



A Policy Agenda for Conserving New England's Forests

Priorities for 2012

We Must Keep New England Forested

Conservation Investment is an Investment in Our Economy

As our nation emerges from recession, jobs and economic development are rightly at the forefront of the national policy agenda. In New England, continued investment in the conservation and stewardship of the forested landscape can help meet these economic challenges. New England is the nation's most densely forested region and has developed an economy that is strongly dependent on its forests. For decades, protecting New England's forests for their economic, public health, and recreational benefits has been a bi-partisan priority for the region's congressional delegation and a rallying point for state, local, and private interests. Continued federal investment and partnership will help the region confront new threats to its forests that could undermine important public values.

Forests are a Foundation of New England's Strong Economy and a Source of New Jobs and Growth



- New England's forests contribute \$20 billion annually to the local and regional economies, sustaining over 100,000 jobs in the woods, mills, and supporting services.
- Natural beauty and recreation assets draw tens of millions of visitors annually to New England, and tourism is northern New England's largest industry. In Maine alone, tourism puts \$10-13 billion into the state economy each year and employs 140,000 workers—almost 22% of the state's work force.¹
- Tourism based on fall foliage displays alone attracts over 1 million tourists annually and generates \$1 billion in revenue for New England businesses.
- The vast outdoor and recreational resources on private and public lands provide ready access to trails, rivers, and outdoor sporting activities that afford important social, cultural and public health benefits.
- New England's healthy fish and wildlife populations are also a backbone of the region's economy. New England's fish and wildlife support a \$5.296 billion-dollar wildlife-related economy. This includes a \$2.568 billion-dollar hunting and angling economy and a \$2.739 billion-dollar wildlife watching economy. Protecting the region's important wildlife habitats and creating more public access for all wildlife-related activities will maintain this vital economic engine.
- A growing movement to replace New England's unique dependence on heating oil with wood from sustainably managed forests can create 140,000 jobs, reinvest \$4.5 billion in the regional economy, and displace 1.14 billion gallons of imported fossil fuel each year.²

New England's Drinking Water and Air Quality Depend on Forests

- The region's forests are the headwaters for all of the Northeast's major rivers and protect drinking water quality for millions of people. This includes water supplies for 4.5 million people from the Connecticut River watershed, New England's largest river system.
- New England's 33 million acres of forest clean the air and store vast quantities of carbon. Each year, the region's forests absorb and store carbon equivalent to 23-43% of New England's emissions from electricity and heating. New England's relatively young, carbon-rich forests can anchor national efforts to slow climate change and help our natural systems adapt to shifts already underway.



The bottom line

Continued investment in forest conservation and stewardship is a necessity even in a time of very limited public resources. We understand that budget reductions must be made and that conservation must take its share. Yet disproportionate cuts in conservation programs risk setting back decades of progress and momentum towards protection of one of New England's fundamental economic assets—its forests. New England's state and federal policy makers, industries, land owners, and citizens must work together to ensure that this globally-important forest resource will remain indefinitely intact, healthy, productive, profitably and sustainably managed, and accessible to all segments of society.

THE CHALLENGES

Forest ownership in New England is undergoing a major transition.

For the past 100 years, New England has been regrowing forests cleared for farms during the 1800s, and the region has been hailed as a major conservation success story. Today, the region is 80% forested and Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont are three of the four most heavily forested states in the country.

However, regional forest regrowth peaked in about 1960³, and since that time annual forest loss has begun to occur. Challenges unique to the region include the high percentage of forests being owned privately (80%), the immense population pressures (the Northeast is the most densely populated region in the country), and the changing economics of the forest products industry that once owned and managed much of Northern New England's forests without notable turnover.

Forest cover is declining in all six New England states.

Today, there are significant indications that a new era of major deforestation may be underway.

- Two thirds of the Northern Forest region of northern New England and New York exchanged hands in the last two decades as the economics of the forest products industry changed dramatically.⁴
- A study of Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont forest loss from 1992 to 2001 estimated an approximate net loss of 495,000 acres of forest.
- A national analysis by the U.S. Forest Service found that three of Maine's southern watersheds are in the top 15 nationwide for largest projected increase in housing density.⁵
- A Massachusetts Audubon Society analysis found that the Commonwealth lost 30,000 acres of forestland between 1999 and 2005 alone.⁶
- U.S. Forest Service researchers have estimated that by 2050, 60-70 percent of Rhode Island and Connecticut could well be urbanized.⁷
- A 2006 survey of New England's aging forestland owners revealed that 43,000 owners of 1.75 million acres planned to sell some or all of their land in the next five years, and that a group 28,000 owners managing another 500,000 acres planned to subdivide their land over the same period.⁸

The future is up to us

After almost a century of remarkable improvement, New England's forests are experiencing increased parcelization and development. Current research shows that exponential forest loss is likely in the next 20 years without action. All evidence points to a new era of permanent forest fragmentation and loss that jeopardizes New England's forests and the related economic and environmental values so vitally important to the region and the country – if we do not collectively work to reverse this trend.



THE ACTION PLAN

A coalition of organizations committed to protecting New England's unique forest resources are actively advocating for critical policy actions to ensure that government, private forest owners, the forest products industry, and non-profits have the needed tools and incentives to maintain this nationally significant forest resource.

The policy opportunities listed below are the most critical over the next two years:

FUNDING FOR WORKING FORESTS

New England has an incredible endowment of private working forestland that is the backbone of the region's forest products economy. The **Forest Legacy Program** was created by New England's congressional delegation to help protect this asset, primarily through conservation easements. Since its establishment in 1990, Forest Legacy has protected 996,000 acres from development in New England.

New England has \$30.635 million of important Forest Legacy projects in the President's FY12 Budget (listed below). These projects must be funded to help sustain the region's working forest economy and traditional public access.

FY12 Forest Legacy Project List New England Opportunities

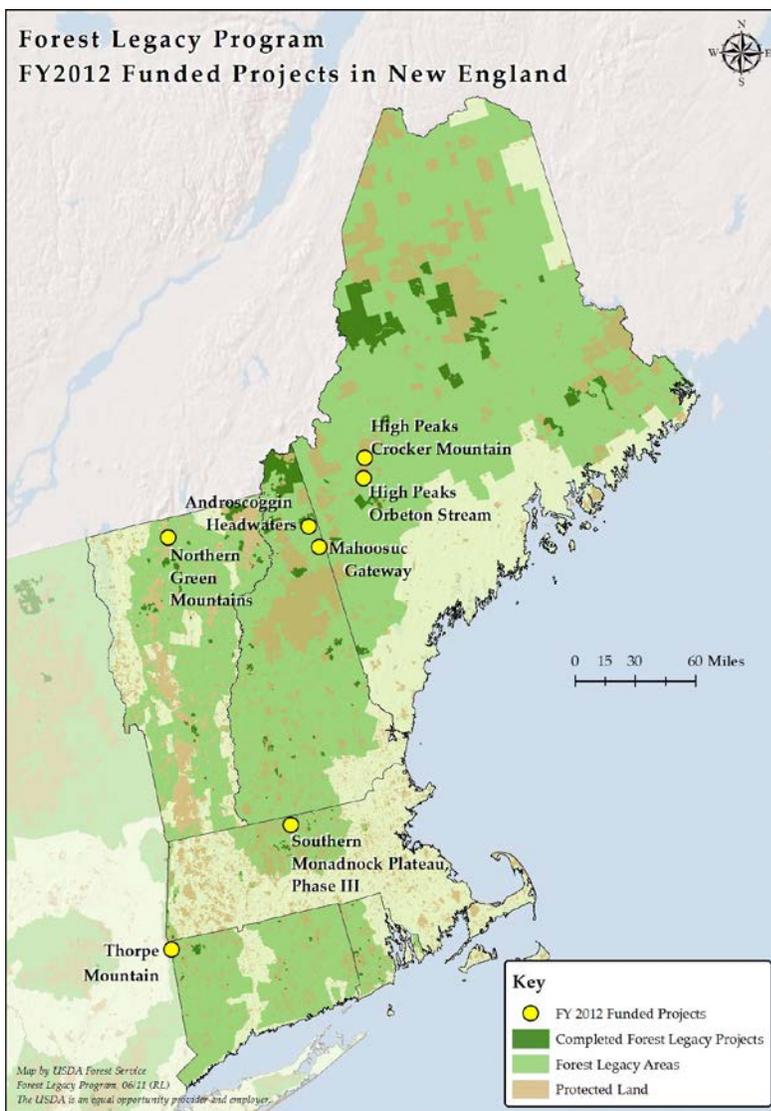
Maine: High Peaks—Crocker Mountain (\$7M);
High Peaks—Orbeton Stream (\$1.73M)

New Hampshire—Androscoggin Headwaters
(\$5M); Mahoosuc Gateway (\$3.375M)

Vermont—Northern Green Mountains (\$2.55M)

Massachusetts—Southern Monadnock Plateau,
Phase III (\$3.87M)

Connecticut—Thorpe Mountain (\$2.11M)



CONSERVING LARGE NEW ENGLAND LANDSCAPES

New England has pioneered the movement to focus conservation efforts across large landscapes such as the **North Woods (also known within the region as Northern Forest)** and the **Connecticut River watershed**. Both of these landscapes were named as priorities in the President's FY12 Budget and the America's Great Outdoors report.

As the Administration implements America's Great Outdoors (AGO), it should include both named New England landscapes in the effort, including any competitive funds created for large landscapes to match state, local, and private funding.

CONNECTING FORESTS AND COMMUNITIES

New England has a proud tradition of community forests—forests established across the region that are owned and managed by communities, often with local citizens in a leading role. The **Community Forest and Open Space Conservation Program** was created by New England's congressional delegation in the 2008 Farm Bill to continue this tradition by providing matching funds for local governments, tribes, and nonprofit organizations to purchase, manage and protect forests for local ownership.

New England has many pending community forest projects that need access to the \$5 million for the Community Forest and Open Space Conservation Program that was included in the President's FY 2012 budget.

The **Recreational Trails Program (RTP)** provides national highway trust funds to the states to develop and maintain recreational trails for both non-motorized and motorized recreational trail uses, while the National Park Service's **Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program (RTCA)** is the community assistance arm of the National Park Service. RTCA supports community-led natural resource conservation and outdoor recreation projects so communities can preserve open space and develop trails and greenways. These programs help to get people outside and keep them active, and both programs keep communities in touch with the outdoors around them.



PROTECTING SPECIAL PLACES

New England has far less public land than other parts of America—just 20 percent of its forests are in public ownership and less than 5 percent in federal ownership. The federal side of the **Land and Water Conservation Fund** supports additions to federal lands, and has been used to add land to beloved federal units in New England like the Green and White Mountain National Forests, Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge, Appalachian National Scenic Trail, and Cape Cod National Seashore.

In FY 12, New England has a number of projects in the President’s Budget (listed below) that will further add to federal lands protected for public recreation and other purposes.

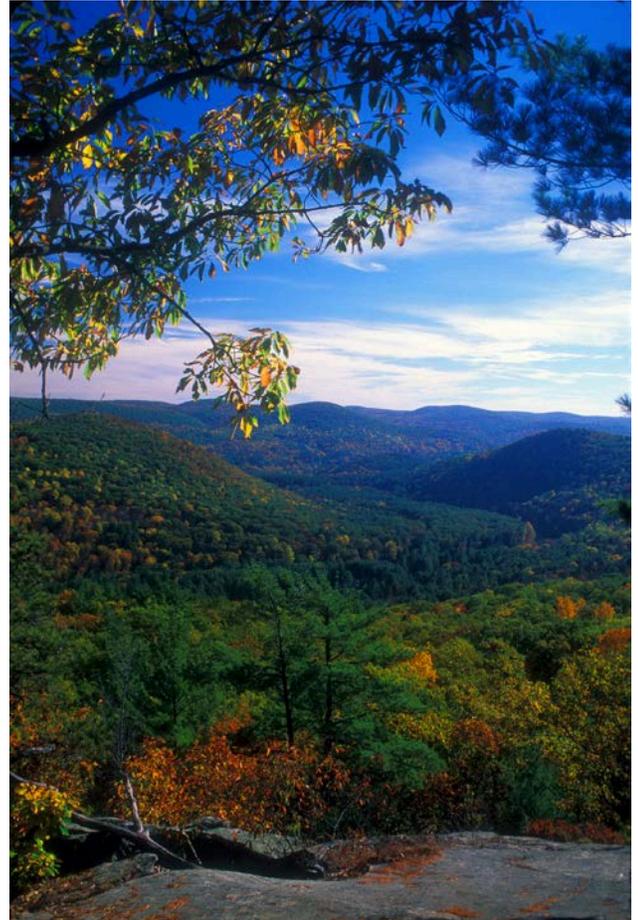
FY12 Land and Water Conservation Fund Federal Project List: New England Opportunities

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Conte National Fish & Wildlife Refuge (CT/MA/NH/VT) (\$6.5M)
Rachel Carson National Wildlife Refuge (ME) (\$750K)
Umbagog National Wildlife Refuge (NH/ME) (\$1.5M)

National Park Service

Acadia National Park (ME) (\$3.040 M)
Appalachian National Scenic Trail (VT) (\$1.75M)
New England National Scenic Trail (MA) (\$475K)



INCENTIVES FOR FOREST LANDOWNERS

New England's private forest owners have a tradition of good forest stewardship. Now these landowners are facing a range of challenges and imperatives, including rising ownership costs, uneven timber markets, development pressures, invasive species, fish and wildlife habitat, and more.

The federal government should meet these landowners half-way with incentives for management that meets important objectives like timber stand improvement, watershed protection, and habitat restoration.

In addition to traditional Farm Bill cost share and incentive programs, two innovative new federal programs could really help: the **Healthy Forest Reserve Program (HFRP)** and the **Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative (CCPI)**. HFRP should be funded at the President's FY12 request of \$9.5 million, and New England should be awarded a number of CCPI areas to help catalyze landscape-scale collaboration on forest stewardship.

RENEWABLE ENERGY

Biomass from New England's forests, when sustainably managed and applied at the appropriate scale with efficient technologies, has the potential to deliver significant benefits and competitive advantages to rural communities.

Vermont, in particular, has been a national leader in developing community-scale biomass. For example, fully 20 percent of Vermont schoolchildren go to a school heated with biomass—replacing millions of gallons of fuel oil, saving money for local budgets, and creating economic returns for private forest owners.

Yet, federal and state policies tend to direct incentives to larger scale biomass electric generation, and until national clean energy guidelines include goals for thermal energy, we cannot meet the potential for the efficient use of our forest resource.

To fully realize the potential of New England's forests to serve local community interests, biomass thermal must be incorporated into state and federal policies. Here are some recommendations:

Congress has an immediate opportunity to provide matching grants for model community-scale biomass projects by funding the **Community Wood Energy Program** at the President's FY12 request of \$3.75 million. This funding can be used for ready projects in New England. Additional funds are needed to scale up this work.

Looking forward, the Administration and Congress should work together to redirect policy focus and funding in Department of Energy biomass programs and USDA's advanced biofuels programs to assist in the development of thermal and combined heat and power applications. For example, USDA loan guarantees should be used to support community-initiated renewable energy projects, and the tax code should be amended to provide appropriate Investment Tax Credits to biomass thermal installations.



Policy Priorities for Conservation: New England's Forests Partners

The organizations listed below endorse and urge action on the policy priorities described in this agenda.

Appalachian Mountain Club
Audubon Connecticut
Connecticut Audubon Society
Forest Guild
Highstead
Mass Audubon
New England Forestry Foundation
The Nature Conservancy
The Trust for Public Land
Wildlands and Woodlands Partnership



¹Moholland, DD. Perfect Weather Sparks New England Tourism Rebound. WBZ 1030 Radio, 10/30/10

²Heating the Northeast with Renewable Biomass: A Bold Vision for 2025. <http://www.nebioheat.org/vision.asp>

³Foster, D.R. and W. Labich. 2008. A Wildland and Woodland Vision for the New England Landscape: Local Conservation, Biodiversity and the Global Environment, pp. 155-175. In R.A. Askins et al. (eds.), *Saving Biological Diversity*. Springer.

⁴New England Governors Conference, Inc. 2009. *Report of the Blue Ribbon Commission on Land Conservation*. Available at <http://www.necg.org>.

⁵Stein, Susan M.; McRoberts, Ronald E.; Alig, Ralph J.; Nelson, Mark D.; Theobald, David M.; Eley, Mike; Dechter, Mike; Carr, Mary. 2005. *Forests on the edge: housing development on America's private forests*. Gen. Tech. Rep. PNW-GTR-636. Portland, OR: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Pacific Northwest Research Station.

⁶DeNormandie, J, C. Corcoran, and J. J. Clarke. 2009. *Losing Ground: Beyond the Footprint*. Lincoln, MA: Mass Audubon.

⁷Nowack, D. J. and J.T. Walton. Projected Urban Growth (2000 – 2050) and Its Estimated Impact on the US Forest Resource, *Journal of Forestry*, Dec. 2005.

⁸Butler, B. J. 2008. *Family Forest Owners of the United States, 2006, a Technical Document Supporting the Forest Service 2010 RPA Assessment*. Washington, D.C., U.S. Forest Service.

Photos by John Burk. Photos by Rob Lilieholm on pages 3, 6, and 8.