

## HUG A TREE AND STAY PUT

### AN INTERVIEW WITH DAVID AND JEANNE MOODY

by Jordan McCarron, intern, Monadnock Conservancy

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“If you have a piece of land with any natural resource value, you have a responsibility to manage it and protect it,” proclaims David Moody from a seat on his back deck overlooking the beautiful and tranquil Beaver Wood Pond. David and his wife, Jeanne, have done just that.

Owners of Beaver Wood Tree Farm on Route 12A in Alstead, the Moodys placed 220 of their 242 acres under conservation easement with the Monadnock Conservancy. In addition, their tree farm has been certified by the American Tree Farm System since the early 1980s, affirming their use of a long-term forest stewardship plan, licensed forester, and adherence to sustainable silvicultural practices.

The Moodys bought their property in 1979 after an extensive search around New England. At the time, they were living in the Washington, DC, area, but they felt drawn to the forests of New England. Both David and Jeanne were born and raised in Boston suburbs and have family ties in southern New Hampshire.

Jeanne credits two formidable experiences with their more than thirty-year ownership and stewardship of Beaver Wood. During the 1970s, they visited colleagues of Jeanne’s who raised Christmas trees in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia. The notion of a tree farm caught their fancy. The second push was the saying of a plant geographer and Harvard Forest researcher with whom David studied in graduate school. “Every true New Englander owns a woodlot.” From that point on, the Moodys focused on finding some land they could manage for timber resources and wildlife diversity—the first to help support them in retirement and the second to leave their mark as environmental stewards.

David, who spent 32 years as a hydrologist with the US Geological Survey and now works as a minister at the Anglican Church of the Good Shepherd in Charlestown, New Hampshire, remembers fondly the process of finding Beaver Wood. After several years of hunting all around New England for the right property, they connected with LandVest, Inc., which specializes in large tracts of high-quality land. The Moodys knew they would need at least 100 acres to make any profit from timber management. LandVest, Inc. assisted the Moodys in hiring a forester, creating a forest stewardship plan, and connecting them with the American Tree Farm System and the New England Forestry Foundation.

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According to the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the property sits almost entirely on Group 1 forest soils—the highest category of suitability for producing forest products. In addition, the property contains numerous wetlands and vernal pools plus 72 acres of priority wildlife habitat as categorized in the NH Wildlife Action Plan. “You sense in your inner parts the quality of a nice woodland,” David says when asked if he knew how ecologically important and productive Beaver Wood was when they bought it. “Scientifically, I now know that my intuition was correct.”

The Beaver Wood conservation easement is the culmination of more than three decades of interest in permanently protecting their property. The Moodys were first approached by the Alstead Conservation Commission in 1980 to put an easement on their land. The costs associated with the easement process were prohibitive at that time, so they put the idea on the back burner. David, who joined the Conservation Commission himself in 2003, credits the Monadnock Conservancy’s Monadnock Community Conservation Partnership (MCCP) and the Quabbin-to-Cardigan Partnership (Q2C) federal grant program for allowing them to finally achieve their goal. Beaver Wood was identified as a priority conservation focus during the MCCP’s open-space planning process with the town of Alstead. The Q2C program helped fund transaction and staffing costs of the easement process.

What have the Moodys learned through this process? “Talk to folks—easement holders, the local conservation commission, the Monadnock Conservancy,” David says. “Don’t assume you can’t do something because the costs are too high.”

Although the Moodys can rest assured the land they’ve stewarded and grown to love will be protected in perpetuity, their family has no plans to leave. Their daughter and her husband as well as their granddaughter have formed a real bond with the property. “When our granddaughter was young,” David says, “I would tell her that if she ever got lost in the woods, to hug a tree and stay put.” In a manner of speaking, the Moodys have done just that.