

Officials discuss ways to sustain Sullivan County's natural resources

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Contributing Writer

On the hilltop where Kimball Union Academy overlooks the forests and fields around Meriden, a number of landowners, educators, state and county leaders, and University of New Hampshire and UNH Cooperative Extension (UNHCE) staff, converged Monday evening.

UNH President Mark Huddleston hosted the event, "Sullivan County Conversations – Sustaining Sullivan County's Natural Resources".

Huddleston, traveling the state with the ongoing series of conversations, engaged those involved in sustainable resource management, and continues to learn more about the different regions of the state and the partnerships UNH shares.

After touring two area farms, Pooh and Anne Sprague's Edgewater Farm and Richard

Caruso's Farm in Plainfield, the group gathered at the campus.

"This afternoon, our focus is "Sustaining Sullivan County's Natural Resources" where we will learn from UNH Cooperative Extension specialists and educators about the efforts employed to help sustain Sullivan County's working forests, farmlands, water resources and wildlife." Huddleston said during his remarks to the audience.

"Sustainability is one of UNH's hallmarks. We integrate the idea of sustainability into everything we do: Curriculum, operations, research and why we are here today.

"Between 60 and 70 percent of UNH research dollars go toward research in environmental issues; UNH is home to leading research in climate change, marine biology, biodiesel, natural and water resources management, and environmental engineering," said Huddleston.

Darrel Covell, Extension Program Leader, Forestry and

Wildlife, facilitated the program.

Enhancing Productions

Seth Wilner, Sullivan County Extension Educator, Agricultural Resources, highlighted Extension programs aimed at assisting farmers, large and small. He explained how the Extension meets the needs of farmers, enhancing productions while sustaining a way of life and the natural resources around them.

Wilner and the Extension form relationships with farmers, determine their needs, and bring in specialists to cover a wide variety of scenarios and farms. The Extension takes research that has been tried on UNH land and translates it to farmers, in just one of their efforts to help them with growth and sustainability.

Whole Farm Planning, a program helping farmers design what they are managing towards and determining the economics of it, has won awards for Extension programs. Through workshops, meetings, grants, collaborations, research and more UNHCE con-

tinues to develop a diverse knowledge base and assistance program.

"The most effective way of delivering these programs, and what I feel makes UNHCE so strong in the agriculture area, is the one-on-one sight visits," Wilner said.

Farming, a substantial economic industry in Sullivan County and New Hampshire is decreasing. Approximately 12 percent of Sullivan County remains farmland. While new farmers are getting into the industry, the numbers are down.

Charles "Chuck" Hersey, Sullivan County Extension Educator, Forest Resources, shared UNHCE's Forestry and Wildlife program mission; to educate New Hampshire's citizens about forest ecosystems and enhance their ability to make informed natural resource decisions.

More than 80 percent of Sullivan County is forested, and 80 to 90 percent of that is pri-

vately owned by families and non-profits. Extension's efforts help landowners implement forestry practices through workshops and training in wildlife habitat management, invasive plant control, forest roads and trails, management plans and more.

Third Largest Industry

"The forest products industry in New Hampshire is the third largest manufacturing industry in the state — over \$1 billion a year," Hersey said. "The industry is alive and well in Sullivan County. There are several large sawmills in the county. One in Springfield saws enough lumber each year to produce 1,500 homes."

New Hampshire is the second most forested state in the country, but 17,000 acres of forestland is lost to development annually. Recreation and tourism, the state's biggest industry, is set against a backdrop of nice farms and forests. It's why people come here.

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Statewide, the Forestry and Wildlife program offers more than 300 workshops a year.

"There's nothing stopping anyone from learning as much as they want about natural resources, except time," Hersey stated.

Matt Tarr, Extension Specialist, Wildlife, spoke on the Extension's programs for conserving and managing wildlife and wildlife habitats in the state.

"We're taking results of the most current research from the faculty and students at UNH and bringing it out to the farmers to improve their businesses, bringing it out to the private landowners to help them improve their forestry and wildlife habitat resources on their land." Tarr said.

Educational workshops, short courses and publications combine to help landowners, communities and professionals identify, manage and conserve habitats in the greatest need of

conservation.

The Extension works to identify the needs of landowners in Sullivan County.

Information to Researchers

"We get as much information back from the folks we visit," said Tarr. "We bring that back to researchers at the University to make sure the research being conducted is truly meeting the needs of the public."

In 2005 New Hampshire completed a nationally mandated Wildlife Plan for conserving and managing wildlife and wildlife habitats statewide. This is the most comprehensive assessment and action plan ever accomplished in the state. New Hampshire's plan is considered a model across the U.S.

In order to cover the state, the Extension trains around 25 volunteers each year to promote habitat stewardship in their communities. A number of the state's 275 volunteers were

in the audience. Sullivan County has 15 volunteers acting as advocates for responsible land management, who encourage people to contact Chuck Hersey for a one on one sight visit.

The University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension's Agriculture, Forestry and Wildlife Program's primary role is education to help landowners accomplish their objectives, and make responsible natural resource management decisions on their land.

"No matter how far away a community is from the Durham campus," President Huddleston said, "UNH — through Cooperative Extension and other outreach efforts — has a significant impact in matters involving everything from agriculture to family issues to water quality and more."

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