



## Forest Stewardship

### **Situation:**

There are approximately 136,387 acres of forest in Strafford County, of which nearly 90% is privately owned. Cooperative Extension's Forestry and Wildlife Program staff work with these landowners to help them maximize the economic, educational and ecological benefits of the land. In one year alone, Strafford County residents received over 2.3 million dollars of income from selling timber and other wood products and the towns received over \$230,000 in timber tax (2005, NH DRED).

### **UNH Cooperative Extension's Response:**

UNH Cooperative Extension helps private landowners and communities actively manage their land for long term stewardship of natural resources. Extension programs in forestry and wildlife, agriculture, and water resources bring a comprehensive approach to solving problems and protecting resources through an extensive network of partners within the natural resources community.

Long term memoranda with the NH Division of Forests and Lands and NH Fish and Game recognize Extension's lead role. The Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests, Audubon Society of New Hampshire, NH Timberland Owners Association, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Farm Service Agency, U.S. Forest Service, NH Office of State Planning, Conservation Districts, NH Department of Environmental Services, regional planning commissions and county governments are all active partners.

Assistance was provided to forest landowners by Deborah Goard, Strafford County Forest Resources Educator regarding land stewardship and management of forest resources.

- 1,167 Strafford County landowners were contacted through on-site visits, phone calls, e-mails and 22 educational events on topics including:
  - forest harvesting laws
  - cost-share programs
  - water quality
  - selling timber
  - current use
  - insect and disease identification
  - forest management
  - pruning and planting trees
  - selecting a logger and forester
  - tree identification
  - selecting firewood
  - chainsaw safety
- Strafford County and several municipalities received direct assistance from UNH Cooperative Extension Strafford County programs in the past year, which included:
  - providing management recommendations for forestry and wildlife,
  - workshops for municipal officials on state forestry laws, and
  - a meeting for landowners who suffered damage from the July tornado, providing them with information and education necessary for debris clean-up.
- Twenty-two referrals were made to consulting foresters for services including forest stewardship plan preparation, timber sale preparation and oversight, timber stand improvement, boundary line identification, and timber appraisal.
- Deborah continues to provide technical assistance, outreach, and project review for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) in Strafford County through a new MOU between the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the Forestry and Wildlife staff.
- The Community Tree Steward Program educates volunteers in community and urban forestry. Tree Stewards participate in an 11-week course. The goals are to strengthen communities, promote social change, and enhance urban ecosystems. In return, they spend 40 hours volunteering in their communities, although most volunteer additional hours beyond the required 40.

- The NH Coverts Project trains volunteers to promote wildlife habitat conservation and forest stewardship. The Coverts Project goals are to enhance, restore and conserve habitat for its rich diversity, and to increase the amount of New Hampshire's public and private land managed with a stewardship ethic. Almost half of all Coverts volunteers serve on their town's Conservation Commission, bringing knowledge of wildlife and habitat to these local decision-making bodies. Coverts volunteers are asked to spread what they've learned at the Coverts training workshop to other landowners, community members, and the public. There are currently 13 active Coverts Cooperatives in Strafford County, involved in presenting programs in their communities, serving on boards and conservation commissions.

**How We Made a Difference:**

- Since 2003, 1,429 acres in Strafford County are now in conservation easements or trusts as a result of working with Cooperative Extension.
- Strafford County's Forestry and Wildlife Educator, Deborah Goard, reviewed and approved five cost-shared forest stewardship plans covering 565 acres. She also reviewed and approved a cost-shared timber stand improvement plan, designed five forest trails and certified seven forest trails as being completed for the EQIP program.
- Since the start of the Forest Stewardship program in 1991, just under 20% of the eligible forest in the county has had a forest stewardship plan developed. In the last 5 years, over 40 residents in Strafford County hired licensed foresters to write plans for 4,260 acres. This represents direct economic activity with payment to licensed foresters estimated to be in excess of \$60,000, much of this reimbursed through federal assistance. We know that these plans generated additional economic activity in terms of timber sales, road construction, and forestry improvement practices. For example, with technical assistance from Extension and NRCS, an estimated 70,650 feet of woodlot access roads were built in the last five years on private woodlots with a direct payment to the landowners estimated to be \$250,000. These payments reimbursed them for work done by construction equipment, laborers, and others and are only a portion of the cost of the project.
- Cooperative Extension provides extensive training to Community Tree Steward volunteers and Coverts Cooperators, in return for their continued involvement in local projects. Strafford County Community Tree Stewards and Coverts Cooperators devoted a total of 2,413 hours of time last year, presenting workshops, serving on conservation commissions, landscaping at public facilities, and volunteering at local exhibits. Their time, when calculated at the 2007 value of \$19.51/hour for volunteer time ([independentsector.org](http://independentsector.org)) represents \$47,078 in contributions to local programs.
- Strafford County Coverts volunteers own 521 acres in the county, and are responsible for managing an additional 300 acres. In addition, they were involved in land conservation projects in 2008 that protected 530 acres of land in the county.

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