

## News Release

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### North County Land Trust, Inc.

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

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### Group Launches Westminster Midstate Trail Project

A group of Westminster residents has begun a major land conservation project in town, focused on the Midstate Trail. The Westminster Open Space Committee, in partnership with North County Land Trust, Inc. hopes to permanently protect much of the land in the 12-mile Midstate Trail corridor.

To gain support for the Westminster Midstate Trail Project, the group has publicized a series of hikes on the Midstate Trail in Westminster. These hikes are sponsored by the Midstate Trail subcommittee of the Appalachian Mountain Club. The last of these hikes will take place on Sunday, October 31<sup>st</sup>.

The Midstate Trail is an historic long-distance trail that bisects the state. Its northern-most section runs from Mount Wachusett in Princeton to Mt. Watatic in Ashburnham. In Westminster, the Midstate Trail runs through private land for 8 miles. Only about 4 miles of the trail are on state forest land or town-owned conservation land.

Development pressures threaten much of the remaining open space in Westminster, including many large parcels in the Midstate Trail corridor. The Westminster Midstate Trail Project offers landowners alternatives to developing their land, through the sale of conservation restrictions. Land under conservation restriction will remain in private ownership. The land may be bought and sold, but it is permanently protected from development.

Funding to purchase conservation restrictions is being sought from state and federal grants programs. The Westminster Midstate Trail Project is part of a regional project to protect the Midstate Trail, with federal Forest Legacy funds. Because of the large number of private land parcels involved and the cost of conservation restrictions, it will take several years to achieve the project's land protection goals.

Janet Morrison, Director of Land Protection for the North County Land Trust commented, "We decided to focus our land protection efforts on the Midstate Trail corridor, because of the historic, cultural and recreational significance of the trail. The Midstate Trail will help attract funding for land conservation that will protect hundreds of acres and augment other conservation land in Westminster."

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North County Land Trust, Inc. is a non-profit, land conservation organization which works to protect open space in Westminster and other communities in north central Massachusetts.

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