

AVIS Receives State Grant to Support Land Purchase on the Merrimack River

On December 8, 2016, the Division of Conservation Services of the Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs announced an award of \$85,000 to The Andover Village Improvement Society (AVIS), Andover's local land trust. The award was one of ten (10) projects announced at a ceremony in Brewster, MA. At the ceremony the Baker-Polito Administration announced \$744,545 in funding for local land conservation projects across the Commonwealth.

The Conservation Partnership Grant will reimburse AVIS after it acquires 26.60 acres of land that includes a half mile of the Bay Circuit Trail along the Merrimack River, upstream of the water intakes for Andover, Lawrence, and Methuen, and within NHESP BioMap2 core habitat. The Conservation Partnership Grants provide funding to assist non-public, not-for-profit corporations in acquiring interests in lands suitable for conservation or recreation purposes.

The 26.6 acres are part of a larger parcel of 34.5 acres that AVIS is purchasing from Melmark New England. Melmark obtained the land from the Order of St. Francis which operated a seminary at this site until 1977. Susan Stott, AVIS Land Acquisition Chair, reported that: "With this assistance from the State, AVIS has now reached more than 80% of its goal to raise \$400,000 to purchase the river front property from its current owner, Melmark New England." She said that: "Donations from the community are still critical in order for AVIS to complete the purchase of this property early in 2017 and to obtain release of the State money."

As stated in a news release from the State, "The grants are being provided to ten land trusts by the Executive Office of Environmental Affairs' (EEA) Conservation Partnership Grant Program and will protect over 330 acres of land from Cape Cod to the Quabbin Reservoir."

"Local conservation areas are important investments that provide citizens of the Commonwealth access to open spaces and the opportunity to enjoy nature," said Governor Charlie Baker. "Conservation Partnership Grants are instrumental in helping protect Massachusetts' unique natural habitats for our residents and visitors alike."

"By establishing close partnerships with local land trusts, our administration is committed to protecting Massachusetts' ecological resources for future generations," said Lieutenant Governor Karyn Polito. "The Conservation Partnership Grant Program allows

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the Commonwealth to provide our local partners the resources they need to protect our state's most important working lands and wildlife habitat."

AVIS is a 122-year old land conservation organization with a mission to acquire, protect and maintain land in its natural state in the town of Andover, Massachusetts. AVIS' twenty-one reservations include forests, fields, wetlands and vernal pools and are open to the public for hiking, birding, skiing and quiet enjoyment. AVIS and other organizations, such as the Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC), Andover Trails Committee, Andover Historical Society, and Andover's Department of Community Services, organize guided walks, skiing get-togethers, educational classes and other activities on its reservations. Its open land protects the habitat of many plants and animals.

Those seeking more information or who wish to donate to this Capital Campaign should call Susan Stott at (978) 475-3748 or go to the AVIS website, www.avisandover.org.

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Hiker: A hiker walks a portion of the Bay Circuit Trail near the old St. Francis Seminary along the Merrimack River. AVIS plans to purchase this river front property. AVIS is in the middle of a Capital Campaign to ask donors to support this acquisition. Currently owned by Melmark New England, this property is well known for the St. Francis Seminary that was there until 1977. By purchasing the river front portion of this property AVIS will also help preserve the Bay Circuit Trail for future generations to enjoy.

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View of the Water: a view of the Merrimack River from land that AVIS is purchasing from Melmark New England, land that used to be the St. Francis Seminary.

Photo credits: Susan Stott