



Forest Stewardship

Situation:

There are approximately 364,008 acres of forested land in Cheshire County, 80% of the county. Of the 364,008 acres, 78.9% is under private ownership with another 6% and 13% under municipal and state ownership, respectively. Cooperative Extension's Forestry and Wildlife Program staff are available to work with these landowners and help them maximize the economic, educational and ecological benefits of the land, which include direct and indirect benefits to the landowners themselves and the communities where the land resides.

In one year alone, Cheshire County residents received over \$3 million of income from selling timber and other wood products and the towns received over \$300,000 in timber tax (2007, NH Department of Revenue Administration). Healthy, sustainable forests are critical to New Hampshire's forest products industry and the forest-related tourism and recreation industries which contribute more than \$2 billion annually to the state's economy.

UNH Cooperative Extension's Public Value:

Educational programs and technical support to landowners and community-owned forestland improve their health and aesthetic value and provide financial resources to the industry. In turn, property values, tax revenues and opportunities to promote tourism increase, providing a stronger economic base and quality of life for people who live in and visit the county.

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.

The program's strength is the one-on-one contact and assistance Steve Roberge, Cheshire County Forest Resources Extension Educator, provides to the public, landowners and forestry professionals. He reaches other audiences through public forums, field demonstrations or workshops, and by newsletters, bulletins, articles and radio spots. Since Steve began in October, 2006, he has met with every municipality at least once every year. He also serves on committees providing assistance, programs and workshops with a state and regional impact.

This past year, Steve conducted an examination of 6,003 acres of forestland with 129 landowners on 73 properties. Nineteen were referred to a New Hampshire licensed forester. To date, over half made contacted a consulting professional.

Steve provided forest resource information to nearly 725 individuals, organizations, communities or businesses on issues that included forest/tree insects and diseases, environmental concerns, current use and forest laws. Many contacts are made through visits, telephone, email, facts sheets or publications covering a variety of forestry and wildlife-related topics, including timber harvesting and forest improvement practices, wildlife habitat considerations, working with natural resource professionals, cost share programs, construction of forest access trails, erosion control, timber sale agreements, timber markets, water quality protection, recreational opportunities, taxation, and land protection techniques.

How We Make a Difference:

- Cheshire County Extension's Forest Resources Educator, in partnership with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the Farm Service Agency (FSA), implements the NRCS Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Wildlife Habitat Improvement Program (WHIP) and the Forestland Enhancement Program (FLEP) in Cheshire County. These federal programs provide cost-share dollars for practices that improve and protect forestland, wildlife habitat and water quality and usually act as the catalyst for the forest products industry in New Hampshire.

- Cheshire County landowners received over \$500,000 in cost-share dollars from these programs to implement conservation practices on their forestland. These practices include long-term stewardship plans, timber stand improvement, wildlife habitat improvement projects, access roads, invasive plant control and water quality improvement projects.
- Volunteer programs such as the New Hampshire Coverts Project and Community Tree Stewards further the efforts of the Extension Educator by providing outreach to citizens within their communities. In Cheshire County, there are 38 Coverts and Tree Stewards volunteers who volunteered over 2,900 hours. This represents a cost benefit to the county of \$5,658 when calculated at the 2007 value of \$19.51/hour for volunteer time (independentsector.org). Their efforts to teach the public about the importance of the county's forest resources reached over 6,100 people in 2008.
- When appropriate, landowners visited by the Cheshire County Extension's Forest Resources Educator were referred to New Hampshire licensed foresters to oversee the management of their forest resources. When working with a forester, landowners see greater revenues, while at the same protecting or enhancing public resources such as water, wildlife and landscape aesthetics.
- The Cheshire County Extension's Forest Resources Educator works with municipalities providing technical assistance in the field of forestry. Specific examples include:
 - Working with the town of Roxbury to identify natural resources for their town Master Plan update;
 - helping the town of Alstead to identify conservation priorities and review a proposed timber sale on town-owned land;
 - Helping the town of Swanzey identify conservation priorities and providing a support for a grant opportunity; and
 - Identifying hazard or dangerous trees on the city of Keene's parklands and reviewing management plans for city owned forests.

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