



Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs

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Patrick-Murray Administration and Land Trust Partners Complete Commonwealth's Largest Conservation Restriction on Private Land

Conservation restriction on nearly 3,500 acres of W.D. Cowsls' Land in Pioneer Valley maintains a sustainable working forest, conserves vital wildlife habitat and ensures public recreational access

[Map of the Paul C. Jones Working Forest](#)

BOSTON – Friday, December 23, 2011 – Massachusetts Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA) Secretary Richard K. Sullivan Jr. today announced the Commonwealth's largest private land conservation deal since the 1920's. The partnership between the Department of Fish and Game (DFG), Kestrel Land Trust, Franklin Land Trust, and North Amherst-based W.D. Cowsls, Inc. has resulted in the protection of 3,486 acres of working forest land in the towns of Leverett and Shutesbury.

"This successful and historic land conservation initiative is the result of a unique partnership that will protect this treasure for generations," said Governor Deval Patrick. "This land will forever be home to iconic wildlife, while remaining a productive working forest that supports local jobs and allows hunters, anglers and hikers to enjoy the great outdoors."

Over the past four years, the Patrick-Murray Administration has conserved 85,000 acres of land across the state and the conservation restriction acquired today by the DFG and its Division of Fisheries and Wildlife (MassWildlife) from W.D. Cowsls for \$8.8 million is the largest on a contiguous block of privately owned land in Massachusetts' history. Approximately \$3 million of the total is state funding, comprising DFG's investment of over \$1.4 million from the Commonwealth's open space bond authorization and \$500,000 in Land Stamp funds from the sale of fishing and hunting licenses, as well as \$1 million awarded to DFG and the land trusts by EEA's new Landscape Partnership Grant Program.

"By collaborating with partners in the private sector, the Commonwealth has leveraged almost \$6 million in non-state funding to conserve an incredible piece of land for all to enjoy," said Lieutenant Governor Timothy Murray. "This announced purchase reflects what can be achieved by building strong public/private partnerships."

The 5.4 square mile area encompasses almost all of Brushy Mountain and includes additional adjacent parcels. Brushy Mountain and its adjoining Rattlesnake Gutter was recently named by

the Massachusetts Office of Travel and Tourism as one of the state's "Best 1,000 Places." The conservation restriction ensures that the property will not be developed – protecting key wildlife habitat – and guarantees public access for hunting, fishing, hiking, and other recreation. Motorized vehicle use - except for snowmobiles, motorized wheelchairs and owner forestry-related vehicles - will not be permitted.

"I am pleased to support this truly unique conservation opportunity with a \$1 million grant through my new Landscape Partnership program. This is exactly the type of collaborative effort we want to encourage. This acquisition protects a very large, unfragmented forest ecosystem - an important climate change adaptation strategy," said Secretary Sullivan. "Equally important, it protects a vital working landscape that supports a sustainable, local forest industry. Statewide, forestry operations contribute \$600 million annually to local rural economies in Massachusetts."

"Many wildlife species, including wide ranging mammals such as black bear, moose, and bobcat, as well as forest birds such as scarlet tanager, Blackburnian warbler, and Canada warbler, require large, intact forest to thrive," said DFG Commissioner Mary Griffin. "We are grateful to W.D. Cowsls for the opportunity to protect this incredible habitat for wildlife while maintaining sustainable forestry operations and providing public recreational access to an area with outstanding natural resources."

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

"It has been a tremendous privilege to work on such a significant conservation project for the benefit of the Connecticut River Valley and for the entire Commonwealth," said Kristin DeBoer, Executive Director of Kestrel Land Trust. "It is a rare opportunity to conserve virtually an entire mountain in a single conservation project with a single landowner. It can take decades to conserve thousands of acres of land. Kestrel Land Trust has been honored to work with Cowsls, the state, and our other partners to complete this Conservation Restriction. We are delighted that the Jones family had the foresight to conserve such a significant portion of their woodlands for future generations."

The Kestrel Land Trust of Amherst and the Franklin Land Trust of Shelburne Falls partnered with DFG in a four-year negotiation process with W.D. Cowsls. The purchase price for the conservation restriction was determined by two independent, third-party appraisals. The land trusts secured \$5 million toward the purchase through the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Forest Service's Forest Legacy Program, which receives funding from the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF).

"I've hiked Brushy Mountain and I'm proud to have helped secure Forest Legacy funding for this mountain's permanent conservation," said Congressman John Olver. "Millions of people live within an hour or two of this rare and special place. It's gratifying to know that it will always remain both a recreational and an economic asset in the Valley."

The land trusts also secured \$839,600 through two grants from the Open Space Institute (OSI) - the Western Massachusetts Land Protection Fund and Saving New England's Wildlife, which were made possible with grants from the Kohlberg Foundation and Doris Duke Charitable

Foundation respectively. OSI works to protect scenic, natural, and historic landscapes to ensure public enjoyment, conserve habitats, and sustain community character.

"This project conserves one of Southern New England's largest tracts of unbroken forest land, and ensuring the connectivity of our forests is essential to enabling wildlife and humans to adapt to a changing climate," said Peter Howell, OSI executive vice president. "This project also brings tremendous benefits to the local community through sustainable forest management and recreational access."

The grants represent the Institute's most significant investment in any land conservation project in Massachusetts.

"I appreciate the spirit of partnership that has guided this process," said Senator Stan Rosenberg. "I agree with Lieutenant Governor Murray that preserving these wilderness and scenic areas for all to enjoy can only be achieved when government agencies and private concerns continue to work together."

"The protection from development of this important forest landscape is truly a gift to the people of the Commonwealth that will be enjoyed and treasured by future generations," said Representative Stephen Kulik. "I am pleased that the land will continue to be sustainably managed, thus contributing to our region's natural resource based economy. I congratulate and thank all of the public, private and non-profit partners in this effort for their vision and hard work to make this happen."

The Paul C. Jones Working Forest was acquired by the Cowls family in small-acre parcel purchases over hundreds of years and has been sustainably forested throughout the land company's ownership history. Cowls will continue to own and manage the woodland and conduct sustainable forestry operations under a state-approved Forest Stewardship Plan. Simultaneous with selling the restriction, Cowls added Forest Stewardship Council Green Certification to its existing Tree Farm and Chapter 61 certifications on the property.

A 2009 Conservation and Assessment Prioritization System (CAPS) analysis by University of Massachusetts ranked 2,400 acres of Brushy Mountain at the highest level of ecological integrity.

The area also contains five interim wellhead protection areas supplying water to local schools, town centers and state recreation areas. The village centers of North Leverett and Shutesbury, where hundreds of private wells are located, are less than a half-mile from Brushy Mountain.

"This project is unique for Massachusetts because it is a large block of contiguous Interior Forest in a densely populated state, near the major population centers of this county," said Alain Peteroy, Director of Land Conservation for Franklin Land Trust. "Through this Conservation Restriction we can achieve several goals at once. We can protect drinking water quality, conserve habitat and connectivity, and promote sustainable local wood production."

The Paul C. Jones Working Forest directly abuts a mosaic of 630 acres of additional permanently protected open space and is located between several important reserves, including Mount Toby State Reservation, the Quabbin Reservoir, Montague Plains Wildlife Management

Area, and the Wendell and Erving State Forests. Combined, these areas provide a critical core and corridor for wildlife living and moving through these protected areas and larger forested regions.

The northern section of the Paul C. Jones Working Forest drains into the Sawmill River, which is stocked with Atlantic salmon fry through the Connecticut River Atlantic Salmon Restoration Program. Doolittle Brook, Roaring Brook and Sawmill River, which flow through or very near the project area, are important coldwater fisheries resources and support populations of native brook trout.

About 70 percent of the project area is recognized by MassWildlife's Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program as BioMap2 *Core Habitat*, and 97 percent of the property is characterized as critical natural landscape – defined as an area that is well suited to support ecological processes, disturbances, and wide-ranging species. *Core Habitat* identifies key areas to ensure the long-term persistence of wildlife species of conservation concern, exemplary natural communities, and intact ecosystems across the Commonwealth.

“In addition to a significant conservation project, this acquisition is also a tribute to the Cowls’ family dedication to creating a lasting conservation legacy,” said George Darey, Chairman of the state Fisheries and Wildlife Board.

“This is an example what can be achieved when state and federal agencies, local and national conservation organizations, and sportsmen come together to work on a common conservation goal,” said Wayne MacCallum, director of MassWildlife.

Massachusetts' largest private landowner, W.D. Cowls, Inc., Land Company, owns and manages timberland in 28 towns in Western Massachusetts. Cowls' Tree Farms produce trees as a crop. In addition to managing its land to produce wood, Cowls also provides public recreational opportunities and wildlife habitat.

“The Brushy Mountain Forest Legacy Project is the largest contiguous single ownership of working woodlands protected in the history of the Forest Legacy Program in Massachusetts,” said Department of Conservation and Recreation Commissioner Edward Lambert, whose agency administers the Forest Legacy program. “The protection of these working woodlands, which have been sustainably managed by W.D. Cowls for many years, addresses the primary issues of forest fragmentation and parcelization identified in the Massachusetts Forest Legacy Program Assessment of Need.”

This year marks the 270th year W.D. Cowls has been sustainably managing forests in western Massachusetts.

“We're obviously in it for the long run and this conservation achievement demonstrates how commercial forest management can complement open space conservation and recreation,” said Cinda Jones, 9th generation co-owner and president. “My dad was really proud that we were making this happen and I'm so proud that we're naming the conserved forest after him.”

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