored beneath the earth’s surface also needs protection. Kestrel is working with the Town of Southampton to protect meadow and forestland over the Barnes Aquifer. This geological underground complex extends for roughly 12 miles beneath Westfield, Holyoke, Southampton and Easthampton. More than 60,000 people depend on this aquifer for their drinking water.

In the City of Holyoke, where 76% of the population lives within an environmental justice community, 99% of households get their water from Holyoke Water Works’ (HWW) reservoir system. The Tighe-Carmody Reservoir, one of two primary reservoirs for the City, is actually in Southampton. This reservoir is one of only four systems in Massachusetts with no extra filtration process other than chlorination, due to the naturally high quality of its water supply. To protect that quality, HWW owns forests in Southampton, Huntington, Westhampton and Montgomery.

We’re all connected by water and the forests through which it flows. Fortunately, by working together we can protect both.

Hundreds of Acres of Forest Protection on Tap Now

➤ SOUTHAMPTON: Beginning a landscape-scale project to protect large areas of intact forests in several towns extending outward from Pomeroy Mountain in Southampton. This region supports land critical for wildlife habitat and broader movement in western Massachusetts, and is also the natural source of drinking water for many surrounding communities.

➤ WESTHAMPTON & NORTHAMPTON: Now in the final phase of conserving 186 acres of forest across the border of the two towns. The land is adjacent to conserved lands around the Robert’s Reservoir region, designated by the state as an outstanding water resources area.
MOVING THROUGH NEW ENGLAND in a wave each fall is a petite predator. Measuring 8 inches long and weighing less than two tennis balls, the Northern Saw-whet Owl ranges over much of North America. These birds have large heads, big eyes, and a tendency to sit tamely when a person is near. And, they are impossibly cute.

Breeding in southern Canada and northern U.S., these owls tend to move south for the winter, but their migration behaviors are much less predictable than other migratory birds. That’s why Kestrel’s Stewardship Director, Chris Volonte and Kestrel board member Anthony Hill, a master bird bander, have studied their movements in our region over the past several years.

On cold, clear nights in October at Kestrel’s headquarters in Amherst, Chris and Anthony carefully net and band owls—if they are lucky enough to catch them. Banding birds is regulated by state and federal agencies, and both Chris and Anthony are certified and permitted. The process involves briefly capturing owls in a fine net, then carefully weighing, measuring, and fitting them with uniquely numbered ID bracelets on their legs. Based on a combination of weight and wing length and the amount of wear on feathers, banders can estimate the sex and approximate age of the birds they catch. (See box below for the results of the most recent banding years.)

The effort is part of Project Owlnet, in which researchers and trained citizen scientists collect and share data to learn more about the migration of Saw-whet Owls. Data collected at consistent locations and times each year helps reveal species’ distributions, movements, and relative numbers. This information is archived by the U.S. Bird Banding Lab run by the US Geological Service, and helps conservation professionals develop effective habitat management and conservation efforts.

Sometimes, sharing this data also results in fascinating insights into individual owls. In 2013, a young female owl our team banded in Belchertown was found by another bird-bander in Virginia. In 25 days, this tiny traveler flew more than 500 miles, clocking an average of 20 miles per day.

Then in November of this year, our team learned that another female they banded in Amherst last fall was recaptured at a lakeside park just outside of Detroit, Michigan. This feisty bird hatched in 2021 and is now in her second year of life. Her appearance in Michigan this year illustrates the unpredictable nature of this species’ migratory movements.

The far-ranging travels of the little Saw-whet Owl give us one more important reason to protect large, connected areas of forest that provide essential wildlife habitat in the Valley and beyond.

Saw-whet Owl size and feather patterns help estimate age and sex.

**Accesssible Park Officially Opens in Easthampton**

THE LONG-AWAITED MOUNT TOM NORTH TRAILHEAD PARK in Easthampton officially opened on September 9. The City’s first secure public access to the State Reservation offers a small parking area with multiple handicapped parking spaces. A wheelchair accessible trail leads up to a sweeping view as well as a short loop trail on land now owned by Kestrel. The park serves as an official trailhead to the New England National Scenic Trail (NET) and Mt. Tom. Visit the park at 96 East St.

**Owls By the Numbers**

2019: 2 adult female owls (older than 1 year, known as “hatch year”)

2021: 15 owls (10 females, 5 unknown sex); 5 hatch year, 10 adults

2022: 11 owls (9 females, 1 male, 1 unknown); 6 hatch year, 5 adults
Jennifer Lynch-Murphy

AS A WILDLIFE BIOLOGIST for over 20 years, I’ve worked on helping airports manage wildlife to reduce or prevent wildlife-aircraft collisions, and currently, I’m the Certification and Outreach Manager at The Wildlife Society. For the past year, I’ve also been a volunteer with Kestrel Land Trust.

I was inspired by the work that my niece and nephew were doing at the Kent Land Trust in Connecticut. I had heard about Kestrel Land Trust and started to look into some of their work. I was impressed and wanted to contribute in some way, so I decided to become a volunteer.

The staff at Kestrel was impressed with my amateur photography skills, and invited me to start taking photos of their events. My first photo assignment was the New Year’s Day hike in 2022. Since then, I’ve photographed other hikes and events like the Big Brothers/Big Sisters Halloween party. In the spring, I took on an American Kestrel nest-box monitor role, and I have also helped out with special events like Mini Golf at the Holyoke Public Library.

One of my most memorable moments though, was with the kestrels. After spending several cold hours over a few weeks scouting the kestrel nest box at UMASS, I was ecstatic when I finally spotted a female kestrel landing on the box for the first time in early June. I saw her—and the male—several times after that and they eventually produced 4 eggs. I considered them my kestrels!

Volunteering with Kestrel gets me outside and taking photographs: two of my favorite things to do. I give my time because there are so many dedicated staff members, volunteers and donors who are doing amazing things. It feels good to be involved in an organization that is doing such great work conserving our precious lands and resources.

IN YOUR OWN WORDS

What the Valley Means to Me

Andres del Campo lives in Chicopee and has been a Kestrel member since 2013.

I CAME TO THE VALLEY WHEN I WAS 8 YEARS OLD from Puerto Rico with my mom and brother. When I was 15, we moved to the Adirondacks in New York where I went to high school. While I lived there, my interest and love for nature—which I had since I was very young—only grew stronger. Later, I moved back to Puerto Rico with my dad where I lived for 14 years but I always wanted to come back to the Valley. Finally I did come back in 2004 and I’ve been here ever since.

I thought the whole world should be like the Adirondacks, where wilderness, communities, and farms coexist in a unique way. Here, the Valley is like that. We have wild places coexisting with farms and communities, and I believe the character of this place needs to be preserved. That’s why I support Kestrel Land Trust.

The Valley is a beautiful place and I love the four seasons, but especially fall and winter. I love a snowy winter scene. Amethyst Brook and Larch Hill in Amherst are two of my favorite places. I appreciate that Kestrel has worked to preserve these places, among others, where I can go and breathe some fresh woodland air.

In life, many things are important, but without wilderness, none of it would matter.

GIVE BACK

Share Your Valley Story! kestreltrust.org/connect/share

Jennifer is Certification and Outreach Manager at The Wildlife Society—a nonprofit organization that enables professionals to sustain wildlife through science-based management and conservation. She lives in Sunderland.
Announcing a Sweet Partnership

Florence-based Artifact Cider Project creates award-winning, craft hard cider, sold across New England and beyond. This fall, the cidery launched an expanded line of its fan favorite cider, Feels Like Home—and a special commitment to the land.

To give back to the region from which its apples are primarily sourced—the place that feels most like home—Artifact is now Kestrel’s major business sponsor and has included Kestrel’s logo on the cans. Four flavors in the new series are available in stores as single- or variety packs: Classic, Blueberry, Double Rum and Extra Juicy.

Members-Only Cider-Tasting Event in January: Invitation to Come by Email!

** Happy Holidays & Happy New Year! **

THE KESTREL GIFT SHOP IS OPEN

Show your love of the land with a cool cap or warm winter hat! The brimmed caps are 100% cotton pigment-dyed twill, with adjustable strap, in teal or purple. Winter beanies are soft acrylic in safety orange. All hats $23, shipping included.

kestreltrust.org/kestrel-gift-shop-hats/

YOUR VALLEY

COVER ARTIST SPOTLIGHT

Patricia Crutchfield

Ice Meadow, PHOTOGRAPH

My photography is the passion at the center of my life, and this passion carries me to “wonder-full” places. As I captured images for Kestrel this past year, I saw the power of our three C’s: Conserve, Care, Connect. On the land, all that grows is connected. My camera and lenses connect me to the wonders of the Valley. I focused on capturing “intimate landscapes” because this approach gives me the freedom to choose and isolate my subject—to make it the center of attention. Intimate landscapes include just enough information in the image for the viewer’s eyes to focus on what I saw and then connect it with the rest of the landscape.

Pat is affiliated with the Robert Floyd Gallery in Southampton.