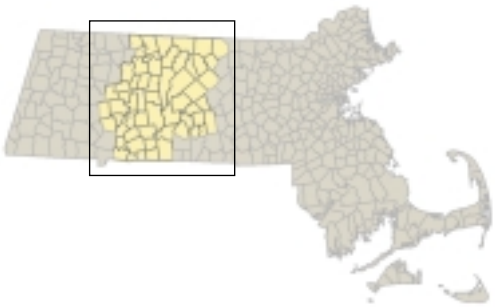
THE EASTERN CONNECTICUT RIVER VALLEY

WATERSHEDS



The Eastern Connecticut River Valley is home to some of the most fertile agricultural land in the world and yields the majority of the nearly $500 million in agricultural products produced in Massachusetts each year. The Eastern Connecticut Watershed is comprised of other smaller watersheds that lie adjacent to the Connecticut River, including the Millers River, Quabbin Reservoir, and the Chicopee River.

In addition to agriculture, the region has a healthy forest economy with several mills located in the hill towns and north of the Quabbin Reservoir. The timber purchased from the Quabbin area alone totals nearly $1 million per year in wholesale value.

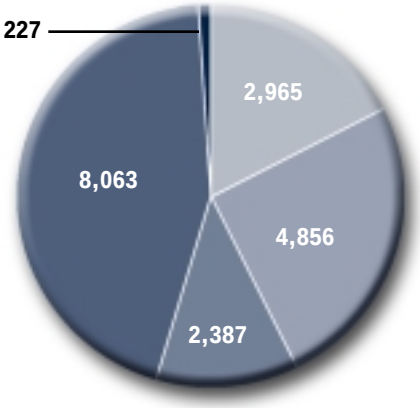
The scenic beauty and outdoor recreational opportunities on the rivers, lakes, ponds, and mountains is one of the fundamental reasons that businesses and residents are attracted to this vibrant region. The conservation land surrounding the Quabbin forms a corridor 35 miles in length, which represents the largest block of protected open space in the Commonwealth. The flood plains along the Connecticut and its tributaries, the isolated mountains of the Holyoke, Pocumtuck, and Toby ranges, and the unique pine barrens of the Montague Plains provide diverse habitats that are home to many rare and threatened species.

The 18,498 acres recently conserved in the region – an area larger than an average town – represents about 2% of the 1,000,000-acre region. Many of the projects could not have been accomplished without the help of land trusts including TTOR, the Valley Land Fund, Mount Grace Land Trust, Franklin Land Trusts, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, The Nature Conservancy, American Farmland Trust, Norcross Foundation, and New England Forestry Foundation. In In addition to the projects highlighted below, the 18,498-acre total includes the 1,500-acre Montague Plains acquisition by DFWELE, the 344-acre river and farmland corridor at French King Gorge, and the 1,700-acre CR around the Ludlow Reservoir, which will incorporate many miles of trails surrounding the water body.

EOEA will continue to focus on the Connecticut River and Quabbin Regions as centers for its land protection efforts. While the protection of a whole new range of hills – the seven-mile Pocumtuck Range – is in the works, further acquisitions to shore up the protection to the Mt. Holyoke Range are planned.

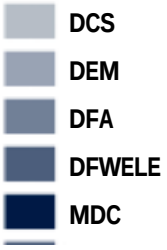
Eastern Connecticut River Valley Land Protection Summary

ACRES



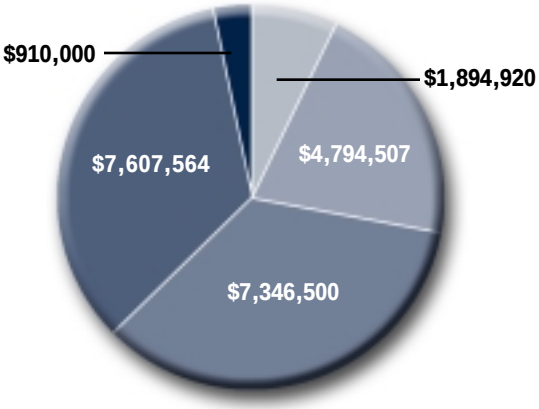
Total Acres: 18,498

AGENCY

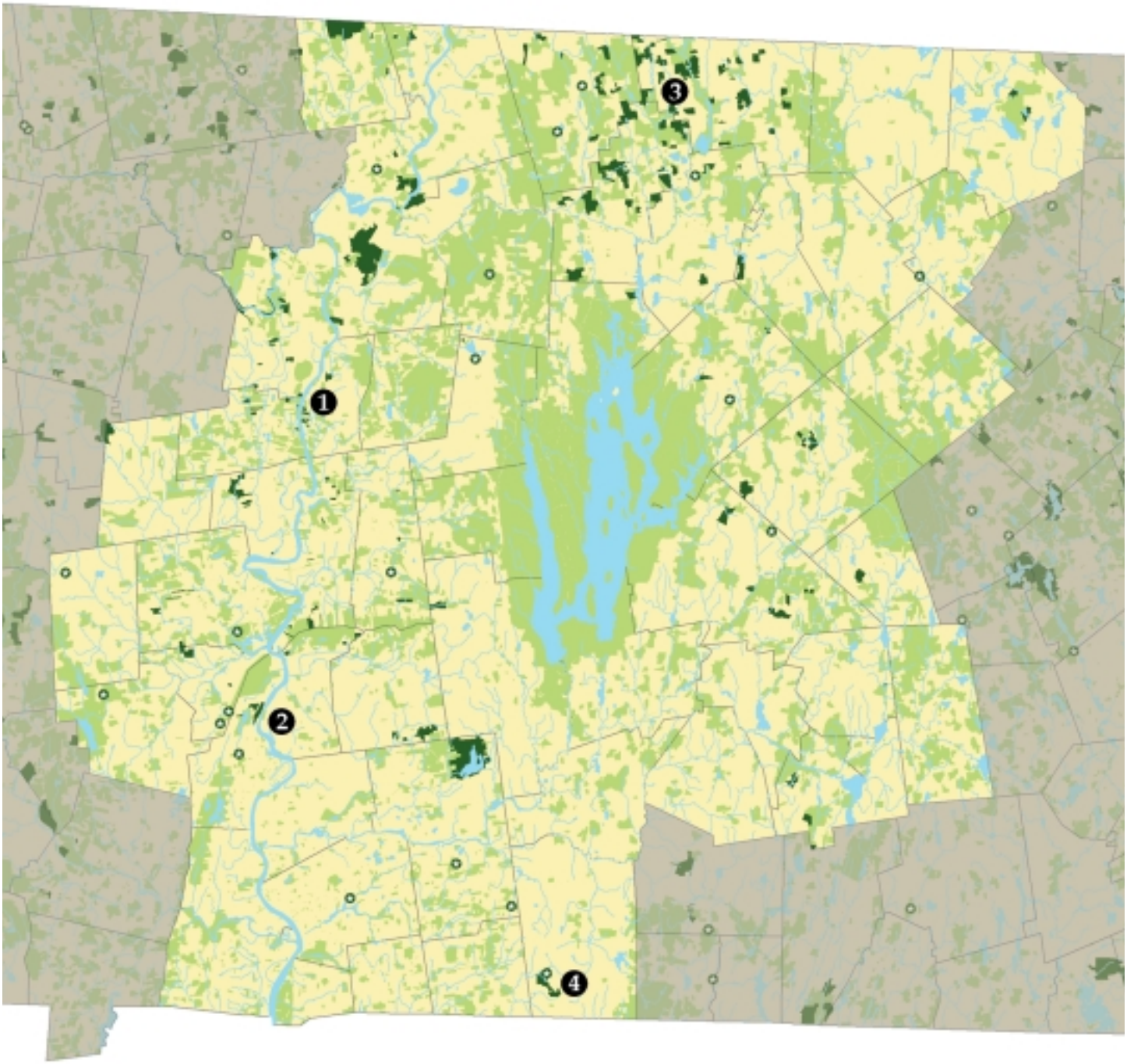


Total Projects: 206

STATE FUNDS



Total Funds: $22,553,491



Legend

- Conservation Restrictions (15-100 acres)
- Newly Protected Open Space (In Fee or CR)
- Previously Protected Open Space

Miles
0 2.5 5 7.5 10

Highlighted Projects

1. Grybko Farm
2. Collins
3. Tully Valley Private Forestlands Initiative
4. Peaked Mountain Reservation

TULLY VALLEY PRIVATE FOREST-LANDS INITIATIVE

DEM/DFWELE • Athol, Orange, Royalston, and Warwick
4,213 acres • Fee and CR • $4,095,000

The Tully Initiative is a great example of Secretary Durand's vision of creating landscape-scale protected areas in significant regions across the state. The Tully River Valley area was chosen as the pilot region to test this new rapid landscape-scale conservation approach. The goal of the Tully Initiative is to protect a large landscape area using CRs that allow public access and encourage sound forest management, while keeping most of the land in private ownership.

DEM and DFWELE protected more than 4,200 acres of forestland in the Tully River Valley area of Central Massachusetts between December, 2000 and July, 2001. This land protection effort, known as the Tully Valley Private Forestlands Initiative, represents a new approach to protecting land in Massachusetts. An inter-agency team worked together to conduct a targeted, rapid acquisition of multiple parcels in the Tully River Valley area. More than 80 tracts of land owned by 43 different landowners in four towns were protected in the Tully Valley area in just six months, primarily through the purchase of CRs.

The Tully Initiative is also unique because it is a team effort involving staff from EOEA, DEM, DFWELE, and Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust, a non-profit organization from the Tully River Valley area. Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust played a central role in the negotiation and execution of the fast-paced transactions on behalf of the state.

The Tully River Valley area, located to the north of the Quabbin Reservoir, comprises one of the largest contiguous tracts of forestland in southern New England. Although the area is not threatened by large-scale development, small patches of development are beginning to fragment this valuable large forest block.

The Tully Initiative also helps protect land surrounding the Tully Loop Trail, a 20-mile loop trail connecting lands owned by federal, state, and non-profit entities. EOEA hopes to protect several thousand additional acres in the Tully River Valley area in FY02 and beyond.

GRYBKO FARM

DFA • Deerfield/Sunderland • 85 acres • APR • $567,000

The August, 2000 and March, 2001 purchases of APRs on the 85-acre Grybko farm in Sunderland, Deerfield, and Whately, by DFA's APR Program represented major acquisitions in the Commonwealth's efforts to protect the critical natural resources of the Connecticut River Valley. DFA was interested in protecting the Grybko farm because it is comprised of "prime" agricultural soils and abuts a number of other properties that have been protected by the APR Program. Its protection, therefore, serves to further DFA's efforts to create a large, economically viable block of APR-protected farmland in this part of the Connecticut River Valley.

In addition to its agricultural significance, the Grybko farm has a number of other attributes that made it worthy of protection. It has approximately 1,775 feet of frontage on the Connecticut River, representing a major addition to efforts that have already been made by the Commonwealth to create a corridor of protected land along the Connecticut River. It also serves as a critical component of the scenic viewshed from nearby Mt. Sugarloaf State Reservation, as well as the adjoining Route 116, Route 47, and River Road corridors.

This combination of significant natural resource attributes on the Grybko farm inspired a cooperative two-stage protection effort involving DFA and local and national land protection organizations. The APRs on the Grybko farm were preacquired for the state by the Franklin Land Trust (FLT) and Deerfield Land Trust (DLT), which have assisted the APR Program with a number of important farmland protection projects in the area. Funding assistance for the FLT and DLT preacquisitions was provided, in part, by The Conservation Fund, a national land preservation organization that has come to recognize the unique character and national significance of the Connecticut River Valley.

COLLINS

DEM • Holyoke • 198 acres • Fee • $570,000

DEM acquired this 198-acre tract of heavily forested land not only to protect its unique qualities, but also as part of a larger effort to establish a landscape-scale bioreserve in the Mt. Tom Range in western Massachusetts. The Collins property contains a significant geological feature known as "Little Mt. Tom," a combination of basalt and shale that contains vernal pools, large old oaks, and fossil dinosaur footprints from the Triassic period. Naturalists view Little Mt. Tom as an ecological jewel that represents many of the natural conditions found along the more remote portions of the range. The purchase of the Collins property augments the Mt. Tom State Reservation, increasing DEM's holdings there to more than 2,200 acres. The Mt. Tom Range overall has an amazing concentration of reptiles and amphibians. Roughly 80% of all the terrestrial versions of these species found in the state are represented at Mt. Tom and its environs.

PEAKED MOUNTAIN RESERVATION

DCS • Monson • 197 acres • Grant
$115,900 DCS, $170,500 total project cost

The Town of Monson had never applied for Self-Help assistance until 1999, but when it finally did apply, it aimed high. The town worked with EOEA, TTOR, the Massachusetts Land Preservation Trust, and the Norcross Foundation to create a new reservation now known as the Peaked Mountain Reservation. This Self-Help project involved the purchase of a CR on 100 acres, the purchase in fee simple of 26 acres, and a tax title taking on another 61 acres, for a total grant award of $115,900 to protect 197 acres. This grant then leveraged a donation of a CR over an additional 198 acres, 148 of which were dedicated for conservation and public access purposes.

The Peaked Mountain Reservation properties abut other protected lands in public and private ownership, ensuring the viability of a wildlife corridor that stretches for 3.3 miles from Monson into the Shenipsit State Forest in Connecticut. The project also protected 2,800 feet along Temple Brook, as well as habitat for several species of rare turtles, including wood turtles, box turtles, and spotted turtles.