



Landscapes

News and Notes from Valley Land Fund Spring 2008

President's Letter

When Pascommuck Conservation Trust approached Valley Land Fund to help protect land on the slopes of Mt. Tom, we had no idea that this would be such a defining project for VLF. At the time, it was a daunting request involving an unbelievably quick timeline, complex legal hurdles and a steep price tag. The story of this land and the partnerships that enabled its protection are described in this newsletter.

Mt. Tom is not the only new place where you can find VLF at work. We are also at work on major land protection efforts in Gill, Hadley and Holyoke. In addition, VLF is delighted to have established our first office. While our mailing address remains the same, we have joined the conservation community in the American Farmland Trust building on Short Street in Northampton.

Valley Land Fund has also enhanced our internal structure. We welcome Jocelyn Forbush and Robert Jonas to the VLF Stewardship Committee, Jim Soper to our Lands Committee, Steve Calcagnino to our Fundraising Committee, and Dave Hershops to our Finance Committee.

Thanks to everyone who has joined us for hikes and walks recently and for all of your continued support.



John Body, President



photo by Terry Blunt

SAVING MT. TOM

In January, Valley Land Fund purchased nearly 15 acres on the slopes of Mt. Tom, protecting vital forest land and expanding one of the region's most popular recreation areas. VLF worked with the Pascommuck Conservation Trust and the City of Easthampton to protect the land from likely development. The parcel, located on East Street in Easthampton, is an important corridor for wildlife and directly impacts the quality of life for people throughout the region.

The land belonged to the Ciak family, long-time residents of Easthampton who had previously conserved their land through "Chapter 61," a state law that provides temporary protection for farmland, forests, and recreational land until the current owner sells the land. When the Ciak family was ready to sell their land, the Chapter 61 agreement provided the City of Easthampton with the right of first refusal to buy it. Easthampton Mayor Michael A. Tautznik asked Valley Land Fund to step in and help permanently save this important natural area for the people of Western Massachusetts. Quick intervention by Valley Land Fund stopped a development domino effect on the slopes of Mt. Tom and initiated a preservation domino effect, as VLF is now in the process of helping neighbors to the east protect their land.

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SAVING Mt. TOM CONT...

Support from the Pascommuck Conservation Trust enabled Valley Land Fund to act quickly and muster the financial resources to purchase this land. Working together, we mobilized new resources, leveraged the diverse expertise of both organizations, and engaged in the substantial work of negotiating this deal. Terry Blunt of Conservation Works, LLC, a local land protection service, was instrumental in negotiating this deal with landowners and the Department of Conservation and Recreation. Special thanks go to Dick Evans for guiding us through the legal intricacies of this project and to Marty Klein who helped forge many of the partnerships that made this project a success.

However, our work is far from complete. VLF and Pascommuck Conservation Trust are now in the process of securing funding to help cover our investment in this project. The State Department of Conservation and Recreation plans on purchasing much of the protected land and the City of Easthampton's Community Preservation Act has pledged to step in as a major contributor. Now we are now looking to Valley residents to help with the final stages of funding the protection of this valuable property.

This project highlights the way that VLF has worked with partners throughout the Connecticut River Valley for over 20 years. By responding quickly to pressing threats to our natural areas, VLF works with state and municipal governments and non-profit organizations to protect the special places of Western Massachusetts. Through support from local citizens, we were able to act swiftly to protect this vital part of the Mt. Tom hillside.

Protecting the Mt. Tom property is one of the largest projects VLF has ever undertaken. Valley Land Fund is counting on your support to allow us to fully fund the Mt. Tom project and play a similar role for other natural areas in the Valley in the future.



photo by Josh Pezz

Seeking Conservation Buyers

Valley Land Fund has just launched another major land protection effort in Northern Franklin County. We are working to put a Conservation Restriction on 180 acres of beautiful wooded land along a major stream. The land includes two existing, secluded homes, each on four unrestricted acres.

VLF is seeking serious buyers for these two sites, which can include the deed to land with a Conservation Restriction as well. The property is situated four miles from I-91 access, and two miles from Rte 2. This is a great opportunity to "buy into" a place that will be forever protected from further development. Home prices are in the high \$200s. Call Terry Blunt of Conservation Works LLC for further details at 413-247-5831 and visit www.ValleyLandFund.org for photos of the site.

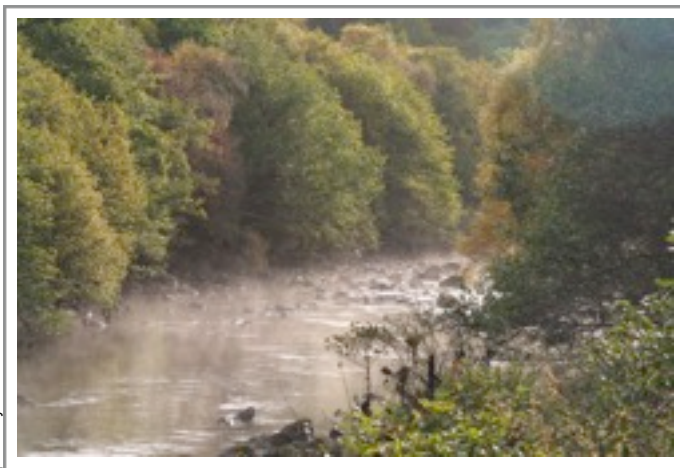


photo by John Haslam