

YOUR VALLEY

CONSERVE | CARE | CONNECT

FALL 2023



**KESTREL
LAND TRUST**

*WHAT'S INSIDE: Meeting Community Needs in New Ways
Making Space for Wildlands
Going Native for Plants & Pollinators*



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*Photo (right): Amethyst Brook
by Jamie Malchholm-Brown*

Fortifying Federal Policy for Local Lands

 I'VE SPENT MOST of my four decades-long career in land conservation, and helped launch more than a dozen land trusts in New York state. I'm a semi-retired conservation and land use lawyer and community planner, and I've served on a variety of nonprofit boards over the years, currently including Kestrel Land Trust. But this spring, I tried something new: Lobbying.

While land trusts rely on individual donors to get local conservation projects off the ground, the big dollars needed to complete those projects often come from federal funding. It can cost hundreds of thousands or even millions of dollars to conserve critical lands.

Federal leaders who control the purse strings must understand their critical role in saving our lands. That's why I spent several days in Washington, DC in April with land trust leaders from across the country to meet with our legislative delegation. Our goal was to encourage increased federal funding for land conservation, particularly in the upcoming Farm Bill, which provides the largest source of federal funding for private land conservation—not only for farmlands, but also forests, grasslands and wetlands.

I was pleasantly surprised to learn that land conservation is a high priority on both sides of the aisle. In this era of political polarization, it was heartening to discover that land conservation is a bipartisan issue that makes sense to folks across the political spectrum.

Last year's "Inflation Reduction Act" dedicated unprecedented levels of funding for the battle against climate change and the preservation of natural systems. Yet federal agencies lack staff capacity to administer this level of public funding. That's where local organizations come in: much of this funding will be channeled through land trusts as well as state and local agencies. And, that's why Kestrel has expanded our staff: To maximize public investment in the Valley's forests and farms.

This is a time of real opportunity to secure the future of threatened landscapes in the Valley, and bring more positive conservation impact home.



Kestrel's Board President Joel Russell at Sen. Warren's office during the Land Trust Alliance's Advocacy Days in Washington, D.C. in April.

Joel Russell, Board President



FROM THE HEART OF THE VALLEY

Forest Inspirations

by anonymous

Commune with the trees
The forest gods old and new
Who never sleep still
But are always wakeful
Always watching, breathing
Here

A poem from the public notebook of the Native Names Project at Nishoquokkipog (Amethyst Brook in Amherst) written on 7/11/2021.



- Sound Finances
- Ethical Conduct
- Responsible Governance
- Lasting Stewardship

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Events for Fall & Winter 2023

LEARNING WITH THE LAND

- **Fall Birding at Foxcroft Farm**, Amherst (Sept. 23, 7:30 am)
- **Beavers: Our Allies in a Changing World**, Kestrel Headquarters (Oct. 14, 9 am)
- **Saw-whet Owl Banding**, Kestrel Headquarters (Nov. 10, 7 pm)
- **Winter Solstice Walk**, Silvio Conte National Wildlife Refuge Hadley (Dec. 21, 5:30 pm)

HIKING FOR HEALTH (9 am - Noon)

- **Robert Frost Trail on Mt. Holyoke Range** (Sept. 30)
- **Robert Frost Trail on Mt. Orient** (Nov. 4)

CELEBRATE THE VALLEY

- **Kestrel Reads Book Group**, Kestrel Headquarters (Sept 27 & Nov 29, 6:30 pm)
- **Plein Air Paint Out** for Artists & Viewers (Oct 14)
- **Mt. Tom Trail Race & Hike**, Easthampton (Oct. 21)

SPECIAL PARTNER PROGRAMS

- **Plein Air "Engaging Nature" Exhibit**, Amherst (Sept.-Oct.)
- **Film Showing: Stewart Udall—The Politics of Beauty**, Northampton Academy of Music (Oct. 10, 7 pm)
- **Yoga with the Seasons**, Kestrel Headquarters, Amherst (Oct. 22, 10:30 am)
- **Monthly Moonlight Hikes**, Kestrel Headquarters Amherst (Sept. 29, Oct. 28, Nov. 27, Dec. 26, times vary)

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Sign up for our biweekly email so you don't miss these events!

kestreltrust.org/email-list-signup



CONNECT

Children get a close look at a saw-whet owl during a live raptor presentation by rehabilitator Tom Ricardi at our headquarters in July.

Tom Ricardi & the Lucky Owl

EARLIER THIS SPRING, an injured barred owl was found at Kestrel Land Trust's headquarters on the Mt. Holyoke Range. Fortunately for this owl, our staff and board includes expert bird handlers who swung into action and got the owl into the care of **raptor rehabilitator Tom Ricardi**, saving the bird's life.

Tom helped the owl recover over several months and released it back in its home territory this summer with supportive onlookers who attended a special presentation with Tom's nonreleasable birds of prey.

>> **See more photos and read the story on our website at kestreltrust.org/blog.**



Chris Volonte, Kestrel Stewardship Director, looks for injuries on a barred owl. It was rehabilitated and later released by Tom Ricardi.

Familiar Faces Return to Join Kestrel Staff and Board



Katie Carr

AS KESTREL STEPS UP our efforts to conserve and care for more lands in the Valley, we also need to build our base of support. That's why we're thrilled that **Katie Carr has joined the staff as Development Manager.**

A resident of Easthampton, Katie volunteered in our office and provided part-time support for our final *5K for Farmland* in 2018 before serving two years with TerraCorps where she split her time between Grow Food Northampton and Hilltown Land Trust. For the past 5 years Katie has served as Engagement Manager at Hilltown Land Trust, where she's taken the lead on communications, event planning, and fundraising. She's looking forward to helping to build Kestrel's development program.



Beth Hooker

We're also thrilled to **welcome back to our Board Beth Hooker**, who served on Kestrel's Board from 2008-2012. Beth lives in Amherst and is currently the Director of Sustainability and Administrative Director of the Center for the Environment, Ecological Design and Sustainability (CEEDS) at Smith College.

Beth has extensive experience in education, having provided institutional sustainability leadership at Smith, Mount Holyoke and Hampshire Colleges. Beth also has expertise in regional resiliency, sustainable practices and clean energy technologies, as well as an M.S. in soil science and a Ph.D. in ecosystems ecology.

This site next to a senior housing community in Easthampton may soon be conserved while providing housing for working families.

Meeting Community Needs with Collaboration, Not Competition

An innovative new initiative aims to address the critical need for both nature and shelter.

IN NEWS HEADLINES, the environment isn't the only issue being framed as a "crisis." Housing—particularly affordable housing—is a hot topic and an urgent need not only in big cities like Boston, but throughout Massachusetts as well. In fact, Gov. Maura Healey says housing affordability is one of the biggest problems in the Commonwealth, with limited housing stock that's too expensive for many people.

A recurring criticism of land conservation is that it often benefits wealthier communities and may drive up the price of remaining land needed to meet housing needs. Recently, questions of equity and inclusion have prompted the land trust community to give more attention to this issue.

This year, the Massachusetts Land Trust Coalition's annual conference focused on the intersection of housing and conservation, and the national Land Trust Alliance is also providing resources on the topic. A few innovative land trusts around the country are beginning to collaborate with affordable housing organizations to change the "either or" narrative. These two pressing public needs—land conservation and affordable housing—need not be in conflict.

A Green Vision for Easthampton

With this in mind, Kestrel has embarked on an exciting new collaborative initiative called **Growing Green: Easthampton**. This pilot project is a partnership with the City of Easthampton, Mass Audubon, and

The Community Builders—a national non-profit organization that develops, owns and operates affordable and mixed-income housing—to provide a viable housing site with socially equitable access to open space, while protecting critical natural resources at the same time.

Easthampton was chosen for this project since issues of housing, land availability, and prices have become particularly challenging.



Conserved fields and riverside forest will embrace a new, affordable neighborhood with access to the open space in Easthampton.

Thanks to two anonymous donors who provided the seed funding for this initiative, our team located 53 acres that is now under contract to be purchased. The majority of the land—42 acres of forest, field, and farmland—will be permanently conserved, while the remaining 11 acres along the road would support up to 90 affordable rental units in three buildings.

Because this is one of the largest remaining undeveloped parcels with significant habitat along the Manhan River, it's been on conservation groups' radar. Conserving it will expand the protected land adjacent to Pomeroy Meadows Conservation Area, owned by Pascommuck Conservation Trust, and the Whittemore Conservation Area in Southamptton. It will also provide a natural buffer around the Manhan, protecting water quality as well as wildlife connections between forest blocks.

Being near the city center, the land is also flagged in Easthampton's recent Housing Production Plan as prime for development. Intense development pressure and high property values have made traditional conservation options unworkable for this parcel, putting all of the land at high risk of becoming a sprawling, unaffordable subdivision development. The Growing Green: Easthampton project is likely the only way to protect the majority of this valuable land.

In a more equitable vision of Easthampton's future, a new neighborhood for that includes families with less wealth will be created alongside a new conservation area, guaranteeing residents access to "natural amenities" usually found in high-priced communities: spectacular views of Mount Tom and Pomeroy Mountain, walking trails through meadows and forest, and fertile ground for growing local food.

Making Space for WILDLANDS

IMAGINE WALKING THROUGH A DENSE FOREST, where tall white pines and broad oak trees reach to the sky. A soft carpet of moss is underfoot, and birds are singing in the tree canopy. An enormous tree trunk, fallen some time ago, creates a maze of branches across your path. In the sunny opening, birch saplings are sprouting, and patches of ostrich ferns spread. Bobcat prints crisscross the muddy edge of a cold stream. Everything about this place tells you it's wild.

Mature, wild forests like these dominated the New England region for thousands of years. Today, virtually no primeval forests are left. Most of New England's forested landscape is second growth, having regrown after colonial settlers stripped indigenous land of its native trees and peoples to make way for European-style agriculture and towns. Though forests have regenerated throughout the region, today many are still managed as woodlands for timber products.

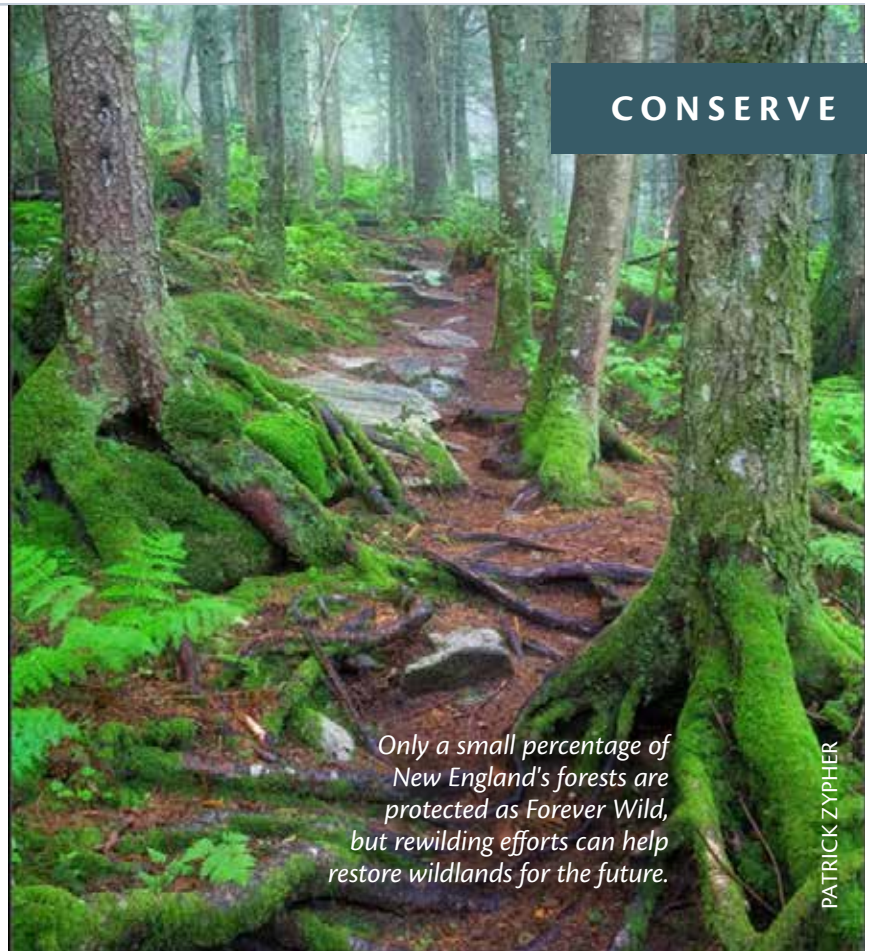
But woodlands can become wild again—if people simply choose to leave the forest alone. By setting aside places where the land can heal, **rewilding** provides safe homes for wildlife, allows trees and plants to grow and adapt, and ensures nature can exist for its own sake.

A new report from **Harvard Forest's Wildlands, Woodlands, Farmlands & Communities Initiative (WWFC)** called *Wildlands in New England: Past, Present & Future* found that while 81% of New England is forested, only 3.3% has been permanently protected as wildlands. The report defines wildlands as areas of any size that are permanently protected with the intent "to allow natural processes to prevail with 'free will' and minimal human interference."

Choosing to "Rewild" Land in the Valley

With so much forest in our region, the opportunity to conserve more wildlands is clear. The WWFC's goal is to ensure that at least 10% of all conserved land is protected as forever wild.

The **WWFC vision**, which Kestrel has endorsed as part of our Strategic Plan, sees wildlands protection as part of an integrated approach to conservation that also includes forests managed for wood products, natural spaces for recreation, and farmlands for local food. Wildlands can exist at any scale, from tens to



CONSERVE

Only a small percentage of New England's forests are protected as Forever Wild, but rewilding efforts can help restore wildlands for the future.

PATRICK ZYPHER

thousands of acres.

Kestrel Land Trust is committed to doing our part. In the last 5 years, we have permanently protected several of tracts of forest that we own as "forever wild," including the 120-acre **Whately Center Woods**, 100 acres along the Amethyst and Heatherstone Brooks in the **Pelham Hills**, and a 350-acre area known as **Old Wolf Hill** in Williamsburg and Westhampton.

That's just the beginning. Right now, our conservation team is looking for more opportunities with willing landowners to protect forest and create more wildlands.

Some forest owners will still prefer to manage their land, harvesting timber for financial or ecological goals like creating open patches for wildlife habitat. They can also choose to protect some areas as wildlands and others as woodlands, while a conservation restriction can ensure sustainable forest management. Kestrel provides both wildlands and woodland conservation options to landowners to help meet their goals and to maximize the amount of forest we can protect.

"Striking a balance between the land we don't actively manage and the land we do actively manage for forest and agricultural products is so important," said WWFC report co-author Liz Thompson, a Vermont-based ecologist and board member of the **Northeast Wilderness Trust (NWT)**. "We're not saying it all needs to be Wildland, but the balance is currently off."

Land trusts and landowners can choose to let land become wild. We simply need to make a commitment to allow the land to evolve on its own terms. This wild choice is one simple and hopeful way to support a healthier, more biodiverse, and resilient planet, right here at home.

Help Rewild Our Forests!

Learn more at wildlandsandwoodlands.org/vision/wildlands and support our work to create wildlands with Kestrel's dedicated **Monica and Bob Leverett Forever Wild Fund**. Every \$1,000 raised can protect 1 acre of wild and remote forest! kestreltrust.org/give/one-time-gift

Going Native: Plants & Pollinators



Kestrel's Mount Warner Meadow in Hadley supports insects and wildlife, as well as valuable native wildflowers.

 BEAUTIFUL WILDFLOWERS IN A meadow, colorful butterflies and buzzy bees flitting about, and birds singing in the sun. This image evokes peacefulness and joy. But flowers and butterflies aren't just pretty to look at: They're critically important. And beneath this bucolic vision lies one of the big ecological challenges of our time.

Bees, butterflies, moths, wasps, and beetles are some of the animals that move pollen between flowers, enabling the plants to produce seeds. These pollinators are vital for other wildlife: Fruits and seeds are a major part of the diet of at least a quarter of all bird species, and of mammals ranging from voles to black bears.



Native boneset thoroughwort

Pollinators are essential to human life too. 85% of the world's flowering plants—including more than two thirds of the world's crop species—rely on the service pollinators provide. Without pollinators, there would be no apples, pumpkins,

blueberries, nor many other fruits and vegetables.

Globally and locally, pollinator populations are suffering from habitat loss, pesticide use, and diseases. (And it isn't only about honeybees, which are a European species that are mostly used like livestock.) Wild, native pollinators are often adapted for specific plants, pollinating efficiently and producing larger and more abundant fruits and seeds. But these native bees are struggling to survive. As these pollinators disappear, the effect on the health and viability of natural plant communities and crops could be devastating.

The Value of Local Native Plants

Driving down North Maple St. in Hadley, you'll see one of those bucolic wildflower fields with Mount Warner rising in the background. This 20-acre oasis, just a mile from the strip malls on Route 9, is Kestrel's Mount Warner Meadow.

Originally conserved by Valley Land Fund in 1994, this meadow was invaded over time by woody shrubs like invasive buckthorn and multiflora rose among others. Over the past several years, our stewardship team has worked to improve this habitat for pollinators. With funding support from a private donor and the Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) run by the **Natural Resources Conservation Services** (NRCS), they've significantly reduced woody invasive plants and knocked back

a 3-acre patch of non-native Reed Canary Grass (*Phalaris arundinacea*) too dense for wildlife to move through. And although fighting invasives is an ongoing battle, these efforts are successfully encouraging native wildflowers and grasses in the meadow.

In fact, two of the native plant species growing in the Meadow are now helping to increase native plants throughout the Valley. The **Native Plant Trust's Nasami Farm** partnered with Kestrel in 2021, 2022, and this fall to collect seeds from **blue vervain** (*Verbena hastata*) and **boneset thoroughwort** (*Eupatorium perfoliatum*), both of which prefer moist meadows.

Miho Connolly, Nursery Coordinator at **Nasami Farm**, said wild seed collection from local populations is central to their mission to increase the availability of native plants. When she visited the site, she estimated at least 1,000 reproductive blue vervain plants



Native Blue vervain

in the meadow. "I was amazed to see some patches that appear to be solely *Verbena*: They look a lot like our seed flats!" she said.

"We prioritize seed-grown plants because they have greater genetic diversity," she explained. Many plants sold at big box stores are grown from cuttings, meaning that they are all genetically identical. "Plants grown from locally collected seed are well adapted to conditions here and carry the genetics that have coevolved with our local ecosystems. Genetic diversity provides resilience in a population, which is particularly important as the climate changes."

Through thoughtful management, the Mount Warner Meadow will continue to provide a haven for pollinating insects and other wildlife, and help source the next generation of native wildflowers in the Valley.

What the Valley Means to Us

Don Verrastro and Heidi Dollard have been members for more than 15 years. They live in Belchertown.

How long have you lived in the Valley?

We moved to the Valley in 1985. We had once visited Northampton for a concert and we thought this area with its vibrant cultural life and opportunities for outdoor recreation would be a great place to live and raise a family. When Heidi saw a job opening at UMass, she applied and we never looked back.

What do you love about the Valley?

We still love the music scene in the Valley. I'm also an avid biker. Heidi has been working very actively with the **Massachusetts Pollinator Network** since she retired in 2020, educating people about the importance of biodiversity and advising and advocating to limit pesticides, grow native plants, and support insects and other essential wildlife.

How and where do you like to spend time outdoors?

We hike often and enjoy exploring new trails near and far. We especially like the Sweet Alice Pond Loop trail since it's convenient for us and our friends from Northampton, and we like routes that

go along water. We've hiked much of the New England Trail and the Quabbin Reservoir. We often take visitors to Buffam Brook in Pelham: the streams are lovely to hike along.

What about Kestrel's mission resonates with you?

We have been committed environmentalists all our lives. Preserving open space is essential for humans and all life on earth and Kestrel is amazingly proficient in conserving land. They also provide programs that get people out into nature to demonstrate its benefits. We've gone on birding and geology walks that were informative and connected us with like-minded neighbors. We also appreciate Kestrel's efforts on environmental



justice. **In these times of environmental peril, we know our contributions to Kestrel are working effectively to save the planet, globally and locally.**

Share Your Valley Story!
kestreltrust.org/connect/

BOARD SPOTLIGHT

Scott Jackson



Scott leading a vernal pool walk engaging people of all ages. We are so grateful for his decade-long volunteer service on Kestrel's board!

KESTREL LAND TRUST HAS been fortunate to attract dedicated volunteers to our Board of Directors for more than 50 years. All of them care about the mission to conserve and care for the land, yet few have had such a directly relevant impact on this work as **Scott Jackson**. Having served on Kestrel's board for the past 9 years, including serving as Chair or Secretary for most of that time, Scott stepped down this past summer. He will continue serving on Kestrel's Lands Committee.

As Extension Professor in the **Department of Environmental Conservation at UMass Amherst**, Scott provided Kestrel with an ecological science-based perspective to help prioritize land conservation projects. He pioneered the **Conservation Assessment and Prioritization System (CAPS)**: a computer-based tool that uses landscape ecology, conservation biology, and geographic data to evaluate the ecological importance of an area. For more than a decade,

our staff has used CAPS as an integral tool for protecting our most critical landscapes for wildlife and climate resiliency.

Scott believes in thinking big. During his tenure as Chair, he supported Kestrel during an organizational growth spurt and undertaking the *Promise to the Valley Campaign*. He encouraged proactive conservation of wildlands, woodlands, farmland, and community parks and trails.

As a resident of Whately and long-time chair of the Whately Conservation Commission, Scott was personally invested in creating Kestrel's **Whately Center Woods Nature Retreat**. And, being an excellent teacher, he led many popular community engagement events for Kestrel over the years, including vernal pool walks and our *Climate Change & Your Community* presentation series that highlighted climate impacts and solutions at the local scale.

For all of this and more, we are immensely grateful for Scott's time and dedication!

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- ▶ 25K solo/relay or 50K Ultra running course
- ▶ NEW: Hiking & Family-Friendly Options
- ▶ Start/finish/lunch at Millside Park, Easthampton
- ▶ Local beer by New City Brewery
- ▶ Commemorative pint glass & fun prizes

Details and registration at
kestreltrust.org/events

Presented by Beast Coast Trail Running

YOUR VALLEY

See the full image on the front cover!

COVER ARTIST SPOTLIGHT

Ross Lippman

Foggy Mt. Pollux, PHOTOGRAPH

During my four years living in the Valley, many of Kestrel's preserved lands provided some of the most inspiring moments for my photography. Cool fall mornings at Mount Pollux often transformed the landscape; none better than it did on the morning this photo was taken with the colorful sunrise fighting to be seen over the fog. It remains one of my favorite photos I've ever taken and a reminder of how beautiful Western Massachusetts is. I now live in Rhode Island with my family, but I look at this picture often to remember the special place we used to call home.

This piece was part of the Robert Floyd Gallery's photography exhibit celebrating Kestrel's 50th anniversary in 2022.