

# The Boston Globe

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 24, 2011

## Deal keeps large parcel of forest protected

### Agreement won't allow for development rights

By Stephanie Ebbert  
GLOBE STAFF

A 5.4-square-mile forest in Franklin County will be protected from development under an \$8.8 million land conservation deal announced yesterday by state officials, who called it the largest of its kind in Massachusetts history.

The agreement covers nearly 3,500 acres of working forest owned by W.D. Cowls Inc., the largest private landowner in Massachusetts. The state contributed \$3 million to the deal, with the Kestrel Land Trust and the Franklin Land Trust shouldering the rest.

Cowls, which provides wood for pulp and paper, firewood, veneer, and sawmills, will continue to own the land and harvest the forest but is surrendering the right to develop it. The company will not receive a tax break.

State officials cheered the deal, which prevents vehicular traffic in the forest, which includes much of Brushy Mountain, but allows public access for hunting, fishing, hiking, cross-country skiing, and snowmobiling.

"This successful and historic land conservation initiative is the result of a unique partnership that will protect this treasure for generations," Governor Deval Patrick said in a statement. "This land will forever be home to iconic wildlife, while remaining

FOREST, Page B11

## State finalizes a deal preserving forest land in Franklin County

► FOREST  
Continued from Page B1

a productive working forest that supports local jobs and allows hunters, anglers, and hikers to enjoy the great outdoors."

While Cowls said it had no intention of developing the land, it had received numerous entreaties in recent years, said Cinda Jones, the ninth-generation president of the company.

Firms wanted to build cell-phone towers or study the mountain as a potential site for wind turbines. Jones said a Texas developer approached her before the economy dipped with a pitch for a slick but inexpensively built golf course community.

"We want Brushy Mountain," Jones said he told her. "I just laughed at him and said, 'Well, it doesn't want you.'"

On the flip side, she said, land trusts had been approaching her grandfather, her father, and herself for as long as she could remember with pleas to protect the land. "We've been conserving land for 270 years. It just seemed ironic that they were going to help," she said.

Still, negotiating the conservation deal took years, she said, because of the difficulty of deciding development rights. Some of the

### 'The Cowls have left us all an amazing present this holiday season.'

RICHARD HUBBARD,  
Franklin Land Trust

parcels were bought as far back as the 1880s. Who would have predicted back then that the mountain would attract cellphone towers or wind turbines?

"To be able to say what my great-great-great-grand nieces will be able to do on this property was hard," said Jones. "If my grandfather had done this, he would never have guessed that people would pay \$1.50 for a bottle of water."

The forest is located between several important reserves, including Mount Toby State Reservation, the Quabbin Reservoir, Montague Plains Wildlife Management Area, and the Wendell and Erving state forests. The conservation restriction covers almost all of Brushy Mountain and includes adjacent parcels, creating a larger corridor for wildlife to

move through protected areas.

State officials said the deal creates the largest contiguous tract of private land preserved in this way.

Others involved in the deal were pleased to secure the large tract of unbroken forest land and said it would protect drinking water quality, conserve habitat and connectivity, and promote sustainable local wood production.

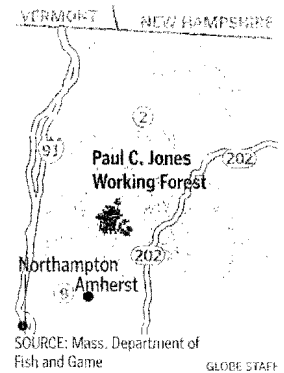
"You don't see this many contiguous acres in Massachusetts in private ownership," said Richard Hubbard, executive director of the Franklin Land Trust. "The Cowls have left us all an amazing present this holiday season."

Hubbard said that the agreement will keep the large tract of land on the tax rolls and publicly accessible but will ensure that it is not broken up for development.

Massachusetts forestry operations contribute \$600 million a year to local rural economies, state officials said.

W.D. Cowls may put the proceeds of the deal toward another development project in North Amherst — remaking the site of its former sawmill into housing and a village center, Jones said.

The preserved forest area will be named the Paul C. Jones Working Forest in honor of Jones' father. He died at 69 just before



Thanksgiving after a sudden decline attributed to Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease, a rare, degenerative and fatal brain disorder.

She said her father was proud that his family was involved in the project, and a friend suggested that they try to name it after him.

"I said, 'I can't rename a mountain,'" Jones said.

But the state Board of Fisheries & Wildlife unanimously approved her request to name the land in honor of her father, honoring his longtime commitment to conservation, she said.

"It's uplifting us right now," she said. "The greatest conservation project in the history of the state is named for Paul C. Jones. And that just makes the whole difficult experience have an upside."

Stephanie Ebbert can be reached at [ebbert@globe.com](mailto:ebbert@globe.com). Follow her on Twitter @stephanieebbert.