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Falconry, Sea Ducks,
& Sandhill Cranes**

Editorial

Great Resources Require Great Management

For many decades, the importance of land protection has been a central paradigm of natural resource management. The most effective way to ensure that wildlife, fisheries, and threatened plant populations persist is to protect their habitat with a focused landscape level approach. In Massachusetts, our commitment to this approach has been incredibly successful. State natural resource agencies now own or control over 730,000 acres of protected land, and these vitally important public land holdings are complemented and enhanced by almost 570,000 acres held by cities, towns, land trusts, and conservation organizations. In total, there are 1,300,000 acres of land protected, a figure that represents 26% of the state's entire land area.

Citizens of the Commonwealth have made an extraordinary public investment in this all-important effort to conserve our natural resources for the future. They have supported a Massachusetts Constitutional provision that protects conservation land. Hunters and anglers have supplemented our land investment funds by instituting the Wildlands Conservation Stamp, a program that has long required them to pay an additional \$5 for every fishing, hunting, and trapping license they buy. Their self-sacrifice has protected over 30,000 acres. The collaborative public and private approach we have developed in our state to support land protection will sustain the recre-



Photos © Bill Byrne

Habitat management is often crucial to conserve scarce habitat types and wildlife communities that could otherwise be lost. These photos depict the reclamation of a grassland resource from forest incursion.

ational, economic, and social future of our Commonwealth. There are few factors more important to maintaining the quality of life for all our citizens.

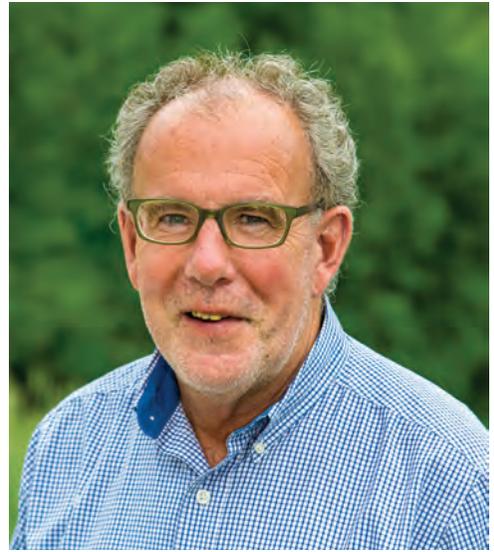
While our work at land protection is still incomplete, we need to take a closer look at the resource values that are the foundation of this investment. There are some troubling signs. Last year, the DFW's Natural Heritage and Endangered



Species Program conducted a rigorous Key Sites Analysis that showed that, in some cases, land that was specifically purchased to protect key natural communities was losing these communities due to a lack of habitat management. This was shown to occur on both DFW and DCR lands. While not abandoning our efforts in land acquisition, we clearly need to redirect a portion of our annual capital and operational investment toward management and stewardship of these important lands. Hopefully, we have learned from the costly lesson our society is facing because we have deferred the maintenance of the nation's roads and bridges. We simply cannot do that with our investment in our natural environment. Our job does not end when the acquisition is complete, but in fact is only beginning; any capital investment requires an associated long term maintenance and stewardship strategy.

The challenge ahead and a path forward was clearly articulated by Secretary of Energy and Environment Matt Beaton at a statewide conference our agency recently hosted on habitat management. The goal of this conference was to take a first step in bringing together a community of interests that is focused on the need to manage our collective conservation legacy; a community of hunters and anglers, land trusts, hikers, wildlife watchers, local officials, and statewide conservation organizations that share a common understanding of the critical importance of managing these resources. The Secretary's creation of a new wildlife habitat grant program, administered by the DFW, that will provide land managers with additional capacity to manage – and a commitment to direct capital funds to management and stewardship of state lands – represents a watershed event. In addition to the Secretary's initiative, the DFW has for the last several years devoted significant operational funds to habitat management. This is an important step toward sustaining natural landscapes that provides direct recreational benefits for wildlife-dependent recreation.

Beyond land protection and management, we need to take a broad view of our landscape that includes not only protected open space, but also private forests and farms. Forest and agricultural



landowners who are actively managing their land should be recognized for the important role they play in preserving the ecological mosaic of our landscape. Private forestlands provide more wildlife habitat (nearly 2 million acres) than any other type of ownership in Massachusetts, and include substantial areas of priority habitat for state-listed species. Despite the millions of dollars that the Commonwealth has spent in recent decades on protection of public open space, the fact remains that wildlife populations simply cannot be conserved at the landscape level in Massachusetts without the direct and indirect contributions made by private forestlands and agricultural lands.

According to a recent University of Massachusetts study, the good news is that wildlife is often the most important attribute private owners associate with their land. As an explicit recognition of the importance of the forest products industry, the Division's Natural Heritage Program has been working cooperatively with the Massachusetts Forestry Alliance to streamline review under the Massachusetts Endangered Species Act. These industries must not be viewed as a reflection of a former way of life, but viable components of our future economy and ecology.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jack Buckley". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Jack Buckley, *Director*

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