

# YOUR VALLEY

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SPRING 2024



**KESTREL  
LAND TRUST**

*WHAT'S INSIDE: Welcome to Bright Water Bog at Ames Pond  
Landowners Make Gifts for Wildlands Conservation  
Teaming Up to Improve Long-Distance Trails*



# KESTREL LAND TRUST

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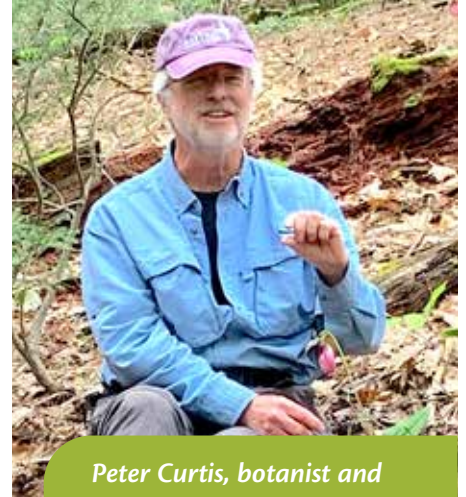
# Cultivating Deeper Connections to the Land

*“That land is a community is the basic concept of ecology, but that land is to be loved and respected is an extension of ethics.”*

– Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*



THE VISIONARY CONSERVATIONIST Aldo Leopold called it a Land Ethic—something that develops in us from an understanding and appreciation of our relationship with the natural world. I taught ecology to undergraduates for many years, covering our scientific understanding of nature’s interwoven communities. For Leopold, **witnessing in person the interplay of plants and animals, year after year, is central to cultivating an ethical relationship to the land.**



*Peter Curtis, botanist and Kestrel Board Treasurer, is Professor Emeritus of Ecology at Ohio State University. He lives in Northampton.*



*Hepatica*

One of the joys of spring in the Valley for me, a botanist, is to regularly visit one of our conserved natural areas and welcome native plants as they make their appearance throughout the season. The leader of the pack is always Skunk Cabbage, poking up through snow and ice in February. March is slow but come April there is a rush: red maple, hepatica, bloodroot, and trailing arbutus are quickly followed by trillium, Dutchman’s breeches, and trout lily. Many others follow in their wake.

The actual timing of first flowering, or budburst, depends closely on microclimate with some places predictably earlier or later than others, and one year differing from another. Indeed, changes in the **timing of plant and animal life events like flowering or nest building is one of the most sensitive indicators of climate change** that we can readily observe. Really getting to know a place and its inhabitants leads to caring deeply about that place: the genesis of a land ethic.



*Bloodroot*

Our region is richly endowed with natural resources and with communities of people who understand the value of conserving those resources. My own journey from academic researcher to Kestrel Land Trust board member has given me the opportunity to participate in conserving natural areas and providing people with access to natural spaces to get to know and love. This spring, why not pick a favorite place to visit often and watch the season unfurl—you’re sure to make lots of new acquaintances!



*Trout Lily*

**Peter Curtis, PhD**  
**Kestrel Land Trust Board Treasurer**



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

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# The Power of Partners for Getting Kids Outdoors

REMEMBER THE DAYS sitting in a classroom as a child, staring out the window, daydreaming? Suddenly, one exciting phrase jolts you out of your trance: “We’re going on a field trip!”

That is where Kestrel’s youth engagement program comes in. Getting kids outdoors for new experiences, whether during the school day or on a weekend, offers so many benefits. **Emily Biggs, our TerraCorps Youth Education Coordinator**, has been helping create these exciting experiences during the 2023-24 service term.

In February, kids from **Big Brothers/Big Sisters** gathered at the Kestrel office for a stroll around the pond, followed by hot chocolate and cookies. An educator from **Fishing Friends** then taught the children about aquatic ecology before testing their newfound knowledge, and casting practice lines on the grounds around Plum Brook Pond.

After the school bell rings, children in the Springfield Elementary Schools are exploring the world of conservation and ecology with environmental educators from **U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service** and Kestrel, in partnership with the **Springfield Public Schools**.

During the April school break, a group of younger girls from **Girls Inc.** will join Emily at the Sylvio O. Conte National Wildlife Refuge in Hadley to play in the pond, look for frogs, and learn about the importance of vernal pools. Then, teens from Girls Inc. will have the opportunity to learn about and practice archery at the Refuge.

Emily stresses how important these outdoor experiences are: “The value of informal education just cannot be missed.” When kids



Youth and adults with Big Brothers/Big Sisters explore wetlands at the Silvio Conte Refuge.

get to step outside, learn, and explore, Emily sees them open up. “They’re curious, they’re discovering, they’re asking questions, and they’re having fun.”

While Kestrel holds public events primarily for adults, community partnerships with youth-serving nonprofits and other agencies broaden who we can reach and expand the scope of what we can offer. Emily notes that our partners at Big Brothers/Big Sisters and Girls Inc. know their community well and are already serving them successfully. “There are people in these communities doing good work,” Emily says. “It’s so powerful to connect with those organizations, enabling us to do more than each of our organizations could do alone.”

## Join Us! Events for Spring & Early Summer 2024



### LEARNING WITH THE LAND

- ▶ **American Kestrel Nest Box Talk & Walk**, Conte Refuge, Hadley (April 27, 9 am)
- ▶ **Spring Wildflowers at Dyer Field & Forest**, Hadley (May 4, 9 am)
- ▶ **Pollinator Walk & Blueberry Picking**, Pie in the Sky Berry Farm, Northampton (July 13, 10 am)



### CELEBRATE THE VALLEY

- ▶ **Film: Stewart Udall—The Politics of Beauty**, South Hadley Public Library (April 24, 6 pm)
- ▶ **Breakfast & Birding at Foxcroft Farm**, Amherst (May 11, 7am)
- ▶ **Plein Air Paint Out**, Amethyst Brook, Amherst (May 18, noon)
- ▶ **Kestrel Reads Book Discussion: *The Nature Fix***, Kestrel headquarters, Amherst (June 5, 6:30 pm)

- ▶ **Kestrel Member Community Picnic**, Hadley, (June 2, 5 pm)
- ▶ **Ben Cosgrove Concert**, Forbes Library, Northampton (June 27, 6 pm)



### GET ACTIVE OUTDOORS

- ▶ **Give Back to the Land Cleanup Challenge**, Location of your choice in the Valley (any time April 1 – April 16)
- ▶ **Mindful Movement in Nature**, Kestrel Headquarters, Amherst (April 20, May 18, Jun 15)
- ▶ **Monthly Moonlight Hikes**, Mt Norwottuck, Amherst (April 22, May 22, Jun 20, Jul 20, Aug 18)
- ▶ **National Trails Day Hike on the Robert Frost Trail**, Amherst (June 1, 9 am)
- ▶ **Native Wetland Plants by Canoe**, Lake Warner, Hadley (August 3, 9 am)



### CONSERVATION ACTION FOR BIODIVERSITY

- ▶ **Wildlands for Ecological Resilience**, online speaker series with Northeast Wilderness Trust, (May 29, 6 pm)



# Welcome to Bright Water Bog



AS A RETIRED PSYCHOLOGIST, Julian Janowitz cared about people. He also loved art and nature. Believing in the power of those things to make people's lives brighter, Julian spent 40 years creating a magical place to bring them all together on 147 acres surrounding Ames Pond in Shutesbury.

Kestrel Land Trust worked with Julian to conserve this land in 2003 with a Conservation Restriction held by the MA Department of Conservation and Recreation. He continued to own the land, encouraging his neighbors to visit the trails and sculptures he built. Then, to ensure the public would always be able to experience this special place, he passed ownership of his beloved land to Kestrel in his will in 2021.

The land is centered in the West Quabbin region—a key area for protecting forests to benefit wildlife, climate, and recreation. To the west is Brushy Mountain, where Kestrel helped conserve 3,486 acres of working forest with W.D. Cows in 2012. Kestrel's lands surrounding Ames Pond are protected as wildlands, never to be harvested for timber.

This spring we're pleased to reintroduce this unique place as **Bright Water Bog**

**Nature Retreat.** This is Kestrel's 7th and largest Nature Retreat—conserved lands under our permanent ownership that the public is welcome to enjoy for hiking, birding, and other passive recreation.

The new name reflects the spirit of the place as Julian Janowitz envisioned it: a place of inspiration both natural and

artistic. "Bright Water Bog" also highlights one of the area's dramatic features: the sparkling ponds and adjoining bog that support a diverse array of life. Here you'll find wild cranberry and carnivorous sundew and pitcher plants, as well as moose, bear, beaver, and more.

Approximately five miles of trails wind through forest and bog, leading up to a dramatic cliffside overlook. And the whimsical sculptures Julian created around the pond will

remain a special feature of Bright Water Bog.

## MAKING THE MAGIC SPARKLE AGAIN

In 2022, our team embarked on an ambitious trail improvement plan to restore access to the land's many remarkable features while protecting the sensitive natural ecosystems. Improving many

deteriorating portions of the trail network to protect both users and the environment comes at a cost of \$270,000. Seed funding for these improvements came from our *Promise to the Valley Campaign*, with generous support from the Town of Shutesbury, Mass Trails grants, as well as foundations and individuals. Community support is still needed to finish the work: See how you can help, below.

An accessible raised pathway now provides a welcoming entrance from a new 8-car parking area, while also minimizing foot-traffic damage to the meadow vegetation by replacing several user-made paths. The path leads to an accessible pond-side viewing platform with a built-in bench near one of Julian's iconic sculptures.

Decades ago, Julian spanned the bog with a boardwalk that eventually sank and began rotting away. Now, we're building 870 feet of durable boardwalk using materials and techniques to protect vegetation, including metal supports that don't displace wetland soils.

Our team also built a new 190-foot boardwalk to reconnect a trail flooded by a beaver dam. Finally, a third boardwalk of roughly 140 feet through a wooded wetland is being replaced this spring. To minimize its impact, this work was targeted for winter and early spring while plants were dormant, and each boardwalk makes use of low-impact support structures suited to its site.

On the upland forest trail, another big lift—literally!—was stabilizing the steep stone stairs. Now, adventurous hikers can more safely follow the trail up along dramatic rock outcrops to reach the cliffside overlook.

Though more improvements are to come, including trail markers and signs, we invite you to visit Bright Water Bog later this spring to enjoy the magic yourself.



Volunteers building one of three long boardwalks.



## Help Us Finish Making the Magic!

AS WE ENTER THE FINAL PHASE of improvements at Bright Water Bog, you can help meet a \$50,000 challenge gift to complete the work.

Go to [KESTRELTRUST.ORG/GIVE/ONE-TIME-GIFT](https://kestreltrust.org/give/one-time-gift) and select "Ames Pond" from the dropdown menu. Or, mail a check with "Ames Pond/Bright Water Bog" in the memo line.



# The Gift of Forever Wildlands



IN THE FACE OF GLOBAL problems like the climate and biodiversity crises, large-scale land conservation efforts are crucial. Yet even at a small scale, protecting nature for its own sake is vital. Wildlands, where no logging or resource extraction takes place, offer refuge for wildlife and allow forests to mature, maximizing carbon storage: an essential climate solution.

At the end of 2023, three sets of landowners donated land or a Conservation Restriction to Kestrel to protect their forestlands as wildlands in the West Quabbin Region.

## WHITNEY LAND DONATION: 5 ACRES IN SHUTESBURY

In the 1960s, UMass Amherst professor **Lester Whitney** and his wife bought a landlocked 5-acre forested lot not far from their cottage at Lake Wyola in Shutesbury. The land had been logged in the 1930s but for decades had been left to mature, and it could only be reached by foot.

“Over the years we enjoyed hiking and camping there,” son **Scott Whitney** said. “The peace and tranquility of the old stand of pines made it feel far away from everything.”

In 1999, Scott’s parents passed the land to him and his wife Kathryn. But over the years, it became more challenging to access the land as lots along Wendell Rd were developed. And, when offered the chance to harvest timber with their neighbors, Scott and Kathy declined. “We felt adamantly that leaving the land alone was its best use.”

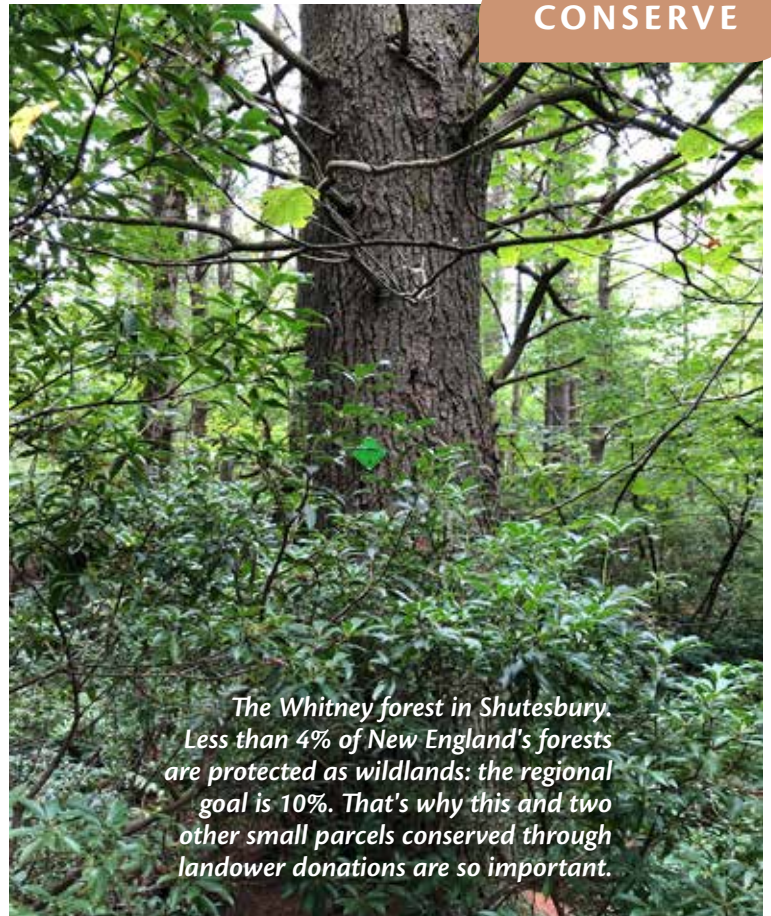
When they learned that Kestrel had become owner of the Ames Pond land abutting their parcel, they decided it was time to secure their forest’s future. In 2023, they gifted their land to Kestrel in memory of Scott’s father. Scott is pleased that their gift expands Kestrel’s Bright Water Bog Nature Retreat and that he “can rest assured that our land will remain in its wild and natural condition forever.”

## KAHN LAND DONATION: 22 ACRES IN LEVERETT

On the other side of Lake Wyola, another set of landowners were also considering the future of their land. Here, nearly 23 acres of pine and hemlock forest provide valuable wildlife habitat in Leverett.

**Ken Kahn** and his wife bought this land together with friends 40 years ago. As a decades-long board member of **Rattlesnake Gutter Trust**, Ken understands the value of protecting mature forests—particularly parcels like his that haven’t been harvested for at least 80 years. “We never wanted to cut it, and as backland, it’s best to preserve it for the public to enjoy.”

This forest is valuable for buffering core habitats, and enhancing connectivity and resilience. It also supports a trail system connecting Leverett to Fiske Pond in Wendell.



*The Whitney forest in Shutesbury. Less than 4% of New England’s forests are protected as wildlands: the regional goal is 10%. That’s why this and two other small parcels conserved through landowner donations are so important.*

For these reasons, Ken felt it was time to act. “I’m getting older and it just felt like time to do something. I didn’t want to leave the land in limbo,” he said. Because his land abuts 10 acres of land Kestrel already owns, it made sense to him to donate it, creating a larger conservation area. The two parcels are connected by the trail system. “I think Kestrel is the right organization to conserve land that’s contiguous to several towns, with the expertise to put these projects together.”

## PICK CR DONATION: 9 ACRES IN SUNDERLAND

New Kestrel Board member **Nancy Pick** lives in Sunderland, but while spending a semester in Germany in 2022, she heard that a parcel of forest on Mount Toby, hiking distance from her home, was up for sale. “I jumped on it, all the way from Berlin,” she said.

As a Town Conservation Commissioner, Nancy knew these 9 acres of forest were important. The land includes a dramatic rock ledge and provides critical habitat for wildlife and plants—including some rare and endangered species. A hiking trail also runs through the parcel.


“People assume that all of Mount Toby is protected, but in fact it’s a complicated patchwork of public and private land,” Nancy said. “This was my chance to turn another little piece of the mountain ‘green’ on the conservation maps.” In 2023, she purchased the land and donated a Conservation Restriction to Kestrel.

“We’re dedicated to letting it be forever wild. Being able to permanently protect this beautiful patch of land has made me feel a notch better about the future!”



*The Appalachian Mountain Club and Kestrel Land Trust team up to improve shared trails along the NET and RFT.*

## Building on Each Other's Strengths

 MOST SEASONED HIKERS know the feeling: navigating through muddy, eroded, or flooded trails that test both your determination and your hiking boots. With steep inclines and heavy foot traffic, the **New England National Scenic Trail (NET)** and the **Robert Frost Trail (RFT)** on the Mt. Holyoke Range are particularly susceptible to erosion.

### SHARED PATHS & SHARED GOALS

For this reason, Kestrel Land Trust is partnering with the **Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC)** to give these trails some essential care. "Much of the work focuses on areas where the paths share a route," said Chris Volonte, Kestrel's Stewardship Director, "so it was natural for us to consider a collaboration."

AMC's New England Trail Committee is the principal steward and manager of the NET. Kestrel played a role in the creation of the RFT and has recently undertaken a long-term project to ensure its longevity through trail maintenance and improvements.

**Miriam Maistelman**, the Coordinator for AMC's NET committee, recognizes the risk of erosion the NET faces and is eager to improve the trail for future generations of hikers.

"Parts of these trails are so eroded that you can see the roots of trees dangling and loose rock. And then, in the winter

season the trail can turn into a sheet of ice," Miriam said.

Thanks to funding awarded to Kestrel by the **Mass Trails Grant Program**—two grants totaling \$108,800 for two project phases—trail crews are getting their



*This section of the RFT/NET trail on Mt. Norwottuck now has a more durable tread and boardwalks.*

hands dirty and making significant progress.

### TWO-YEAR PROJECT IN FULL SWING

Last year, AMC, Kestrel staff, SCA, and the AMC Holyoke NET Youth crews spent six weeks restoring sections of the trails, including adding wooden walkways and a bridge on the RFT north of Norwottuck Ridge. They also improved the climb to Norwottuck's summit by installing

750 feet of gravel tread, decreasing the incline, and installing grade dips to prevent trail washouts.

On the western side of the Notch, KLT crews rerouted an extremely wet portion of the newly designated RFT route along the lower section of the Low Place Trail south of Mt. Hitchcock.

This year, KLT staff and volunteers will continue the work with a bridge on the Low Place Trail, while AMC will complete planned improvements to the Norwottuck summit ascent. Additionally, the steep ascent of Long Mountain, shared by the NET and RFT, will be made easier and safer with step repairs and replacements.

### PARTNERS MAKE PROGRESS POSSIBLE

This project would not have been possible without the partnership between AMC and Kestrel, Miriam stresses: "We're twice as powerful when we work together," she says.

Kestrel has a "pulse" on the needs of the community and experience in the complicated world of permits and grants, helping AMC to direct their resources, Miriam explains. On the other hand, AMC has an abundance of trail workers and specialized labor—about 80



seasonal trail workers—that allows them to complete a project of this scale.

With the support of members and volunteers, AMC and Kestrel plan to continue collaborating to protect and sustain these trails for the enjoyment of generations to come.



# What the Valley Means to Me

Judy Pozar of Amherst has been a Kestrel supporter since 2018.

**How long have you lived in the Valley?**

I moved to the Valley from Ohio in 1981 and have called this area home ever since.

**What do you love about the Valley?**

This area offers a perfect blend of the rural (but not too remote!) and the cosmopolitan (but not too fast-paced!) way of life. Natural beauty surrounds us, and our colleges, museums, and wonderful live music venues provide a wide range of cultural experiences.

**How and where do you like to spend time outdoors?**

I like walking, just breathing in the fresh air, and quietly observing nature, particularly plants and birds. It is always calming and healing. Buffam Brook in Pelham is an easy hike and is peaceful and lovely any time of year. But Ames Pond in Shutesbury is a wonderful place to experience the tranquility and beauty of nature; it's magnificent when mountain laurels are in bloom!

**What Kestrel program have you particularly enjoyed?**

I was thrilled to be part of the rehabilitated owl release event last summer, and to experience the rare opportunity to

observe many raptors up close. I have enjoyed several guided bird walks, at Foxcroft Farm, Sweet Alice, and other bird-friendly places.

**What about Kestrel's mission resonates with you?**

I believe we have a responsibility to take care of the earth, and in doing so, we help ensure that it can continue to take care of us. I give to Kestrel because one of the most pressing issues of our time is the climate crisis. We need to protect forests and farmland and waterways, and to support sustainable agriculture. The public events that Kestrel sponsors help remind us of how important nature is to our very existence.



Judy, left, at Bright Water Bog with her friend Susan Schiller

Share Your Valley Story!  
[kestreltrust.org/connect/share/](http://kestreltrust.org/connect/share/)

VOLUNTEER VOICES

## The Kestrel Chicks



Left to right: Sara Griesemer, Sue Emerson, Janice Jorgensen and Sally Hills in front, have been monitoring kestrel nest boxes for 10 years.

WE ARE THE KESTREL CHICKS: **Sara Griesemer, Sue Emerson, Janice Jorgensen and Sally Hills!** For 10 years, we've been Kestrel Nest Box monitors, but we started out as friends who were all members of the Hampshire Bird Club and the Monday Morning Birders. We all live close to each other—three of us in Hadley and one in Sunderland, so we would call each other to come see something special like a barred owl or a female moose in the neighborhood.

Since we all love birds and enjoy volunteering, it made sense to help watch kestrel boxes together, which we started in 2014 at the Fort River Refuge. We enjoy being outdoors with a purpose: watching the progression of

what happens with the birds arriving, parents bringing in food to the chicks, and watching the kestrels' behavior, then reporting to Kestrel's staff on this activity at the nest box.

There've been memorable moments from monitoring our boxes, like seeing bird copulations on the box or in tree branches nearby, and explaining what we're doing when people pass by wondering why we've stopped in one place. And, of course, we love getting the chance to observe the expert bird banders Chris Volonte (Kestrel's Stewardship Director) and Anthony Hill (board member) when they band the kestrel chicks each spring.

All of us are retired: One psych nurse, a neonatal nurse practitioner, an elementary teacher, and a former government employee with FEMA and Peace Corps. Now we bird, bird, bird, bird, and we're happy to support the Kestrel Nest Box project!



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SEE INSIDE >>>

## 2023 Annual Impact Report

Read about what YOUR support made possible for the land, wildlife, and people in the Valley last year.



# Give Back TO THE LAND

Forests. Farms. Wild places.  
*Our land matters more than ever.*

Join Kestrel and our regional conservation partners in a 24-hour online giving event to support the vital work to conserve land & water in Western and Central Massachusetts.

*You need the land. The land needs you.*

**GiveBacktotheLand.org**

**Tuesday, April 16**



## YOUR VALLEY



### COVER ARTIST SPOTLIGHT

## Patrick Zephyr

**American Kestrel**, PHOTOGRAPH

*I have spent most of my adult life exploring and photographing wild landscapes of the Valley. For some reason I chose not to point my camera at the amazing birds all around me. I'm not quite sure why, but recently that changed and I'm so grateful it did. Once I opened my eyes to their beauty, I was hooked. I don't know if I could call myself a "birder" yet but my short-term goal is to meet and photograph all the birds that spend part of their lives here. One bird that was high on my wish list was the American Kestrel. Last winter I had the opportunity to spend a couple of weeks hanging out with this special falcon that apparently decided not to fly south. What a treasure!*

View more of Patrick's work at [patrickzephyrphoto.com](http://patrickzephyrphoto.com).