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Community Forest Collaborative*



A COMMUNITY INVESTMENT STRATEGY

# COMMUNITY FORESTS





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# COMMUNITY FORESTS

## A COMMUNITY INVESTMENT STRATEGY

*A Report by the  
Community Forest Collaborative  
August 2007*



*Quebec-Labrador Foundation  
Atlantic Center for the Environment*



*The Community Forest Collaborative is a partnership of The Trust for Public Land,  
the Northern Forest Center, and the Quebec-Labrador Foundation/Atlantic Center for the Environment*

*This report is made possible by the generous support of Jane's Trust, the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation, The Sudbury Foundation,  
Davis Conservation Foundation, Sand County Foundation/Bradley Fund for the Environment, the Overhills Foundation, and the Neil and Louise Tillotson Foundation*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

This report represents the hard work and contribution of many individuals who, collectively, have helped develop an understanding of the potential role of community ownership and management of forestland in northern New England.

Robert McCullough's *The Landscape of Community: A History of Communal Forests in New England* describes the past relationship between communities and forests, offering valuable information on which to build today's model. The Northern Forest Alliance's Vermont Town Forest Project, organized to support public awareness, appreciation, and stewardship of existing town forests, promotes new town forest initiatives in Vermont. The Trust for Public Land and the New England Forestry Foundation have been instrumental in working with community groups to establish new Community Forests.

Steve Keith and Mike Berry from the Downeast Lakes Land Trust; Julie Renaud Evans, Gloria Coffin, Bill Freedman, and Stan Gula from the Errol Community Forest Project; Mike Waddell, Glen Eastman, and Haven Neal from Gorham; Patricia Ayres Crawford, Dave Crawford, and Fred Cook from West Fairlee; Nancy Jones and Robert Nutting from Bradford; Dave Paganelli, Orange County Forester; and David Willcox, Walter Graf, and John Scarinza from Randolph provided invaluable assistance with the case studies. These individuals and many others are all responsible for creating and managing today's Community Forests.

Tom Deans and Peter Stein are valued colleagues who have contributed in many ways to help make individual projects possible and to advance the thinking and concepts behind the Community Forest Model. Keith Bisson's research presented important data on the economic value to communities of owning and managing forestland.

Stephen Engle, Frederic Hyde and Ari Ofsevit from the Quebec-Labrador Foundation/ Atlantic Center for the Environment; Dan Sundquist from The Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests; Mark Anderson from The Nature Conservancy, and Cathy Poppenwimer from the Appalachian Mountain Club provided data, maps, and invaluable help with the GIS analysis.

Peter Howell and Abigail Weinberg have contributed their experience, time, and resources from the Open Space Institute, as well as opening doors and offering provocative questions and support as we seek to expand the model.

Collaborative partners Rodger Krussman from The Trust for Public Land and Steve Rohde from the Northern Forest Center have demonstrated the important role of supporting institutions in Community Forest projects and, through the creation of new Community Forests, offer tangible examples of the Community Forest Model.

Finally, Steve Rohde, and Kelly Short from the Northern Forest Center; Rodger Krussman, Sarah Erb, Debra Summers, Brian Lehman, and Matthew Shaffer from The Trust for Public Land have all contributed valuable time and expertise to the development, editing, design, and layout of this report.

*Community Forests: A Community Investment Strategy* is an expression of the observations and insight, experience, hard work, determination, and wisdom of all.

Martha West Lyman  
Principal author

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## PREFACE

Rural communities in northern New England are facing significant economic and social pressures, many of which exert their greatest force at the interface of human populations and the natural resource systems that support them.

For forest-based communities, questions related to the future of their most valuable asset, productive forestland, are also questions that relate to their civic vitality and economic well-being.

- ❁ Who will own the land?
- ❁ How can we preserve the ecological integrity of the forest landscape?
- ❁ How can we protect the productive forestland base to ensure that the raw materials and the services it provides (timber products, soil stabilization, moderating climate, water quality and quantity, wildlife habitat, and recreational landscape) are available for economic activity?
- ❁ How can forest-based communities preserve their culture and traditions while adapting to the imperatives of the new global economy?

The principles of sustainable development offer a compass, and the practice of community-based natural resource management is a guide to working at this interface. One of the core principles of sustainable development requires secure rights to natural resources. The field of community-based natural resource management, a practice consistent with the principles of sustainable development, presents an expanding portfolio of projects that demonstrate the following<sup>1</sup>:

- ❁ If a community owns or has access to rights to a resource
- ❁ if a community participates in management decisions affecting the resource
- and
- ❁ if a community receives benefits from the value of the resource
- ❁ then the resource will be better managed.<sup>1</sup>

Community Forests are based on the principles of sustainable development and community-based natural resource management. They have the potential to be a valuable component in a mosaic of conservation, community and economic development strategies for the region that can result in the conservation of productive forestland and important ecological systems while promoting community vitality and economic well-being.

The purpose of this report is to describe a flexible and adaptable Community Forest Model, to present the analysis from our research on the value and opportunities of community ownership and management of forestland, to offer experience and learning from five case studies, and to offer recommendations to facilitate expansion of the Community Forest Model.

<sup>1</sup> Brian C. Child and Martha W. Lyman. 2004. *Natural Resources as Community Assets: Lessons from Two Continents*. Sand County Foundation/Aspen Institute. [www.sandcounty.org/assets](http://www.sandcounty.org/assets).



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Trust for Public Land, the Northern Forest Center, and the Quebec-Labrador Foundation/Atlantic Center for the Environment have created the Community Forest Collaborative to marshal resources to expand community ownership and management of forestland. In order to do that, the collaborative has worked to define a Community Forest Model and to analyze the potential role of Community Forests as a component in regional conservation strategies and as a community and economic development strategy.

This report is based on findings from research on the potential role of community ownership and management of forestland that included GIS<sup>2</sup> analysis, interviews, surveys, input from two workshops, and five case studies of Community Forests in northern New England that illuminate particular aspects of the Community Forest Model.

### COMMUNITY FOREST MODEL

*The Community Forest Model secures access and rights to the forest resource at the community level; it promotes community participation in management decisions; it ensures that communities receive value and benefits from the land that can support and reinforce community priorities and economic development objectives; and it secures permanent protection of the conservation values of the forestland.*

### CASE STUDIES

- ❁ Paul T. Doherty Memorial Forest, Gorham, New Hampshire (Town of Gorham)
- ❁ Farm Cove Community Forest, Grand Lake Stream, Maine (Downeast Lakes Land Trust)
- ❁ 13 Mile Woods Community Forest, Errol, New Hampshire (13 Mile Woods Association)
- ❁ Brushwood Community Forest Initiative, West Fairlee, Fairlee, and Bradford, Vermont (Towns of West Fairlee, Fairlee, Bradford)
- ❁ Randolph Community Forest, Randolph, New Hampshire (Town of Randolph)<sup>3</sup>

### FINDINGS

- ❁ Community Forests can be a significant component in a mosaic of conservation strategies for landscape scale conservation by buffering ecologically sensitive lands or existing conserved lands and by linking existing conservation lands.
- ❁ Community Forests offer a potent tenure option at both the local and regional levels to conserve productive forestland, wildlife habitat, watersheds, and open space as they offer an alternative to state and federal ownership, expand the constituency for conservation, leverage partnerships, and expand the financial pie for conservation.
- ❁ Community Forests can be a valuable component of economic development strategies by expanding the assets of a community. They can create

<sup>2</sup> GIS stands for Geographic Information System. GIS is computer hardware, software, and geographic data that collect, manage, and have the potential to analyze and display a suite of "geographically referenced" data. For more information, see [www.usgs.gov](http://www.usgs.gov) and [www.gis.com](http://www.gis.com).

<sup>3</sup> The case study for the Randolph Community Forest was written for publication in *Natural Resources as Community Assets: Lessons from Two Continents*. The case study is available online. See [www.sandcounty.net/assets/chapters/assets\\_chapter\\_2.pdf](http://www.sandcounty.net/assets/chapters/assets_chapter_2.pdf)



revenue and jobs, protect ecological services, and provide a resource base for economic activity.

- ❖ Community Forests can reinforce community development objectives by building social capital and community capacity and can provide support for other community priorities such as education and recreation.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### *Expand resources for acquisition and stewardship of Community Forests.*

- ❖ Create a regional private philanthropic fund to support acquisition and stewardship of Community Forests.
- ❖ Create a public Community Forest funding program through the Farm Bill currently pending in Congress.
- ❖ Expand the criteria for access to existing community and economic development financing programs to include Community Forests.
- ❖ Analyze the value of focusing more conservation resources where community ownership could expand conservation options in landscape-scale conservation projects.

### *Expand and institutionalize technical support and assistance to communities.*

- ❖ Develop a permanent infrastructure to support community ownership and stewardship of forestland.
- ❖ Expand education and public awareness about the potential role and opportunity for Community Forests.
- ❖ Conduct research on the potential for Community Forests to build community capacity by expanding social capital and improving governance.
- ❖ Conduct research on the economic value of environmental services provided by Community Forests.

# COMMUNITY FORESTS *in* NORTHERN NEW ENGLAND

## INTRODUCTION

The forests of northern New England have provided the natural resource base upon which the economy and the culture of its human communities have grown and prospered. The forests defined the relationship between communities and the physical landscape within which people settled. The forests provided raw materials initially for fuel and shelter and then for a vital forest products industry that provided employment for people and drove the economy of the region. The forests offered places for recreation and defined the culture of communities and many of their traditions.

In the 1980s northern New England began to experience powerful crosscurrents—the impacts of which continue to reverberate through many communities:

- ❖ *Globalization* of the forest products industry resulted in increasingly distant ownership of the forestland and mills and reduced employment derived from the forests and forest products. This, in turn, effectively disconnected the traditionally close and synergistic relationship between the forest products industry and people in communities.
- ❖ A massive *transfer of ownership*, particularly of industrial forestland, accompanied by management pressures that resulted in increasingly intensive harvesting, sparked an impressive series of conservation initiatives by state and national conservation organizations, land trusts, and private agencies. However, even as land conservation increased sharply, virtually all conservation ownership remains in the hands of large absentee landowners, including timber investors and national or global nonprofits (albeit many with community-friendly attitudes). While the communities gain some environmental benefits from improved stewardship, much of the economic value flows out of the region and out of local communities.

Lessons from the past demonstrate that there is a historic relationship between the use of forest resources and community welfare and that communal forests have always been important pieces of community structures.<sup>4</sup> New England's town forests and, more recently, the acquisition of land for Community Forests (including the acquisition of 27,080 acres by the Downeast Lakes Land Trust, Grand Lake Stream, Maine; 10,200 acres of forestland by the Town of Randolph, New Hampshire; and 5,269 acres by the 13 Mile Woods Association, Inc., in Errol, New Hampshire) suggest that by *increasing local equity in forestland, community ownership of forestland offers the potential to achieve conservation goals while advancing economic and social objectives, particularly in the low-income rural communities of northern New England.*

Recent research that analyzed the value to communities of ownership and management of forestland concluded that:<sup>5</sup>

- ❖ *Forests either pay their way or produce revenue for towns and impose no net costs to towns.*<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Robert McCullough. 1995. *The Landscape of Community: A History of Communal Forests in New England*. University Press of New England. Hanover, NH.

<sup>5</sup> Keith Bisson and Martha Lyman. 2003. *Valuing Forests as Community Assets in the Mount Washington Valley: A Study of the Economic, Environmental, and Social Contributions of Public and Private Forests and Their Potential Role as a Component of a Regional Economic Development Strategy*. Mount Washington Valley Economic Council.

<sup>6</sup> Recent projects that have acquired large tracts of land have resulted in significant costs to towns (Errol, Randolph), which that have been covered in part by public financing programs (New Hampshire Land and Community Heritage Investment Program, the Federal Forest Legacy and New Markets Tax Credit programs) as well as private and philanthropic capital.

- ❖ *Forests provide a complex suite of both monetary and nonmonetary benefits, including timber revenues, nontimber forest product revenues, water supply and quality, recreation, wildlife habitat, and open space.*
- ❖ *Forests provide support for other community priorities, including social services, education, and processes that help build community capacity and social capital.*

There is, at the same time, some healthy skepticism concerning the potential role of community ownership and management of forestland. Many towns, even those that already own forestland, are not fully aware of the benefits of owning and managing forestland as a community asset. In fact, those that do own forestland often do not consider it a community asset. Further, there is concern among some town residents, as well as among potential funding partners, about the capacity of towns to own and manage forestland. This is based primarily on a belief that the governing bodies of towns do not offer appropriate safeguards to ensure the level of long-term stewardship required by conservation imperatives. The Community Forest Collaborative has developed a Community Forest Model that addresses these legitimate concerns.

This report describes a Community Forest Model, offers research and analysis on the potential role of community ownership and management of forestland, and presents five case studies of Community Forests in northern New England that illuminate particular aspects of the Community Forest Model.

## THE COMMUNITY FOREST MODEL

Community Forests build on the historic practices of town forests and communal lands, but incorporate additional safeguards and principles to create a current model that is relevant to many of the issues facing the region's communities and forestland. Fragmentation of productive forestland, reconciliation of competing uses of forestland, public demonstration of good forestry practices, and self-determination for rural communities represent the most salient of these issues.

The Community Forest Model consists of the following components:

- ❖ Community Forests are owned and managed by a municipal entity or by another group (e.g., land trust) on behalf of a community.
- ❖ The proposed acquisition and management structure ensures community participation in and responsibility for management decisions.
- ❖ The community has secure access to the value and benefits of the forest, both monetary and nonmonetary, that can support and reinforce community priorities and economic development objectives.
- ❖ The conservation values of the forestland are permanently protected through a conservation easement and sustainable forest management practices.

Experience has demonstrated that the model must be flexible and adaptable, as its application will result in a different look depending on the land as well as the capacity and priorities of individual communities. However, it is important to develop, in the near term, a good understanding of what it means to own and manage land on behalf of a community and how it is expressed, to ensure community participation in and responsibility for management decisions, and to ensure a community has secure access to the values and benefits of the forest.

Existing town forests and new Community Forest projects help put rigor to the model by giving more clarity and offering substantive examples to help define these components more carefully. The case studies of the Paul T. Doherty Memorial Forest, the Farm Cove Community Forest, the 13 Mile Woods Community Forest, the Brushwood Community Forest Initiative and the Randolph Community Forest have helped advance our thinking about the model. They suggest that there will be a suite of tenure options for ownership that may include a municipal board (selectmen, conservation commission, water commission, forestry committee), association or other nonprofit (13 Mile Woods Association), or land trust (Downeast Lakes Land Trust). In most cases, there will be a direct affiliation with one or more governing bodies within the community, but in all cases, the entity that owns the land will be governed by people who live in the community and represent the interests of the community.

Similarly, mechanisms to ensure community participation and responsibility might include involvement by community members on town boards, or if the forest is owned by an association or land trust (e.g., 13 Mile Woods Association, Downeast Lakes Land Trust), representation by community members on nonprofit boards and/or committees. Opportunities to inform and engage the public include public meetings, formal public hearings, public events on the Community Forest, and actions that require voting at town meetings. Responsibility for management decisions may range from public participation in the development and approval of a management plan, to oversight and supervision of forestry/management operations, and/or integration of management planning and oversight with town boards or other formal town processes such as master planning and town meetings.

Finally, mechanisms to ensure that a community has secure access to the values and benefits of the forest range from a simple statement of purpose of the forest and its availability for use by the community, to more formal vehicles such as the establishment of a Community Forest fund that holds income from management operations and may require a town meeting vote for expenditures. Other mechanisms include permitting systems for use of resources (Downeast Lakes Land Trust) or collaborative partnerships with other community groups (13 Mile Woods and Randolph with local trail and snowmobile clubs, Gorham with the school department and the water and sewer district).

## FINDINGS

Our research evaluated several key values of Community Forests, analyzed the qualities that influence the readiness of communities to undertake Community Forest projects, and identified the resources needed to support Community Forest projects.

Community Forests have the potential to be a valuable component in a mosaic of conservation and community and economic development strategies for the region that can result in the conservation of productive forestland and important ecological systems, while promoting community vitality and economic well-being.

Community Forests serve as a vehicle for grassroots activism and community participation. They can create social capital and expand community capacity. And they can offer a forum where the often-contentious debates on conservation, property rights, jobs, and the economy can be reconciled.

#### CONSERVATION VALUE

An examination of several GIS data layers together (productive forestland, conservation land, municipal ownership, and large land sales) revealed an impressive image of the current and potential role of Community Forests to:

- ❖ *Buffer conservation lands.* The Farm Cove Community Forest buffers an ecological reserve. (map 2) The 13 Mile Woods is adjacent to a state park. (map 3) and the Randolph Community Forest abuts the White Mountain National Forest. (map 4).
- ❖ *Link existing conservation lands.* The Randolph Community Forest connects the two sections of the White Mountain National Forest. (map 4) The Brushwood Community Forest will connect Bradford municipal watershed land, the new West Fairlee Town Forest, and the Fairlee Town Forest. (map 5)
- ❖ *Provide a component in the mosaic for the conservation of large landscapes.* The Farm Cove Community Forest is a significant component in a one-million-acre conserved landscape of contiguous forestland in eastern Maine and western New Brunswick. (map 2)

The 13 Mile Woods Community Forest is an important link in a chain of private, state, federal, and non-profit protected lands that stretches from the Lake Umbagog National Wildlife Refuge to the White Mountain National Forest. (map 3)

While the Farm Cove Community Forest and the 13 Miles Woods Community Forest offer impressive examples, there are other areas in the region where community ownership may have particular added value within landscape-scale conservation strategies, including the Mahoosucs (Maine/New Hampshire), Appalachian Corridor (Northeast Kingdom/southern Quebec), and Quabbin to Cardigan (Massachusetts/Vermont/New Hampshire). The Community Forest Collaborative will continue to analyze other potential focus areas as part of its ongoing work.

- ❖ *Conserve local resources.* The Paul T. Doherty Memorial Forest, the Farm Cove Community Forest, the 13 Mile Woods Community Forest, the Brushwood Community Forest Initiative, and the Randolph Community Forest conserve a broad spectrum of local resource values and environmental services, including productive forestland for forestry, water supplies and quality, wildlife habitat that supports hunting and fishing, and open space for outdoor recreational activities.

Additional analysis of GIS data for New Hampshire's State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP) (map 6), water resources (map 7), and productive forestland (map 8) confirmed that community ownership can play a significant role, as well, in more local strategies to conserve important wildlife, water, and forestland resources.

Information from interviews offered further insight into the potential role of community ownership and management of forestland as part of the regional conservation strategy:

- ❖ *Leverage partnerships.* Recent Community Forest projects have involved multiple partners not only in the acquisition process, but also in subsequent program and management activities. Partners include community members and town boards; consulting foresters; nonprofits; state and federal agencies; local, regional, and national foundations; local businesses; a private equity partner; a commercial bank; and trade associations. For example:

Farm Cove Community Forest partners: Downeast Lakes Land Trust, New England Forestry Foundation, Maine Natural Resources Council, Northern Forest Alliance, Grand Lakes Stream Guides, Quebec-Labrador Foundation/Atlantic Center for the Environment.

13 Mile Woods partners: The Trust for Public Land, Lyme Timber Company, United States Fish and Wildlife Service, Town of Errol, the Northern Forest Center, the First Colebrook Bank, Coastal Enterprises, Inc. (CEI), State of New Hampshire, and the New Hampshire Land and Community Heritage Investment Program (LCHIP).

Randolph Community Forest partners: The Trust for Public Land, Town of Randolph, Town of Jefferson, Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests, Appalachian Mountain Club, The Nature Conservancy, Randolph Foundation, Randolph Mountain Club, Waumbec Snowmobile Club, State of New Hampshire, White Mountain National Forest, and LCHIP.

- ❖ *Expand funding for conservation.* The Community Forest Model has demonstrated the capacity to attract broad funding from municipal finance (bonds, taxes, operating budgets), as well as new sources of financing (New Markets Tax Credits and commercial bank loans). New opportunities for funding based on the multiple benefits of Community Forests may include access to public funding programs for community and economic development such as the Community Development Block Grant program and federal and state economic development pro-

grams. In addition, efforts are under way to include funding for Community Forests in the 2007 revision of the Farm Bill and to expand involvement of the philanthropic sector in helping to finance acquisition of forestland by communities.

❖ *Offer a strategy for the conservation of land that may not have sufficient conservation value for national or state public nonprofit acquisition.* Several recent Community Forest projects such as the 13 Mile Woods Community Forest, Farm Cove Community Forest, and Randolph Community Forest represent land with high conservation values from a state and national perspective. Community Forests, however, also offer an opportunity to conserve land that may have value to the community but would not meet the criteria for acquisition by agencies or nonprofits at the state or national level. The parcels of land that will be aggregated to form the West Fairlee Town Forest and Trout Pond in Freedom, New Hampshire, are good examples.

#### ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT VALUE

The role of productive forestland within an economic development strategy is based on the forest's ability to provide raw materials and environmental services to support economic activity.

❖ *Raw materials.* Perhaps the most obvious and tangible economic value comes from forest products. Towns receive revenues from timber-harvesting operations and nontimber forest products. Experience from Community Forests around the region suggests that the economic value to communities varies according to the size of the forest, forest type, quality of standing timber, and management priorities. The management of Community Forests often supports local or regional enterprises such as consulting foresters, local loggers, and sawmills. Finally, while there is little documentation of the extent to which Community Forests support these activities, the Farm Cove Community Forest offers some record of what products are used and by whom. The Downeast Lakes Land Trust grants permits to local craftspeople who harvest seasonal greens from the forest for wreath making, ash for baskets, and wood for the famous Downeast Laker canoe.

Here are some other examples:

*Conway* (1,840 acres): Over a 26-year period (1978–2003), the town received total revenues of \$181,403.72, expended \$100,232.24 in costs associated with managing the land, and realized \$81,171 in net revenue to the town. Forest management of Conway town lands supports jobs (part time) for a consulting forester and loggers.<sup>7</sup>

*Eaton* (2,000 acres): Over a 10-year period (1993–2002) the town received total revenues of \$62,655, expended \$58,583 in costs associated with managing the land, and realized \$4,072 in net revenues from timber and nontimber products (blueberry cultivation).<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Figures from the Town of Conway published in Keith Bisson and Martha Lyman, *Valuing Forests as Community Assets in the Mount Washington Valley*.

<sup>8</sup> Figures from the Town of Eaton published in *ibid*.

*Randolph* (10,200 acres): Over the first two years of harvesting, the town received total revenues of \$89,736, expended \$70,162 in costs associated with managing the land, and realized \$19,574 in net revenues. (A small portion of expenses in 2005/2006 was covered by a grant.) Management activities on the forest provided jobs for a three-person professional forestry team, and trail work is contracted by the Randolph Mountain Club and the Waumbec Snowmobile Club.<sup>9</sup>

*Farm Cove Community Forest* (27,080 acres): was purchased in 2005. The Downeast Lakes Land Trust is still assessing timber revenue potentials. The first year's revenues were offset by initial investments in aging road infrastructure. The land trust has created job opportunities through forest management activities and has supported a local economy based on tourism, protecting the land base, guaranteeing public access, and developing trails and campsites.<sup>10</sup>

*Errol* (5,269 acres) has projected average net revenues from timber-harvesting operations of \$225,000 per year for the first seven years (2006–2012). These revenues will go toward paying off the loan for the purchase of the property. In addition to a consulting forester, in the early years, up to seven logging jobs for 40–44 weeks each year are projected for forestry operations.<sup>11</sup> In the long run, the more significant impact of the 13 Mile Woods on economic development may be its role in enhancing the development of Errol as a destination for recreational tourism.

*Gorham* (4,900 acres [est.]): Over a 16-year period (1991–2006), the town received \$1.2 million in revenues from timber-harvesting operations. From 1991 to 1995, harvesting operations under contract with a local pulp and paper company netted the town \$160,000. In 1998 the region experienced a catastrophic ice storm that resulted in significant damage to the region's standing timber. Salvage operations in the town forest were begun in 1999 and continued until 2006, netting revenues to the town of \$1 million over the seven-year period, or an average of \$145,000 per year. Because of the extensive damage from the 1998 ice storm and subsequent harvesting from salvage operations, there will be few if any harvest operations for 15–20 years in order to allow the forest to recover and grow. It is anticipated, however, that the forest can produce, on a sustained basis, an estimated \$50,000 in annual income to the town.<sup>12</sup>

While transitions in the forest products industry make it difficult to predict the future for markets for forest products, economic activity based on raw materials from the forest will, no doubt, continue. New markets for forest products and uses of timber resources may include biomass for fuel and energy as well as for “green certified” forest products. Climate change and developing markets for carbon trading<sup>13</sup> may result in economic value to communities for carbon sequestration or carbon offsets.

9 Conversation with David Willcox. February 2007.

10 Email exchange with Mark Berry. April 2007.

11 Conversation with Steve Rohde. March 2007.

12 Conversation with Haven Neal. March 2007.

13 Carbon trading is a mechanism for reducing carbon emissions that trades permits to emit carbon dioxide for activities that reduce carbon emissions. Some of those activities include forestland management and forestland conservation. For examples, see [www.pacificforest.org/services](http://www.pacificforest.org/services).



*Environmental services.* In addition, productive forestland provides environmental services that support economic activity such as raw materials, wildlife habitat, and opportunities for recreation. Forests also stabilize the landscape, protect soils, provide buffer against pests and disease, regulate water flows, moderate climate, and contain global warming.<sup>14</sup> While the economic value of these services has not been quantified, they are listed here to highlight their role and signal a need for further analysis.

*Water supply.* Many communities own forestland that protects the municipal water supply (Paul T. Doherty Memorial Forest, Brushwood Community Forest Initiative). The land is managed with the principal purpose of conserving the quality and quantity of water that supports individual households and commercial enterprises.

*Wildlife habitat.* Productive forestland supports biological diversity and provides habitat for wildlife that supports both a local culture of hunting and fishing and important enterprises based on these activities such as lodging facilities and guiding businesses.

*Recreation.* For towns like Errol and Grand Lake Stream, recreation and recreational tourism are components of planned economic development strategies. New trails and canoe campsites in the Farm Cove Community Forest are part of an economic development plan to provide expanded amenities for people who come to stay in the lodges in Grand Lake Stream. The 13 Mile Woods Community Forest is enhancing an initiative that began as a result of the designation of the Lake Umbagog National Wildlife Refuge and the subsequent organization of the Umbagog Area Chamber of Commerce, to make Errol a destination for tourists. Among the benefits from that initiative, to date, are the creation of more than 20 new businesses and the addition of a significant number of new employees at a local sporting goods store. Moreover, the planned development of a snowmobile trail in the 13 Mile Woods Community Forest is expected to expand economic opportunities related to increasing numbers of snowmobilers in the region.

Experience in the development and implementation of “working forest” conservation easements builds the capacity in the region to encourage economic activity through forest management while achieving conservation objectives.

#### COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT VALUE

Historically, common lands or town forests were often established to support other community priorities and institutions. Churches and schools were often sited on the land, and revenues from the timber paid the minister and the teacher.<sup>15</sup> Other towns looked to the forest to support the needs of community residents. In Conway, for example, fuelwood was provided to needy families from town land. In Ossipee, revenue from harvesting operations still subsidizes fuel costs for some families.<sup>16</sup> Community Forests provide outdoor classrooms for

<sup>14</sup> Brian Dabson, Rural Policy Research Institute. Information from presentation at Coos County Symposium. May 2007. [www.rupri.org](http://www.rupri.org)

<sup>15</sup> Robert McCullough. *The Landscape of Community*.

<sup>16</sup> Keith Bisson and Martha Lyman. *Valuing Forests as Community Assets in the Mount Washington Valley*.

the schools (Gorham) and summer outdoor education programs (Farm Cove Community Forest). Community Forests provide open space and recreational opportunities for town residents, access to resources for local crafts, and materials for town facilities. Finally, Community Forests connect or reconnect people to nature by offering a place close to home where people can interact with nature.<sup>17</sup>

Though much of the analysis on the potential value of community development is based on anecdotal information, Community Forest projects advance community development objectives in several, less tangible areas:<sup>18</sup>

*Culture and tradition.* Often the land that becomes a Community Forest represents recognized and valued “places” in a community. Errol’s 13 Mile Woods, Freedom’s Trout Pond, and West Fairlee/Bradford/Fairlee’s Brushwood Forest are examples of Community Forest projects that have engaged people and organized them around a recognized place name and shared values. Participation in and support for the Community Forest project have, more often than not, been based on the interest of people within a community to protect landscapes and places that hold special meaning to the community.

Moreover, as people across the region have observed the impacts of industrial forestland sales and changes in the forest products industry, they have become more concerned about what is happening in the woods and fearful of change. New England communities have long been defined by a culture of local control and self-determination.

Community Forests secure the rights to an important access at the local level so that decisions about how the land will be managed can be made within the community. As one individual commented, “It was going to change one way or another ... this way we got to choose.”<sup>19</sup>

Many towns, recognizing that change is inevitable, have taken the initiative to ensure that the character, culture, and traditions of their community will not be compromised. They often use the master planning process, town meeting, or stewardship planning as vehicles for expression of community values. One of the stated goals of the Randolph Community Forest, for example, was “to preserve the current rural state ... preservation of the land from development.”<sup>20</sup> West Fairlee’s Master Plan incorporated a specific recommendation to establish a town forest.<sup>21</sup> The Stewardship Plan for the 13 Mile Woods Community Forest states: “The citizens of Errol recognized the changing patterns of

17 The Trust for Public Land’s Parks for People program emphasizes the value of close connections between human communities and the natural world around them by working to “ensure that everyone—in particular, every child—enjoys close-to-home access to a park, playground, or natural area.” See [www.tpl.org](http://www.tpl.org). Frederick Law Olmstead amplified the value of these connections in his report for the Yosemite Commission entitled *Yosemite and the Mariposa Grove: A Preliminary Report 1865*. The report “offers one of the first systematic expositions in the history of the Western world of the importance of contact with wilderness for human well-being, the effect of beautiful scenery on human perception, and the moral responsibility of democratic governments to preserve regions of extraordinary natural beauty for the benefit of the whole people.” For Olmstead’s report, see [www.yosemite.ca.us/library/olmstead/report.html](http://www.yosemite.ca.us/library/olmstead/report.html).

18 For a good discussion of the relationship between community forests and community engagement, see Bethany Claire Hanna. 2005. *The Role of Town Forests in Promoting Community Engagement and Fostering Sense of Place*. Master’s thesis. University of Vermont. The thesis can be found with accompanying case studies at [www.uvm.edu/~rscfar/townforest/](http://www.uvm.edu/~rscfar/townforest/).

19 Conversation with Lindsay Wheaton. July 2006.

20 David Willcox. “The Story of the Randolph Community Forest: Building on Local Stewardship.” In Brian C. Child and Martha W. Lyman. *Natural Resources as Community Assets*.

21 Conversation with Patricia Ayres Crawford. July 2006.

ownership and the new interest in recreational land development and sought to protect the traditional uses of this important piece of the town.”<sup>22</sup>

*Social capital.* Social capital is defined as the networks of association within a community that create value by building trust, encouraging reciprocity and cooperation, and facilitating flows of information.<sup>23</sup> Social capital “matters” because research has proven that in communities with strong social capital “people are healthier, schools work better and kids learn faster, local government performs better, [there are fewer] crimes against people and property and a broad range of positive impacts on local businesses.”<sup>24</sup>

Community Forest projects may help build social capital in the following ways: They often engage broad participation by people in a community. At the most basic level, Community Forest projects often attract people who have never been involved in the community. At one Community Forest workshop, for example, a participant who had been silent throughout the entire meeting raised his hand to speak. He described how he had never participated in community life and had had little interest in conservation. He went on to explain that he had a child and that he was moved to join in the Community Forest project to ensure the forest would be there for his son to use and enjoy.<sup>25</sup> Invariably, the leaders of a Community Forest project spend countless hours meeting with people in town and hold public meetings to provide information and expand awareness about the project. Often members of several town boards are involved (select board, planning board and conservation commissions). In some cases the project is started by a “newcomer” (West Fairlee) but is often joined by “old-timers.” Community Forest projects engage people who may never have participated in town affairs; they connect people not only within a community but also between communities (Randolph/Jefferson; West Fairlee/Fairlee/Bradford), and with individuals and organizations outside the community. The outcome is the currency of social capital that includes the following: new networks of association; access to information by a broader group of people within a community; and connecting networks within a town, between towns, and between town and outside resources.<sup>26</sup> Each of these, according to social capital research, builds trust, facilitates the exchange of information, and enhances cooperation.<sup>27</sup>

*Community capacity.* Community Forest projects engage a cross section of people within the community in a common goal. In addition, Community Forest projects often attract new people that bring differ-

22 Stewardship Plan for the 13 Mile Woods. 2005.

23 For background information on social capital, see the Saguaro Seminar: Civic Engagement in America. [www.ksg.harvard.edu/saguaro/primer.htm](http://www.ksg.harvard.edu/saguaro/primer.htm).

24 Email exchange with Lew Feldstein, cochair of the Saguaro Seminar. May 2007. For more information on social capital research, see [www.ksg.harvard.edu/saguaro](http://www.ksg.harvard.edu/saguaro).

25 Notes from Community Forest workshop, Ossipee, NH. October 2005.

26 For more information on social capital, see [www.ksg.harvard.edu/saguaro/primer.htm](http://www.ksg.harvard.edu/saguaro/primer.htm).

27 Ibid..

ent talents, skills, and resources to bear within a community. Finally, some Community Forest projects actually build new community institutions. The 13 Mile Woods Association in Errol and the Downeast Lakes Land Trust in Grand Lake Stream have relieved the boards of selectmen from the day-to-day responsibility of managing a community asset and attracted new partners with greater access to skills and resources. When a project engages a broad and enthusiastic cross section of the community, it expands the resources available to the community and the capacity of the community to conduct its work (Errol, Freedom).

*Governance.* All three states have town forest laws that generally delegate management responsibility for town forests to local boards and authorize the establishment of a town forest committee and a town forest fund. In some towns, the board of selectmen has established a town forest committee and delegated management authority and responsibility for the town forest to that committee. In other towns, either the board of selectmen or conservation commission provides the management and oversight of a town forest. Income and expenses from a town forest can be managed either through the town's general fund or through a separate town forest fund that requires annual approval at town meeting.

Several Community Forest projects offer insight into the potential of a project for improving governance at the town level. While much of the anecdotal information suggests improved participation, decision making, and procedures governing the land itself, the residual benefits may also improve governance for other town issues.

At the most basic level several projects have brought in new people with important skills and capacity to serve on town boards. A Randolph resident joined the conservation commission as a result of the Community Forest project and subsequently ran and won a seat on the board of selectmen. He is, according to town residents, "a very, very good selectman." In Errol, a recent resident who had never been involved in town business volunteered to be on the board of the newly formed 13 Mile Woods Association. His training in finance and accounting brought valuable skills that have supported the work of both the 13 Mile Woods Association and the board of selectmen as they manage the loan and long-term stewardship requirements of the Community Forest.

Randolph offers a valuable example of deliberate efforts to further refine governing issues, improve town governance, and address skepticism over town ownership. Individuals who led the creation of the Randolph Community Forest were very concerned about the long-term nature of forest management and the business of owning and managing a 10,000-acre asset. They saw the management of the forest "as a long-term planning issue, as a land-use issue, and as an issue of protecting the character of the town as set forth in the master plan."<sup>28</sup> Further, they determined, prior to the purchase of the land, that a Community Forest would have to be insulated from the short-term nature of town politics and the annual needs of town budgets. As a result they decided to vest

<sup>28</sup> Email exchange with David Willcox. June 2007.

“ultimate authority for management with the planning board, the elected town body having an institutional responsibility for those matters.”<sup>29</sup> They sought and secured special legislation from the New Hampshire General Court to:

*authorize a special town meeting to adopt an ordinance that...places responsibility for day-to-day forest affairs in an appointed five-member forest commission, which hires and oversees the activities of a professional forestry team. Three members of the commission are appointed by the selectmen, as in the state model, but there are also two ex officio members, one from the conservation commission and one from the planning board. Overall responsibility rests with the planning board not with the selectmen...the ordinance also establishes a non-lapsing revolving fund which is protected from the vicissitudes of town meeting. An annual budget drawn up by the [f]orest [c]ommission is approved by the [p]lanning [b]oard at a public hearing. It is reported at Town Meeting, but no action is required from the town. All moneys in the fund are to be reinvested in the management of the community forest, unless there is a surplus and the [p]lanning [b]oard approves a transfer of funds to the town general account.<sup>30</sup>*

The Randolph experience highlights the importance and value of a community undertaking an open and deliberative process, early on, to think through the best governance structure to “ensure that the decision is publicly and thoroughly thought through and that the community does not turn to one of the state formulae just because it is the easiest alternative.”<sup>31</sup>

#### COMMUNITY READINESS AND INTEREST

Successful Community Forest projects require significant commitments on the part of the community. Most of the projects are initiated and managed by volunteers within the community. The community must make some degree of financial commitment, and the community is responsible for the long-term stewardship of the resource. This requires “readiness and interest” on the part of people within the community.

While there are more than 300 town forests in Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont, many are not considered or managed as a community “asset.” Some communities are opposed to the concept of a town acquiring, owning, and managing land because of the perceived “cost” to the town—the fear that purchasing land will raise taxes or remove it from the tax rolls.

Those communities that have acquired land have done so through the initiative of an individual or group of individuals who either have had the foresight (Gorham) to protect town resources or have been stimulated to act based on a threat such as the potential sale or development of a particularly important piece of land within the town. A project often starts with an individual—a “spark plug” who has vision and leadership like Fran Coffin in Errol, Steve Keith in Grand Lake Stream, and Patricia Ayres Crawford in West Fairlee.

The catalyst for some Community Forest projects has been the sale of a signature piece of land in the community or a threat to the community’s “way of life” resulting from land sales. Other catalysts or leverage points have included the availability of resources and awareness of them. If towns know there is a source of money, particularly for acquisition costs (e.g., the

29 Ibid.

30 David Willcox. “The Story of the Randolph Community Forest.” In *Natural Resources as Community Assets: Lessons From Two Continents*.

31 Email exchange with David Willcox. June 2007.

Forest Legacy Program), the immediate concern and obstacles of issues related to taxes and cost to town are removed, opening the door to discussion about the idea of a Community Forest. In addition, case studies or field visits to other communities that have successfully acquired and are managing forestland provide valuable reinforcement and incentive. When people in the Town of Errol, for example, observed that Randolph, a town of similar size and in proximity, had successfully acquired 10,000 acres, their reaction was “If Randolph can do it, we can too.” Similarly, West Fairlee’s initiative to acquire land to establish a town forest provided the opportunity to engage the neighboring towns of Bradford and Fairlee in discussions and now action to consolidate the town lands under a regional management plan.

#### RESOURCE NEEDS

During the course of two workshops and interviews for the case studies, individuals were asked to identify and describe important resource needs to support Community Forest projects:

##### *Resource needs at the community level.*

One individual or a group of individuals in the community needs to provide *leadership and vision*. This person or group should be well respected and have the interest, capacity, and stamina to promote and shepherd the project and to galvanize resources.

Communities need access to *information* and *resource people* who can facilitate meetings, can provide maps/mapping services, have experience with or case studies about successful Community Forest projects, know how a project moves through town/city government, and have a place and/or database for advice and technical assistance on Community Forest projects and management.

The public outreach and publicity work of the Northern Forest Alliance’s Vermont Town Forest Project has created a growing interest in and understanding of the value of town forests in Vermont. In addition, the project provides a valuable service in connecting interested towns to resources in support of acquisition and stewardship of town forests.

A workshop hosted by the Vermont Association of Conservation Commissions included presentations on town forests by staff members from the Vermont Town Forest Project and The Trust For Public Land. This event proved to be a catalyst for attendees from West Fairlee and provided valuable contacts for follow-up support and assistance in developing a town forest project.

In the early stages of a project, community leaders often receive reinforcement for their idea by bringing people in from the outside to talk at public meetings. Randolph, for example, hosted an evening program for the community and invited the state forester and people from other towns that own and manage forestland to present their experience. The group in Grand Lake Stream invited people from the Northern Forest Alliance to help facilitate a public meeting.

Communities need to know that there are *funding sources* to support activities related to Community Forest projects:

- ✿ Acquisition. The availability of significant funding programs for acquisi-

tion (e.g., Forest Legacy Program, New Hampshire Land and Community Heritage Investment Program, and Land for Maine's Future Program) provide early reassurance that a community can find help in overcoming what could be an impossible hurdle convincing community members to take on a large financial commitment.

- ❁ Inventory and planning. Other funding has been important to help communities undertake initial project planning such as inventory work and cost of community services studies. West Fairlee, for example, used a portion of a grant from a state program to conduct some initial survey and planning work; Downeast Lakes Land Trust was able to secure significant grant support that resulted in its ability to inventory natural and ecological resources so that it could determine the values it was trying to conserve.
- ❁ Building community capacity. Other funds may be required to support paid staff to augment and reinforce volunteers, to provide workshops or training, and to support efforts to build community capacity.
- ❁ Stewardship and management costs. While many Community Forest projects have been able to cover stewardship and management costs through timber revenues, it is not unusual for the costs to accrue before revenues are realized. For many towns, there is no capacity to bridge this gap. Investment in forestry infrastructure such as roads, assistance in developing a business plan, ecological inventories, and ongoing monitoring suggest the need for access to up-front capital or at least to low-interest loans.
- ❁ Program development. Many Community Forest projects include efforts to expand public access and to create educational and recreational programs.

Communities require *technical assistance* at various stages of a Community Forest project. Before acquisition, advice and expertise on financing options have been critical. The Trust for Public Land, Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests, New England Forestry Foundation, and Northern Forest Center have all offered important assistance. In addition, funding programs such as the Forest Legacy Program often require the development of a stewardship plan for the property before the land has been acquired. This requirement comes, in many cases, long before there is community capacity in terms of funds, knowledge, and time to produce a stewardship plan. Grants to fund a stewardship plan, a supporting organization (such as The Trust for Public Land), or a consulting forester have been valuable resources for communities in the preparation of stewardship plans.

Once the forest has been acquired, expanding awareness within the community about “the art and science of forestry” offers a chance to use the Community Forest as a demonstration of state-of-the-art forestry practices. Once forest commission members were appointed in Randolph, they brought in several foresters to talk about what would be involved in managing the 10,000-acre Randolph Community Forest, including goals of management and needed capacity to oversee management plans and management decisions in the field. For communities that will own and manage large tracts of forestland, additional assistance in developing business plans is recommended.

Finally, recent projects underscore the essential role that partners and supporting institutions play in successful Community Forest projects. A private equity partner, state, regional or

national nonprofit that has access to capital, staff time, and expertise and offers the capacity to “act fast” to acquire the land and hold it until a local initiative can get under way are important early partners. These organizations can assume risk if a community can’t or won’t. They can “buy time” so that people within a community can learn about the project, understand the benefits of acquisition and what will be required of them, and organize accordingly.

For Errol, Downeast Lakes Land Trust, Randolph, and others, partners such as the Northern Forest Alliance, The Trust for Public Land, New England Forestry Foundation, Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests, and the Appalachian Mountain Club offered valuable organizing, community building, project design, strategy, and fundraising capacity. For recent Community Forest projects, the United States Forest Service (USFS) and other federal agencies, state agencies, private philanthropy, individuals, and commercial banks have been key funding partners. Some towns need follow-up support to assist with conflict resolution or issues related to governance, multiple uses (e.g., all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) or navigating long-term relationships with adjacent landowners or other partners (Randolph and White Mountain National Forest). Errol benefited from a partnership with the Northern Forest Center to incorporate the New Markets Tax Credit as part of the financing package. The partnership with the Northern Forest Center will continue to provide support to the 13 Mile Woods Association and the Errol Board of Selectmen on issues related to the New Markets Tax Credit. Both Randolph and the Farm Cove Community Forest have benefited from a complex suite of partners that support efforts to develop and implement programs, develop and manage recreational infrastructure, and institute ecological monitoring programs (Randolph Mountain Club, Waumbec Snowmobile Club, National Park Service—Rivers and Trails Assistance Program, Quebec-Labrador Foundation’s Intern Program, volunteers, Land for Maine’s Future Program, state job-training programs, Maine Audubon Society, United States Fish and Wildlife Service).

#### *Resource needs of supporting institutions.*

Supporting institutions have resource needs as well. Fundamentally, they need *time* “so people can buy in [to the idea]...to work out the details of a project” and a *good local person or group* because “it has to matter to someone there.”<sup>32</sup>

Supporting institutions also need institutional capacity, primarily staff time, to meet community members on a regular basis, develop relationships with town boards, establish friendly and trusting relationships within the community, and provide technical advice to community leaders “to guide and steer the bus, but not drive the bus.”<sup>33</sup> Moreover, they need the capacity for due diligence, mapping, landowner contacts, grant writing, preparing applications for funding programs, property assessment, title work, legal, accounting, and finance.

Supporting institutions need to have the capacity within their own staff or access to legal, financing, and accounting expertise that can support efforts to experiment with and apply new tools and to assemble and manage multiple funding sources for an acquisition. Supporting institutions, particularly those that are trying to identify and assemble financing packages, need access to modeling capacity and to municipal and tax law experts to help analyze the availability and flow of dollars to make deals work.

Finally, supporting institutions and communities need access to capital that is flexible (flexible interest rates, no prepayment penalties), patient (provides time without pressure), and long term.

<sup>32</sup> Interview with Julie Iffland, November 2006.

<sup>33</sup> Interview with Rodger Krussman, November 2006.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

If application of the Community Forest Model is to be expanded to achieve conservation goals and community and economic development objectives, a coordinated and robust initiative is necessary to expand resources for acquisition and stewardship of Community Forests and to assist communities in the process.

### *Expand resources for acquisition and stewardship of Community Forests.*

- ❖ *Create a regional private philanthropic fund to support acquisition and stewardship of Community Forests.* Such a fund would provide private capital to municipalities or community-based groups for capacity building and preacquisition costs, loans and grants for acquisition, and grants for management and stewardship costs. The fund could match and/or leverage resources from a public fund.
- ❖ *Create a public Community Forest funding program through the Farm Bill currently pending in Congress.* Such a fund would provide public dollars to communities or community-based groups for capacity building and preacquisition costs, loans and grants for acquisition, and grants for management and stewardship costs. The fund could match and/or leverage resources from a private fund.
- ❖ *Expand the criteria for access to public community and economic development financing programs to include Community Forests.* Municipal bond programs, community development block grant programs, and economic development financing programs should be adapted to support financing for acquisition and stewardship of Community Forests. New programs also should be explored through revisions to the Farm Bill currently under consideration in Congress.
- ❖ *Analyze the potential value of focusing more conservation resources where community ownership could expand conservation options in landscape-scale conservation projects.*

### *Expand, formalize, and institutionalize technical support and assistance to communities.*

- ❖ *Develop a permanent infrastructure to support community ownership and stewardship of forestland.* Design, fund, and implement a “community support system” to help in the early stages of a project when communities express an interest and want to know how to go about starting a project and/or a “SWAT” team to provide accounting, legal, financial, and/or forest management assistance. Regional planning commissions, cooperative extension, and nonprofit conservation groups should be encouraged and supported as partners in this system.
- ❖ *Expand education and public awareness about the potential role and opportunity for Community Forests.*
- ❖ *Conduct research on the potential for Community Forests to build community capacity by expanding social capital and improving governance.*
- ❖ *Conduct research on the economic value of environmental services provided by Community Forests.*

## OVERVIEW OF CASE STUDIES

Five Community Forest projects offer an opportunity to describe various approaches to acquiring a Community Forest, phases of acquisition, and values in owning and managing forestland. In most cases, the towns represent communities that are considered “low income” as designated by the federal government and have a variety of social, economic, and cultural concerns in addition to those related to conservation.

### *Gorham, New Hampshire*

The Paul T. Doherty Memorial Forest is a 4,900-acre(est) tract of land that encompasses the watershed of the town water supply for Gorham. Gorham acquired the first parcel of land in 1936 with the principal intent of protecting the town’s water supply. Since the 1970s, however, the town has expanded its management goals, and the forest now produces income through timber harvesting and provides an outdoor classroom to the town’s public schools. The town has also considered adding a 2,000-acre parcel to the town forest. The case study describes the history of the forest, the evolution of management planning on the forest, and the role of the forest in supporting other community priorities.

### *Grand Lake Stream, Maine*

The Farm Cove Community Forest is a 27,080-acre tract of land that is part of a remarkable land conservation story in one of the most rural and impoverished regions of northern Maine—Washington County. In 2002 the Downeast Lakes Land Trust, in partnership with the New England Forestry Foundation, launched an initiative “to permanently conserve 342,000 acres of forestland strategically positioned between more than 600,000 acres of conserved lands in New Brunswick and 200,000 acres of state, federal and Native American lands in Maine, making the overall conservation impact more than one million acres of essentially uninterrupted habitat across an international boundary.” As part of this effort, 27,080 acres that have become the Farm Cove Community Forest were purchased in fee by May 2005. The case study explores issues related to community readiness and capacity to own and manage forestland. It documents the role of the Farm Cove Community Forest in the larger landscape conservation initiative, the role of a local land trust as an intermediary institution for the community, and the role of the Community Forest as a component of new initiatives in community and economic development planning.

### *Errol, New Hampshire*

The 13 Mile Woods property is the most recently established (December 2005) Community Forest. It is a 5,269-acre parcel of land in northern New Hampshire that is, according to The Trust for Public Land, a critical link in a corridor of federal and state conservation lands that includes the Lake Umbagog National Wildlife Refuge and the White Mountain National Forest. The tract was initially considered for acquisition into the Umbagog National Wildlife Refuge. However, residents of the Town of Errol (population 298) observed that the similarly sized town of Randolph (population 300) acquired 10,200-acres for a Community Forest and decided they could do the same. The case study explores issues related to community capacity and readiness to own and manage a significant resource, benefits to the town of owning and managing a substantial tract of productive forestland, partnerships and resources

available to assist communities interested in owning and managing forestland, financing and new financing tools to support acquisition of forestland, and Community Forests as a component of a local economic development strategy.

#### *West Fairlee, Fairlee, and Bradford, Vermont*

The Brushwood Community Forest lies within a 10,000-acre zone along the “ecologically significant” Connecticut River corridor that is one of the “last significant undeveloped forest blocks in the area.” The Town of West Fairlee, working with The Trust for Public Land, identified 10 parcels of privately owned land, totaling about 1,000 acres, for acquisition into one town-owned block of land. The location of the parcels will link an existing municipal forest in Fairlee (1,700+ acres) with lands held by the Town of Bradford’s Water and Sewer Commission (584 acres) and offer the final link in a 38-mile recreational trail. The case study offers an example of how Community Forests can address the major issues related to the conservation of productive forestland—fragmentation of large blocks of land into smaller parcels, conservation of large landscapes, permanent conservation of existing municipal lands, and regional cooperation in resource conservation.

#### *Randolph, New Hampshire*

The Randolph Community Forest is a fifth example that is referenced in this report. In 2001 the Town of Randolph acquired 10,200 acres and established the Randolph Community Forest. The Randolph Community Forest links two sections of the White Mountain National Forest and ensures that the residents of the Town of Randolph can preserve the forested landscape, timber, and recreation-based economy and culture in their town. The case study is included in a separate publication and available online at [www.sandcounty.net/assets/chapters/assets\\_chapter\\_2.pdf](http://www.sandcounty.net/assets/chapters/assets_chapter_2.pdf)

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

### *History of community land ownership*

New England towns have a long history and tradition of owning and managing land. The earliest tenure model, common land, offered “rights” (typically for grazing and fuelwood) to individuals who worked the land. Between 1630 and 1900, public land was designated in the charters of newly established towns. This public land was “set aside to support community institutions such as churches and schools.”

Another form of town landownership was designed in 1895 when the first municipal watershed lands were established to “improve and protect both the quality and amount of surface drainage collected for Municipal reservoirs.... Municipal watershed forests became the region’s best managed and most economically profitable community woodlands, and a large number were eventually classified as town forests.” The more familiar New England town forest was conceived in the early 1900s when state legislatures passed authorizing legislation for towns to establish town forests. The purpose of town forests was “principally for the cultivation of timber, a means to reclaim idle, cutover wasteland ... [while] other factors such as recreational, educational, ecological and aesthetic benefits often influenced community intentions.”<sup>34</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Robert McCullough. *The Landscape of Community*.

Currently, municipal ownership of forestland in northern New England includes 80,000 acres in 120 towns in Vermont, 103,000 acres in 188 towns in New Hampshire, and approximately 150,000 acres in 170 municipalities in Maine.<sup>35</sup>

### *Information sources, data, and analysis*

This report is based on information gathered from GIS data layers, workshops, case studies, interviews, and surveys.

*GIS analysis.* One of the initial questions during the research was to determine whether community ownership had a particularly relevant role in conservation strategies within the region. Geographic Information System (GIS) data provided the opportunity to overlay many different factors to see if any relationship existed. We selected productive forestland, existing conservation lands, municipal ownership, and large land sales as relevant factors in the potential role of community ownership.<sup>36</sup> The purpose of the analysis was to see if a confluence of factors could illuminate opportunities for community ownership in local or landscape-scale conservation initiatives, or if a significant cluster of overlapping factors could be found in particular places. Data layers for forest cover, productive forest soils, conservation lands, large land sales and municipal lands were collected for Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine. (maps 9, 10, 11, 12)

We also looked at smaller-scale GIS data layers for New Hampshire and conducted a similar analysis of the confluence of the state wildlife action plans, water resources, and productive forestland base with existing conservation lands and municipal ownership. (maps 6, 7, 8)

*Workshops, interviews, and surveys.* Information gathered from individuals at two Community Forest workshops and through interviews and surveys was used to develop the case studies, describe critical aspects of community readiness and capacity to undertake a Community Forest project, and determine whether any link existed between Community Forest projects and community and economic development objectives. Questions were also asked during workshops and interviews to identify resource needs both within communities and of supporting institutions.

It is the hope of the Community Forest Collaborative that the information gathered for this report and the collective experience and wisdom of those who contributed to it will attract the necessary resources to support broad application of the Community Forest Model across northern New England and have relevance to other regions.

<sup>35</sup> New Hampshire Office of Energy and Planning, Maine Department of Conservation: Forest Service, and Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation.

<sup>36</sup> GIS data from the Appalachian Mountain Club, the Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests, The Nature Conservancy, Granite System in New Hampshire, The Trust for Public Land, the Vermont Biodiversity Project, Maine State Office of GIS, and Maine Forest Service.



# PAUL T. DOHERTY MEMORIAL FOREST

## GORHAM, NEW HAMPSHIRE

In 1936, eleven years after New Hampshire passed state legislation enabling towns to acquire and manage forestland, residents of Gorham purchased 3,380 acres of land for \$41,531 for the purpose of protecting the town's water supply.<sup>1</sup> Over time, the town would acquire additional land. In 1990 the residents voted to organize more than 4,900 acres<sup>2</sup> into a town forest and, in 2001, named it the Paul T. Doherty Memorial Forest in honor of a longtime resident and respected civic leader. The story of Gorham's town forest illustrates:

- ❁ the value to communities of conserving the natural assets or "green infrastructure" of a community
- ❁ the role of forests in supporting other community priorities
- ❁ the role of a Community Forest in building community capacity by engaging new partners and reconciling conflict
- ❁ the evolution of a town forest into a Community Forest

### BACKGROUND

The Town of Gorham (resident population of just under 3,000) is located in northern New Hampshire adjacent to the White Mountain National Forest and lies in the Androscoggin River Valley. It was incorporated in 1836 with a population of 150. Over the next century the town would grow and its economy would develop around the forest products industry. Like many of its neighbors, the community could measure its vitality and well-being by the health of the region's forest products industry.

Three events would play an important role in both establishing the town forest and demonstrating its value as a community asset.

First, in the aftermath of the Depression, economic hardships and property tax delinquencies left the Town of Gorham owning more than a third of the land in town. It became the stated policy of the town to do whatever it could to move any town-owned land back into private ownership and, thus, back onto the tax rolls. Simultaneously, repercussions from the Depression continued. In 1935 the Brown Company, which had extensive holdings of forestland in surrounding communities and operated pulp and paper mills in Gorham and the neighboring city of Berlin, filed for bankruptcy. Although the company eventually recovered, its assets were sold several times during the period from 1935 to 1940. It was during that time that some people in Gorham became concerned that the town's water supply was vulnerable to the increasing intensity of timber harvesting and to the potential uncertainty over who would own the land in the watershed. Despite the policy of the town to sell as much town-owned land as possible, a small group of local residents began to negotiate with the Brown Company to acquire land to protect the watershed of the town's water supply. In 1936 the Town of Gorham purchased over 3,380 acres of land to ensure that the land surrounding the water supply would be protected.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Interview with Haven Neal. April 2007. Information from Brown Company archives.

<sup>2</sup> Town records show four parcels of land in Gorham totaling 2,700.42 acres that, when added to the 2,278 acres in Randolph that was part of the original purchase from the Brown Company in 1936, make up the 4,978.42 acres of the existing town forest.

<sup>3</sup> There is no documented history of events leading up to the purchase of the land from the Brown Company. The background provided here is based primarily on anecdotal information from interviews with Haven Neal, Town Forester, and Mike Waddell, town forest committee member, from March 2006 to April 2007.

Second, similar uncertainty and nervousness surfaced again in the late 1970s and early 1980s as changes in the forest products industry again were accompanied by economic hardships in the local forest products industry. Industrial forestland was being sold, and employment in the mills became increasingly uncertain as the mills were mechanized and were bought and sold. Between 1980 and 1994 mills in Gorham and Berlin would twice change ownership (the mills were sold in 1980 to James River and in 1994 to Crown Vantage). In addition to the fear and uncertainty created by these changes in the forest products industry, the culture of the community that had been so deeply connected to forests and the forest industry was beginning to change. The community took pride in the traditions associated with forestry. Jobs associated with the well-paying forest products industry were being substituted by lower-paying service jobs related to an expanding tourist industry. In addition, there was growing resentment of “environmentalists” whom many blamed for the decline of the forest products industry. Jobs vs. the environment became shorthand for the situation in which employment and economic uncertainty created a climate of fear and divisiveness, often pitting the environmental community against community residents.

In Gorham the conflict was particularly acute, deeply rooted, and openly expressed in ways that affected many aspects of community life. One of the most visible expressions of the conflict was the inability of people in town, and the institutions they represented, to agree on an approach to environmental education for the schools. Everyone, it seemed, wanted to ensure that the next generation would grow up not only with an appreciation for the values of the forests, but also with training and experience in forestry-related activities. But no one could agree on how to achieve that goal. The Gorham town forest would play a central role in reconciling the conflict.

Third, one final event would produce the most tangible evidence of the value of the town forest to the community of Gorham. In 1998 a catastrophic ice storm hit the region and caused significant damage to forestland. While the damage was not consistent across the region, the Gorham town forest was particularly hard hit, requiring significant salvage operations that resulted in windfall revenues for the town between 1999 and 2005.

Through each of these periods, the natural resources of the Gorham town forest have demonstrated their value as an important community asset that has conserved the green infrastructure of the town, offered a place to begin to reconcile deep conflicts within the community, expanded community capacity, and provided support for other community priorities.

#### ACQUIRING AND MANAGING THE FOREST

The 4,900-acre (est) Gorham town forest was assembled from a number of parcels that have been acquired over the past 70 years. The initial acquisition included a 1,102-acre piece located in Gorham and 2,278 acres located in the neighboring town of Randolph. The remainder of the land was acquired in smaller parcels, but all within the watershed of the town’s water supply.

For more than 50 years, the land was primarily “left alone” to protect the watershed. Any activity was related to the management of two reservoirs on the land that supplied drinking water to the town. Until 1990 the town’s water and sewer board was responsible for all decisions affecting the land.

Consistent with the state laws enabling towns to acquire and manage forestland, towns may also organize a town forest committee and establish a town forest fund.<sup>4</sup> When Gorham established the Paul T. Doherty Memorial Forest in 1990, the board of selectmen also organized a town forest committee and established a town forest fund. The town forest committee is a five-member board composed of two members from the water and sewer board, two members from the conservation commission, and one member of the board of selectmen. The fund would be used to make payments in lieu of taxes to the Town of Randolph, to pay for management costs on the forest, and “any other purposes.” Distribution of money from the town forest fund requires a majority vote at town meeting.

The transfer of management authority over the town forestlands, however, from the water and sewer board to the town forest committee was not without conflict. Clearly there would be fallout from a town board losing control over a valuable town asset. More challenging, however, was the tension between the management strategy long held by the water and sewer board to “leave the land alone” and the call by some members of the new town forest committee for a more active management strategy that would include timber harvesting. While there continues to be a subtle tension between the water and sewer board and the town forest committee, the work over time by the town forest committee to articulate the benefits of active forest management, to engage a respected professional forester, to develop management plans, and to establish specific priorities for managing the forest seems to be demonstrating how perceived competing interests can be reconciled.

In 1991 the town forest committee circulated a request for proposals to local foresters for assistance in developing a management plan for the town forest. Haven Neal, then a forester for the James River Corporation, submitted a bid that was accepted. Haven worked with the forest committee to develop a forest management plan. The goals of the management plan, in order of priority, were:

- ♣ to protect the town’s water supplies
- ♣ to provide income to the town to offset property taxes owed to the Town of Randolph for that portion of the town forest that is in Randolph, and for other “special projects”
- ♣ to maintain wildlife habitat to support historic wildlife populations
- ♣ to serve as an educational resource for the community<sup>5</sup>

Forestry practices and timber-harvesting operations would be conducted primarily with the objective of protecting water quality (ensuring proper techniques to prevent runoff and silting of the reservoirs) and water quantity. In addition, however, there was sufficient standing timber to support a harvesting plan that would not compromise the goal of conserving the water resources. The town established a relationship with James River Corporation whereby

<sup>4</sup> The enabling legislation is New Hampshire Revised Statutes Annotated (RSA) 31:10, RSA 31:11, RSA 31:12 and RSA 31:13.

<sup>5</sup> Interview with Haven Neal. March 2007.



Haven Neal provided the services of a licensed forester and contracted out logging operations. In exchange, timber products would be sold to James River and the town would receive revenues. From 1991 to 1995 four timber harvests netted approximately \$40,000 a harvest, contributing approximately \$160,000 to the town forest fund.<sup>6</sup>

After the devastating ice storm, salvage operations became necessary to remove the large volumes of downed and damaged timber. The goal of the salvage harvesting was to sell as much of the timber as possible to local sawmills and get as much of the value from the downed timber before it began to deteriorate. Salvage operations began in 1999 and would continue for the next seven years. The harvests produced an average of 3,500 cords of wood a year over a six-year period from 1999 to 2005. The revenue from this period was approximately \$1 million with expenses of approximately \$300,000.<sup>7</sup>

Salvage operations were completed in 2006, and the forest was inventoried. In the aftermath of the ice storm, salvage operations had removed all the marketable timber. The town forest committee determined that the forest needed time to recover from the effects of the ice storm and grow. A new management plan was completed in early 2007 and is currently under review by the town forest committee. The goals of the plan, in order of priority, include the following:

- ❁ To maintain the water supply of the Town of Gorham at current levels and at the highest possible quality.
- ❁ To manage the timber resource in a way that protects the water supply and provides long-term sustained income for the town to help offset local property taxes, fund town projects, and allow for continued property management.
- ❁ To maintain and enhance wildlife habitat so that the forest can continue to support the abundance and diversity of native wildlife species that it has traditionally supported.
- ❁ To provide public access for recreational purposes at traditional levels as long as that access does not conflict with watershed integrity and other forest management activities.
- ❁ To serve as an example of a high standard of forest management in the region and to serve as an educational resource for environmental and forest management education for adults and children.<sup>8</sup>

It is expected to take up to 20 years before the forest will be back to producing marketable timber and able to support harvest levels of a fully functioning, sustainably managed forest.

#### SUPPORTING OTHER COMMUNITY PRIORITIES

In addition to protecting the town's water supply, the Gorham town forest has both directly and indirectly supported other community priorities:

##### *Honoring a civic leader*

In 2001 the town renamed the Gorham town forest the Paul T. Doherty Memorial Forest in honor of a longtime and respected resident who had served as a regional conservation officer

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Interview with Haven Neal. April 2007.

for the New Hampshire Fish and Game Department and director of the New Hampshire Division of Forest and Lands.

### *Support for capital projects*

The town forest fund has provided resources for two major community infrastructure projects. In 1995 the town voted to transfer \$50,000 from the town forest fund to support a project to expand the fire station and emergency facilities.<sup>9</sup>

The town forest fund would also play an important role in supporting the renovation of the Gorham Town Hall. The Gorham Town Hall, built in 1919, is a valuable historic and community asset. The building sits on the town common and has historically been the center of community activities. In December 2005 the Town Hall was officially listed on the New Hampshire State Register of Historic Places. During the same year, residents of Gorham were presented plans for renovation of the buildings—three floors for town offices and a community theater. The total cost of the renovations is \$2,290,000. At the 2005 Town Meeting, Gorham residents were asked to allocate \$100,000 from the town forest fund to support the renovation project. An additional request was approved at Town Meeting and \$750,000 was allocated from the town forest fund to support the renovation project.<sup>10</sup>

### *Wood products for town facilities*

Wood harvested from the town forest has been used in the renovation of the Town Hall and has provided the material for tables and chairs in the town library, water and sewer district offices, and the Town Hall.

### *Transportation and recreation planning*

The Gorham town forest also supported transportation and recreation planning. In 1997, \$21,400 from the town forest fund was approved for use to plan a multimodal path system that would connect Routes 2 and 16 with access to the trail system in the White Mountain National Forest, to construct a 1.75-mile handicap accessible trail within the town and provide an access link between two parts of town for emergency vehicles.<sup>11</sup>

### *Education*

In 1998 the Gorham School Board established a 15-member Community Environmental Education Committee to make recommendations for an environmental education program for the Gorham schools. The Committee established the following goals:

- ❁ to develop a process to engage students and teachers in community-based environmental education
- ❁ to use community-based environmental education as a tool to make interdisciplinary connections
- ❁ to reach one-third of Gorham school students

<sup>9</sup> Email exchange with Denise Vallee, director of Finance and Administration, Town of Gorham. April 2007.

<sup>10</sup> Information on the Town Hall renovation project from interviews with Mike Waddell, Gorham town selectman and manager of the project, and William Jackson, town manager, Town of Gorham. March 2006–April 2007.

<sup>11</sup> Interview with William Jackson. March 2006; email exchange with Denise Vallee. .

The committee also decided that “*an underutilized and valuable community education resource was the Gorham Town Forest.*” (italics added) The committee developed curriculum support programs and a service-learning program that would use the town forest as an outdoor classroom. The programs had the following objectives:

- ❁ to develop math skills through reading and analyzing data, and through compass and map exercises
- ❁ to develop science skills by collecting and analyzing biological data
- ❁ to build students’ capacity for team work

During the first year (1997/1998) the committee identified and began to work with two local partners: Town Forester, Haven Neal and a local nonprofit, Trailmasters. A service-learning program developed in collaboration with Trailmasters began to design and construct an interpretive trail system for use in school programs (completed in 2003). The first Sophomore Survival Day, a program that focused on winter survival, orienteering, and data collection on forest health, was held.

After the first Sophomore Survival Day, it was recognized that students came without sufficient knowledge about forest ecology and forestry. A new program, Freshman Field Days, was designed to introduce students to tree identification, trail maintenance, and wildlife assessment.

Expanded programming now works with juniors, who collect data on the wetlands and water quality. It also offers support to seniors who choose to extend selected parts of their previous work into their senior project, the culmination of which has become an open event for sharing student work with the larger community.

In addition, the programs have engaged new partners, including twelve foresters, community members who participate by giving talks to student groups on town history and watershed ecology, local loggers, the United States Department of Agriculture Soil Service, the town’s recreation director, parents, other teachers, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, and members of the National Guard, who have assisted in mapping, orienteering, and Geographic Information System (GIS) programs.

#### *Demonstration of good forestry practices*

The town forest is used as a site for many workshops. The Appalachian Mountain Club has held sessions on forest soils and wildlife as part of its summer series “Getting to Know.” The Quebec-Labrador Foundation/Atlantic Center for the Environment’s Community Forest Workshop was held in Gorham in 2003 and incorporated a tour of the town forest as part of the program. The Society of American Foresters, Cooperative Extension Service, and Timber Harvesting Council host field workshops for foresters and professional loggers.<sup>12</sup>

#### BUILDING COMMUNITY CAPACITY

One of the least tangible and most interesting contributions of the Gorham town forest has been its role in building community capacity and reconciling conflict within the town.

<sup>12</sup> Interview with Haven Neal. April 2007.

The two areas where this can be observed most visibly are in the management of the town forest and in the development of environmental educational programs for the schools.

### *Managing the forest*

The establishment of the town forest and the subsequent appointment of a town forest committee to oversee management of the land expanded the range of interests, skills, and community participation in the management of the forest. Members of the committee include a county forester and a district ranger for the White Mountain National Forest. By hiring a professional forester, the committee acquired someone who would facilitate the long-term planning for the asset, be able to coordinate such planning with on-the-ground knowledge of the capacities and needs of the forest, and provide a valuable resource to other community groups (e.g., schools) that would make use of the forest.

The town forest committee has expanded the range of benefits of the town forest to community members, offered a forum for a suite of interests around management of a community asset, and relied on a planning process that has provided a vehicle for balancing uses that may be perceived as competing.

### *Environmental education*

In the mid-1990s there was a stalemate in Gorham over the implementation of an environmental education program in the schools. Both the school board and the school district had consistently identified implementation of an environmental education program as a high priority, but they had been unable to agree on how to proceed primarily because of “divided local politics and lack of a clear implementation plan that meets the needs of all local constituents.” Two principal factors were at the root of this stalemate.

Since the late 1980s Gorham had become increasingly polarized around the jobs vs. environment debate. Many residents felt that the environmental community had been, if not wholly, at least partially, responsible for the unraveling of the forest products industry, the threatened shutdown of local mills, reduced employment, and the loss of the town’s “way of life.” Added to this was a structural anomaly in town institutions. The school system (school district) and the town government (school board) were two separate corporations. This not only insulated one institution from the other, but also had over time created an atmosphere that at best discouraged cooperation and at worst fostered suspicion.

While there had been efforts by two organizations to provide environmental education programs to the schools, they were perceived differently by the factions in town, and neither one had been able to establish “good working relationships with the Gorham Schools, teachers and/or school board.” One of the organizations, the Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC), is an environmental nonprofit. While the AMC had the capacity and willingness to contribute to environmental education in the Gorham schools, it had become a lightning rod in town as a result of its role in two controversial environmental issues that were related to the licensing of a hydroelectric facility and the permitting of AMC huts in the White Mountain National Forest. The other, Trailmaster, a local organization, had expertise in the area of environmen-

tal education and had good working relationships with local foresters but was not considered by some to be “environmental” enough.

In 1997 the Antioch New England Institute developed a community-based approach to environmental education in a new program called Project CO-SEED. Staff at Antioch had been approached and encouraged to select Gorham as one of its pilot sites. Unfortunately, the AMC had been identified by Antioch New England as a local “service provider” for support to the schools. This caused renewed public uproar and heated debate about how the school district would meet its goal of including environmental education in the school curriculum.

During the fall of 1998, the Gorham School Board appointed a 15-member Environmental Education Committee “to design an environmental curriculum which suits the needs of the community and to implement a balanced and comprehensive environmental K-12 curriculum.”<sup>13</sup> The committee represented the diverse environmental, social, and economic concerns of the community. CO-SEED was only one of the programs that the committee considered. After establishing a common vision of environmental education, the committee explored the many organizational resources available. In December 1998 the Community Environmental Education Committee chose CO-SEED to coordinate environmental education programs for the Gorham schools. Committee members stated that they chose the program because it would best be able to draw on and integrate the services of state and federal agencies and local nonprofit organizations, as well as meet the needs of the school system and the needs of teachers.<sup>14</sup>

The tension resulting from ongoing conflict and distrust was palpable during the first meetings of the Community Environmental Education Committee. Antioch New England staff, however, took the time to meet individually with committee members as well as other people in the community: “We found it necessary to understand the tensions between the environmental and industry factions in the town in order to develop an environmental education program that would meet the needs of the entire community while also benefiting the students. It was useful to talk individually with many of the Gorham residents who had strong opinions about the role of the environment in education. As a result, we were able to gather many viewpoints as well as demonstrate that there were many areas of consensus. We were also able to develop compromises for the few areas of dispute.”<sup>15</sup>

This process, coupled by a sincere commitment within the community of the importance of an environmental program for children, “moved the residents of Gorham away from political disputes and toward self-directed action for improving the sustainability education of their children.”<sup>16</sup>

Ultimately, the Community Environmental Education Committee would agree to focus on projects within the town forest. By doing so, it successfully brought together various factions to work together for a common goal. “By highlighting both the involvement and contributions of local forest-resources people and local environmentalists in a visible and positive

<sup>13</sup> See case study, Project CO-SEED, Gorham, NH. [www.napawash.org/aa\\_federal\\_system/july2000\\_building.html](http://www.napawash.org/aa_federal_system/july2000_building.html).

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

project, the committee has been able to find common ground and build the foundation for future dialogue” and cooperation.<sup>17</sup>

The Community Environmental Education Committee clearly expanded the capacity of the town through improved relationships, coordination, and cooperation between the town and school system. The design and composition of the Community Environmental Education Committee, and the process it went through to select and environmental education program, created social capital that enhances the community’s capacity to address other issues. In addition, the programs developed for use in the town forest built new partnerships that brought new resources to the town and engaged broader community participation in the schools.

## TRANSITION TO A COMMUNITY FOREST

The history of the Paul T. Doherty Memorial Forest illustrates the transition from simply a town owning a piece of forestland to a town developing a Community Forest. Since 1990 Gorham has taken steps to formalize the status of the land within the town by designating it as a town forest and organizing the town forest committee and a town forest fund. In addition, the town has established a process for formal management of the resources by hiring a professional forester and has designed, implemented, and revised a management plan for the forest. Finally, the community has certainly received benefits from the value of the forest resource: water supplies, revenue for other community priorities, and educational resources.

Additional steps that could be taken to further advance the Paul T. Doherty Memorial Forest as a Community Forest are related to the long-term stewardship of the resource and include:

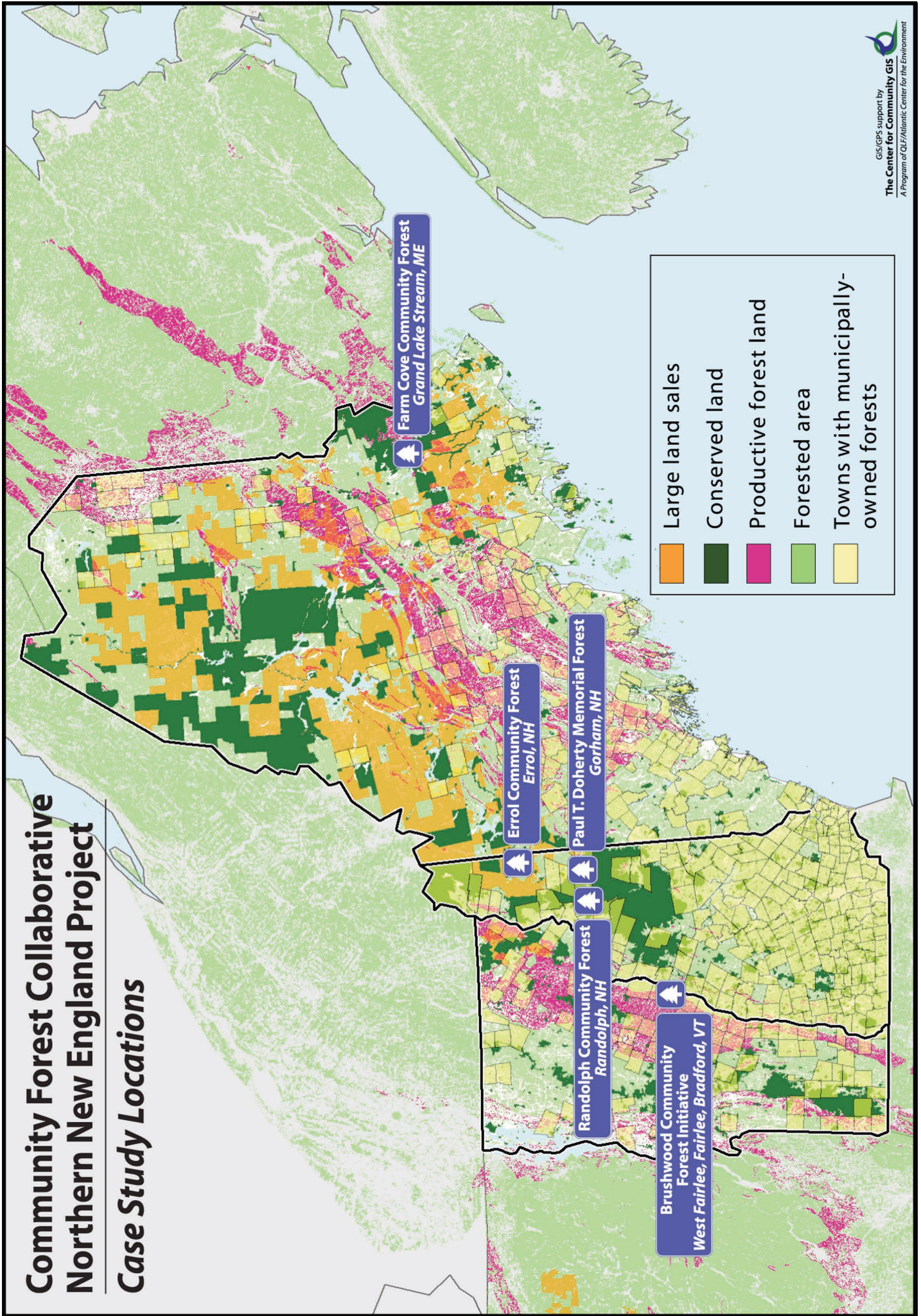
- ❖ *Efforts to secure the conservation values through the sale or donation of a conservation easement.* There are two options currently under discussion, both of which would benefit the town and secure the conservation values of the forest. One is to sell an easement to the Town of Randolph for the portion that is in Randolph in exchange for reduced property tax obligations. The second is to sell a conservation easement to the state or a nonprofit to produce revenues to purchase land for expansion of the forest.
- ❖ *Establish an ecological monitoring program.* A long-term monitoring program would provide important information on the health of the forest system that could inform management decisions as they relate to water supplies and quality, timber management, and wildlife habitat. Systems developed as components of the school programs and data already collected could provide the basis for a more formal monitoring protocol.
- ❖ *Encourage and expand opportunities for public participation in the management and monitoring of the forest.* The town forest committee and school programs offer particularly important vehicles for public participation in the management and monitoring of the forest. Continued efforts to engage the schools as well as the broader community in management planning and monitoring activities will continue to build appreciation within the town of the value of the forest’s assets to the community.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

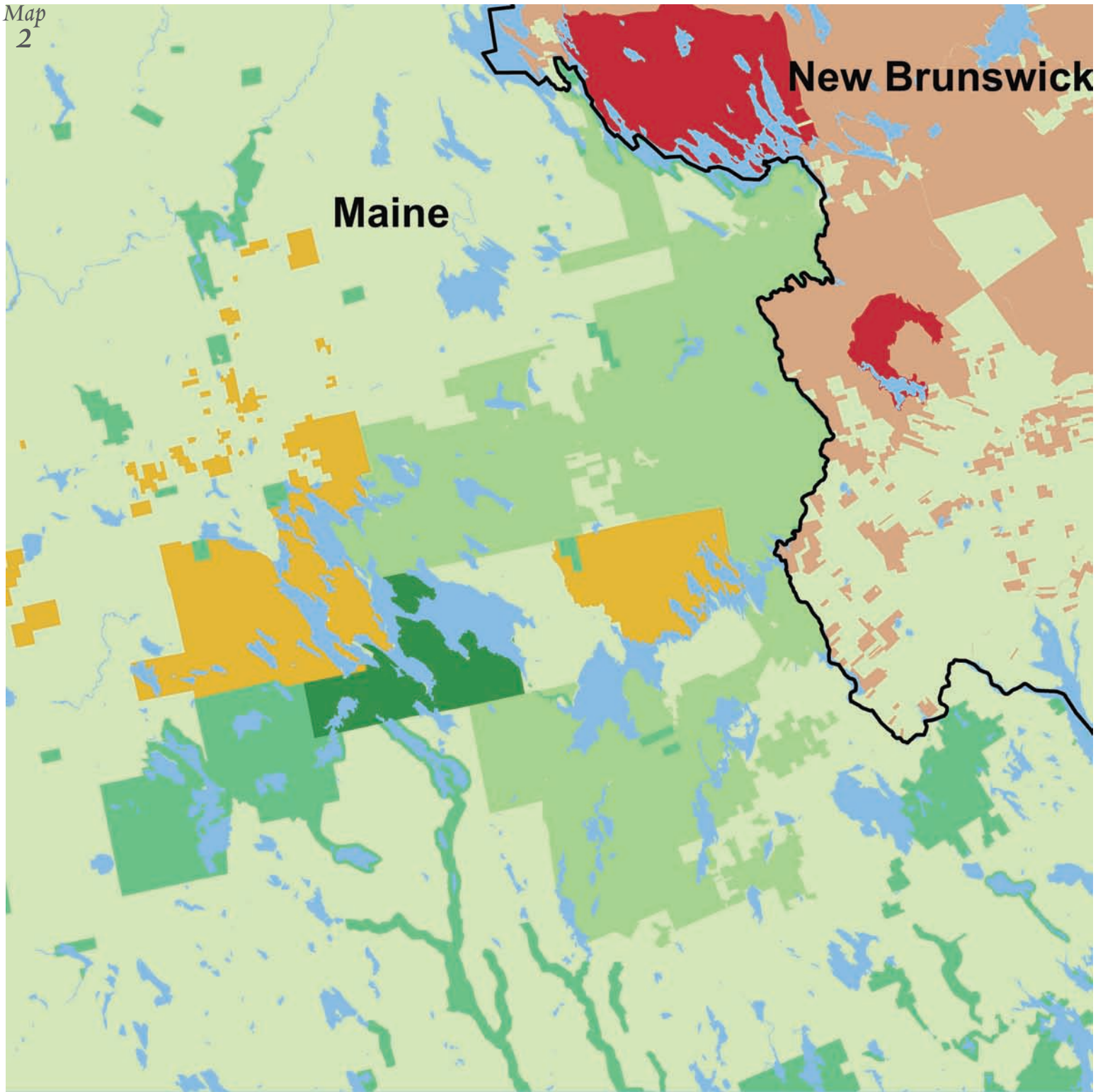
## LESSONS LEARNED

- ❖ Community ownership of forest land can protect important environmental services.
- ❖ Community Forests offer resources to support programs within other community institutions.
- ❖ Community Forests can attract new resources to a town.
- ❖ Community Forests can provide common ground.
- ❖ Managing Community Forests can generate income to support other community priorities.

# Community Forest Collaborative Northern New England Project Case Study Locations







# Downeast Lakes LAND TRUST

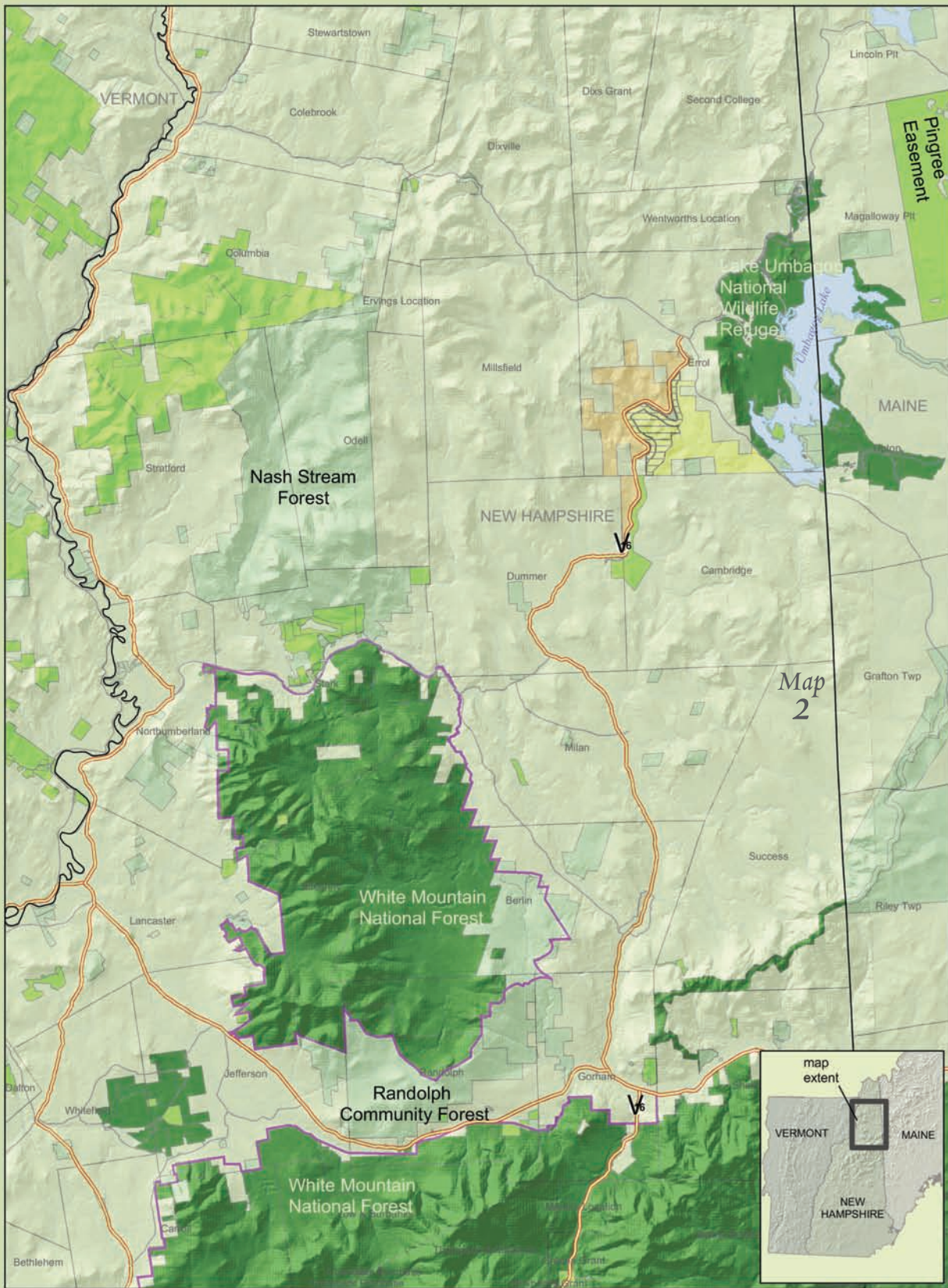
-  DLLT Farm Cove Community Forest
-  NEFF Wagner Easement
-  Maine Conservation Land
-  Native American
-  New Brunswick Protected Areas
-  New Brunswick Crown Lands



Map by DLLT 3/29/07  
Data from Maine OGIS, NEFF, TNC, & Service NB










# Errol Town Forest - Regional Conservation Lands



Map  
2

0 2.5 5 10 Miles

	Federal Conservation Land		Errol Town Forest
	State & Local Conservation Land		Mollidgewock Brook TPL Project (with Forest Legacy Easement)
	Private Conservation Land		Mollidgewock Brook TPL Project (in progress)
	WMNF Proclamation Boundary		

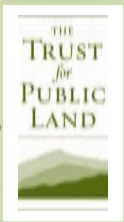
Base Data from GRANIT. Boundaries are approximate.

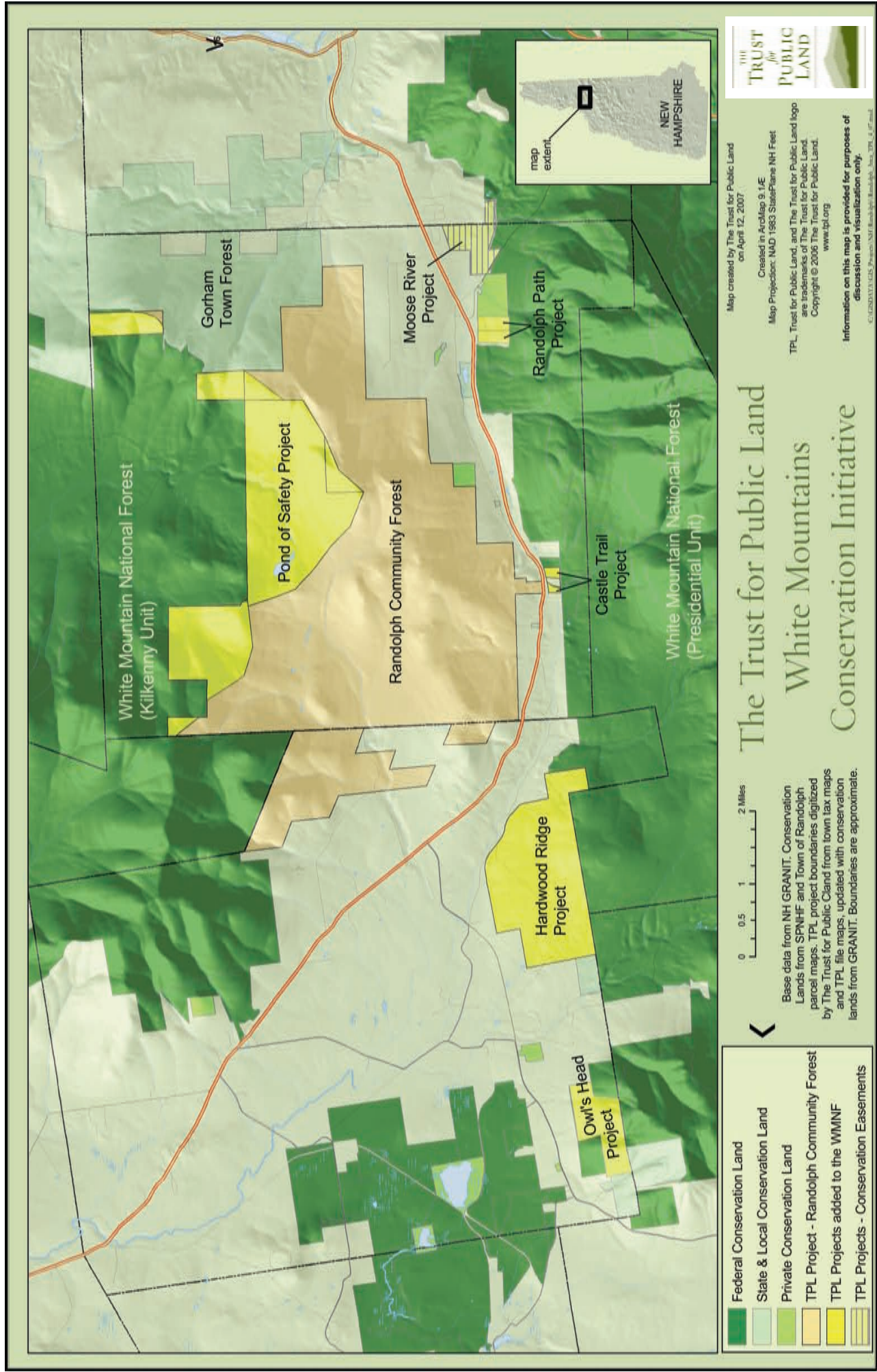
Map created by the Trust for Public Land on April 12, 2007

Created in ArcMap 9.1/E  
Map Projection: NAD 1983 State Plane NH feet

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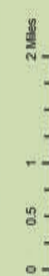
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# The Trust for Public Land

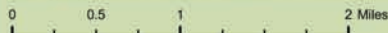
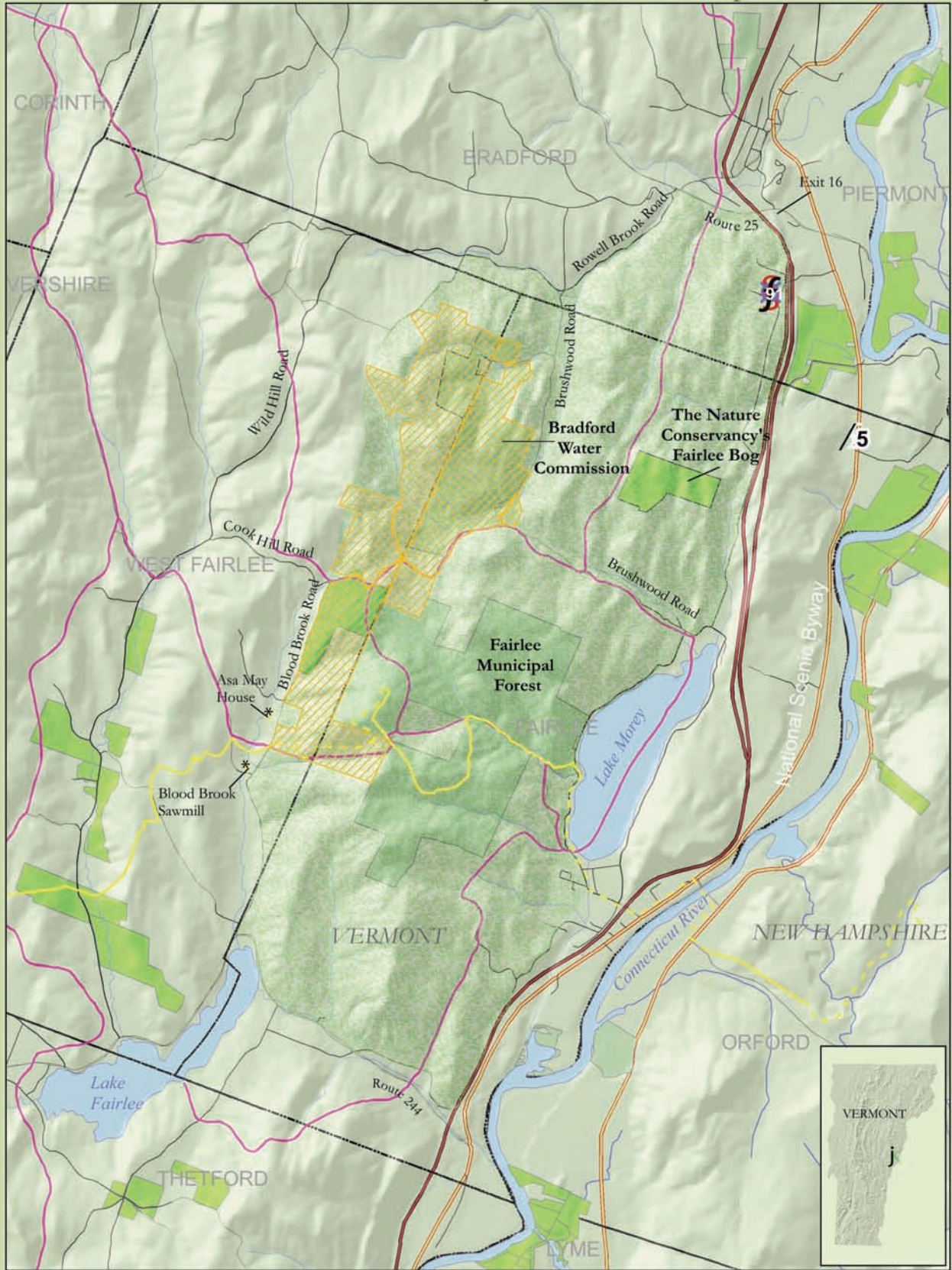
## White Mountains Conservation Initiative

Base data from NH GRANIT. Conservation Lands from SPNHF and Town of Randolph parcel maps. TPL project boundaries digitized by The Trust for Public Land from town tax maps and TPL file maps; updated with conservation lands from GRANIT. Boundaries are approximate.

- Federal Conservation Land
- State & Local Conservation Land
- Private Conservation Land
- TPL Project - Randolph Community Forest
- TPL Projects added to the WMNF
- TPL Projects - Conservation Easements

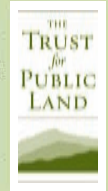


# Brushwood Community Forest Locus Map



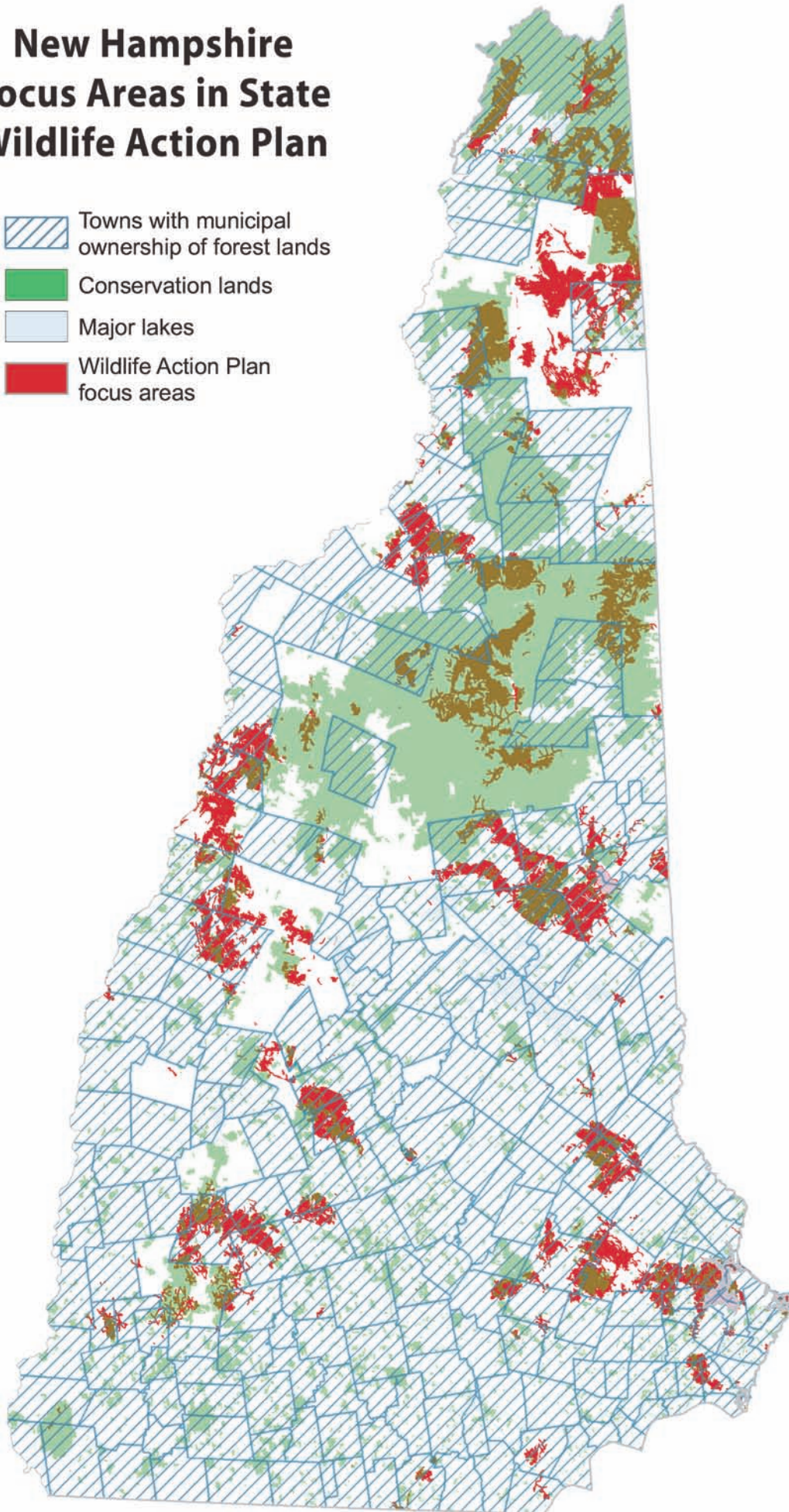
	Federal Conservation Land		Brushwood Forest (10,800 acres of unfragmented forest)
	State & Local Conservation Land		Completed Cross Rivendell Trail
	Private Conservation Land		Proposed Cross Rivendell Trail
	TPL Project in progress: Brushwood Community Forest		Historic Sites
			VAST Snowmobile Trails

Town base data provided by NH GRANIT and VGIS. River and road data from ESRI. Town of Fairlee and West Fairlee provided by Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Commission and edited by TPL. Map produced by The Trust for Public Land Oct 18, 2006. Property boundaries are approximate. This is not a survey product.




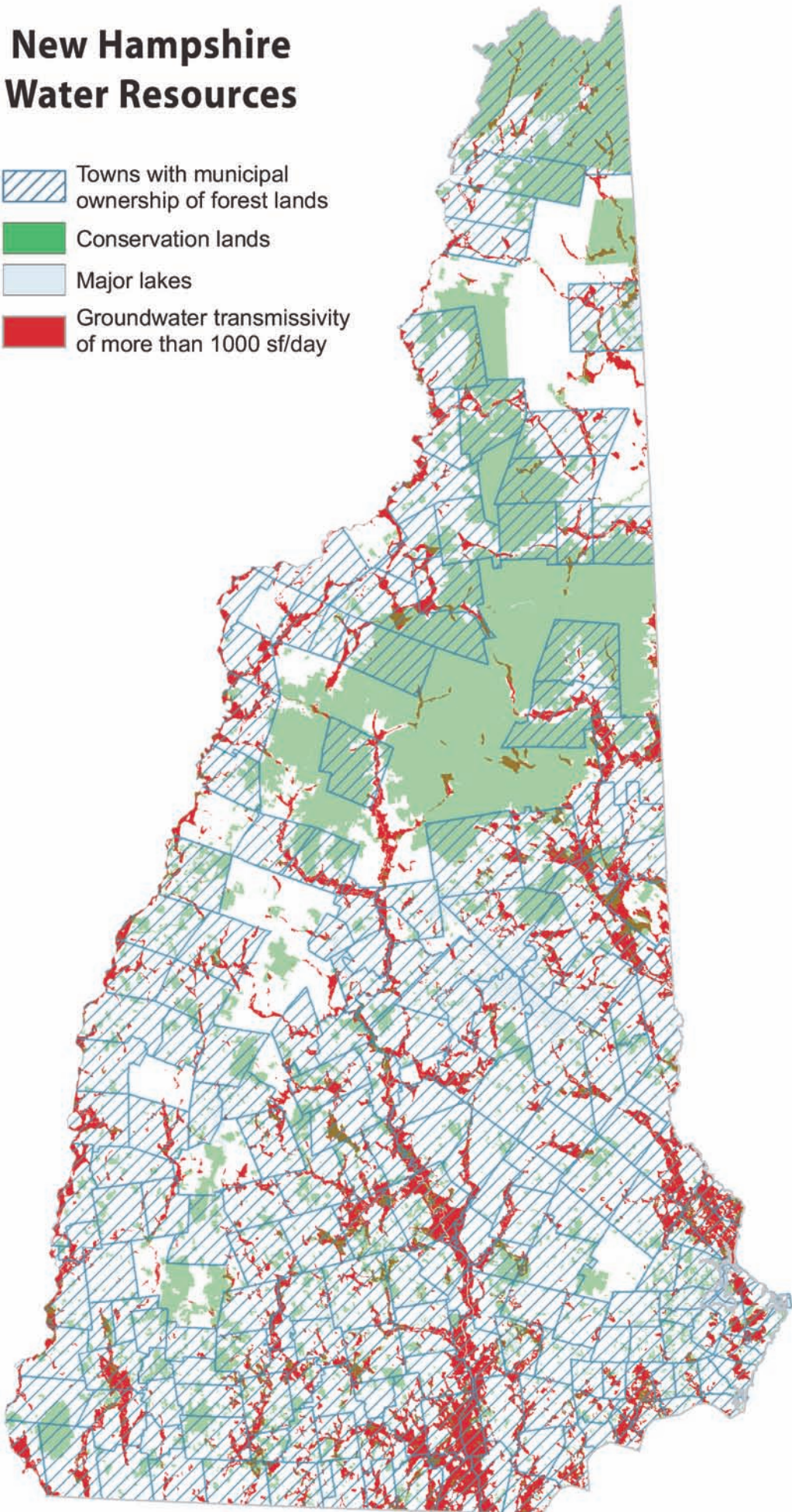
# New Hampshire Focus Areas in State Wildlife Action Plan

-  Towns with municipal ownership of forest lands
-  Conservation lands
-  Major lakes
-  Wildlife Action Plan focus areas









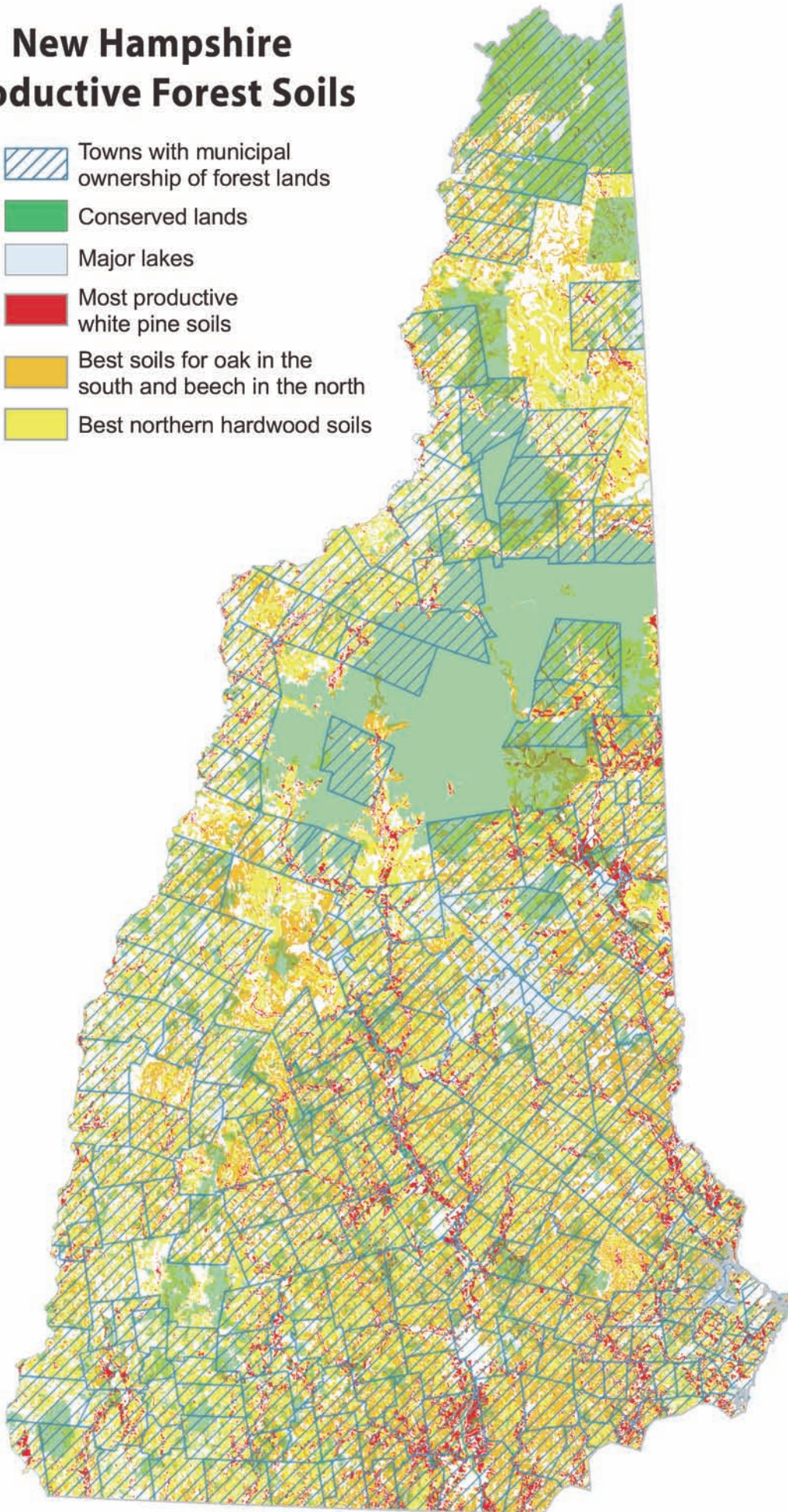
# New Hampshire Water Resources

-  Towns with municipal ownership of forest lands
-  Conservation lands
-  Major lakes
-  Groundwater transmissivity of more than 1000 sf/day

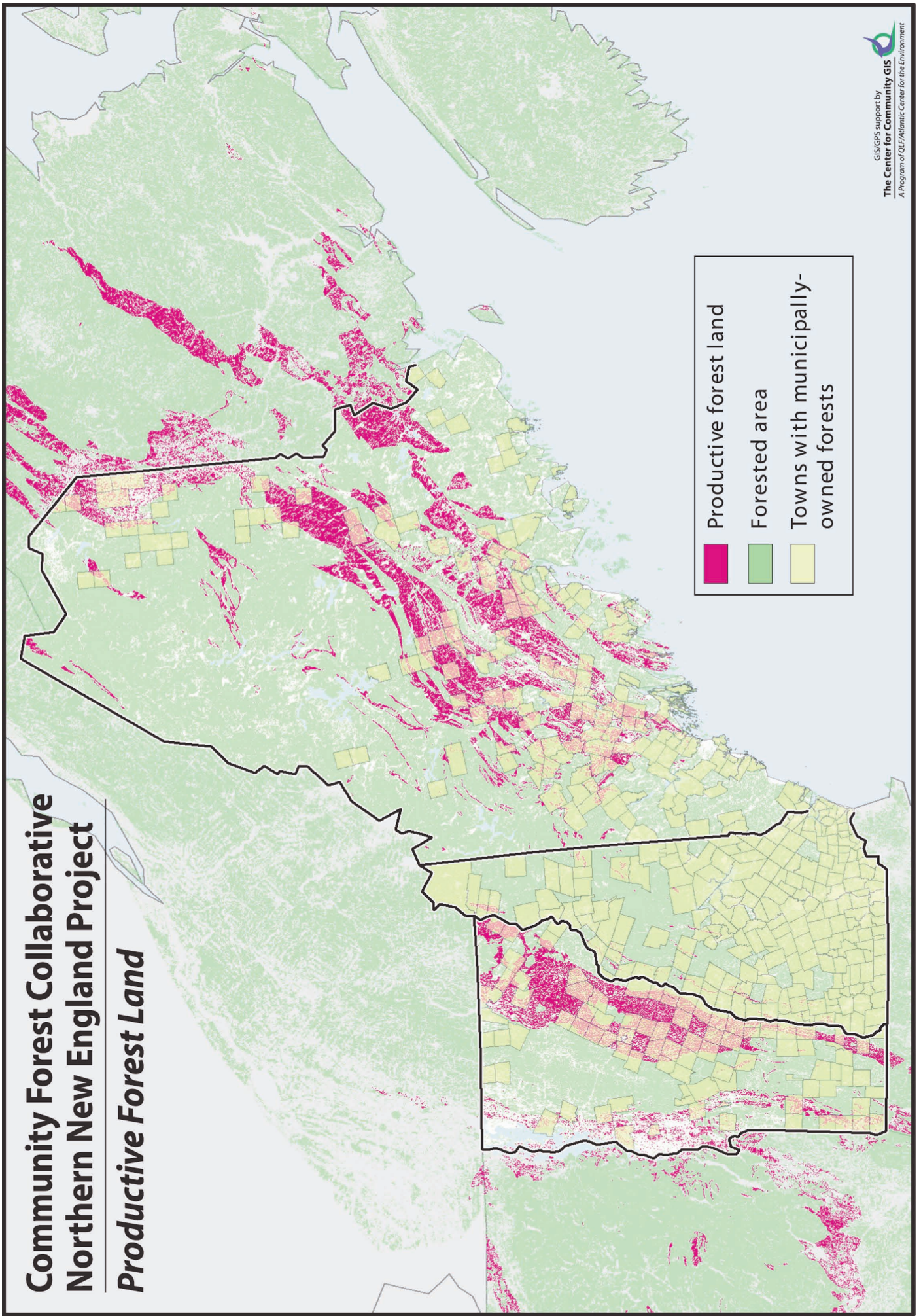


# New Hampshire Productive Forest Soils

-  Towns with municipal ownership of forest lands
-  Conserved lands
-  Major lakes
-  Most productive white pine soils
-  Best soils for oak in the south and beech in the north
-  Best northern hardwood soils

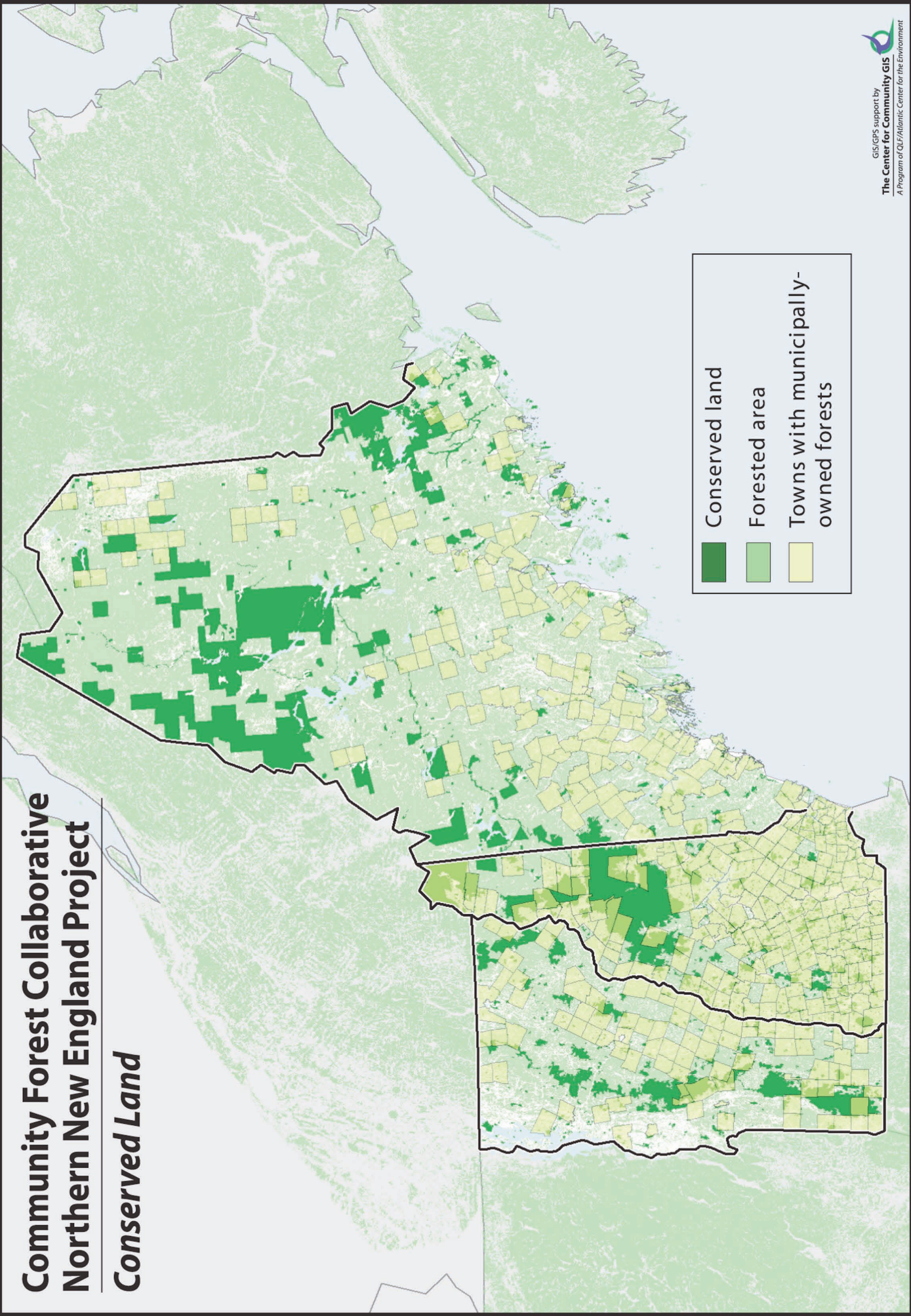





# Community Forest Collaborative Northern New England Project Productive Forest Land





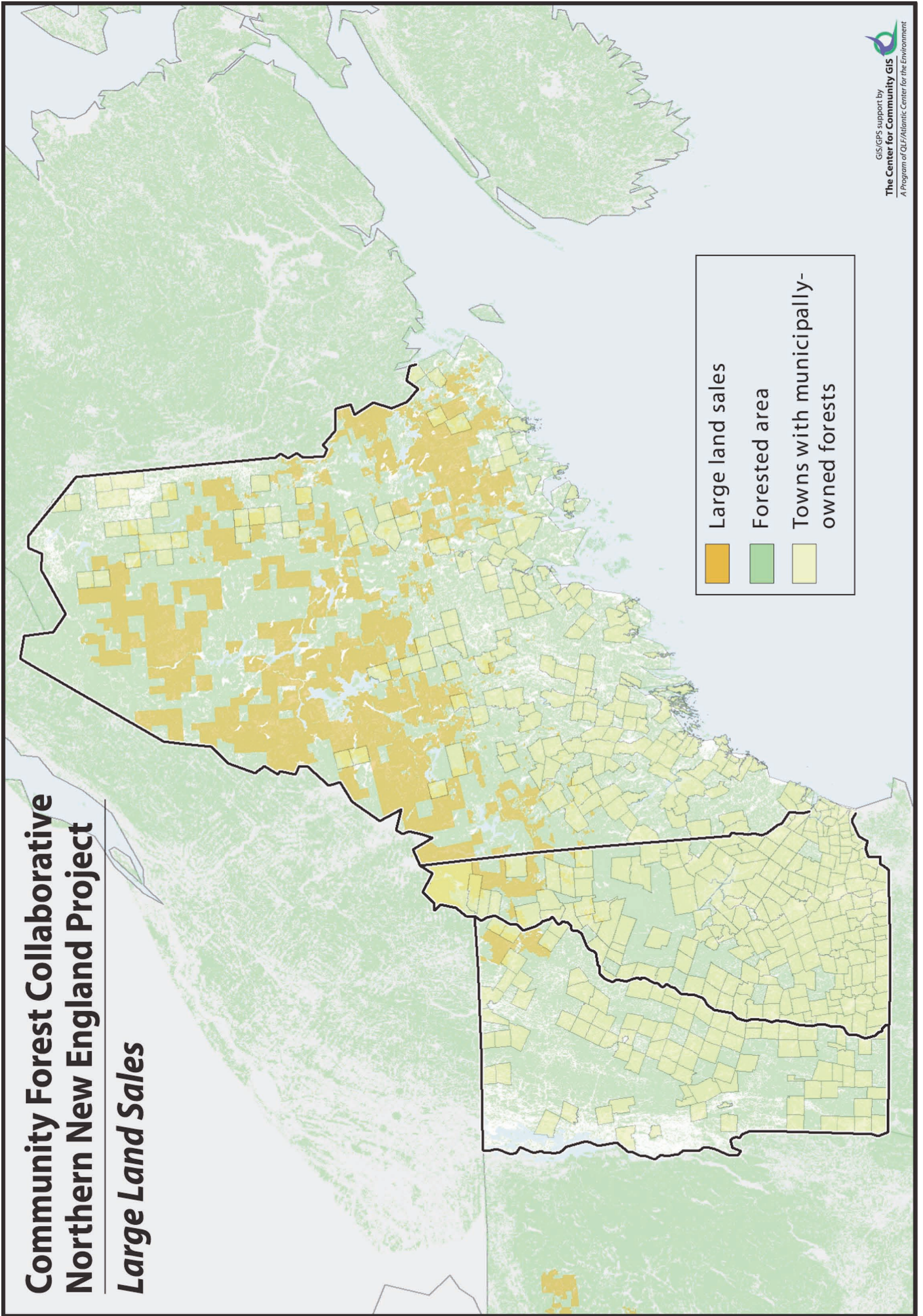
# Community Forest Collaborative Northern New England Project Conserved Land



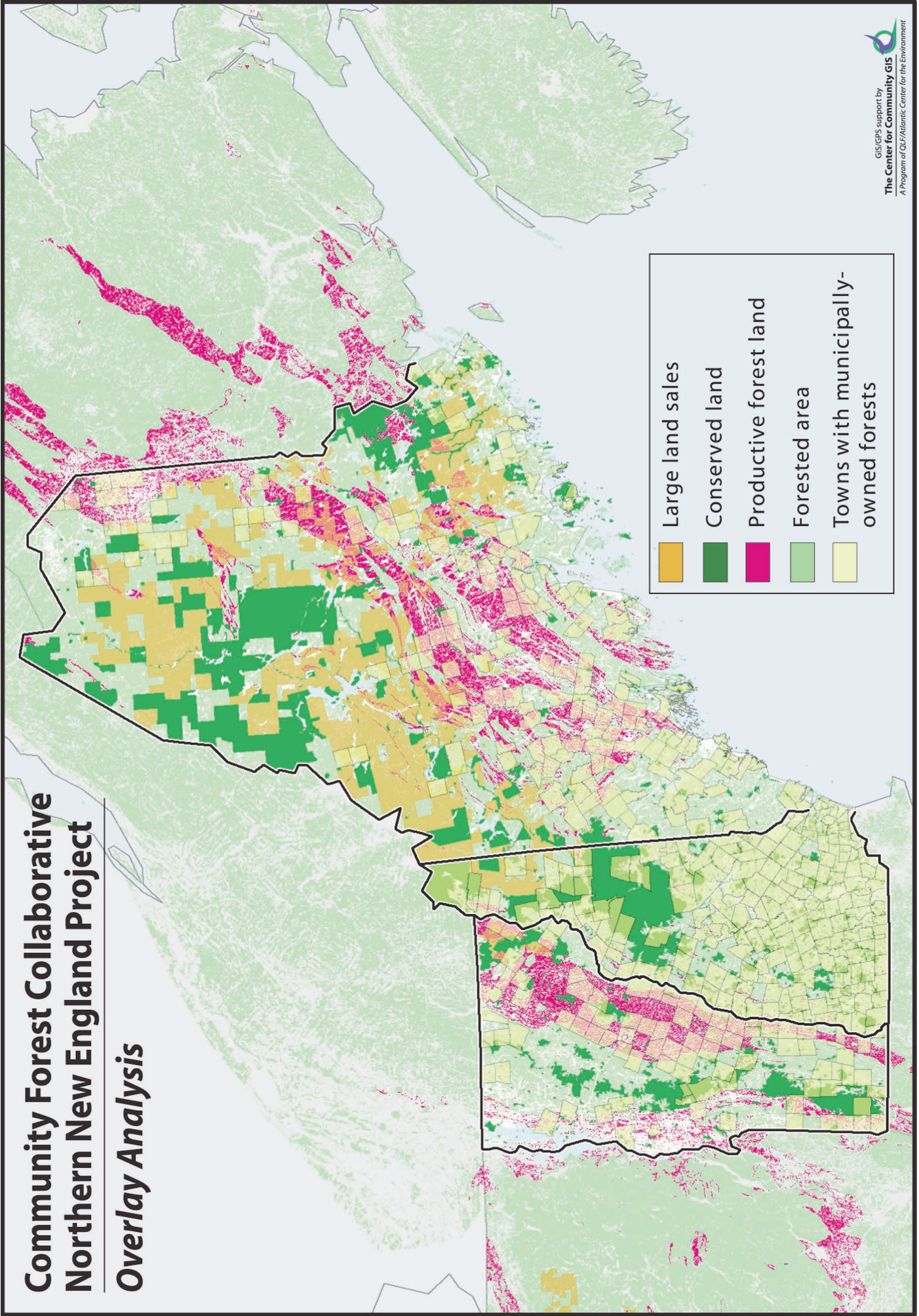
	Conserved land
	Forested area
	Towns with municipally-owned forests

# Community Forest Collaborative Northern New England Project

## Large Land Sales



# Community Forest Collaborative Northern New England Project Overlay Analysis



# FARM COVE COMMUNITY FOREST

## GRAND LAKE STREAM, MAINE

*“This is unrealistic....you guys are dreaming”<sup>1</sup>*

2000

This was the reaction to an idea offered by a handful of residents from Grand Lake Stream, Maine, to purchase 123,000 acres of land in an effort to conserve the forestland and lakes that they considered to be central to their “way of life.” Within a year of the time that they were told this, they had organized the Downeast Lakes Land Trust (DLLT). By 2002 the Downeast Lakes Forestry Partnership, a collaboration between the DLLT and the New England Forestry Foundation, had been formed and set a goal of raising \$31.5 million to conserve 340,000 acres, including the centerpiece of the project—the acquisition of a 27,080-acre parcel that would become the Farm Cove Community Forest.<sup>2</sup> By 2005 the conservation of 340,000 acres was completed, including the establishment of the Farm Cove Community Forest.

The Farm Cove Community Forest includes 62 miles of shoreline on six lakes, extensive wetlands, a 3,560-acre ecological reserve, and a 3,751-acre late-successional forest management area. The forest is managed as a community asset that both invites participation in management decisions and produces tangible benefits to residents of Grand Lake Stream and surrounding communities.

The boldness of the vision was matched only by the dedication and perseverance of the people who carried it out. The creation of the Farm Cove Community Forest offers valuable lessons in:

- ❁ the role of Community Forests in large landscape-scale conservation projects
- ❁ ownership strategies
- ❁ building community support
- ❁ establishing and managing partnerships
- ❁ creating opportunities for community and economic development

### BACKGROUND

The Farm Cove Community Forest is located in two unorganized townships in the heart of Maine’s poorest and most underserved region—Washington County. Adjacent to the forest is Grand Lake Stream Plantation, a community with a year-round resident population of 150. The forests, lakes, and rivers have supported the economy, culture, and traditions in the Grand Lake Stream region for generations and there was always a trusting and easy relationship between landowners and residents.

Georgia Pacific owned a pulp mill in Baileyville as well as half a million acres of land surrounding the village of Grand Lake Stream. Residents of Grand Lake Stream and surround-

<sup>1</sup> Tom Colgan, Wagner Woodlands, at meeting in June 2000. Related in interview with Steve Keith, October 2006.

<sup>2</sup> For more extensive information on the Downeast Lakes Forestry Partnership and the Downeast Lakes Land Trust, see [www.downeastlakes.org](http://www.downeastlakes.org) and [www.newenglandforestry.org](http://www.newenglandforestry.org).

ing communities were employed in the mill or worked in the woods, providing timber to the mill. In addition, the culture, traditions, and economy of the community were based on recreational hunting and fishing in the area. For generations, people have come to Grand Lake Stream, hired local residents as guides, and stayed in the lodges. Local craftspeople depend on the surrounding forests for raw material for baskets and to construct the famous Grand Laker Canoe.

During the late 1980s people in the northern New England region began observing the impacts of a widespread change in landownership patterns and forest management practices. The people of Grand Lake Stream began to feel the reverberations of those impacts when, in 1992, Georgia Pacific announced plans to build vacation homes on 260 acres along the banks of the river. In response, town residents organized and, with help from the Maine Natural Resources Council, succeeded in having the land purchased by, and deeded to, the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife. After Georgia Pacific sold all of its forestland to Wagner Woodlands in 1998, residents began to notice additional, and more disturbing, changes. While they were used to logging trucks going through town, instead of two or three trucks a day, they often counted twelve or more a day. In addition to the increasingly visible impacts of heavy cutting, rumors began to circulate that the company was planning to gate the land, prohibiting public access. The implications were clear—the landscape, traditions, and economic well-being of the town were vulnerable.

#### GETTING STARTED

Initial signs of community reaction came from people “grousing outside the store” according to Kurt Cressy, owner of the only store in Grand Lake Stream and a central gathering place for people in town. But it took the initiative of a core group of residents, including Steve Keith, Steve Schaeffer, Kurt Cressy, Louis Cataldo, Jimmy Upham, and Dave Toby, to organize a response.

Most were motivated by a “fear of change” a “fear that the shorelines would be subdivided and developed” and by a “dislike for what Wagner was doing.”<sup>3</sup> Steve Keith expressed something more, though. Initially, he said he was moved to do something out of a “love of the place.” When he “observed the older people in the region, now in their 80s and 90s ... [who] represented vestiges of the former agrarian and forest-based economy in eastern Maine ... I was heartbroken that they were heartbroken over the changes in the forest.”<sup>4</sup>

They scheduled a meeting in November 1999 and invited Karin Tilberg from the Northern Forest Alliance and Jeff McEvoy from the Maine Natural Resources Council to attend and help facilitate the discussion. Thirty members of the community attended. Karin led them through discussions focused on “figuring out what values are important...what we want... [and helped us] decide what to do...She was instrumental in getting us organized.”<sup>5</sup> The group decided to write a letter to Wagner Woodlands. At the same time that the letter requested a meeting, it was critical of Wagner’s cutting practices. “We wanted them to listen and under-

<sup>3</sup> Interview with Steve Keith, October 2006; interviews with Kurt Cressy, Jimmy Upham, and Kathy Cressy, June 2006.

<sup>4</sup> Interview with Steve Keith.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

stand how it has always been,”<sup>6</sup> said Kathy Cressy. A meeting followed the letter and, by all accounts, it “didn’t go well.”<sup>7</sup>

They regrouped and over the winter of 1999/2000 they accomplished the following:

- ❖ organized Friends of Downeast Lakes
- ❖ determined what they wanted and what values they were trying to protect
  - 1) raised \$15,000 to hire a consultant to conduct a landscape analysis on 123,000 acres as a basis for future conversations with Wagner
  - 2) raised \$12,000 for a feasibility study to see whether there was the capacity to undertake a large land acquisition project
  - 3) conducted inventories and ecological assessments on land in two watersheds
- ❖ began informal discussions and meetings in town to identify people who might be interested in a new organization and to expand awareness about a potential project

The challenge of engaging the community’s involvement and support began early on and persisted. It was rooted in the dynamics within Grand Lake Stream and the very culture of the community. Some described the town as composed of different clans, some who got along, others who didn’t. People were suspicious and had a “natural skepticism” toward new ideas. There was tension between “newcomers” and “old-timers” and between people who thought conservation was a good idea and those who thought development was good for the community. Beyond that, if people were focused on what was happening either with Wagner’s management or with the project, it was on a concern about “losing rights,”<sup>8</sup> or perhaps more immediately, a greater concern for what was happening to the mill in Baileyville. Whatever the reason, it was clear from the beginning that it would be a long time, if ever, before the community as a whole would become fully engaged or willing and able to reach a consensus, much less want to participate. Those deeply involved decided to move ahead and “keep doing what we thought was right.”<sup>9</sup>

This posed a second and related challenge. Who would or could own the land? One option was to have the town (Grand Lake Stream Plantation) own the land. This, however, presented numerous challenges. The plantation form of government offered limited authority at the local level. There was too small a base of support of people in the town, and it would take too long to build the kind of consensus in town that would be needed for the town to purchase the land, to develop the kind of capacity needed to ensure good management in the short term, and to ensure appropriate stewardship in the long run. With time running out, the only option was to establish a new and independent organization.

The imperatives, then, became, clear:

- ❖ establish and organize a land trust
- ❖ identify a partner(s)

6 Interview with Kathy Cressy.

7 Interviews with Steve Keith, Kurt Cressy, and Kathy Cressy.

8 Sentiment expressed in a variety of ways during interviews conducted in the community. June 2006.

9 Interview with Steve Keith.

- ♣ build public support
- ♣ raise money

So in 2001 the Downeast Lakes Land Trust (DLLT) was formed with Steve Keith as executive director and Steve Schaeffer as president. The structure of the organization, though generally typical of a small, nonprofit land trust, was deliberate in design. A large board (twelve members) and multiple committees (six) would welcome and engage as many individuals within the community and region as wanted to participate.

In the first two years, the operating budget of the organization averaged \$125,000, supported primarily by grants and individual contributions. Steve Keith served as its executive director and did so in a volunteer capacity.

In June 2001 the Downeast Lakes Land Trust began looking for partners. Meetings were arranged with Wagner, the State of Maine's Department of Conservation, The Nature Conservancy, The Trust for Public Land, and the New England Forestry Foundation (NEFF).

NEFF had much of what the group was looking for. It clearly had the skill and experience for such a project, having recently completed a \$31 million capital campaign for a large conservation project on the Pingree family lands in northern Maine. It had a Community Forest program and was interested in the Downeast Lakes project. When NEFF agreed to a partnership, it did so on one condition—that the project be expanded.

#### FARM COVE COMMUNITY FOREST WITHIN THE DOWNEAST LAKES FORESTRY PARTNERSHIP

As initially conceived, the project to acquire the 27,080-acre Farm Cove property would have been a significant enough challenge for a small and very new local land trust in a community with a year-round population of 150. With NEFF, the project grew to include the conservation of more than 300,000 additional acres of land through a complex mosaic of fee and easement purchases, and the collaboration of multiple organizations including the Downeast Lakes Land Trust, the Woody Wheaton Land Trust, and the New England Forestry Foundation.

The Downeast Lakes Forestry Partnership was created with several lofty goals: to purchase the original parcel—27,080 acres west of Grand Lake Stream, to acquire a 500-foot conservation easement along 50 miles of Spednic Lake and the upper St. Croix River (which the Wheaton Land Trust had been working on since the 1990s), and then to purchase a conservation easement on an additional 312,000 acres managed by Wagner between Grand Lake Stream and the Canadian border. The whole project would protect, through ownership or easement, 342,000 acres of woodlands, 60 lakes with 445 miles of lakeshore, 1,500 miles of riverfront, 54,000 acres of wetlands, and the home of about one in ten loons in northern Maine.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> See Downeast Lakes Forestry Partnership. [www.newenglandforestry.org](http://www.newenglandforestry.org). Wayne Curtis. May 2006. "Grand Lake Dream." Down East Magazine. [www.downeast.com/under.php?page/issues/id/299](http://www.downeast.com/under.php?page/issues/id/299).

The total cost was just shy of \$30 million, with \$1.5 million added as an endowment for the Downeast Lakes Land Trust to support stewardship costs of the conserved lands.

Though dwarfed in size by the acreage of the easement purchases, the purchase of the Farm Cove Community Forest was the centerpiece of the project for two main reasons:

- ❖ It was the only piece that would be purchased in fee and owned on behalf of the people of Grand Lakes Stream and surrounding communities.
- ❖ The Community Forest Model offered a mechanism for engaging interest and support not only in conservation of the natural resource and ecological values but in protecting and enhancing the community and economic values.

## BUILDING PUBLIC SUPPORT

*Articulating a vision and priorities.* While many of the initial organizers maintain they came to this project with “no experience,” their early work suggests, then, an instinctive knowledge of what would be needed. Their decision to organize a public meeting as a first step in organizing a project, and to do so with an outside facilitator, resulted in a focused and productive effort to articulate values and priorities that would serve as organizing components of the project.

*Gathering data.* With unusual foresight, initial projects focused on raising funds to inventory the natural resources and assess ecological features on the land even before the land or easements were purchased. The inventories provided substantive data to support the list of values and helped build the case to support fundraising efforts. In addition, they raised funds to conduct a feasibility study of the group’s potential to fundraise for a land acquisition project. They conducted surveys, interviews, and economic assessments in order to define the value of the project not only for conservation, but also for what it would mean for the local economy and social fabric of the community. All of this information served both to substantiate the goals of the project and to validate and reinforce confidence in those individuals who moved ahead, despite opposition, because they knew it was “the right thing to do.”

*Outreach to the public.* The process of identifying important values, gathering data, and setting priorities cast a strong foundation upon which the structure of the organization, the broader purposes of the project, and public support for their goals would be built.

In order for this project to succeed there would need to be a significant effort to engage the public and secure its support. The “public,” however, would extend beyond the residents of Grand Lake Stream. For a project of this scale, the public would have to include people in surrounding communities; representatives of the state and federal governments; local, regional, and national nonprofits and philanthropic institutions; individual donors from around the region and country; and the press.

While the outreach efforts would always include informal one-on-one discussions, meetings around town, or conversations in the general store, the group developed a slide show and



more formal presentations that included data from the inventories, photographs, and maps. Formal presentations were given to local groups, before legislative hearings, and at briefings to funders, conferences, and fundraising events. In addition, staff and board members of the DLLT and NEFF took individuals (donors, legislators, journalists) out in the field and on aerial surveys to describe and promote the project. Finally, the DLLT offered field trips for the public as well as special events, including canoe races, its annual meeting, and local crafts day.

Critical components of the outreach effort included:

- ❖ a public meeting that invited the public to voice its interests and concerns early in the process
- ❖ facilitation of the first public meeting by a skilled individual from outside the community
- ❖ articulation of values and priorities
- ❖ good inventory and assessment data
- ❖ access (through the Downeast Lakes Forestry Partnership) to staff, board members, and other individuals with technical expertise and skills that expanded the capacity of the DLLT
- ❖ expanded network of contacts through partnership within and outside the region for public outreach work
- ❖ the vision and commitment of leaders such as Steve Keith that infused the outreach effort with an infectious energy and passion for the project

#### MANAGING THE PARTNERSHIP

There is no question that the goals of a project with the scale and complexity of the Downeast Lakes Forestry Partnership required more organizational capacity than could be achieved through the efforts of people in one newly organized local land trust. The partnership exposed the project to a wider audience and an expanded network of connections. It expanded the capacity of a fledgling organization by bringing resources in the form of staffing, technical skills, and access to funding, and it created a larger context and broader vision within which the Farm Cove Community Forest Project could be presented and supported.

Between 2001, when the DLLT was formally established, and 2005, when the closing occurred completing the purchase of the conservation easement on 312,000 acres and the 27,080 acres that would become the Farm Cove Community Forest, the partnership had raised almost \$19 million from public funds, private philanthropy, and individuals.

DLLT closed on one-half of the Farm Cove Property in December 2004. With all but \$6 million in hand, the partnership was able to close on the remainder of the Farm Cove Community Forest Land and on the easement on 312,000 acres in May 2005. The funds had been raised in a herculean effort on the part of individuals and organizations within the partnership—but at great cost to the partnership.

The partnership was subject to many challenging forces that pressed on and at times fractured its cohesion, slowed its momentum, and diverted attention and resources from the effort. Among the most significant were the following:

- ❁ The sheer scale of the project stretched the capacity of all the organizations, resulting in significant costs to individuals and organizational output. This was particularly acute for the Downeast Lakes Land Trust, which was a fledgling organization whose staff and board were working to establish and sustain a new organization while engaging in a capital campaign that would have been daunting even for a mature organization.
- ❁ Though multiple pressures created tremendous incentive to raise the funds, they strained both the organizational capacity of the partnership and relationships within it. DLLT, for example, was obligated to pay Wagner \$180,000 a year not to harvest wood from the Farm Cove property. Pending deadlines for options on both the Farm Cove parcel and easements caused additional strains. With time running out, for example, NEFF mortgaged one of its properties to raise the necessary and final \$6 million that included a \$4.5 million loan from the Maine Bank and Trust and a \$1.5 million loan from the Open Space Institute. Proceeds from the partnership's capital campaign provided the resources to repay these loans.
- ❁ At several points significant substantive and personality conflicts caused abrupt staff changes and conflict that threatened the progress of the capital campaign, the partnership, and, as a result, the success of the overall project.

It is to the credit of everyone involved, and part of the significance of this story, that the partnership held together and has demonstrated resilience, the land has been protected, and there is every expectation that the final goals of the capital campaign will be met.

#### CONSERVING THE LAND

When the DLLT closed on the 27,080 acres of land establishing the Farm Cove Community Forest, the transaction included the donation of two conservation easements. A “working forest” conservation easement of more than 23,530 acres would be retained by NEFF, which would also hold the easement on the additional 312,000 acres. An “ecological reserve” easement on 3,560 acres would later be transferred to Sweetwater Trust.

#### OWNING THE LAND

On May 25, 2005, the Downeast Lakes Land Trust became owners of a 27,080-acre parcel of land that included a 3,560-acre ecological reserve and 23,530 acres that would be managed according to sustainable forestry practices. The organization's stated goals were to protect the natural resource and ecological value of the land, to apply sustainable forestry practices on the portion that would be managed, to preserve traditional uses of the property for the residents of Grand Lake Stream and surrounding communities, and to support the operations of the DLLT from timber harvesting revenues.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> See [www.downeastlakes.org](http://www.downeastlakes.org).

While the organization had forestry expertise on the board and an active Forestry Committee, the executive director, Steve Keith, and many members of the board, including members of the Forestry Committee were still deeply committed to the capital campaign. They realized that there was not the capacity to manage the land, nor were there funds to support some of the initial upfront costs associated with ownership (e.g., developing a stewardship plan and infrastructure costs associated with timber harvesting operations such as road construction and maintenance). It was decided that the Downeast Lakes Land Trust would contract these responsibilities to a private forest management company. The organization hired Orion Forest Management Company to design a stewardship plan and invest in the infrastructure needs for forestry operations. Orion agreed to be paid based on returns from harvesting operations.

The expectation that timber revenues could support a portion of the operational budget for the Downeast Lakes Land Trust took over a year to be realized, and the full potential is still unknown. Initial road maintenance costs (due, in part, to heavy precipitation events), and management fees meant that there was a substantial debt owed to Orion. This debt was paid in the second year of harvesting, and forest management made a small contribution to the operating expenses of DLLT. The balance between harvesting costs and potential financial returns would need to be carefully evaluated for any specific project. In the case of the Farm Cove Community Forest, the long-term income potential is good, but it will take decades of careful harvesting to achieve the desired timber stocking and wildlife habitat conditions.<sup>12</sup>

The DLLT board knew that it would need to identify and produce tangible benefits beyond conservation and timber revenues, however, particularly to residents of Grand Lake Stream, in order to demonstrate the broad value of the Farm Cove Community Forest and to continue to build public support for the organization and its work.

#### CREATING VALUE FOR THE COMMUNITY

The Downeast Lakes Land Trust made some deliberate decisions and took some immediate steps to demonstrate its commitment to manage the land as a community asset. There was no disruption of traditional uses of the land by residents of Grand Lake Stream. Harvesting operations continued, and residents saw heavy equipment going in and loaded logging trucks coming out. All-terrain vehicles (ATVs) and snowmobiles were not prohibited, and the DLLT worked with local off-road clubs to ensure oversight and appropriate use of the land for those activities. In addition, residents were offered the ability to obtain permits to harvest seasonal greens, wood for use by local craftspeople, and gravel.

Looking ahead, the DLLT charged its Economic Opportunities Committee to develop a plan that would identify opportunities for economic development activities related to the acquisition of the Farm Cove Community Forest and purchase of the easement protecting the shores of the lakes.<sup>13</sup> A survey conducted during the planning process revealed the need for recreational trails to offer visitors “something else to do.” The following year the DLLT Trails Committee initiated a community-mapping project to identify and mark potential trail routes and canoe campsites. The first trail and campsite were constructed in the summer of

<sup>12</sup> Email exchange with Mark Berry, executive director of DLLT, March 2007.

<sup>13</sup> Economic Opportunities Plan, DLLT, October 2005. Available from DLLT, [www.downeastlakes.org](http://www.downeastlakes.org).

2006. Color brochures identifying the trail and campsite have been published and made available to local outfitters and lodge owners.<sup>14</sup>

In addition, the DLLT worked to identify the needs and priorities of local residents. DLLT and a local guides association joined forces and adopted cabins at a local environmental education camp that needed repair. Trees were donated from the Farm Cove Community Forest, milling services were secured, and volunteer labor was contributed. Newer to the portfolio of benefits were an education and summer camp program for residents and their children and an effort to employ local loggers for forestry operations.

Less tangible, though no less important, however, is the growing support within the community for DLLT and its conservation efforts that represents new “civic capacity” that surely will benefit and support other community needs. Evidence of this is primarily anecdotal information gained from interviews of people within the community. There were many ways in which the culture of the town was described, but it was universally presented as a divided community consisting of the locals and those people “from away,” a community that was a collection of “clans” as opposed to a unified community, and a community where people were often suspicious of those from away. DLLT was invariably described as “them,” not “us.” However, DLLT was also described as “a good intermediary” that offered a new capacity in town to take the initiative and do some important work on behalf of the town. One person commented that “in a small town people often don’t want to speak up...but [they] had to.” Before, there was “a whole lot of skepticism around the idea...we can’t do this...what will they do... Now that it has been done, [there is] a complete change...complete support...pride [in] ownership in land.”<sup>15</sup>

While the notion that there is “complete support” may be a bit of an enthusiastic description, most telling are some of the words used to describe people’s reaction and an emerging climate within the community. When asked if the Downeast Lakes Land Trust in acquiring the Farm Cove Community Forest did something for the town, one individual responded with a hearty “Heck yes!” Town residents “relaxed” after the property was acquired. “Because the community still sees heavy equipment going in ... almost like they have relaxed ... [they] don’t have to worry about the land being locked [up] ... fear that DLLT is going to do something different or odd has abated.” A feeling of relief was expressed on a number of occasions: “Now I can breathe, it is never going to change ... now what I have out there is more special.” And finally, one individual commented: “It was going to change one way or another ... this way we got to choose.”<sup>16</sup>

## LESSONS LEARNED

The Farm Cove Community Forest project offers a complex suite of lessons and observations related to adapting and applying the concept of Community Forests:

- ❖ *There are a variety of tenure models that can serve as a structure for a Community Forest as long as the following principles are incorporated:*

<sup>14</sup> The Economic Opportunities Plan, community-mapping project, and construction of the trail and campsite were conducted in partnership with the Quebec-Labrador Foundation’s Community Forest Program and Summer Intern Program.

<sup>15</sup> Interviews with Grand Lake Stream residents. June 2006.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

- ❖ The ownership structure ensures community participation in and responsibility for management decisions.
- ❖ The community has secure access to the value and benefits of the forest.
- ❖ *Determine the tenure arrangement and governance structure based on the needs and capacity of a community.*
- ❖ *The power of a good idea and strong leadership can mitigate opposition and skepticism as well as help overcome substantial challenges and obstacles in a project.*
- ❖ *Substantive data gathering early in a project provides valuable reinforcement and support throughout the project.*
- ❖ *Partnerships have emerged as critical components of successful Community Forest projects.* The Farm Cove Community Forest has been constructed on and will be maintained through a broad range of partnerships, including early relationships with the Maine Natural Resources Council; Northern Forest Alliance; Maine Audubon Society; Downeast Lakes Land Trust; New England Forestry Foundation; Orion Forest Management Company; Quebec-Labrador Foundation; state agencies in Maine supporting workforce development, biological inventorying, forestry, and economic development; the University of Maine and community college systems; and local groups in Grand Lake Stream including ATV and snowmobile clubs, a guide association, and the historical society. Each adds to the capacity of DLLT, expands the base of information on the forest, and opens opportunities for creating value from the forest for the community.
- ❖ *Develop good working relationship with landowners.*
- ❖ *The financial imperatives of a small local land trust require, at least initially, long-term philanthropic operating support.*
- ❖ *Key resources for projects involving a small organization or community include:*
  - ❖ access to technical support and outside staff capacity
  - ❖ access to sources of financial support
  - ❖ relationships and networks
  - ❖ partnerships with larger organizations that can bring resources and skill to the project

# THE 13 MILE WOODS COMMUNITY FOREST

ERROL, NEW HAMPSHIRE

*The vision of...Fran Coffin to acquire this parcel as a town-owned property is extraordinary. In a time of changing land ownership patterns, a changing business climate in the forest industry, and a new recreational focus on the Northern Forest, he saw the value of protecting, preserving, and enhancing the traditional uses of this forest....May this stewardship plan for the Thirteen Mile Woods be a work plan for the people of Errol as a testament to his vision, and may their work become a lasting legacy of the traditions of land management in the northern forest of New Hampshire.<sup>1</sup>*

In December 2005 a newly formed community nonprofit, the 13 Mile Woods Association, purchased the 13 Mile Woods for \$4,050,000.

The purchase assured conservation of 5,269 acres of productive forestland and the eventual ownership by the Town of Errol, New Hampshire, of a tract of land that is widely appreciated as a valuable community asset as well as an important piece in a mosaic of conserved lands that stretches from the Lake Umbagog National Wildlife Refuge to the White Mountain National Forest.

In addition, the Town of Errol (population 298), demographically, is representative of many small, underserved rural communities in northern New England. The 13 Mile Woods project, therefore, presents a good case study not only for the conservation that was achieved, but also for lessons in:

- ❁ financing community ownership
- ❁ partnerships in support of community forest projects
- ❁ community forests and community and economic development

## BACKGROUND

The Town of Errol is located in the Androscoggin River Valley of northern New Hampshire. It was incorporated in 1836 and, like many of the towns in the region, grew and prospered on a forest-based economy.

The 13 Mile Woods in Errol has long been recognized as a natural asset of statewide and regional value. The property includes 8.8 miles of frontage along the Androscoggin River, 24 miles of frontage along other streams, 140 acres of wetlands, 630 acres of deer wintering habitat, and the 45 acre Munn Pond.<sup>2</sup> It represents an important component in a larger landscape of conserved lands, including a national wildlife refuge, state parks, and privately conserved lands that link the Lake Umbagog National Wildlife Refuge to the White Mountain National Forest. The 13 Mile Woods and the Androscoggin River that runs through it attract tourists, recreational boaters, and sportsmen.

As important, however, is that the 13 Mile Woods is a valuable community asset for the residents of Errol. The property has a long history and tradition of use by people in town associ-

<sup>1</sup> 13 Mile Woods Stewardship Plan. May 2005.

<sup>2</sup> Conservation Easement for the 13 Mile Woods property. New Hampshire Division of Forest and Lands.

ated with its scenic, recreational, and timber values. Errol residents historically have relied on their surrounding natural resources for livelihoods gained from employment in the woods or tourist-based activities, for recreational use, and for the quality of life offered by an undeveloped pristine landscape.

For the better part of a century, residents of Errol had little reason to imagine that the resources would not always be there, available to them for their livelihoods and enjoyment. Until the 1970s one company, the Brown Company, owned the 5,269-acre 13 Mile Woods. Residents worked in the woods for the company and had access to the use of the land for hunting, fishing, and other recreational activities. By the late 1980s, however, changes in the forest products industry and ownership patterns of industrial forestland across the region raised the prospect of widespread fragmentation of the productive forestland base, reduction in forest management and timber harvesting activities, and diminished public access to the land and resources. The reverberations of this trend would soon be felt in Errol.

The 13 Mile Woods property is a case in point. The Brown Company owned the 13 Mile Woods property until it sold the land, in the 1970s, to Gulf and Western. Gulf and Western sold it to James River in the 1980s, and in 1990 James River sold it to Crown Vantage. Each turnover reinforced a growing sense of uncertainty, generally, about the future of the forest products industry. The sale of the land by Crown Vantage in 1992 to John Hancock, a timberland investment company, signaled another phase in a transition that was happening across the region—woodland ownership was being decoupled from forest industry facilities. This not only reinforced perceptions about the instability of the forest products industry generally, but also sparked additional concern about the future use of the region's forested land base. Accompanying this trend were signs that development pressures were not just a problem for the more populated region of southern New Hampshire. More people were visiting New Hampshire's North Country, more houses were being built, and more people were looking for land to buy. Cumulatively, these factors reinforced a sense of uncertainty about the intentions of any new owner and the future of productive forestland, as well as a recognition that the relationship between landowners and the community would become increasingly distant.

While the region has a long tradition of industrial ownership and “working forests,” there is an equally strong conservation tradition. Three state parks are located along the Androscoggin River and Lake Umbagog. In the early 1970s the Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests worked to secure a scenic easement, which would be held by the State of New Hampshire, for the portion of the 13 Mile Woods along the west side of the Androscoggin River. In the early 1980s an agreement among the State of New Hampshire, a hydroelectric developer, and conservation groups ensured the ongoing use of a famous 2.5-mile stretch of the river, just south of the 13 Mile Woods, for whitewater and recreational boating. In 1992 the Lake Umbagog National Wildlife Refuge was established, protecting more than 20,000 acres, including the seven-mile-long lake, which covers more than 7,000 acres. In 1997 a conservation easement was purchased with funds from the Forest Legacy Program on property along the east side of the Androscoggin.

While residents of Errol were most likely aware of and in some cases participated in discussions related to each of these efforts, the town, in no case, was either a party to or a partner in any of the conservation projects. The Northern Forest Lands Study in 1990 and the subsequent work of the Northern Forest Lands Council, coupled with the establishment of the Lake Umbagog National Wildlife Refuge in 1992, helped reinforce Errol's strategic location as a potential "gateway community" to New Hampshire's North Country. Many residents began to recognize that Errol's location and its natural resources were significant assets to people beyond the town.

In 1995 Errol residents played a key role in organizing and working to establish the Umbagog Area Chamber of Commerce. The chamber gathered information and attracted local support for a publication that lists local services and provides information about the region's history, natural resources, and recreational activities. Since the establishment of the Lake Umbagog National Wildlife Refuge and the creation of the Umbagog Area Chamber of Commerce, the Errol area has attracted twenty-three new businesses, seven new campgrounds, and two new state parks and has experienced a noted increase in the number of annual visitors.<sup>3</sup>

The town's master plan, completed in 1995, reinforced a growing awareness within the town of its assets. The plan recognizes the town's natural resources as important to the town for the scenic beauty and for the basis of economic activities such as the forest products industry and tourism. Two of the plan's stated goals are to preserve natural resources and develop a stronger tourist industry.<sup>4</sup>

Fran Coffin, a local businessman, and chairman of the board of selectmen, spearheaded many of these efforts. A trusted leader, he was always looking for ways to "improve the town," particularly by improving the economy, creating new businesses and job opportunities, and "keeping the young people in town."<sup>5</sup> He knew the 13 Mile Woods parcel was a valuable community asset. He recognized the implications and consequences of increasing growth and development pressures and understood the value of conservation. As important, however, he saw community and economic development opportunities in town ownership of the 13 Mile Woods. As a result of his participation on the advisory committee overseeing the establishment of the Lake Umbagog National Wildlife Refuge, he knew the 13 Mile Woods property could easily be incorporated into the Refuge and that it would be protected. He worried, however, about the consequences of the federal government owning so much land.<sup>6</sup> In addition, he had heard about the recent efforts of the Town of Randolph, a similarly sized community in northern New Hampshire that had purchased 10,000 acres for a community forest. He became convinced that that was the route for this piece of land—to conserve it, but to ensure that it would remain a community asset. When Hancock signaled its interest in 2000 in selling the land, Fran went to work with the intent of having the Town of Errol purchase the land.

<sup>3</sup> Information received from Steve Rohde taken from background material gathered for the New Markets Tax Credit.

<sup>4</sup> Town of Errol. Master Plan. 1995.

<sup>5</sup> Conversation with Gloria Coffin. November 2006.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*



## MANAGING THE PROJECT: THE POWER OF PARTNERSHIPS

Though Fran was the catalyst within the Town of Errol, he was not the only person who had an eye on the 13 Mile Woods. The United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) knew it had considerable value as an addition to the wildlife refuge. USFWS staff member Paul Casey, however, also believed in the value of cooperative conservation and felt that there were many advantages to having the town as a conservation partner. The Trust for Public Land (TPL), which had been involved in the Umbagog project, also was aware of the significance and vulnerability of the parcel and was looking to ensure its permanent conservation. (In addition to the Lake Umbagog project, TPL has been involved in the Connecticut Lakes Headwaters project and facilitated two signature community forest projects in Randolph and Freedom, New Hampshire ). Julie Iffland, TPL's senior project manager at the time, had begun to work closely with Fran Coffin. Other parties, including the timberland investment management company, Lyme Timber Company, would find the parcel an attractive potential investment opportunity, given the value of its standing timber.

While Fran was convinced of the concept of community ownership of the 13 Mile Woods, he was less sanguine of the town's ability to finance a \$4 million land transaction. He solicited the advice and counsel of local foresters, Kevin Evans and Julie Renaud Evans, who assured him that the timber value on the property could support significant debt that might be assumed by the town to pay for the project. In addition, as a result of his work on the Advisory Board of the Lake Umbagog project, he had worked closely with TPL and USFWS staff and consulted with them about the potential for a Community Forest project. Finally, he used his leadership position with the town to begin to engage residents of Errol in the idea. He gathered information, held public meetings, and met with town residents. He talked about the value of the property and voiced his concern, coming off the Lake Umbagog project, that "the government was going to control us."<sup>7</sup> He explained how the project might benefit the town's economy and how it could work.

In 2000 the Lyme Timber Company purchased the land from Hancock. As it turned out, the purchase of the 13 Mile Woods by Lyme Timber was fortuitous. Lyme Timber has created a niche for itself among timberland investment companies by developing an expertise in complex land transactions that incorporate a conservation component.<sup>8</sup> By way of illustration, in 2001 Lyme Timber began working with TPL on the Connecticut Lakes Headwaters Project,<sup>9</sup> which secured the conservation of the headwaters of the Connecticut River. (Eventually, Lyme Timber purchased 146,400 acres of that project.) In addition, one of the principals of Lyme Timber, Peter Stein, has a keen interest in and commitment to the concept of community-owned forests. Lyme Timber's plan was to hold on to the land for a few years and get some returns for its investors by selling a conservation easement to the USFWS in conjunction with some limited forest management.<sup>10</sup> When the potential for acquisition by the Town of Errol surfaced, TPL and Lyme Timber became instrumental in "buying time" to help the town create a community-based project. TPL stepped up to the plate and in 2002 secured initially a one-year option to purchase the property.

<sup>7</sup> Conversation with Gloria Coffin.

<sup>8</sup> Interview with Peter Stein, Lyme Timber. October 2006.

<sup>9</sup> For more information on the Connecticut Lakes Headwaters Project, see [www.nhstateparks.org](http://www.nhstateparks.org), [www.dred.state.nh.us](http://www.dred.state.nh.us), and [www.tpl.org](http://www.tpl.org)

<sup>10</sup> Interview with Peter Stein.

At this point in the project, the critical roles in a partnership were emerging. Lyme Timber, as a private enterprise, had the expertise and capital to act quickly to purchase the land from Hancock. Not only was it nimble, but also it had important long-term relationships with TPL, and individuals within the organization both understood and were sympathetic to the concept of community ownership. In fact, during the five years that Lyme Timber owned the land, it did not harvest any of the land's valuable timber.

TPL brought a number of important capacities to the partnership. First, it had a good working relationship with both Lyme Timber and Fran Coffin. It had a track record of Community Forest projects, as well as experience and success in securing funds from the Forest Legacy Program and the New Hampshire Land and Community Heritage Investment Program (LCHIP). It had the financial capacity to borrow funds that became necessary to extend the option beyond the initial one-year period. And it had the staff time and expertise to support the town and to manage the project.

Finally, the town's consulting forester, Julie Renaud Evans, would provide on-the-ground knowledge and expertise about forest management and harvesting potential that would prove invaluable in informing the structure of the financing package. She would also work with the town to develop a stewardship plan, provide technical assistance to town officials and the 13 Mile Woods Association, and act as a liaison between the town, financial institutions, and the New Hampshire Division of Forest and Lands to ensure that the harvesting plans would be consistent with the conservation easement.

In the winter of 2004, as the project was still taking shape, Fran Coffin was killed in a car accident. His death shook the community and put the 13 Mile Woods Project on hold as there had been no other person in the town who had been as closely involved or knowledgeable about the project as Fran. Julie Iffland had been working closely with Fran and realized that she would largely have to start from scratch.<sup>11</sup> She would have to begin to engage other members of the board of selectmen and build a new capacity in the town to carry on the project. The clock was ticking, however. While Lyme Timber was flexible in extending the option on multiple occasions, TPL had to borrow \$1 million to secure the option. Borrowing costs and staff costs were mounting for TPL. Moreover, Lyme Timber's considerable patience could not last indefinitely. It was critical that sooner rather than later a plan had to be developed to identify and secure funding for town acquisition.

The story of the 13 Mile Woods is certainly testament to the vision of one man and the determination of a community to pull together after his tragic death to realize that vision in his memory. According to Julie Iffland, "They did it ... they did it largely in good humor and with the future of their community [in mind].... They were real public servants when it was probably really painful."<sup>12</sup> It would not be accurate, however, nor would it be fair to all the individuals and organizations that have helped make this project work, to suggest that a small town in rural northern New England can acquire almost 5,300 acres at a cost of over \$4 million without a little help from some friends.

<sup>11</sup> Interview with Julie Iffland, TPL. November 2006.

<sup>12</sup> Interview with Julie Iffland.

As is clear in the design of the financing package, the time frame and complexities of the project required the involvement and participation by multiple parties, including members of the Errol Board of Selectmen, town residents, Town Forester Julie Renaud Evans, Lyme Timber, TPL, the Northern Forest Center, Open Space Institute,<sup>13</sup> New Hampshire LCHIP, New Hampshire Division of Forest and Lands, United States Forest Service, First Colebrook Bank, and Coastal Enterprises, Inc. (CEI), a regional community development organization.

## FINANCING THE PROJECT

One of the most difficult and challenging aspects of this project was identifying the components of and assembling a financing package. From the outset, it was clear that the land had the potential to generate substantial revenue from harvesting to make payments on funds that might be borrowed while still being faithful to sustainable forest management practices. In addition, there was considerable confidence that the project could attract support from both the Forest Legacy Program and LCHIP. But the project was expensive with a price tag of \$4,050,000 to purchase the land, plus whatever transaction costs might be necessary.

In the aftermath of Fran's death, the town's board of selectmen met with its bankers at First Colebrook Bank, a local commercial bank that handled much of the banking needs of the town, to see if there would be an interest and willingness within the bank to help finance the acquisition. Though some emerged optimistic from the meeting, there was no immediate commitment or plan that called on the bank's participation.

In 2004 the town received commitments from the Forest Legacy Program of \$1,640,000 and from LCHIP of \$350,000. This left a balance of \$2,060,000 plus transaction costs that would have to be raised with a mix of funds that might include private fundraising, program-related investments (PRIs), commercial loans, and/or financing through the New Hampshire Municipal Bond Bank.

Influencing the financing options, however, were the following constraints:

- ❖ The board of selectmen had promised residents that there would be no tax increases for local residents.
- ❖ The possibility of relying solely on a conventional commercial loan seemed remote as the ratio of the amount that needed to be borrowed compared with the post-easement appraised value of the land substantially exceeded normal banking practices. However, even if the town had managed to secure a loan, the payments on the loan would have been so high that the town probably would not have been able to make the payments without raising taxes.<sup>14</sup>
- ❖ Private fundraising seemed unlikely as there was general donor fatigue from a number of large land conservation projects, including the Lake Umbagog and Connecticut Lakes projects, and there was little capacity at the local level for significant if any private fundraising.
- ❖ Relying solely on general obligation bonding authority was problematic because the \$2,060,000 balance would bump against the limits on general obligation bonding authority for the town.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> The Open Space Institute was established "to protect scenic, natural and historic landscapes to ensure public enjoyment, conserve habitats and sustain community character. OSI achieves its goals through land acquisition, conservation easements, special loan programs, and creative partnerships." For more information, see [www.osiny.org](http://www.osiny.org).

<sup>14</sup> Interview with Steve Rohde. November 2006.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

- ❖ Relying to a large degree on the use of the New Hampshire Municipal Bond Bank was problematic because of restrictions limiting the flexibility to match repayment schedules with harvesting schedules.<sup>16</sup>

These constraints presented increasingly difficult challenges to TPL and to the town. TPL was beginning to feel the burden of increasing carrying costs of the \$1 million it had financed to purchase the option and to buy time. And though Lyme Timber had already agreed to two extensions on the option, more extensions came with additional costs to TPL. TPL looked at and presented to the town a number of options, including a private capital partner, but the town board of selectmen found this option “too complicated.” TPL considered walking away from the project but had “gone down the road [to town ownership] so far.”<sup>17</sup> But time was running out.

During the same period, Steve Rohde, director of the Sustainable Forest Futures Program of the Northern Forest Center, was developing a sustainable forestry initiative for the Northern Forest Center and had identified the New Markets Tax Credit (NMTC) as a potentially useful new tool for conserving working forestland.

The NMTC is a new federal tax credit program that seeks to encourage and provide a vehicle for investment in low-income communities throughout the country. The program can be used for a broad range of projects that meet its eligibility requirements, including working forestland projects. The NMTC enables financial institutions and other corporate investors to make an equity investment in a qualifying Community Development Entity (CDE) in exchange for receiving tax credits against the investor’s federal income tax liability over a seven-year period. Since the investor is getting substantial economic benefit from the tax credit, this reduces the amount of cash return the investor needs on its equity investment. In turn, this capital is used by the CDE to make a subsidized loan to a qualifying project. The NMTC is administered by the United States Department of Treasury, which allocates available tax credits to qualifying CDEs for use in individual projects.<sup>18</sup>

In January 2005 Steve called Jim Tibbetts, president of First Colebrook Bank, and discussed with him the potential of using the New Markets Tax Credit as a central feature for the final financing package to close the \$2,060,000 purchase gap, with First Colebrook Bank being the principal source of capital. The Town of Errol was a customer of First Colebrook Bank, which had experience with financing forestland purchases.

Jim enthusiastically agreed to explore the possibilities, and a meeting was held on February 1, 2005, involving Jim and other senior staff of the bank, Steve Rohde (Northern Forest Center), and representatives of TPL to discuss the potential application of this new program to the 13 Mile Woods Project. After the meeting, TPL concluded that the New Markets Tax Credit was the best and perhaps only remaining option to complete a financing package for town purchase of the 13 Mile Woods. In essence, the NMTC could substantially reduce the amount of borrowed funds that would have to be repaid. Thus it could serve as a kind of

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Interview with Julie Iffland.

<sup>18</sup> For more information on the New Markets Tax Credit, contact Steve Rohde, the Northern Forest Center, [srohde@northernforest.org](mailto:srohde@northernforest.org).

down payment that would potentially make the loan conform to traditional banking standards. The NMTC also had the potential of covering the carrying costs associated with the \$1 million option.

For the bank, helping to finance the project was consistent with its mission as a community bank. The bank saw the project as a chance to demonstrate how community banking provides value, particularly to small towns like Errol that have limited resources. In addition, it offered a chance to be involved in “practical conservation” and a way to protect an economy that had been based on timber harvesting.<sup>19</sup> The bank, however, had some particular concerns and issues that would have to be considered:

- ♣ the time frame for paying back the loan
- ♣ the uncertainty in timberland deals related to timber markets and harvesting conditions
- ♣ the impact of the conservation easement on timber revenues
- ♣ the degree to which the town was knowledgeable about and in support of the project

It would require much of the rest of 2005 and a significant effort to address these concerns and tailor the 13 Mile Woods Project to the NMTC. While the NMTC had been applied to other forestland projects, the challenge was “Could we make it work for a Community Forest deal?”<sup>20</sup>

With Steve Rohde coordinating the details regarding how the NMTC could be structured to apply to this project, many complexities needed to be addressed regarding concerns by the bank, the town, TPL, and various attorneys. The bank, the town, and TPL had never before worked with the NMTC so there was also a steep learning curve about how the program worked. Successfully putting the deal together required a significant commitment of staff time by Steve Rohde (Northern Forest Center), Julie Iffland (TPL), Steve Weems (CEI, which held the federal allocation of NMTCs that was used for the project), Julie Renaud Evans (who could provide significant information about reasonable expectations from timber-harvesting returns and work with the New Hampshire Division of Forest and Lands to ensure that harvesting operations would be consistent with the terms of the conservation easement), and Eric Marsh from First Colebrook Bank. Extensive meetings, phone calls, and negotiations occurred demanding the cost and time of representatives from the town, the bank, and TPL; consulting forester; and various attorneys. Among the issues that needed to be resolved were the following:

- ♣ Before the NMTC could be applied to this project, CEI had to approve the deal.
- ♣ First Colebrook Bank was familiar with loans to finance forestry projects, but those loans generally call for repayment over a three- to five-year period. Financing for the Errol project, however, would require a longer time frame.
- ♣ Structuring the deal to fit the NMTC required the construction of a complicated infrastructure of limited liability companies and nonprofits through which funding for the tax credits, loans, and debt service would

<sup>19</sup> Interview with Jim Tibbetts, First Colebrook Bank. November 2006.

<sup>20</sup> Interview with Steve Rohde.

flow. Establishing this NMTC structure required extensive design work as well as substantial legal and accounting expertise and analysis.

- ✿ It was originally hoped that the town could be the owner and still comply with the rules of the NMTC. While some felt that a case could be made that the town was eligible, without a definitive ruling from the IRS it was not practical to secure a clean tax opinion to that effect. Thus it became necessary to establish a new nonprofit that clearly would be eligible under the rules of the NMTC. The 13 Mile Woods Association was organized to purchase, own, and manage the land for the period of time in which the tax credits would be in effect (seven years). In 2012 title to the land will be transferred from the 13 Mile Woods Association to the Town of Errol.
- ✿ The bank wanted confirmation of public support from the town of the new financing structure before it would lend the money. This led to an additional public meeting in Errol with town residents at which the financing was discussed in detail.

For some, it felt like trying to “fit a square peg into round hole.” For others, the NMTC was the last hope for the town to finance the purchase. Everyone, however, appreciated the value in participating in a new, potentially valuable, financing tool for rural communities. In the end, the financing package for the 13 Mile Woods Project included the following:

Forest Legacy Program	\$1,640,000
LCHIP	350,000
Sources of funds channeled through NMTC:	
-First Colebrook Bank loan	1,381,872
-First Colebrook Bank equity investment in LLC	711,128
-Open Space Institute loan	300,000
Total:	\$4,383,000

The total financing package of \$4,383,000 accounted for the purchase price of \$4,050,000, plus an aggregate total of \$333,000 in various transaction costs, fees, and carrying costs.

The loans from First Colebrook Bank and the Open Space Institute totaled \$1,681,872 and were the sources for loans made directly to the town, which in turn channeled those funds through the NMTC structure. Without the use of the NMTC, it is clear that the town would have had to borrow in excess of \$2,100,000. This would have been too high, both in terms of the post-easement appraised value of \$2,410,000 and in terms of providing assurance to the town that the loan could have been repaid from net harvesting income on the property. The reduced amount of funds actually borrowed by the town is backed by the general obligation of the town, but the lower amount and the structure provide a very high likelihood that the loans can be repaid from conservatively projected harvesting income from the Community Forest.

The loan made by First Colebrook Bank was structured with the flexibility to facilitate repayments that will match with projected harvesting revenue. This flexibility will enable the town to pay off the debt as rapidly as practical, in order to save interest costs by accelerating the necessary payments. In addition, the flexible payment schedule will advance the time when harvesting revenue from the Community Forest can be devoted to other town needs. Conservatively, it is projected that the loan will be fully paid off within 18 years or less of the December 2005 origination date.

As indicated in the above table, in addition to its loan to the town of close to \$1.4 million, First Colebrook Bank made an equity investment in excess of \$700,000 in a limited liability company established as part of the NMTC structure. The bank's return on this equity investment will be almost exclusively in the form of tax credits, meaning very little cash will be required to pay the bank for this part of its involvement in the deal. This, essentially, is what allows the NMTC to subsidize the overall deal.

In summary, the NMTC program provided the following immediate benefits:

- ❖ It became an essential component to the financing package that allowed the project to proceed.
- ❖ It reduced the amount of money the town had to borrow by over \$400,000.
- ❖ It facilitated a loan with flexible repayment terms.
- ❖ It expanded the capacity within the town to manage the business of owning and managing more than 5,000 acres of forestland by creating the 13 Mile Woods Association.
- ❖ It brought significant legal and accounting expertise to the town.
- ❖ It engaged significant institutional resources from the private and public sector, and expanded the funding pie for conservation and community and economic development.

It is clear that without the New Markets Tax Credit, the 13 Mile Woods project could not have proceeded as a Community Forest project. In the short run, there are significant challenges that must be faced by the 13 Mile Woods Association and the town's board of selectmen, not the least of which is ensuring that harvesting operations and timber revenues continue to flow in a timely manner to efficiently make payments on the loans while ensuring continued compliance with the terms of the conservation easement. Coordination among the town, 13 Mile Woods Association, the bank, the foresters, and the New Hampshire Division of Forests and Lands is necessary. There is ample evidence, however, that all parties are committed to making this project work and have developed an impressive degree of cooperation and coordination to ensure its success.

In the long run, several issues have already emerged that will influence the NMTC's potential as a funding mechanism for Community Forests.

- ❖ It is clear that currently the NMTC is best suited for projects that have a borrowing need of at least \$2 million. Most Community Forest projects fall in the 1,000–5,000-acre size and often will fall under the \$2

- million figure. There is some thought of structuring NMTC deals to allow for “bundling” multiple Community Forest projects, but this will require considerable coordination and timing to facilitate this approach.
- ❖ The fact that municipalities are not clearly designated as directly eligible borrowers may limit to some degree the application for Community Forest projects. However, this limitation can potentially be addressed by either seeking a direct ruling from the IRS or amending the federal legislation.
  - ❖ To work effectively, the complexities of the NMTC program require that communities are assisted by someone with substantial technical expertise who can work with the community to help facilitate, guide, and manage the project through the NMTC process. In the 13 Mile Woods case, this role was played primarily by Steve Rohde.

Important lessons for the Community Forest movement from efforts to secure financing for the 13 Mile Woods Project include the following:

- ❖ Develop a portfolio of potential forestland investment firms willing and able to partner on projects at the scale of Community Forests. They are nimble, have resources and access to good information, can act rapidly when a parcel comes on the market, and often can provide the “land banking” capacity to hold the land until municipalities or nonprofits can put financing packages together.
- ❖ Develop sources of “patient capital” that are compatible with the needs of communities and revenue streams from timber harvesting. At a minimum, new sources of long-term, low-interest loans are an important first step.
- ❖ Coordinate and expand institutional support and a team(s) of technical assistance to advise and assist community groups, and to be able to experiment with new funding instruments such as the NMTC. To the extent possible, recruiting local individuals who have the skill and talent to provide technical assistance will add value. “Somehow it is easier to trust someone local [who] is looking out for you than to have teams of faraway folks saying, ‘We’re here to help you and are looking out for your best interest.’”

## COMMUNITY SUPPORT AND PARTICIPATION

Community support and participation is a fundamental prerequisite to engaging partners in a project, to securing financing, and to ensuring the long-term stewardship of the forest.

Community support and participation within the Town of Errol for the 13 Mile Woods Project evolved from the work of a strong and well-respected leader, an understanding and recognition of the value of the 13 Mile Woods property to the community, and, to some degree, prior experience in owning and managing other parcels of land such as Akers Pond (145 Acres) and the School Lot (207 Acres).

To say, however, that the project progressed with full support of everyone in the community would be inaccurate. It would take time, patience, information, and convincing to secure the



support of people in the Town of Errol—and even then there were “plenty of naysayers.” Fran Coffin would spend many hours talking one-on-one with townspeople. He solicited information and analysis from local foresters Kevin Evans and Julie Renaud Evans on the income potential from the land. He engaged the town’s other two selectmen in the early stages of the project.

The project received its first formal public discussion at Town Meeting in 2004. When the town was asked in 2005 for a formal vote in support of the project, it passed by a six-to-one margin (in a 73–12 vote).

Public support for and participation in the project has expanded beyond the board of selectmen to include the active engagement by the town in the development of a stewardship plan for the property (as required by the Forest Legacy Program), selecting members of the 13 Mile Woods Association who include not only the selectmen, but also individuals who bring new talent and capacity to the project as well as connections to other groups in town such as the local snowmobile club.

Since the property was acquired in December 2005, the town has gone through one year of harvesting activity. Harvesting income exceeded the original projections, payments were made on the loan, and there is growing confidence that the financial obligations can be met. With that comes a growing confidence to move forward on plans to develop programs with the schools and trails for public recreation. These programs and activities will help expand public support and engage a broader constituency in the stewardship of the Community Forest.

#### OWNING AND MANAGING THE 13 MILE WOODS PROPERTY

The Forest Legacy Program and the New Markets Tax Credits imposed several important requirements on the project related to ownership and management of the property.

*13 Mile Woods Association.* In order for the project to be eligible for the NMTC, a new non-profit organization had to be established to own and manage the Community Forest on behalf of the community during the first seven years. While this initially seemed a complication and one that potentially would require more from a small town the size of Errol than it had to give, the 13 Mile Woods Association, as the nonprofit corporation was named, has created unanticipated value for the project and the town. It has:

- ❁ expanded participation in the ownership and management of the property and engaged new people from the community in the project
- ❁ brought important skills and constituencies to the project, expanding the capacity within the town to own and manage a valuable asset
- ❁ insulated the board of selectmen from the day-to-day operations of the property

*Conservation easement.* All projects funded through the Federal Forest Legacy Program are required to convey a conservation easement on the land to a state agency. The New Hampshire Division of Forest and Lands holds the conservation easement for the 13 Mile Woods property.

*Stewardship plan.* All projects funded through the Forest Legacy Program are required to develop a stewardship plan. While the Town of Errol already had experience working with a professional forester for its other municipal lands, the implementation of the stewardship plan has built a good working relationship between the professional forester, Julie Renaud Evans, and the 13 Mile Woods Association, that has proven to be invaluable in helping to coordinate the demands of the financing structure with the on-the-ground reality of the forest management operations. In addition, Julie has acted as a valuable facilitator and link between the 13 Mile Woods Association and the state forester's office in efforts to coordinate the dictates of the conservation easement with the practical imperatives of the forestry operations.

The development of a stewardship plan also created an opportunity for the town to participate in articulating its goals and vision for the future of the 13 Mile Woods. Included in the plan are the goals as articulated during a townwide planning process:

From the beginning, the rationale for the purchase of the 13 Mile Woods was presented consistently as:

- ❁ preservation of open space
- ❁ management of working forest
- ❁ enhancement of recreational opportunities
- ❁ preservation of open access
- ❁ protection of wildlife habitat

The citizens of Errol recognized the changing patterns of ownership and the new interest in recreational land development and sought to protect the traditional uses of this important piece of the town.

In addition to detailing a timber management strategy, the stewardship plan lays out specific recommendations for activities that will help achieve the town's community and economic development goals:

- ❁ to support the region's timber economy
- ❁ to enhance recreational opportunities and access for residents and visitors through the establishment of new trails
- ❁ to create educational opportunities
- ❁ to create a sustainable revenue stream from timber harvesting that will support other community priorities

There is legitimate caution and reason for concern in the near term about the financial commitments and the ability of the timber management program to produce the income necessary to pay down the debt. The closing of the pulp mill in Berlin represented the loss of an important market and reinforced concern about the ability to make sound financial projections with so much uncertainty about the future of the forest products industry and related markets. The end result for the 13 Mile Woods project is that it will continue to be difficult to estimate financial returns from harvesting operations in the near term. To compensate, financial projections must be both realistic and conservative.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Email exchange with Julie Renaud Evans, forester for the 13 Mile Woods. April 2007.

For most people involved in the project, however, there is no question that, in the end, the town will own a significant asset and will have secured the ability to manage the land in a way that supports the economy and the quality of life in the community.

## GAINING BENEFITS

The Town of Errol has already realized many benefits from the 13 Mile Woods Project. Ownership of the land and therefore control over how it will be managed are now securely in the hands of the people of Errol. Protection of its most valuable resource features has been assured through the terms of the conservation easement. And timber revenues from harvesting operations have begun to pay off the loan on the property.

In addition, however, the project is producing other benefits to the town including:

*Expanded community capacity.* The organization of the 13 Mile Woods Association brings new institutional capacity to the town. It has relieved some of the pressure on the board of selectmen, has engaged broader participation in the management of the Community Forest, and has stimulated engagement in other aspects of the town. One member of the association, for example, has become so involved in the project and the workings of the town that he considers the possibility of running for town office some day.

*Expanded program opportunities.* Plans are under way to develop new snowmobile and hiking trails for use by residents and tourists. Future plans call for developing programs with the schools.

*Economic development.* Anecdotal evidence suggests that the Community Forest has already created economic opportunities. In the early years, timber harvesting under the Stewardship Plan will result in logging jobs for 40–44 weeks out of each year with contracts sent out to bid by local contractors. In 2006 logging accounted for seven new full-time jobs. It must be noted, however, that 2006 represents the largest harvest year, so seven full-time jobs is the maximum number of jobs that can be expected from logging operations. More broadly, the Community Forest enhances the developing trend of making Errol a destination location for tourists visiting the New Hampshire North Country. This trend has led to significant expansion of economic activity, including both the development of new area businesses and the hiring of ten new employees by the local sporting goods store. The planned development of a snowmobile trail is also expected to expand economic opportunities related to the through traffic of snowmobilers in the region.

## LESSONS LEARNED:

- ❖ Local leadership is critical to initiate and sustain a Community Forest project.
- ❖ Awareness and appreciation of the value of natural resources to other aspects of community well-being are important in securing public support for a project.
- ❖ Critical roles for partner organizations include “land banking”

or some ability to move quickly to secure land and hold it until the community can assemble a financing package and public support; staff time to support town volunteers; and expertise, or access to expertise, that may be required to acquire a Community Forest.

- ❖ Access to ongoing support and technical assistance for stewardship will be important for many Community Forest projects.
- ❖ Flexible financing and financing institutions that can provide upfront capital to secure an option or ability to develop a project, patient capital such as long-term low-interest capital, and debt payments that are structured to reflect a relationship to the timber harvesting schedule are critical.
- ❖ Building new institutions to manage a Community Forest may expand community capacity in other areas of the community.



# BRUSHWOOD COMMUNITY FOREST INITIATIVE

## WEST FAIRLEE, FAIRLEE, AND BRADFORD, VERMONT

*This conservation effort will ultimately create a 3,400 acre contiguous block of working forestland to be managed as a regional resource.*

Forest Legacy Application, July 2006

On October 12, 2006, Patricia Ayres Crawford, chairman of the board of selectmen in West Fairlee, Vermont, received word that the Brushwood Community Forest Initiative had just been selected as Vermont's No. 1 priority project for consideration under the Forest Legacy Program. This news offered welcome support for the Town of West Fairlee's effort to purchase ten privately owned parcels of land to establish a 1,172-acre West Fairlee Town Forest. Moreover, it helped to launch the Brushwood Community Forest Initiative, which, in addition to establishing the West Fairlee Town Forest, seeks permanent conservation of the Town of Bradford's municipal water district lands (591 acres) and consolidation of these properties with the Fairlee Town Forest (approximately 1,700 acres) into a 3,400-acre contiguous block of working forestland that would be managed regionally.

The Brushwood Community Forest Initiative represents a unique application of the Community Forest Model and demonstrates the potential role of community ownership and management in:

- ❁ "defragmenting" productive forestland
- ❁ conservation of larger landscapes
- ❁ permanent conservation of existing municipal lands
- ❁ regional cooperation in resource conservation

In addition, the Brushwood Community Forest Initiative highlights the critical role that supporting institutions and public funding programs play in assisting communities to acquire, own, and manage forestland.

### BACKGROUND

The Towns of West Fairlee, Fairlee, and Bradford, Vermont, are located in the Connecticut River Valley of eastern Vermont and are representative of many of the region's rural communities. Demographically, they are small to medium in size and all three have lower per capita incomes and average annual wages than the state as a whole.

Their history and culture have been based primarily on a natural resource-based economy. In the 1870s West Fairlee prospered by providing support services for the nearby Ely Copper Mine. Throughout much of the 20th century, however, agriculture and forestry were the principal economic activities in all three towns.

The landscape history of the three towns is consistent with other rural New England communities. Much of the original forestland was cleared by the mid-1800s for agriculture. In the late 1800s, when many people left farms in New England for the midwest and west, the

land began to revert to forests. The land has been held primarily in private ownership, characterized by large family holdings with a long history and tradition of stewardship that recognizes the close connection between people, the community, and its natural resources.

While the profile of the communities may seem typical among northern New England rural towns, the natural resources upon which the communities rely are not. The region hosts some of the most productive forestland in New England. All three communities are located within a 28,268-acre undeveloped block of forestland identified by The Nature Conservancy as the Brushwood Hills Landscape. The area is also recognized for its biological diversity and has been targeted by the University of Vermont as an important area for bird conservation. The land is an important watershed that features the headwaters of two important recreational areas: Lake Morey and Lake Fairlee, the drinking water supplies for Fairlee and Bradford, and the Connecticut River. In addition, the last remaining link of an interstate 38-mile recreational trail—the Cross Rivendell Trail—is located within the planned West Fairlee Town Forest.<sup>1</sup>

In keeping with other New England states, Vermont has had a long history and tradition of communal lands dating back to colonial times, so the concept behind Community Forests is not new. In 1892 the Village of Bradford bought, with town funds, the first parcel of land to protect a portion of the watershed of the municipal water supply. Several other parcels were added over the course of the next century, all of which were purchased with revenue from the town's water users. The lands, now managed by the Town of Bradford's Water and Sewer Commission, include 107 acres of land in West Fairlee and 484 acres of land in Fairlee. The land is heavily used as a recreational resource with a complex trail system that has been developed from old farm roads and forest management roads. Because the lands are considered by the state to be "municipal" lands, and because municipal lands owned in other towns are not eligible for enrollment in the Current Use Program, the Town of Bradford is required to pay the full tax rate on land it owns in West Fairlee and Fairlee. In many years, property taxes exceed timber revenues. For example, in 2006 property taxes on the land were over \$5,000 with no timber revenue to offset the obligation.<sup>2</sup> While the land is widely used and appreciated as a local asset both for water supplies and recreation, many feel that with no conservation easement on the land and an increasingly burdensome tax obligation to West Fairlee and Fairlee, the land and its conservation values are vulnerable.<sup>3</sup>

In 1915 the State of Vermont passed legislation authorizing municipalities to acquire forestland citing the multiple values to communities of forests for timber harvesting, recreation, water supplies, and wildlife. In 1948 the Town of Fairlee took steps to acquire land "for watershed protection and timber revenues." The first parcel of approximately 450 acres was acquired through tax delinquency. There is no management history except for occasional timber harvests to generate cash. In 1954 the town acquired an additional parcel of approximately the same size (450 acres). In 1979 the Lange family offered to sell a large parcel to the town to establish a town forest in memory of their son for "open land [and a] recreational area." The town purchased 770.6 acres from the Lange family in 1980 for \$158,500. The purchase was funded by a combination of resources, including a bargain sale by a landowner

1 See [www.tpl.org/tier3\\_cd.cfm?content\\_item\\_id=20964&folder\\_id=256](http://www.tpl.org/tier3_cd.cfm?content_item_id=20964&folder_id=256).

2 Interview with David Paganelli, Orange County Forester. March 2006.

3 Interviews with Nancy Jones, Bradford Conservation Commission. March 2006; Patricia Ayres Crawford. July 2006 and March 2007.

(\$31,700), federal funds through the Federal Bureau of Outdoor Recreation, Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service (\$79,250), and state funds. Finally, the town acquired a 52-acre piece for \$1 from the telephone company that connected the Fairlee town forestlands with Lake Morey.<sup>4</sup> Much of the town forestland is ridgetop land, which is difficult to access but represents the scenic backdrop for the community. There are some trails on the land and recreation is limited to some hiking, all-terrain vehicle (ATV) and snowmobile use. Forest management practices have resulted in removal of most of the good timber, leaving what is described by the county forester as “a forest that needs to grow.”<sup>5</sup> While the selectmen established a town forest board, there is no dedicated fund for management of the forest. To date, there is no forest management plan, no investment in forestry operations to improve the quality of the forest, and no conservation easement to protect the conservation values of the land.

There is a growing concern in all three towns that the landscape and culture of the communities are vulnerable to several forceful crosscurrents:

- ❁ Access to I-91 and a major state highway, as well as proximity to two attractive recreational areas, Dartmouth College, and the Hanover/Lebanon, New Hampshire economic hub promote increasing development pressures.
- ❁ Rising property taxes are becoming increasingly burdensome for landowners, resulting in fragmentation of large land holdings.
- ❁ Intergenerational transfers of land result in the sale or subdivision of land that has been held in one parcel for generations.

It is against this backdrop that the West Fairlee town forest project evolved and the larger Brushwood Community Forest Initiative was conceived.

#### THE WEST FAIRLEE TOWN FOREST PROJECT:

A West Fairlee municipal forest located along the Fairlee-West Fairlee town line was originally proposed in 1971 by the Orange County Natural Resources Technical Team (NRTT) in order to “consolidate the three properties into a [single, expansive] tract in public ownership. Good accesses are provided to the proposed site from Fairlee, Bradford, and West Fairlee over existing town roads and its location offers a central base for an all-purpose recreational trail system covering all areas in the forest complex. It is the recommendation of the NRTT that this site be acquired by the Town of West Fairlee with the assistance of state and federal funding programs.”<sup>6</sup>

The NRTT recommendation also states that “this type of land form, in addition to wild streams, abandoned farmland in transition, and varied forest types, provides the basis for an excellent multiple-use municipal forest.”<sup>7</sup>

While West Fairlee does not have a town forest, the idea has “always been around town” in part because of the experience in neighboring towns and in part because people in the community value their natural resources. In the 1980s the idea was proposed and “everybody

<sup>4</sup> Information from town records obtained through interviews with Patricia Ayres Crawford, Peter Lange, and David Paganelli. March 2006.

<sup>5</sup> Interview with David Paganelli.

<sup>6</sup> Excerpt from NRTT report provided by Patricia Ayres Crawford.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.



wanted to do it...[but] didn't want to take land off the town's tax rolls."<sup>8</sup>

When Patricia Ayres Crawford and her husband, David, purchased 150 acres and moved to West Fairlee, they began to explore opportunities to conserve their land, including town ownership. The Town of West Fairlee, however, did not have a conservation commission. For many people, the Crawfords included, there is considerable skepticism about long-term conservation for a town forest that is managed solely by the board of selectmen that has many competing demands on its time and for town resources. Without at least a conservation commission, town ownership of the Crawford land would not ensure the kind of protection Patricia and David were seeking.<sup>9</sup>

Patricia was quickly becoming an active member of the community, including running for and winning a position on the board of selectmen. While she had the town forest idea in mind, many issues and other projects would require her time, as well as influence future possibilities for a town forest. At the outset, there was a significant issue related to town taxes. For West Fairlee, with little industry and no retail industry, the cost of community services falls squarely on the shoulders of property owners. In addition, a new state law enacted in 2002 (Vermont Act 60) and intended to address school funding issues resulted in significant increases in local property taxes. This had a double impact for conservation in the town. First, and perhaps foremost, any project that would require financing from the local tax base would certainly go nowhere. Increasing taxes, however, were also putting pressure on landowners to subdivide or sell land, creating both a conservation challenge and an opportunity.<sup>10</sup>

At the same time, the town needed to update its master plan. In preparation for that process, a townwide survey was prepared and circulated in the summer of 2004. Included in the survey was the following question: "Should the town work with landowners to conserve land?" In response, "86% of people said yes." In addition, "no other question had the same response rate."<sup>11</sup> As a result, the updated master plan includes new language in the section on recreation that reads: "the town should create a town forest" and makes reference to the survey. Patricia Ayres Crawford and native resident Fred Cook also began efforts to talk with individual landowners who either owned important parcels of land or might be interested in conservation. In addition, there were growing efforts to engage the community in appreciating and conserving the town's resources. The conservation commission linked the programs for the monthly speakers series to the town forest project and sponsored events such as a "green up day," walks on the Rivendell Trail, and a "poetry" hike. These events began to attract wider community participation and interest in the town's natural resources. When, in 2005, town residents were asked to vote to establish a conservation commission, they did, and enthusiastically so. Not only was the vote unanimous but also, as the story goes, by the close of Town Meeting, 11 people had volunteered to serve on the newly established nine-member commission.

Two weeks after that Town Meeting, the Vermont Association of Conservation Commissions held its annual meeting and conference. Patricia Ayres Crawford attended the meeting and

8 Interview with Fred Cook, West Fairlee native and member of board of selectman. July 2006.

9 Interview with Patricia Ayres Crawford and David Crawford. July 2006.

10 Interview with Patricia Ayres Crawford. July 2006.

11 Excerpt from master plan provided by Patricia Ayres Crawford.

heard presentations by Jad Daly of the Northern Forest Alliance's Vermont Town Forest Project and a representative from The Trust For Public Land (TPL). The presentations both reaffirmed, for Patricia, the currency of her idea and offered potential help in her efforts. She contacted TPL, and in July 2005 Jad Daly from the Vermont Town Forest Project and Rodger Krussman from TPL met with the West Fairlee Conservation Commission.

For Rodger, this project offered an opportunity to create a Community Forest by amassing a number of parcels of private land that could demonstrate the potential of the Community Forest Model to “defragment” productive forestland—a major issue in the region's forested landscape.<sup>12</sup> Rodger, Patricia, and Fred set to work on a West Fairlee Town Forest project by identifying potential parcels of land that could be assembled into one large parcel. Patricia and Fred had tried, on a number of occasions, to enlist private landowners in the project without success. When Rodger joined the effort, he brought TPL's stature as well as professional experience in meeting and negotiating with landowners. This proved to be enough to secure commitments from some landowners—and enough to leverage discussion with others.

For Patricia, and the Community Forest project, the value that TPL brought to the project included a capacity to negotiate options on easements and fee purchases, to develop publicity materials to expand public awareness of and support for the project, to assemble the Forest Legacy application, and to promote the project within state agencies and congressional offices.<sup>13</sup> By December 2006 TPL had purchased the first property, had contracts on three properties, was negotiating with three landowners, and had initiated discussions with four other landowners.

During the same time period, the town had voted to approve the project and establish a West Fairlee Town Forest; the application had been submitted to the Forest Legacy Program and received the top ranking for the State of Vermont; at least one public meeting had been held to engage community feedback on the purpose and management of a town forest; and over \$100,000 had been raised locally toward the effort.

#### EXPANDING THE VISION:

##### THE BRUSHWOOD COMMUNITY FOREST INITIATIVE

The idea to expand the project beyond the West Fairlee Town Forest evolved from conversations between Patricia Ayres Crawford, Jad Daly from the Vermont Town Forest Project, Orange County Forester Dave Paganelli, and Rodger Krussman from TPL. Although Patricia had the larger landscape in mind, her immediate focus was to fill “a gap” in conserved lands in West Fairlee. Rodger, who had had earlier experience with Community Forests and had played a valuable role in connecting conserved land across a larger landscape, saw the pieces that could create a mosaic of conserved land in the three towns. There was definitely added value in expanding the project beyond a single town forest project:

- ❖ A 3,400-acre project would present a stronger application to the Forest Legacy Program.
- ❖ A larger regional project would expand access to more funding sources.
- ❖ A project that brought in assets of three towns would encourage cross-town discussions that could expand regional cooperation in other areas.

<sup>12</sup> Interview with Rodger Krussman. November 2006.

<sup>13</sup> Interview with Patricia Ayres Crawford.

For all, the opportunity to link the Fairlee town forestlands, a new West Fairlee town forest project, and the Bradford Water and Sewer Commission lands would not only add value to the project, but would also offer another model for the role and value of community ownership of forestland.

The fundraising challenge, however, crystallized the idea behind a broader initiative. It was clear to Patricia that going to people in Fairlee and Bradford to raise funds to support a West Fairlee project would be a challenge and rightfully so. There had been some talk about changing the name, but nothing surfaced until they asked Dave Paganelli what people called the area. His response was “the Brushwood Forest.” When Patricia tried it out, it “resonated as if it were a lost place name that had been resurrected.”<sup>14</sup>

There would be other advantages to a broader and more regional initiative as well. Funding from the Forest Legacy Program would provide support for acquisition of the West Fairlee parcels and acquisition of a conservation easement on the Bradford Water and Sewer Commission lands. In addition, Forest Legacy funds could support acquisition from the Town of Bradford of the parcels in West Fairlee and Fairlee by the respective towns, thus relieving the Town of Bradford of increasingly burdensome tax obligations to the two towns. Finally, Forest Legacy funds could be used to support plans to develop a management structure that would include participation from each of the three towns, promote cooperation among the three towns to conserve local resources within a larger landscape, and open the door to other opportunities for cooperation among the three towns.

#### FUNDING THE PROJECT

If there was one thing upon which everyone in all three towns could agree, it was that the Brushwood Community Forest Initiative could not move forward if it were to count on an appropriation from town budgets or require any municipal bonding that would have implications on the tax rates in the towns. In fact, discussion of a West Fairlee town forest or the idea of Brushwood Community Forest would never get off the ground in any of the three communities.

The West Fairlee Town Forest and the Brushwood Community Forest Initiative, however, had some characteristics that TPL felt made it a strong candidate for funding under the Forest Legacy Program. The project could be described within the context of a larger landscape with high conservation values, it was a community-based initiative, and it was located in an area described by the United States Forest Service as “threatened forestland.”

The project budget for the Brushwood Community Forest Initiative is \$2 million, which includes acquisition costs to purchase both conservation easements and land in fee (\$1.5 million); project costs, including survey, legal, and professional staff (\$300,000); and stewardship costs (\$200,000).<sup>15</sup> An application for \$1.5 million was prepared and submitted to the Forest Legacy Program, leaving an additional \$500,000 that would have to be raised through land value donations and private donations to satisfy the matching requirement under the program. Of that, \$250,000 would have to be raised from individuals within the three towns.

<sup>14</sup> Interview with Patricia Ayres Crawford. March 2006.

<sup>15</sup> Forest Legacy Application, West Fairlee town forest/Brushwood Community Forest Initiative. July 2006.

According to Patricia Ayres Crawford, they are “committed to private fundraising.” This commitment is founded on the recognition that many people in addition to town residents will be using the forest and that town residents will be committing significant volunteer time to the project and in managing the forest. They decided that fundraising should be based on people’s capacity and willingness to contribute voluntarily. To date, the strategy is showing impressive results. Over \$100,000 has been raised. Individuals from both West Fairlee and Fairlee have committed \$25,000. Five thousand dollars of a \$13,000 state grant from the Vermont Housing and Community Affairs for planning in West Fairlee was allocated to the town forest project.<sup>16</sup>

The potential funding from the Forest Legacy Program offered something else. If town funding had been a requisite for success of the Brushwood Community Forest Initiative, it would have been impossible to have even preliminary discussions about the potential of the initiative. The ranking of the application and the possibility of external funding for the project created a climate in which people could have discussions about the project and could work to build public support from individuals within each of the towns. In addition, the matching requirement of the program presented an incentive to undertake some level of fundraising at the local level.

#### BUILDING SUPPORT

The West Fairlee town forest is being constructed because of the leadership and vision of people within the town supported and assisted by professional staff from The Trust for Public Land. Though Patricia and Fred always had in mind the big picture of establishing a larger Community Forest, the description of the project evolved as smaller efforts to engage people in conserving important resources in town gained interest and participation. The survey, walks, cleanup days, master planning process, and informal meetings and discussions between people in town led to the formation of the conservation commission and laid the groundwork for meetings with landowners, public meetings, and a potluck dinner to discuss the idea of a community forest and secure public support for a West Fairlee town forest. In March 2006 West Fairlee residents were asked for support of the project and, with a unanimous vote at town meeting, they gave it.

Concurrently, Patricia and Rodger began to meet with people in Fairlee and Bradford to describe the opportunity for a regional conservation initiative and to help build public support in those communities for the Brushwood Community Forest Initiative. For a long time, the Bradford Conservation Commission had been interested in protecting the municipal watershed lands. In 2004 Nancy Jones, chair of the Bradford Conservation Commission, convened a meeting to which were invited members of the Bradford Water and Sewer Commission, members of the select boards of the towns of Bradford, Fairlee, and West Fairlee and the Upper Valley Land Trust. The outcome of the meeting was an agreement to develop a joint proposal between the Upper Valley Land Trust and the three towns for funds to acquire development rights. The proposal was not funded. But that was not the only setback. The conversation awakened some strong sentiments in town concerning property rights, the federal government, and any effort that would result in Bradford “losing control” of the land.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Information on additional fundraising requirements for the project obtained during interviews with Rodger Krussman, Patricia Ayres Crawford, and Nancy Jones. November 2006 through March 2007.

<sup>17</sup> Interview with Nancy Jones. February 2007.

In 2006 the conservation commission invited Rodger and Patricia to brief the Bradford Water and Sewer Commission about the Brushwood Community Forest Initiative and the important role of the Bradford Water and Sewer Commission lands in the initiative. By then, the Forest Legacy application was sufficiently well along that they could offer the potential for money. If the water and sewer commission wanted to sell the land, there would be substantial revenues; if it wanted to sell the development rights, the revenues would be less, but there would be some. The commission was willing to listen and consider the options. It is anticipated that members of the conservation commission, supported by Patricia and Rodger, will continue discussions and education about the initiative with members of the water and sewer commission and Bradford residents. A recent Bradford Conservation Commission event offered a strong signal that the community was behind the initiative. In planning the annual meeting and auction for 2007, the commission had pledged that half the proceeds would go to the Brushwood Community Forest Initiative. Commission members communicated that pledge to all donors for the auction and to all those who bought tickets and auction items. One hundred thirty people attended the event (more, as Nancy Jones put it, “than attend town meeting”), and the commission raised \$6,400 of which \$3,200 will go to support the Brushwood Community Forest Initiative. When asked if she thought the initiative would be successful, Nancy Jones replied, “Oh yes ... and it blows my mind ... I admire Patricia Crawford for thinking big.”<sup>18</sup>

The Town of Fairlee poses more complex challenges. There have been recent and quite contentious debates in the town over planning and zoning. Initial efforts to engage the Town of Fairlee have included the following:

- ❁ a meeting with the Fairlee Town Forest Advisory Board in May 2006
- ❁ a meeting with the Fairlee Select Board in the fall of 2006
- ❁ informal discussions with other leaders in town to build support for the project

The town currently is divided, and while Patricia and Rodger received a positive reaction from the town forest board, they were advised to move slowly and not push for votes at town meetings or organize townwide public meetings. There are, however, individuals within the town who have made generous pledges to the fundraising effort and/or have expressed their interest and commitment to the initiative. Efforts within Fairlee will focus on meeting with individuals, working through the town forest board, and building support slowly over time.

The Brushwood Community Forest Initiative has several advantages as people work to build public support:

- ❁ People in all three towns are familiar and identify with the resource values of the “Brushwood” region.
- ❁ Potential funding from the Forest Legacy Program not only offers a source of money for acquisitions, but also eliminates any concern that the project would require town funds.
- ❁ Local control for conservation and management of the lands will be assured.

<sup>18</sup> Interview with Nancy Jones. February 2007.

- ❁ There are local leaders to promote and steward the project.
- ❁ The visibility, reputation, and strong institutional support from TPL builds capacity at the local level and emphasizes the value of the project beyond the three towns.

## SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Any Community Forest project certainly requires a catalyst and a leader from within the community. One only has to talk with Patricia Ayres Crawford once to appreciate her role in advancing this initiative. Her energy, generosity, skill, and commitment offer impressive resources. As important, however, is her recognition that she couldn't do it alone. In a letter to The Trust for Public Land in August 2005, she stated firmly and in bold print, "I am certain that the West Fairlee/Tri-Town Forest Project will not happen without TPL's leadership."<sup>19</sup>

While there is no doubt that the West Fairlee town forest project and the Brushwood Community Forest Initiative would never have gotten off the ground without the energy and leadership of Patricia Ayres Crawford and the engagement and support by other residents such as Fred Cook and Nancy Jones, the participation and resources of outside organizations proved pivotal. According to Patricia, TPL brought "credibility" to the project, helped think through a strategy, brought fundraising expertise as well as the technical skills and experience of working with landowners.

Credit for the ultimate success of the Brushwood Community Forest Initiative will have to include the following:

- ❁ *Organizations and events that provide information on a broad range of resources available to communities.* An invitation from the Association of Conservation Commissions to the Vermont Town Forest Project and The Trust for Public Land to present at the group's annual meeting created a link and opportunity for members of the newly established West Fairlee Conservation Commission to learn about resources available for community forest projects.
- ❁ *Organizations and institutions whose purpose it is to provide technical support, assistance, and resources to communities in the specific areas of land acquisition, finance, and land stewardship.* The capacity that The Trust for Public Land brings to a Community Forest project includes its knowledge, reputation, and skills to negotiate with landowners; access to money for acquisition; experience with other projects; patience and skill in providing support so that the project is very much "owned" by the community; experience and knowledge about funding programs; and experience in the application process for Forest Legacy.
- ❁ *State and federal programs such as Forest Legacy that can provide substantial resources for acquisition and stewardship.* The Forest Legacy Program, to date, offers the most important financing instrument to help advance the community forest model in the region and to support Community Forest projects that can demonstrate the range of applications for the model. In addition, the Vermont Town Forest statute states that any town that owns forestland can receive, free of charge, management and stewardship assistance from the county forester.

<sup>19</sup> Copy of letter supplied by Patricia Ayres Crawford.

## NEXT STEPS

While everyone waits for a decision on funding from the Forest Legacy Program, there are many other activities under way:

*Commitments on land.* TPL is continuing its effort to secure commitments on the various parcels of land. It has purchased one property, has contracts on three other properties, is in negotiations with three landowners, and is in discussion with four others (including the Bradford Water and Sewer Commission).

*Fundraising.* Fundraising is under way both within each of the three communities and by TPL. It is expected that \$500,000 will be raised from a combination of individual donations and grants.

*Public support.* While the Town of West Fairlee has already voted to establish a community forest, there is ongoing work to secure the approval of the Bradford Water and Sewer Commission and the Town of Fairlee to include those lands in the Brushwood Community Forest Initiative. This requires continuing discussion with town boards, educating board members and town residents on the goals and opportunities of the initiative, and scheduling votes by appropriate town boards.

*Management and governance.* The goal is to establish a management and governance structure for the Brushwood Community Forest that will include representation from each of the three towns and will be vested with the authority to make management decisions. Under the Vermont state statute governing town forests, any town that owns forestland may request management assistance from the county forester. In this case, Dave Paganelli, the Orange County Forester, has worked with the Bradford Water and Sewer Commission, is familiar with the other parcels, and is strongly supportive of the Brushwood Community Forest project. In a letter of support for the Forest Legacy application, Dave wrote: "In my eighteen years as Orange County Forester I have seen no other project that has this much potential to preserve productive working forest and keep such a large acreage open for public recreation. It is clear to me that this project would have a significant positive impact on the communities involved." For Robert Nutting, chair of the Bradford Water and Sewer Commission, the important thing is that management will be in "local control."

It is hoped and expected that the Brushwood Community Forest Initiative will be completed by the spring of 2008.

## LESSONS LEARNED:

- ❖ Community ownership can be a valuable and key component in landscape conservation strategies.
- ❖ Community Forests offer a way to assemble fragmented parcels of land that can be owned and managed as one piece of forestland.
- ❖ Community Forests can buffer and link existing conserved lands.

- ❖ Community Forest projects can leverage and expand land conservation from private landowners.
- ❖ The Community Forest Model can be applied on a multitown or regional scale.
- ❖ Supporting institutions provide critical resources to successful Community Forest projects.
- ❖ Major funding programs such as the Federal Forest Legacy Program are critical to expanding adoption of the Community Forest Model in the region.
- ❖ Efforts to identify the resources and assistance that have been critical to individual projects promote a broader understanding of the needs for a permanent infrastructure of resources to support community ownership and management of forestland throughout the region.



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