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32 Acres added to Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge

Hadley, Mass. – The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service this week acquired 32 acres in Hadley, Mass., for the Fort River Division of the Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge.

The land had been subdivided into four house lots and put on the real estate market in July of 2011. To protect the land from development, the Kestrel Land Trust stepped in at that time to purchase the land until the Conte Refuge could acquire the property. The purchase was made possible with funds from the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund with support from The Conservation Fund.

"I was pleased to support this new addition to the Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge using funds from the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund. Protecting lands of local and national significance is a gift to future generations," said U.S. Representative John Olver.

The refuge division is in the heart of a mosaic of farmlands and grasslands extending north from the base of the Mt. Holyoke Range to the Fort River in Hadley and Amherst, Mass. The newly acquired land at the Fort River Division will help protect the longest free-flowing tributary to the Connecticut River in Massachusetts. The Fort River and its surrounding provide habitat for the federally endangered dwarf wedge mussel and rare bird species.

"Our partners and the landowners who have made the choice to conserve their properties have made the Fort River Division of the Silvio O. Conte refuge, as well as broader conservation efforts in the Pioneer Valley, a reality," said Andrew French, project leader for the Conte refuge. "The efforts of the Kestrel Land Trust and the support of The Conservation Fund made this investment for wildlife and people possible. Partnerships like this continue to protect these important natural resources for future generations."

Conservation organizations are working together to ensure that Hadley and surrounding areas preserve habitat and scenic, agricultural, and historic character. National, regional, state and local partners include: the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Kestrel Land Trust, The Conservation Fund, The Trust for Public Land, Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation, Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources, and the Conservation and Agricultural Commissions of Hadley and Amherst.

"This was a must-save parcel of land," said Kristin DeBoer of Kestrel Land Trust. "With iconic views of the Mount Holyoke Range and its critical location in the heart of this protected rural area, it was critical to take this land off the real estate market. Even one new house on Moody Bridge Road would have degraded this conserved area at the heart of the Valley."

"What makes this area special is the diversity of landscapes that essentially define the character of Valley," said Reggie Hall, manager of The Conservation Fund's Land Trust Loan Program. "We are proud to help the Kestrel Land Trust continue its commitment to conserving lands in the heart of the Connecticut River Valley, and we applaud the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for all of their good work in the region."

Land trusts have worked to cultivate landowner participation, negotiate deals, conduct private fundraising, and pre-acquire parcels when necessary. In the last five years, four projects have been completed protecting more than 150 acres as part of the Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge or Mass Agricultural Preservation Restriction Program. More than 200 acres of nearby farmland have been conserved by the Department of Agricultural Resources through the Agricultural Preservation Restriction Program.

About The Partners

The mission of the **U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service** is working with others to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals, and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit www.fws.gov <<http://www.fws.gov>> . Connect with our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/usfwsnortheast <<http://www.facebook.com/usfwsnortheast>> , follow our tweets at www.twitter.com/usfwsnortheast <<http://www.twitter.com/usfwsnortheast>> , watch our YouTube Channel at <http://www.youtube.com/usfws> and download photos from our Flickr page at <http://www.flickr.com/usfwsnortheast>.

Kestrel Land Trust is dedicated to conserving the land that sustains the quality of life and ecological integrity of the Connecticut River Valley. Founded in 1970, Kestrel and its partners have conserved over 19,000 acres of farms, forests, fields, wetlands, and riverlands. The Trust serves a 19-town region surrounding Amherst and Northampton. For more information see www.kestrreltrust.org <<http://www.kestrreltrust.org>> .

At **The Conservation Fund**, we combine a passion for conservation with an entrepreneurial spirit to protect your favorite places before they become just a memory. A hallmark of our work is our deep, unwavering understanding that for conservation solutions to last, they need to make economic sense. Top-ranked, we have protected more than 7 million acres across America.

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