Protecting Your Land with the Monadnock Conservancy
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160 Emerald Street
Post Office Box 337
Keene, New Hampshire 03431
(603) 357-0600
info@Monadnock Conservancy.org
wwwMonadnockConservancy.org
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Why Protect Land?

Many people have a deep, emotional attachment to their land. They worry about what will happen to it when they no longer own it. Whether the land has been in their family for generations or for only a short time, residents of the Monadnock Region care deeply for the fields, woods, and waters where they walk and picnic with their families, where they bird watch and swim, where they harvest crops and cut firewood, where they see deer and moose and peepers and salamanders living alongside humans.

People also are concerned about the future of lands they don’t own but still cherish—scenic views they pass daily or lands that have been identified as significant for their community’s rural character.

Important undeveloped land is under threat throughout the country. More than eight square miles of open space is lost to development every day—a total of two million acres every year. At this rate, we have about 20 years to protect our most important natural resources and cherished landscapes before they will be lost forever. Due to budgetary and political constraints on government land acquisitions, non-profit land trusts such as the Monadnock Conservancy are playing a greater role in land conservation. These organizations have protected more than 6.2 million acres—an area roughly twice the size of Connecticut—and each year protect an average of 500,000 additional acres.

New Hampshire itself is growing faster than any state in the northeast. In the Monadnock Region alone, more than 1,400 acres are lost to development every year, resulting in further fragmentation of the landscape. With the help of local ecologists, biologists, and other planning experts, many communities are inventorying the important natural resources in their towns and identifying the areas that are suitable for development and growth, as well as the lands
that provide crucial public benefits and must be protected. These lands protect clean water supplies, local forest products, farms that produce the fruits and vegetables sold at local farmers’ markets, beloved hiking trails and views, and unfragmented blocks of wild lands that protect the full range of native plants and animals.

Ultimately, land is protected in a partnership between the Monadnock Conservancy and private landowners. These dedicated individuals and families are as diverse as the land itself. The families hope their actions will inspire others.

Conservation provides a practical and permanent solution: land is protected from extensive development and important natural resources are saved—forever. Conservation ensures that future generations will benefit from the foresight of others, and that our children’s grandchildren will be able to enjoy the same Monadnock Region that we all love today.
The Monadnock Conservancy: Mission, History, and Priorities

The Monadnock Conservancy is a community land trust whose purposes are to identify, promote, and actively seek protection of significant natural, aesthetic, and historic resources in the Monadnock Region; and to monitor and enforce the protection of lands in the Trust.

A non-profit, membership-based organization, the Monadnock Conservancy was founded in 1989 by citizens concerned for the quality of life in southwestern New Hampshire. Now housed in a downtown Keene office, the organization works in 35 towns throughout the Monadnock Region.

The Conservancy is managed by a small staff and governed by a 15-member Board of Trustees. More than 100 active volunteers support the work, including town representatives, scientific and professional advisors, and conservation land monitors.

More than 80 percent of the revenue to support our work comes from private contributions made by individuals, foundations, and businesses, with the balance from project revenue and endowment interest. Donations to the Monadnock Conservancy go directly to accomplishing the mission.

We adhere to the Standards and Practices of the Land Trust Alliance, the national association that has established a professional code of conduct for land conservation groups. (For more information, see www.lta.org.) These national guidelines assure that the Monadnock Conservancy maintains procedures and policies of the highest standards.
The Monadnock Conservancy has clear priorities for our conservation work, using established criteria to evaluate projects. Our goal is to conserve land that will support or enhance:

**Clean Water**
- Land overlying aquifers and aquifer recharge areas
- Frontage on rivers, streams, lakes, ponds, and reservoirs
- Wetlands, flood plains, buffer areas, and riparian zones

**Forestry and Agriculture**
- Tracts of woodland with sufficient size, appropriate soils, and other attributes that support responsible forest management, including the production of timber and other forest products
- Farmlands and open fields with prime soils and other attributes that support viable agriculture

**Wildlife and Special Natural Areas**
- Large tracts of undeveloped habitat and corridors important for wildlife
- Land containing ecologically significant or rare natural communities or species
- Other lands which increase the diversity and viability of wildlife populations, including fields, riparian areas, and land contiguous to existing protected natural areas

**Recreation, Scenery, and Cultural Resources**
- Land that offers opportunities for responsible outdoor recreation by the public
- Scenic views, ridgelines, and other aesthetic areas
- Landscapes that preserve the region’s cultural and historic heritage

We are equally committed to:

**Cooperation and Collaboration**
- With municipalities, citizen groups, non-profit organizations, public agencies, and other important partners
In general, the Monadnock Conservancy favors land projects that:

• Abut, enlarge, or provide linkages to existing conservation areas
• Are threatened by a change in use that will undermine identified conservation values
• Have been designated for protection by a municipality, public agency, or land trust
• Have clear potential to stimulate future contiguous land protection projects
• Offer meaningful public environmental education opportunities
• Provide access for responsible outdoor recreation by the public
• Benefit a wide range of people and enjoy demonstrated public support
Conservation Options for Landowners

There are several options available to a landowner. The two most common are the donation of a conservation easement on the land, or the donation of the land itself. These and other options are described briefly below; more information is available from the Conservancy staff.

**Donation of a Conservation Easement**
A landowner may choose to donate a conservation easement on his or her property, retaining ownership and use of the land, but giving up the right to develop it. A legally binding agreement between a landowner and a land trust such as the Monadnock Conservancy, a conservation easement describes specific permitted uses of the property, including agriculture, forestry, recreation, and other open space uses; and specific prohibited uses, including industrial, commercial, and residential development, and other intensive activities such as mining and unsustainable logging. See more complete description on page 12.

**Donation of Land**
A landowner may give a property to the Monadnock Conservancy outright, with the agreement that the organization will manage the land for conservation. With the permission of the donor, the Conservancy may place a conservation easement on the land and then sell it or otherwise convey it, with restrictions in place, to another land trust or to a private or public entity.

**Gift of Land or Conservation Easement by Bequest**
An individual may make a bequest of land or of a conservation easement to the Monadnock Conservancy through her or his will.
Gift of a Remainder Interest
Landowners can donate land to the Monadnock Conservancy while retaining a life interest in the property for themselves, their families, or others. When the term of the life interest expires, the Conservancy takes full ownership of the property and will ensure its permanent protection.

Sale of Land or Easement
Occasionally, the Monadnock Conservancy may purchase a piece of land or a conservation easement. In this case, an independent appraiser determines the sale price. Often such a transaction may be a “bargain sale,” whereby the purchase price of the property, or of the easement, is less than the appraised fair market value. Currently in New Hampshire there is limited public money for these types of conservation transactions. When the Monadnock Conservancy has participated in such projects, it has been with the leadership of the local municipality or of a committed group of community members, and funded by a local, private fundraising campaign and/or municipal appropriation.
Conservation Easements: The Details

The majority of the work of the Monadnock Conservancy involves assisting private landowners with the process of conveying conservation easements, and seeing that the easements are enforced.

A conservation easement is a legally binding agreement, made between the owner of a property and the Monadnock Conservancy, that restricts development and other intensive uses of the land. The landowner retains ownership—including the right to sell, give, or transfer the property to a new owner at any time—but gives up the right to certain uses that are restricted by the easement.

An easement describes restrictions on development and other uses in order to protect the land’s conservation values. An owner can work with the Conservancy to determine the exact scope of these restrictions. For example, residential or commercial construction may be prohibited entirely, or can sometimes be limited to specific sites. Other typical restrictions include prohibiting removal of topsoil and gravel, heavy or unsustainable logging, construction of billboards, commercial and residential buildings, and other uses that are detrimental to natural resource conservation.

The easement also may provide for certain uses: such as education and scientific research, public recreational access, improvements for forestry and agriculture, and other activities that conform to the purposes of the easement. Some owners also want to reserve certain rights, such as building a cabin or a pond or withdrawing a house lot. These rights are worked out between the landowner and the Conservancy.

Landowners who grant conservation easements make their own choices about whether to open their property to the public.
Some landowners convey specific public access rights, such as allowing fishing in designated areas, or hiking along a clearly defined trail. Others do not. Public access is more often granted when the property has a history of public use and is considered an important recreational resource, or if the easement is purchased.

All subsequent owners must also comply with the easement. The Monadnock Conservancy accepts the legal responsibility for ensuring that the terms are observed in perpetuity, and for seeking redress if violations occur. The easement is recorded at the county Registry of Deeds so that all future purchasers or lenders and other interested parties will have notice of the restrictions when they obtain title reports.

Any owner of property with significant conservation values that meet the criteria of the Conservancy may grant an easement. If the property belongs to more than one person, all owners must approve. If the property is mortgaged, the lender must also agree.

Every property is different, and every landowner has different needs and goals. The Monadnock Conservancy works with each landowner to structure an easement that meets mutually agreed objectives.

*Donations of Easements from Towns*

The Conservancy also works with other land trusts and public agencies, particularly municipalities, to design appropriate conservation solutions. More and more communities are setting priorities for conservation. These priorities may include permanently protecting town-owned lands for a variety of public uses, often supporting clean drinking water and recreation.

The Conservancy is increasingly being asked to accept conservation easements on these properties. Towns must have a vote at Town Meeting to proceed, and then they have much of the same flexibility as private landowners in drafting an easement. When a town or other public entity owns the property, public access is typically granted.
The Structure of a Conservation Easement Deed

• Opening statements set forth intentions and identify the Grantor (the current landowner and all future owners) and the Grantee (the conservation organization).
• An explicit list of Purposes explains the primary reasons the land is being protected and cites the state and federal laws that enable easements.
• Use Limitations describe the restrictions on certain activities such as commercial or residential development, commercial activities, and extractive activities such as mining and heavy logging.
• The landowner’s Reserved Rights describe certain specific rights retained by the landowner, such as the right to build a cabin or a pond.
• The remaining sections of the easement define the obligations of the Grantor and Grantee, and outline the process by which easements are monitored, amended, and upheld.
• Appendices to the easement include a detailed description of the property and certain guidelines for forestry activities.

A more extensive summary and a complete copy of a model easement are available from the Monadnock Conservancy office.
1. The first step in exploring conservation options is to contact the staff at the Monadnock Conservancy, by telephone, email, or letter. An initial conversation can establish a common understanding of the landowner’s goals, and determine if the staff should begin to research the natural resources and other features of the property. The Conservancy also strongly encourages a meeting with staff to walk the property.

2. If the landowner and the staff agree to continue discussions, the Lands Committee of the Board of Trustees visits the property, to meet the landowner if possible and determine whether the project meets the organization’s formal land protection criteria. If so, the Committee recommends to the full Board to proceed with the project.

3. Next steps by staff include certain due diligence work, including confirming a clear title to the property, conducting hazardous waste assessments, and determining a clear description of the bounds of the property through existing or new survey work. Staff continues to research the natural resources through Geographic Information Systems analysis and consultation with other experts.

4. Staff work with the landowner to define the terms of the easement or of the gift of land, producing draft deeds to be reviewed by the landowner, the landowner’s legal counsel, and the Conservancy’s legal counsel.

5. When all these pieces are in place, the Lands Committee brings the project back to the full Board for a final vote of acceptance. Staff set up the “closing” with the landowner, where the deed or other...
legal document is signed, notarized, and recorded in the county Registry of Deeds.

6. Staff complete a “baseline documentation” of the property, recording the condition of the land at the time the deed is signed. This file of maps, photographs, and other written reports is kept in a fireproof safe to stand in perpetuity as a record of the conservation values of the property, and is updated at least annually through our Stewardship program (see page 20).

This process can take as few as three months, but generally somewhat longer. The timing depends on the landowner’s preparedness, availability of key documents, and the complexity of the project.
Financial Considerations: Benefits and Costs

Benefits

Land protection may provide certain tax benefits, and can be an important part of long-term financial planning. The tax implications of a conservation gift will depend on the timing and the value of the gift, the donor’s financial circumstances, tax laws and rates at the time of the transaction, and other factors. The Monadnock Conservancy can supply general information about the tax implications of land protection, but a landowner considering conservation options should consult with his or her own tax advisors.

Federal Income Taxes: In relinquishing the right to develop a property through a conservation easement, the landowner may reduce the financial value of a property and be able to claim that difference in value as a charitable deduction. In the case of a gift of land, the entire value may be deducted. Values are determined by an independent appraiser.

Estate Taxes: A conservation easement may reduce the value of a landowner’s estate, thereby reducing the inheritance taxes levied on his or her heirs. This may enable heirs to keep the property, rather than being forced to sell it to pay estate taxes.

Property Taxes: In some cases, placing a conservation easement on land may reduce local property taxes.

Costs

There are some costs associated with donating an easement or land to the Monadnock Conservancy. A landowner is generally expected to be responsible for the items listed below. The Conservancy staff can provide updated information and help estimate approximate
costs. There are limited funds that may be available to help landowners with these expenses in case of need.

**Survey Work**
In order for the Monadnock Conservancy to accept an easement or gift of land, there must be an accurate survey of the property. This may be an existing survey. If the easement excludes land around existing buildings, or covers only a portion of the land, these areas will need to be surveyed.

**Legal and Recording Fees**
Legal professionals have helped develop the language in the Conservancy’s model easement deed. Staff can explain the structure and content of the model easement, but landowners are strongly urged to review the documents with their own attorney to obtain a complete understanding of the potential impact of protecting their land.

The Conservancy requires a title review, a clean hazardous waste assessment, and the approval by the organization’s attorney of any unusual terms or changes to the standard easement deed. The Conservancy requires reimbursement for these legal and professional costs, as well as for the cost of recording the easement at the Registry of Deeds.

**Direct Expenses**
The Conservancy charges on an hourly basis for staff time spent negotiating and completing an easement transaction. Time spent initially meeting with a landowner, walking the property, and discussing the Conservancy’s process has no charge. Costs will vary depending on the complexity of the project; a typical easement involves 15-20 hours of staff time, which includes managing any survey work, negotiating and drafting the easement deed, and preparing the baseline documentation. If the property is a large tract with poorly marked boundaries, or the easement is complex and involves many drafts, the time involved may be much greater.
**Stewardship Donation**
When the Conservancy accepts an easement, it takes on the permanent responsibility of upholding the terms of the easement. The Conservancy, therefore, asks that easement donors make a one-time tax-deductible contribution to its Easement Stewardship Fund, which enables the organization to watch over the land in perpetuity. Monies must be committed to this fund prior to the execution of the easement. Guidelines for contributions to the Stewardship Fund are available at the office.

**Other Services**
As part of planning for the future use of your property, a landowner may wish to consult with land use planners, foresters, or other professionals. The decision to hire consultants is strictly personal; if there are complex goals for the property, the Conservancy may suggest seeking professional advice.

The Conservancy can provide landowners with general information about tax and estate issues. The staff strongly urges landowners to seek advice from a financial professional if the land protection choices are likely to influence or be influenced by income tax and estate planning considerations.

If the property is mortgaged, the mortgage holder must agree to the easement in writing. Banks sometimes charge for executing such agreements.

As mentioned earlier, a gift of land or a conservation easement to a non-profit organization such as the Monadnock Conservancy may entitle the donor to a federal income tax deduction. In order to claim a deduction, the value of the easement must be determined by an appraiser who has experience appraising conservation easements.

The Monadnock Conservancy strongly suggests that landowners consult their own tax and legal advisors.
Stewardship

Conservation Easements
If land protection is to be meaningful, it must stand the test of time. When the Monadnock Conservancy accepts a conservation easement, it agrees to uphold the intent of the agreement forever. Our mission statement closes with our commitment to this responsibility: “To monitor and enforce the protection of lands in the Trust.” Once the Conservancy accepts an easement on a property we become partners, working side-by-side with the current landowner and all future owners, to ensure the long-term protection of the land.

Good land stewardship has several components: annual monitoring to make sure the land is being used according to the easement terms developed by the donor; good record keeping; maintaining positive relations with easement donors and consecutive owners of a property; and the maintenance of funds dedicated to the enforcement of the easement should any violations occur.

The Monadnock Conservancy monitors each of its easement properties annually to assess compliance with the terms of the agreement. Staff or trained volunteers visit the property to meet with the landowner, walk the boundaries of the property, and note any significant changes. The organization keeps written records and photographs on file to document its site inspections, and communicates regularly with landowners. The monitoring program is designed to head off easement violations before they occur.

In some rare cases an individual landowner may act in clear violation of an easement’s provisions. In other cases, abutters, members of the public, or professionals such as loggers or engineers may act counter to the terms. In any of these instances, the Conservancy will do whatever is necessary to see that the activity is stopped and that the condition of the land is restored. If required, the
Conservancy will seek independent arbitration and/or legal action to uphold its obligations, as guided by the terms of the easement.

Landowners who grant conservation easements know and appreciate the importance of living with their provisions for the land. When a property under easement changes ownership, the seller must inform the Conservancy. Staff will meet with the new owner to review and explain the terms of the easement. Easement stewardship becomes more important with time, to ensure that future users of the land understand and respect the original grantor’s intentions.

Recognizing the permanent fiscal obligation created by accepting easements, the Conservancy funds these stewardship expenses through revenue generated by the Easement Stewardship Fund. In addition, the Conservancy has established an Enforcement Fund to provide for the legal defense of an easement. These two funds give the Conservancy the confidence to uphold its commitments, now and for years to come.

Fee-Owned Conservation Land
For property the organization owns outright, the Conservancy follows a land use and management policy adopted by the Board of Trustees. The policy encourages constructive community interaction with the land, while protecting the natural, aesthetic, and cultural resources of the property. A Management Plan for the land will be based on a scientific inventory of the property’s natural resources, as well as consideration of its cultural and recreational uses. In general, management of Conservancy-owned land will meet or exceed the use limitations in our standard conservation easement, and the land will be open to the public for uses that do not threaten the conservation value of the land. More information on the land use policy is available from the Conservancy staff.
Each of the landowners profiled in the following pages has come to the Monadnock Conservancy to protect permanently the special qualities of their properties.

**John and Betsey Harris** of Dublin wanted to help preserve the brook that runs through their property for its water quality and the wildlife habitat it supports.

**Ned Eldredge** of Peterborough wanted to ensure that his carefully managed woodlot would provide forest products for the region for generations to come.

**Jacob and Georgia Wolterbeek** of Rindge wished to protect their historic farm and its prime agricultural soils from the subdivision and development that have affected other parts of their town.

**Barbara and Walter Lacey** of Keene wanted to safeguard their family lands and to expand a corridor of open space for wildlife habitat and recreation.

**Melissa and David Stephenson** of Peterborough wanted to add to a growing network of conservation lands protecting the water quality of the Contoocook River. The Stephensons also cut firewood, harvest Christmas trees, and tap sugar maples for syrup.

In the town of **Greenfield**, a group of neighbors devoted themselves to “Keeping the Green in Greenfield.” The Timmons, Pennoyer, and Lehner families each donated easements on their land, for a total of almost 900 contiguous acres. The families hope this is just the beginning.

Ultimately, land is protected in a partnership between the Monadnock Conservancy and private landowners. These dedicated individuals and families are as diverse as the land itself.
Squat, brown quail sail low through the trees ahead of Betsey Harris as she walks along the course of Stanley Brook. She points out tree trunks gouged by pileated woodpeckers, and describes the cloven footprints of moose whose lofty, elusive bodies she has yet to glimpse. From their lawn, higher on the property, she and her husband John can watch turkeys ramble between themselves and Mount Monadnock or they can just watch the mountain, as clouds vary the shades of its green.

Set intimately in a rural environment, Betsey’s retirement is an image of her childhood, which she spent among the woods and swamps near Thoreau’s Walden Pond. Her father—a writer of essays about wilderness and a publisher who brought out the landmark *Silent Spring*—would take her out bird- or butterfly-watching, or walking through the swamps, from the time she was a small child.

Bringing the legacy of concern for land into its next generation, Betsey helped to found the Monadnock Conservancy in 1989. She says, “We saw the need for a conservation organization where neighbors knew neighbors, where if someone was thinking about land conservation they could call up somebody they knew.” John and Betsey entrusted the Conservancy with its first easement that same year, protecting nearly eighty acres of their land, a mix of forest, open field, swamp, pond, and brook.

These habitats benefit myriad members of the natural community. Among these, Betsey takes particular joy in the bands of human young that pass through, when a local school brings students to explore the stream. The last time, Betsey says, “they all drew these wonderful, gorgeous pictures of all the nasty little things they had dredged up out of the brook. Also, they had the most marvelous time. I felt particularly happy about that, those kids getting out, having a chance to run around in the woods.”
Ned Eldredge’s kitchen windows face acres of thinned woods. He was a kid on this land, leaving only long enough for college, and the third generation of his family to live here. Still, he feels that his hold on his sixty ancestral acres may be slipping. “I got the easement to protect myself,” he says, for the day when his income as a logger or his stipend as a graduate student couldn’t stretch to meet the tax bill, when he might be tempted to sell off house lots. Subdivision and development, as far as Ned is concerned, are the worst things that could happen.

Ned spreads a map of Peterborough over his kitchen table, across the orderly yet sprawling grid of stacked notebooks and documents that surround his open, humming laptop; he’s on the cusp of finishing his Master’s thesis in biogeochemistry. On the map, Ned points out where properties shaded gray adjoin each other. Gray indicates protected parcels, and the more borders they share, the better. Corridors let animals hunt and migrate and let people wander the woods without interruptions. For that reason, since prohibiting development on his own land, Ned’s been working to persuade his neighbors. Drawing a finger down their road, he notes, “We’re well on the way to having most of this section of Windy Row protected.”

Both Ned and the easement he donated in 2001 are emphatic that timber harvesting is essential to his vision for the land. “Forestry activities,” the easement reads, “shall be conducted with the specific objective of promoting regeneration and survival of ecologically and commercially valuable tree species.” Keeping conservation goals are the first priority, and silvicultural practices are encouraged.
“As a logger,” Ned says, “I’ll show you how we try to do things sustainably.” He puts it like this: “Any time you extract a resource, whether it’s timber or water or minerals, there are impacts, no question. But those resources are going to be extracted somehow. Isn’t it better to have them done on protected land where it can be controlled?”

For Ned, these woods still form the center from which knowledge expands outward. His work as a conservationist is inspired by this bond. “I know every inch of my land,” Ned says. “I know every tree on sixty acres. I know most every coyote den. I know where to see deer in the winter. I know where the thrushes hang out. I have a very intimate relationship with this land.”
Swallows circle the barn rafters in a panic. Many of their young have fledged already, Georgia Wolterbeek says, but there must be infant birds still in a few nests.

Beams and ladders all are frowsy with loose hay, and the sweet fragrance permeates the barn’s corridor. But when Georgia opens a door to a neat stall with a spinning wheel at its center, the smell changes. The odor—an oily, pungent rankness—emanates from shelves that store heap after heap of heavy fluff in rich shades of brown, cream, dun, and gray. Outside the windows, sparser versions of that cloudy fur, this time with legs and faces, graze a hillside.

“Spinning is about the only thing I can think of that you can do without harming something,” Georgia says. “The sheep are so delighted to have their fleece taken off.” Georgia and her husband, Dr. Jim Wolterbeek, have practiced this ethic of gentleness as best they could since they purchased their 302-acre farm in 1968. Raising animals for milk, eggs, and wool, they cultivate less than a third of the property. The other hundreds of acres—woods, meadow and swamp— are left to whatever wild creatures can use them.

When they donated their easement in 2002, the Wolterbeeks took the uncommon step of forbidding commercial logging. Their forest, Jim asserts, takes bountiful care of itself. “Our wish was for it to be left unspoiled,” he says. “For the animals,” Georgia adds, “to be able to live in the woods in peace.” 

Landowner Profiles
West Hill, Keene

At a wedding reception in Walt and Barbara Lacey’s woods, many of the guests had met there before, over and over. The clearing, edged by a semi-circle of small, cedar-shingled buildings, was the same spot where the bride, Walt’s niece, had been christened, where her parents celebrated their engagement, where her brother got married, and where her grandfather was memorialized. “Just every kind of family celebration and ritual was held there,” Barbara says, “from birth to death.”

The clearing has served as a gathering place since Walt’s great-grandfather constructed the first tiny cabin there in 1903. A makeshift log pencilled onto that cabin’s door notes some of the last century’s goings-on. Among them, an entry from the fifties, gleefully signed “Anonymous,” divulges, “Two of us skipped school and came to this site!” An entry from 1944 reads: “Sugar off, with bombers flying east.”

By placing the camp and the 153 acres of thick woods surrounding it under easement, the Laceys have also protected the family legacy for future generations. Already their offspring, and nieces and nephews, are celebrating. Each New Year’s Eve, that generation converges for a sleepover gala. Late at night in the dark and the snow, the cousins blast off fireworks.

The easement also protects the changeable, sometimes fiery, colors of West Hill, one of Keene’s most dominant landmarks. “That hillside is probably one of the most beautiful vistas,” Walt says. “Every day it looks a little different. There are the times of the year, the trees and the color, the texture, the rain, the fog, clouds…And that’s not going to change.” Gifting the future with a family treasure and a scenic treasure, Walt says, “was probably one of the most satisfying things I’ve ever done.” 🗓
“Everyone was doing something crazy,” says David Stephenson. “It was fun,” says his wife, Melissa. “It was the times.” It was 1974, and the crazy thing they did was take an old barn someone was giving away, cart the thing in pieces from its barnyard 40 miles to the north, and start building a house out of it. Their property was minus electric lines, so they had to live off the basics. “We… melted snow and washed the children,” David says.

They’d moved to Peterborough to get “back to the land,” but were excited about the surrounding culture too. “Peterborough had the hills and the woods,” David says. “And there were great people too.” He and Melissa had found their arcadia. But as the population surged, they found this idyllic balance would need to be defended.

“What we were interested in saving was…our own backyard,” Melissa says. Over the years, they helped wage a successful campaign against a multi-lane highway, then threw their persuasive energies into conservation projects. While they were busily working to steward all of Peterborough, they literally did save their yard, placing 27 acres under easement. “If everybody takes care of their backyard, this will be a better place,” David says.

The taking care is, of course, mutual. Their yard, year after year, has hoarded honey for them into bee boxes. It’s sent tomatoes bursting upwards and sap trickling down through trees’ interiors. It’s hosted an inventive house, and helped to raise their flourishing children. In the eased forest, a footpath offers secluded daily walks.

“What defined our life was this piece of land,” David says. “It really became who we are.”

Melissa smiles to talk about it. It may still be the times. “Where you live should make you better,” she says.
Keeping the Green in Greenfield

An exciting conservation project in Greenfield, New Hampshire began in 1999 when a few neighbors began discussing ways to “Keep the Green in Greenfield.” The group took hikes together, pored over maps, studied natural resource surveys, met with land trust professionals, and held potluck dinners to discuss options. In June 2000, seven families signed a letter expressing their intent to protect 1,000 acres of land. They challenged other neighbors to match this with an additional 1,000 acres. The group grew.

In 2001, two families, the Timmons and the Pennoyers, stepped forward to lead the way by protecting their lands with conservation easements. Jeff and Sara Timmons’s 416-acre Woodland Hill Farm is a patchwork of working and natural forests, open fields, rich wetlands, winding woods roads, spectacular views of nearby highlands and valleys, and historic cellar holes and stone walls. Sheldon and Penelope Pennoyer’s Blanchard Hill Farm, connected to Woodland Hill Farm by a trail network of old woods roads used by townspeople for walking and skiing, contains 112 acres of fields and forest. Monica and Michael Lehner and their children (above) have conserved their 318 acres nearby, protecting frontage on Rand Brook as well as recreational uses and wildlife habitat.

“We want the land to be as it is for many generations to come, and we want others to enjoy the beauty as well,” Sheldon and Penelope say. “We have found that farming is a wonderful environment to bond a family together in this fast-paced society.”

With their donation of conservation easements on 846 contiguous acres, the three families created the largest private conservation action in Greenfield’s history. With protection of these three core properties complete, other neighboring landowners are now working with the Monadnock Conservancy to expand these protected lands.
We really would like our land to stay the way it is. It’s just too beautiful a thing to have loaded up with houses and streets.

We love being able to look uphill and see just the trees and the bears that sometimes visit us, the turkeys that fly into the yard, all sorts of great things. This land should be enjoyed by everybody.

– Easement donors
Joe and Stephanie Baute,
Surry Mountain, Keene

Pictured on the cover.