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## Hawes Hill Conservation Corridor - Grant

<b>Grant Name</b>	Hawes Hill Conservation Corridor - Grant	<b>Today's Date</b>	12/14/2023
<b>Staff Size</b>	11	<b>Organization Name</b>	Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust
<b>Total Membership</b>	950	<b>Annual Operating Budget</b>	\$1,229,341.00
<b>BIPOC-led</b>	No	<b>Operating Budget Year</b>	
<b>C-Suite Staff</b>		<b>Tax Status/Organization Type</b>	501c3 Organization
<b>Notes</b>			

### Project Information

<b>Project/Campaign Name</b>	Hawes Hill Conservation Corridor	<b>Project Address</b>	
<b>Project Location (State or Territory)</b>	MA	<b>Amount Requested from Alliance</b>	\$50,000.00

### Proposal Questions

<b>1. Purpose/History Of Organization</b>	<p>Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust is a regional land trust nationally recognized for innovative programs, including work assembling groups of landowners and partners for collaborative landscape scale conservation, our whole farm conservation projects, our climate-focused conservation map, our partnerships with members of the Nipmuc Tribe, and our creation of the independent TerraCorps program.</p> <p>Since 1986, Mount Grace has protected more than 37,000 acres in Massachusetts and New Hampshire. Mount Grace is the 2022-23 recipient of the Land Trust Alliance's National Excellence Award.</p>	<b>7. Measurable On-Ground Outcomes</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Permanent conservation of the four Mount Grace CRs (parcels 5-8)</li> <li>2. Permanent conservation of the four Mass Audubon CRs (parcels 1-4)</li> <li>3. Resolution with landowner regarding the final disposition of parcel 9</li> </ol>
<b>2. Final Success</b>	<p>The Hawes Hill Conservation Corridor Project will permanently conserve at least 914 acres in Barre, Massachusetts, including 139 acres available for "tough mudder" races and events, resulting in a contiguous expanse of 4,000+ protected acres of land including Quabbin watershed land, working farmland, carbon-sequestering forests, and recreational resources.</p>	<b>8. Evaluate Your Progress</b>	<p>Interim progress will be evaluated during the project term based on the specific steps needed to conserve land.</p> <p>These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Securing funding to cover the remaining project costs</li> <li>• Completing necessary land surveys, title examinations and other diligence</li> <li>• Completing CR drafts</li> <li>• Conducting baseline conditions surveys on each property</li> </ul> <p>The expansion of our Nipmuc collaboration will be evaluated based on</p>

the satisfaction of Indigenous partners.

The project's ultimate success will be measured based on acreage conserved, with a goal of at least 914 acres protected by June 30, 2024 and the possibility of an additional 59 acres added if the final prospective partner chooses to participate.

### 3. Location Details

Massachusetts is a densely populated state, but is also highly forested, with more than 60% forest cover statewide. Open land clusters in the western half of the state, where forests can connect to the larger forest reserves of Vermont and western New Hampshire—increasing forest resiliency.

The largest single forest resource in Massachusetts is the land around the Quabbin Reservoir. Watershed protection became a key element of Massachusetts' safe drinking water strategy after the reservoir was created in the 1930s, a process that involved evacuating and flooding the four towns of Dana, Enfield, Greenwich, and Prescott through eminent domain.

The resulting reservoir provides drinking water for 3 million people. More than 73,000 of the 95,000 acres of land in its watershed are protected, either through state agencies or by groups like Mount Grace and Mass Audubon. These protected lands form a biodiversity reserve unique in southern New England, and unusually accessible to millions of people, including those who fish, hunt, hike, bike, and otherwise enjoy the public open space.

This project is the result of outreach to eight semi-contiguous landowners in Barre, MA, who are willing to conserve 900+ acres as part of the Massachusetts Landscape Partnership Program. It offers a unique opportunity to build a bridge from Mass Audubon's existing 1,776-acre Rutland Brook Sanctuary to the 800-acre Prince River Wildlife Management Area, while also bringing the contiguous conserved land around the Quabbin to within 500 feet of the western boundary of the 20,000+ additional acres protected in the neighboring Ware River Reservation.

Creating corridors of protected land to link lands already conserved is a critical element of Mount Grace's climate-based conservation strategy. Mount Grace's work was featured as a case study in *Conserving Nature in a Changing Climate*, the Open Space Institute's 2016 climate resource for land trusts.

In addition to its value as a conservation corridor and for carbon sequestration,

### 9. TCA Funding Plan

Funding from the Conservation Alliance will be allocated across four aspects of the project budget as described below:

Direct acquisition of conservation restrictions--\$32,500  
Diligence costs (surveys, title searches, closing costs, etc.)--\$10,000  
Project management and public communication costs--\$5,000  
Stewardship costs (baseline conditions reports, co-funding of Indigenous cultural inventories)--\$2,500

A full project budget is included as attachment 1.

Massachusetts' Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program maps 80% of these 900+ acres as either "Core Habitat" (areas needed to promote the survival of species listed under the Massachusetts Endangered Species Act) or "Critical Natural Landscapes" (intact landscapes that are more resilient in the face of ecological disturbance). This is a complex, permeable, and connected block of undeveloped land that is a rare find in southern New England.

#### 4. Strategy & Timeline For Final Success

This project involves nine parcels, eight owners and a variety of different conservation strategies and partners. Strategies and goals are provided below for each parcel. Economic and recreational impacts of the project are covered together after the individual summaries.

In every case, the end date for completing legal protection of the land is June 30, 2024.

Protecting this land will cost ~\$2.9 million. Most has been secured through a \$1.25 million MA Landscape Partnership Program (LPP) Grant and \$357,000 from the MA Department of Conservation and Recreation. An additional \$100,000 has been identified as available through bargain sales from the Stevens family, owners of three of the nine parcels.

The LPP grant requires grantees to raise a 50% match, which this grant would contribute towards.

Parcel 1, 168 acres: This parcel is owned by Insight Meditation Society, which hosts 4,000+ people for meditation in nature annually. Its woods include several small tributaries of the Quabbin Reservoir, source of clean drinking water for ~3 million people. This forest will be protected by a watershed preservation restriction (WPR) held by the Massachusetts Division of Watershed Protection.

Parcel 2, 136 acres: Also owned by Insight Meditation Society, this property includes 75 acres of public drinking water supply land outside of the Quabbin watershed. This land will be protected with a conservation restriction (CR) held by Mass Audubon.

Parcel 3, 127 acres: The Engel family will protect this property, which connects Insight Meditation Center land to land abutting Barre's "Old Reservoir" to create a solid block of protected land linking two separate pieces of the Prince River Wildlife Management Area. This property includes a small amount of drinking water supply land. It will be protected by

a CR co-held by Mass Audubon and the Barre Conservation Commission.

Parcel 4, 162 acres: This forested land straddles the divide between the Quabbin and Ware River Watersheds. This project would protect the entire western shoreline of the Old Reservoir. This land will be protected by a CR co-held by Mass Audubon and East Quabbin Land Trust.

Parcel 5, 16 acres: This small parcel is surrounded by existing protected land, including woods buffering Barre's current reservoir. This land will be protected by a CR co-held by Mount Grace. Phil Stevens owns parcel 5 and is related to the owners of parcels 7 and 8. He serves on the Mount Grace Board of Directors. This project has been designed and is being implemented in compliance with the Land Trust Alliance's conflict of interest standards.

Parcel 6, 47 acres: Westwind Farm includes riding trails and a working hayfield that will all be included in a CR co-held by Mount Grace and East Quabbin Land Trust.

Parcel 7, 118 acres: This property is part of Carter & Stevens Farm, featuring active hay fields that feed the farm's 200 cows. This land will be protected by a CR co-held by Mount Grace and the Barre Conservation Commission.

Parcel 8, 139 acres: This property was purchased by Carter & Stevens Farm in 2019 along with the piece abutting it to the south (indicated as parcel 10 on the submitted map) which now hosts the farm's "tough mudder" and "Spartan" races. Trails on parcel 8 extend the running area available for these races, which attract thousands of people annually.

Parcel 9, a 59-acre property, may be added to the project pending negotiations. Trails in these woods are used for quiet reflection and walking by approximately 1,000 visitors each year.

Public access will be encouraged on trails in parcels 5,6,7 and 8. Public access will also be allowed on Parcels 1, 2 (and 9 if participating). Mass Audubon is negotiating the final public access status of parcels 3 and 4.

By further securing the Quabbin watershed, this project contributes to providing safe drinking water for 3 million people through one of the most efficient, and cost effective, natural water supplies in the US.

The project also permanently secures the forest tranquility that supports Insight Meditation Services who together host 5,000+ visitors each year and employ dozens of teachers and support staff.

Permanently conserving the forests that contain and abut the routes of the "tough mudder" races helps give these popular recreational events (which drew 9,000 participants and supporters last year, with entry fees ranging from \$26-\$137) room to grow, while also ensuring that the rural character of the site, which is important in marketing the race, is not compromised.

Loss of small manufacturing and farms post-1950 has left Barre in the bottom quintile of Massachusetts towns for household income. This project bolsters one of Barre's key strengths, the rural feel of a place that is easily accessible by people from metro-Boston and helps lead the post-industrial transition to an economy that incorporates nature sustainably.

#### 5. Key Decision Makers

Most of the work of inspiring key decision makers has been done in the initial phases of the project, (prior to the grant application to the Massachusetts Landscape Partnership Program). This involved outreach to the Town of Barre's Conservation Commission and to a host of landowners in the proposed project region to gauge their interest.

Strong landowner commitment for the project was particularly important as the economics of large-scale land conservation in Massachusetts often rely on bargain sales, in which the landowner sells a CR on the land below its appraised market value, as a critical element of the project budget. This proved tricky in this project, as two key landowners, owning more than 300 or the project acres, are nonprofit organizations and their fiduciary responsibility precludes them from participating in a bargain sale.

Mount Grace was able to make up some of the difference thanks to members of the Stevens family, who have offered to provide bargain sales totaling at least \$100,000 to help make the project work.

At this point, all landowners and all of the necessary town boards have committed to the project with the exception of parcel 9. Originally the landowner was exploring protecting their land with a CR held by Mass Audubon, but after some leadership turnover they are now unsure. Unresolved issues include concerns about the logistics of CRs and a

reluctance to partner with Mass Audubon as long as it is still named in honor of a slaveholder.

After consultations with Mass Audubon, Mount Grace has taken the lead in the parcel 9 project and is working directly with the owner's new Board members to review CR language. Mass Audubon and Mount Grace both agree that Mount Grace will hold the CR if that will facilitate the protection of the land. The Hawes Hill Conservation Corridor project will proceed with or without participation from this landowner and will thus protect either 914 or 973 acres of land, depending on the outcome of final talks with the landowner.

## 6. Elevate Voices

As described in question 5, the grassroots work needed to ensure this project happens is largely done.

This project does offer an opportunity to connect with a group with whom Mount Grace has no links: the tough mudder community.

Carter & Stevens Farm is a fifth-generation dairy farm. As economic pressures have driven most local dairies to close, the Stevens family has added new revenue sources, including a farm store and its own microbrewery. Over the last few years, Carter & Stevens Farm/Stone Cow Brewery has hosted tough mudders and Spartan races—trail runs of varying lengths featuring multiple obstacles.

More than 9,000 people attended these races in 2022 and a 5k, 10k, kids 1k+, and a 4-hour endurance run are all scheduled for August 2024. These races are largely centered on the land shown as parcels 10 and 11 on the map. These trails also run onto parcel 8, which contains parts of the race routes. Mount Grace will also explore with the state whether site appropriate obstacles can be added here without conflicting with a CR.

Future races thus offer an opportunity to highlight the benefits of land conservation for an audience that is significantly younger than Mount Grace's current membership. Mount Grace will work with the farm and brewery to engage with racers and their families to encourage use of Mount Grace's 20 conservation areas and support further land protection in the 23 towns we serve.

This project can also help broaden Mount Grace's ongoing partnership with indigenous groups (see question 10). We are considering expanding this work to include drafting cultural use agreements between Indigenous partners and private landowners. These

agreements reserve cultural use rights on the land for Indigenous people. A first step would be the Indigenous-led creation of an Indigenous Cultural Resource Inventory on the land for Tribal use. Mount Grace will discuss a timeline for this with the Stevens family and Indigenous partners as part of this project.

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