

GREENFIELD/PETERBOROUGH

Grants aid conservation of two parcels of land

Money comes through Monadnock Conservancy

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PETERBOROUGH

Town plans to conserve 120 acres of town-owned land got a financial boost last week as did the conservation of Otter Brook Farm.

On Thursday, Monadnock Conservancy, Keene, announced it has been awarded four grants totaling \$40,150 from the Quabbin to Cardigan Partnership.

An \$18,000 grant was awarded to cover the entire transaction costs of the conservancy's largest project to date: the Otter Brook Farm conservation easement. The privately owned land, which sits in Peterborough and Greenfield, was placed into a conservation easement with the conservancy in December.

"The Otter Brook Farm easement covers more than 1,000 acres and protects diverse wetlands and groundwater aquifers, upland forests and a large, unfragmented area of remote wildlife habitat. Part of the property has been designated forever wild and will remain off-limits to timber harvesting in order to let natural processes prevail," according to a written statement from the conservancy.

Transaction costs vary depending on the complexity of the project, wrote Katrina Farmer, Monadnock Conservancy Communications Associate, in an e-mail to the Ledger-Transcript. "This project was particularly expensive because it was very complex; there were so many individual tax lots as part of the total thousand-plus acres."

Transaction costs can include legal fees, recording fees, title work, environmental site assessment, and staff time, she wrote.

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Francie Von Mertens,
Peterborough Conservation Commission

A \$3,000 grant was designated to cover some of the town's transaction costs to place three town-owned parcels, which abut Otter Brook Farm, into a conservation easement to be held by Monadnock Conservancy. The Select Board voted to place the land into a conservation easement last year. The easement should be finalized in the next couple of months, Conservation Commission member Francie Von Mertens wrote in an e-mail to the Ledger-Transcript.

"It's really important that grant money is available to help pay the costs of conserving land with high natural resource value. Landowners are giving up development value. To ask them to pay transaction costs on top of that puts a damper on a project. Peterborough has a conservation fund to help landowners meet those costs. And we like to stretch that money as far as possible. Partnering with the Q2C group is one way to do that. The Monadnock Conservancy did a great job getting those grants," Von Mertens wrote.

On Monday, Von Mertens said that as a result of the grant the Conservation Commission, through its Land Acquisition and Management Fund, would only pay about \$3,000 to fund the completion of the easement, which requires Monadnock Conservancy staff time, a title search, a legal review of

easement and filing fees, "It's the nuts and bolts cost," Von Mertens said.

According to Von Mertens, the grants were awarded because Otter Brook Farm and the town-owned parcels fall within a priority conservation corridor identified by the Quabbin to Cardigan Partnership.

The Quabbin to Cardigan Partnership was formed as a collaborative effort in 2003 to conserve a 100-mile region from the Monadnock Highlands of north-central Massachusetts and western New Hampshire, according to its Web site, www.q2cpartnership.org.

The partnership seeks to preserve land from the Quabbin Reservoir in Massachusetts to Mount Cardigan and the White Mountain National Forest.

Conservation projects in Alstead, Swanzey and Marlborough were also awarded grants. Funding for the grants was provided by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Services and were administered by the Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests, according to the conservancy.

As the only land trust dedicated exclusively to the 35 towns of the Monadnock region, the conservancy has protected more than 14,000 acres of forest, farmland, shoreline, wetlands, wildlife habitat and miles of public recreation trails in the region since it was formed in 1989.