

DAILY HAMPSHIRE
GAZETTE
Founded September 6, 1786

Published Daily, Except Sundays and Christmas, In Print and Online
By H.S. Gere & Sons Inc., 115 Conz St., P.O. Box 299, Northampton, MA 01061
Publisher: James Foudy Editor: Larry Parnass

EDITORIAL

A forest's long view

The W.D. Cows Co. of Amherst didn't get where it is today by taking a short-term approach to success. The firm, now managed by its owners' ninth generation, is believed to be the 12th-oldest family-led company in the U.S. It is marking its 270th year.

Add to those historical bona-fides this fact: The monumental land deal it completed Friday permanently protects the largest contiguous block of land in the state's history. For \$8.8 million, the company sold development rights to a nearly 3,500-acre parcel on Brushy Mountain in Leverett and adjoining land in Shutesbury.

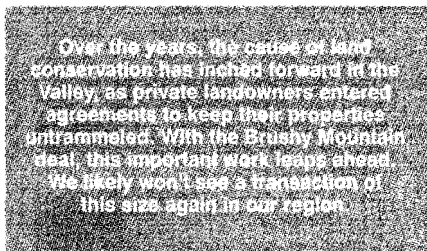
In the short term, not much will change. Crews will log the land. People will hike it. Scarlet tanagers and ovenbirds will alight in its trees and animals that need big home ranges, like black bear, bobcats and moose, will travel it.

Over the long term, securing those uses against the pressure of change is the very point. New restrictions placed on the land will ensure that a block of forest of a size that's rare today will remain intact as an important natural resource.

These 5.4 square miles, along with nearby land already preserved from development, are home to a good representation of the region's native flora and fauna. The land deal establishes that come what may in a century or two, Brushy Mountain will essentially be the place it's been since long before people came up with a name for it.

Despite sitting in a densely settled state, the land has developed significant ecological qualities that are big reasons why so many outside groups joined in the project to protect it. Brushy Mountain is listed by the Office of Travel and Tourism as one of the state's "Best 1,000 Places."

On the public's end, this transaction took years to bring about and needed many stakeholders to champion it. In the end, the Kestrel Land Trust and Franklin Land Trust, two key



players, joined with an alphabet soup of state and federal agencies as well as private groups and foundations. The state provided about \$3 million of the money needed to make this happen.

In exchange for the money it received, Cows gives up the

ability to put the land to other commercial uses, such as housing or even the placement of cell towers or power-generation facilities. The company's president, Cinda Jones, explained last week that the sale will enable her company to invest in other aspects of its operations, as well as pay a hefty capital-gains tax bill.

Cows will continue to pay the same rate of taxes on the land itself, which is registered under the reduced Chapter 61 status. And the land will remain part of our "working landscape" — a term that underscores that natural resources are not the same as museum pieces. Timber from the land will continue to flow into the state's \$600 million-a-year forest products industry.

Over the years, the cause of land conservation has inched forward in the Valley, as small private landowners entered agreements to keep their properties untrammelled.

With the Brushy Mountain deal, this important work leaps ahead. We likely won't see a transaction of this size again in our region.

Preserving 3,486 acres normally takes decades. It took many years for earlier generations leading the W.D. Cows Co. to assemble its vast forest holdings.

And on a Friday morning this month, with the recording of a deed in a Greenfield office, a few years of concerted effort resulted in a lasting achievement that will benefit many generations to come.