

Editorial

Preserving more open space

North County Land Trust, a Leominster-based nonprofit 501(c)3 land conservation organization, again made good on its mission to conserve the farms, forests and landscapes that define the character of our region by recently purchasing more than 200 acres on the south slope of Mount Watatic.

This provides a significant addition to the mount's existing protected land.

The acquisition is part of a land-protection effort supported by local and state partners and generous donors, according to a release from the Trust.

Located just south of the New Hampshire border in the towns of Ashby and Ashburnham, 1,800-foot Mount Watatic, due to its proximity to Boston, spectacular views, and the confluence of the Midstate and Wapack trails, is a popular destination for hikers, hawk watchers and other outdoor enthusiasts.

North County Land Trust took the lead in coordinating the \$1.3 million financing for this project. The Conservation Fund provided a low-interest loan for a portion of the purchase price, the Fields Pond Foundation contributed generously, and NCLT friends and members, as well as allies at the Ashby Land Trust and Ashburnham Conservation Trust, helped spread the word and gave significant donations.

Pending funding, NCLT said it intends to transfer 186 acres to the Department of Fish and Game and its Division of Fisheries and Wildlife, adding to its land holdings in the vicinity.

"NCLT will retain 15 acres of property that will provide

space for the collaborative environmental education and low impact outdoor experiences which our organization values and for which it is known," NCLT Executive Director Anna Wilkins said.

"Mount Watatic is a special place and holds the hearts of many. North County Land Trust could not have achieved this goal without the generosity of key donors, hundreds of individuals, and groups such as the Friends of the Wapack Trail, Midstate Trail Committee and many more," Wilkins said. The property, which features a mix of mature and young forests, pastures, ponds, and wetlands, provides critical wildlife habitat and sanctuary for the site's biodiversity. Hiking, hunting and other nature-based recreation will be allowed on the property, according to the Trust.

NCLT owns seven other conservation areas, including the nearby Kirby Conservation Area in Ashburnham.

We're fortunate to have forward-looking, conservation organizations like North County Land Trust in our midst, which work cooperatively with state agencies to preserve the scenic beauty of North Central Massachusetts and the rest of the coveted open space of the commonwealth. We wish NCLT well as it pursues its mission.