

**KESTREL
LAND TRUST**



CONSERVATION VALUES AND OVERVIEW OF THE CONSERVATION RESTRICTION ON 3,486 ACRES ON AND ABUTTING BRUSHY MOUNTAIN, SHUTESBURY AND LEVERETT

PROJECT SUMMARY

The Massachusetts Department of Fish and Game (DFG), in partnership with Kestrel Land Trust and Franklin Land Trust, purchased from W. D. Cowls, Inc., a Conservation Restriction (CR) on 3,486 acres on and nearby Brushy Mountain. The 5.4 square mile area covered under the CR encompasses almost all of Brushy Mountain and includes additional nearby parcels. This project represents the largest Conservation Restriction on private land in the Commonwealth's history.

The CR will protect wildlife habitat on a landscape-scale, guarantee public access for hiking, hunting and fishing, and promote sustainable forest management of the property. Cowls will continue to own and manage the land for timber, but the CR prohibits residential and commercial development in perpetuity.

The conserved forest is named the Paul C. Jones Working Forest in honor of Cowls' recently deceased 8th generation family leader. Mr. Paul C. Jones, who, for four decades, spearheaded the company's forestry and lumber manufacturing operations, promoted public sportsman access on thousands of acres of timberland throughout his lifetime.

BIODIVERSITY AND RESOURCE PROTECTION

A Unique Block of Interior Forest in Massachusetts: This nearly 3,500 acre parcel is unique for Massachusetts because it is a large block of contiguous, unfragmented Interior Forest in a densely populated state. According to the Massachusetts Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program (NHESP) this mountain represents a sizeable and representative portion of the ecoregion's biodiversity, which if conserved will allow natural processes to continue. The project area directly abuts 630 acres of permanently protected open space and is located between several state important reserves, including Mount Toby, the Quabbin Reservoir, and Montague Plains. Combined, these areas provide a critical core and corridor for wildlife living and moving through these protected areas and larger forested regions. For these reasons, the conservation of Brushy Mountain and its surrounding area is a top priority for DFG, Kestrel Land Trust, Franklin Land Trust, and the greater Pioneer Valley conservation community.

High Ecological Integrity: In a 2009 Conservation and Assessment Prioritization System (CAPS) analysis by MassAudubon, 2,400 acres of Brushy Mountain received an 'index of ecological integrity' (IEI) score of 0.8 - 1.0, the highest level of ecological integrity. According to the MassAudubon *Losing Ground* report, "The CAPS model presumes that by conserving intact areas of high ecological integrity,

we can conserve most (but not necessarily all) species and ecological processes.” The IEI was calculated for all areas of the state in 1971, 1985, 1999, and 2005. It takes into account eight factors when generating results: habitat loss; microclimate alterations; impacts from domestic predators such as cats and dogs; impacts from edge predators such as raccoons, blue jays, and cowbirds; non-native invasive plants; non-native invasive earthworms; connectedness of the landscape; and similarity of each point to the surrounding landscape.

Wide Ranging Mammals: The Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife (DFW) 2006 Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy (CWCS) identifies three mammal species documented on and nearby Brushy Mountain (i.e. moose, bobcat, and black bear) as species in greatest need of conservation due to their large home ranges. According to the CWCS, upland forests and large unfragmented landscape mosaics - the predominant habitat types of this area - are the habitat types needed to conserve viable populations of these and other wide-ranging mammal species.

Interior Forest Birds: The CWCS also recognizes that extensive unfragmented forest is important to maintaining viable forest bird populations, which are less abundant and have lower nesting success near edges and in small forest fragments. Because Brushy Mountain and its surrounding areas is large and unfragmented, it can provide high-quality bird habitat for a variety of forest bird species such as Scarlet Tanagers, Blackburnian Warblers, Ovenbirds as well as SWAP species in greatest need of conservation, such as Wood Thrushes, Canada Warblers, and Louisiana Waterthrushes.

BioMap2 and Rare Species: NHESP has classified 2,351 acres (69%) of the Brushy Mountain project area as BioMap2 Core Habitat and 3,303 acres (97%) as Critical Natural Landscape. This project area also contains 749 acres of NHESP Priority Habitat for two state listed species of Special Concern. Both species have been documented on site.

Climate Change Adaptation: The 2011 *Massachusetts Climate Change Adaptation Report* states that “upland forests provide important functions including support for a variety of habitats and wide-ranging biological diversity, purification of air and water, moderation of subsurface and overland water flow, and the sequestration of carbon in both the above-ground growing vegetation and in the organic components of forest soils.” Additionally, wide-ranging species and species dependent on mid-level elevation habitat will need large contiguous blocks of land for travel corridors, breeding areas, and foraging areas as the climate changes. At over 3,400 acres and with an elevation of 1,200 feet, the Brushy Mountain area will provide important habitat for these and other species types as climate change occurs. In the *Massachusetts Climate Change Adaptation Report* the protection of large, unfragmented forest blocks, such as Brushy Mountain, is listed as the primary climate adaptation strategy needed to maintain the ecological functions and biodiversity of forested ecosystems.

Water Supply Protection and Fisheries: The protected area consists of five sub-basins, in which lie five Interim Wellhead Protection Areas (IWPA) supplying water to local schools, town centers, and state recreation areas. The village centers of North Leverett and Shutesbury, where 3 wells are located, are less than 1/2 mile from Brushy Mountain. Protecting this area will contribute to the protection of this local water supply. Additionally, the northern section of Brushy Mountain drains into the Sawmill River, which is stocked with Atlantic Salmon fry through the US Fish and Wildlife Service’s Connecticut River Atlantic Salmon Restoration Program. Doolittle Brook, Roaring Brook, and Sawmill River, which flow through or very near Brushy Mountain are important coldwater fisheries resources and support populations of native Brook Trout. More than 60% of the project area is located within 500 feet of a pond, river, stream, or wetland.

Local, Regional, and National Importance: The conservation of the Brushy Mountain area is a high priority for local, regional, multi-state, and national conservation initiatives. The entire Brushy Mountain

project area lies within the Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge and the North Quabbin Corridor Forest Legacy Expansion Area. The highly regarded bi-state initiative, the Quabbin to Cardigan Partnership (Q2C) is working to protect forests along a 100-mile corridor between Massachusetts and New Hampshire. Brushy Mountain is identified as a Q2C core and supporting landscape focus area for having outstanding ecological, wildlife, and timber resource values. Due to Brushy Mountain's central location and significant size in Leverett and Shutesbury, it is identified as a major priority within the towns' Open Space and Recreation Plans. Local, regional, and national land trusts have protected nearly 800 acres of land adjacent to or near Brushy Mountain.

WORKING LANDS: ECONOMIC BENEFITS, SUSTAINABILITY, AND THREATS

Local Economic Contribution: In addition to being the largest private landowner in the state, the family business today known as W.D. Cowls Inc., was started in Amherst in 1741 and is the 12th oldest family business in the U.S. W.D. Cowls, Inc. has been and continues to be a long-standing player in the economic development of the Amherst area and the Pioneer Valley and an economic engine of the state's forest products industry

Commitment to Sustainability: The landowner has a demonstrated commitment to practicing sound and sustainable forest management. Portions of the project area have been actively managed for more than 130 years and the area has been enrolled in the Chapter 61 program since the beginning of the program. In June 2010, the landowner updated their Forest Management Plans and completed new Forest Stewardship Plans for the project area. These Plans now all meet Forest Stewardship Council Northeast Region Green Certification. The landowner's woodland holdings have produced high quality and plentiful logs for well over two centuries - one long-term measure of the landowner's good forest practices. The landowner has also received several forestry awards including the National Hardwood Lumber Association's Forest Stewardship Award, the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies' Private Lands Stewardship Award and the US Department of Interior's Cooperative Conservation Award. The landowner's is also a founding member of the American Tree Farm System, and their holdings have also been Certified Family Forests for over 50 years.

Preventing Poorly Planned Development: The CR permanently prohibits residential and commercial development. Given its extensive size and relatively gentle and dry slopes, Brushy Mountain is vulnerable to residential subdivision development and/or estate lot development. MassAudubon's *Losing Ground* report characterizes most of the Pioneer Valley as a "sprawl danger zone." The growing population of this area puts increasing pressure on Leverett and Shutesbury, which are desirable towns in the Valley with its quaint villages, historic homes, and rural beauty.

RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES AND COMMUNITY VALUES

Public Access for Recreation: The CR will permit public access for passive recreational opportunities, including hunting, fishing, hiking, skiing, and wildlife observation, to the entire Brushy Mountain project area. This will guarantee recreational opportunities to the densely populated Pioneer Valley region of the state. Five colleges and located within 15 miles of Brushy Mountain and 600,000+ people live within a 30-mile radius, which includes Amherst, Northampton, and Springfield, the 3rd largest city in the state.

Valley Scenic Values: Brushy Mountain stands prominently in the Pioneer Valley landscape as a defining mountain ridge that can be seen from public conservation lands such as Mount Warner, Mount Toby, Mount Sugarloaf, Mount Holyoke Range, and Wendell State Forest. Brushy Mountain also is in the viewshed of federally recognized byways and trails, including the Connecticut River National Scenic Farm Byway. Brushy Mountain contains the southern slope of Rattlesnake Gutter one of the most spectacular glacial gorges in western MA, which was created 12,000 years ago.

Historic and Cultural Significance: In the 18th century, Brushy Mountain was the site of a small colonial settlement. Historic remnants, including the ruins of old homesteads and miles of stonewalls provide opportunities for colonial heritage interpretation. Other unique stone structures, of possible Native American origin, have been identified throughout Brushy Mountain.

1000 Great Places: The Special Commission Relative to Designating 1000 Great Places in Massachusetts was created by an Act of the Legislature and signed into law by Governor Deval Patrick on January 15, 2009. Its mission was to identify and recognize the 1000 most truly special places in the Commonwealth, in order to celebrate pride in our state's history and culture, increase knowledge of the Commonwealth's natural surroundings, and encourage regional and international tourism. In July 2010, the Commission named Brushy Mountain with its Rattlesnake Gutter as one of the 1000 Great Places in Massachusetts.

PARTNERS & PROJECT STRUCTURE

Partners: Kestrel Land Trust, Franklin Land Trust, and DFG have each been a significant partner on this project. Kestrel Land Trust and Franklin Land Trust began negotiations on this project four years and built an enduring relationship with the landowner that eventually allowed DFG to join the project partnership. Over the past four years, Kestrel Land Trust and Franklin Land Trust have dedicated hundreds of hours of staff time and resources - including a \$10,000 investment in the preliminary appraisal report completed in 2009 - to ensure the conservation of Brushy Mountain. This project would not have been possible without the unwavering participation and dedication of the land trust partners.

Funding: The total cost of the Brushy Mountain area CR is \$8,800,000. The final acquisition cost was determined by two independent third-party appraisals. While DFG will hold the CR interest on the entire property it was Kestrel Land Trust and Franklin Land Trust that secured the majority of the funding for this project. This includes a \$5,000,000 grant from the USDA Forest Service, Forest Legacy Program, a \$400,000 Saving New England Wildlife grant from the Open Space Institute through the Doris Duke Charitable Trust, and a \$439,600 Western Massachusetts Land Protection Fund grant awarded from the Open Space Institute. The remainder of the funding of \$3,000,000 came from a combination of EOEEA's Landscape Partnership Program, DFG's FY12 capital land acquisition and Land Stamp funds.

Long-term Stewardship: The CR requires annual meetings between DFG and the landowner to discuss management and stewardship issues and opportunities and requires DFG review of all forest management activities before the plans are submitted to DCR for approval. The Forest Legacy program also requires annual monitoring visits to the property to ensure compliance with the terms of the CR. DFG fully understands the stewardship responsibilities and expectations of this CR and is committed to making the staff and resource investments needed to fulfill the stewardship obligations. Additionally, the Kestrel Land Trust and Franklin Land Trust will work with DFG to help provide trained land trust volunteers to help monitor the property regularly.

Supporting Parties: Letters of support for the Forest Legacy application for this CR were received from the following: Legislators: US Representative John Olver, US Senator John Kerry, MA Representative Stephen Kulik, MA Senator Stan Rosenberg, MA Department of Conservation and Recreation, MA Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program, US Fish and Wildlife Service, Rattlesnake Gutter Trust, Mt. Grace Land Conservation Trust, Trust for Public Land, Shutesbury and Leverett Conservation Commissions.