

The State of New Hampshire's Forests

***an Interim Status Report of the
1996 New Hampshire Forest Resources Plan***

April 2002



***New Hampshire Department of Resources and
Economic Development
Division of Forests and Lands***

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The Forests

New Hampshire is defined by its forests. Covering 84 percent of the state, they are the source of our clean air, water, scenery, wildlife, and recreation. They are the economic engine that drives our tourism and much of our manufacturing. They are enduring, but not without care.

The 1996 New Hampshire Forest Resources Plan

In 1952, Governor Sherman Adams suggested, “examining NH’s forest problems and determining what should be done about them.” The “problems” change, but the need to care for the land remains.

In accordance with RSA 227-I:8 a citizens committee developed the Forest Resources Plan in 1996, summarizing the condition of the forest and proposing options to a variety of conservation partners to follow to achieve the vision.



Photo by: UNH Cooperative Extension

Highlights of Key Accomplishments Since 1996

Creating a favorable business climate.

For over 300 years, forest-based businesses have been a major contributor to the state’s economy. Recognizing this, Governor Jeanne Shaheen established the NH Forest Industry Task Force in 1997 to investigate ways to promote and expand wood using companies; develop new markets for underused species and lower grades of timber to replace markets lost by downsizing of wood fired electrical generating plants; and to improve the attitude of educational systems toward forest industry. In 2001 the Department of Resources and Economic Development commissioned a 3 phase study on the use of low-grade wood in New Hampshire. The study confirmed the importance of low grade wood markets to sustainable forestry and the viability of forest industries. It also concluded that, in the foreseeable future, there are no alternative manufacturing facilities to replace existing markets for low grade wood.

Keeping contiguous blocks of forests intact.

Our forests are being fragmented into smaller pieces with the average size parcel dropping from 114 acres in 1960 to 37 acres today. Maintaining large blocks of unbroken forests is important ecologically and economically.

In June 2000 the New Hampshire General Court created the Land and Community Heritage Investment Program (LCHIP) to conserve and preserve this state’s most important resources to ensure their perpetual contribution to the state’s economy, environment, and overall quality of life. The program began accepting applications in January 2001.

The federal Forest Legacy Program, administered by the Division of Forests and Lands, complements LCHIP by protecting “working forests” threatened with development. To date, nearly 200,000 acres have been protected or earmarked for protection.

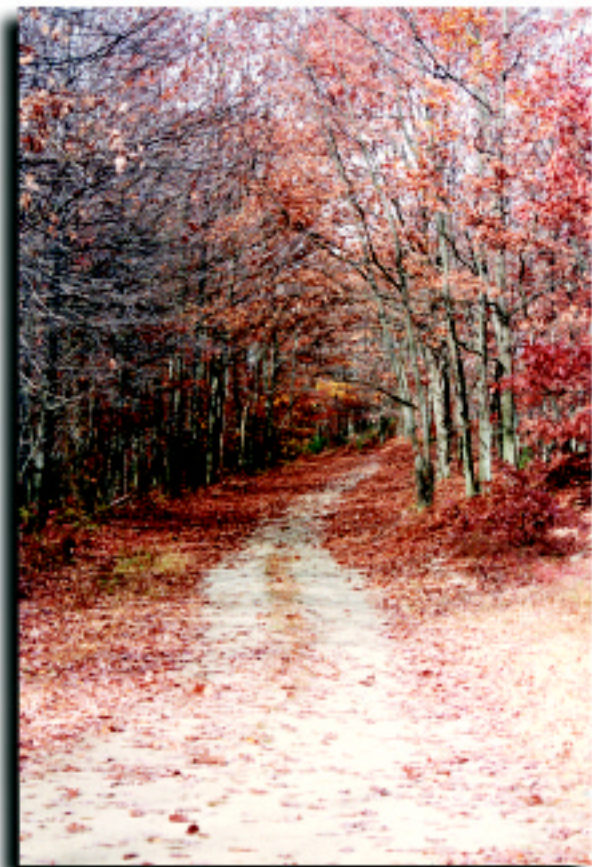


Photo by: Kathy Barrett

Developing mechanisms for sustaining managed forests.

As forests grow, so does our knowledge about them. *Good Forestry in the Granite State: Recommended Voluntary Forest Management Practices for New Hampshire*, published in 1997, contains site-specific forest management practices and landscape level strategies derived from the best available scientific information. It has become “the” reference publication for landowner and natural resources professional education.

Addressing the impact of local land use decisions.

Local decision-making authority is the foundation of civic discourse in NH. Local land use decisions have statewide effects on timber availability, the cleanliness of air and water, and the abundance of wildlife.

1999 was a banner year for the start of public and private collaborations encouraging smart growth and conservation. The Minimum Impact Development Project Partnership, a collaboration of biologists and development interests, was established to identify and implement local development practices that maintain the state’s diverse landscape. The governor directed the 10 agency members of the Council on Resources and Development to compile actions taken by state agencies to deter sprawl and provide recommendations for further action. The legislature passed bills requiring state agencies to coordinate efforts to deter sprawl and directing the Office of State Planning to conduct a study of the effects of sprawl in the state.

Conserving New Hampshire’s biodiversity.

NH is home to more than 15,000 species approximately 15 percent of which are threatened or endangered. Conserving biodiversity is about more than saving these individual species. It’s about conserving the land where they dwell.

The Division of Forests and Lands and the Fish & Game Department jointly established the Ecological Reserve System to establish and support a system of public and private lands voluntarily dedicated to protecting biodiversity.

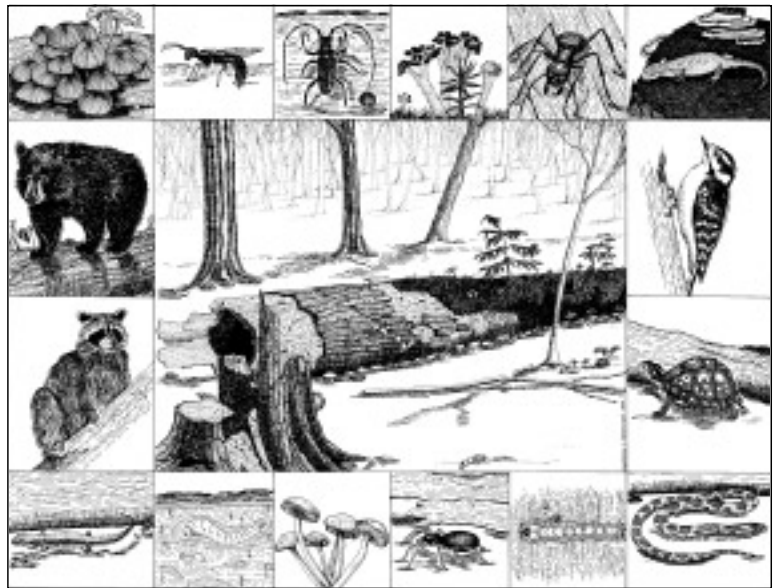


Illustration by Ingeborg Seaboyer provided by NH Project Learning Tree

Continuing the tradition of keeping land open to the public.

Every year for the last 20 years, NH's forestland has shrunk by 13,000 acres. Residents and tourists expect open and easy access to the remaining forests, most of which are owned by private individuals.

New Hampshire's landowner liability laws continue to protect landowners who allow public recreational access on their forestland by limiting their liability when they allow people to hunt, fish, trap, camp, hike, sight see, or operate OHRV's without charge.

Providing the timely collection of data about our forests.

The Forest Inventory & Analysis (FIA) is the most reliable information gathering process of its kind. In the past, it was conducted every 10 to 15 years resulting in untimely information being used to make decisions affecting forests. In fall 2002, the USDA-Forest Service, in partnership with the Division of Forests and Lands, will begin conducting annual inventories to monitor forest health and forest volumes and values. This yearly inventory process enhances our ability to make sound forest management decisions.

Instilling appreciation, knowledge and skills of forest conservation.

Eighty percent of NH's forestland is owned by private individuals and industries. The stewardship of all forest resources relies on informed and voluntary action by these landowners and others.

Conservation education organizations offer a rich variety of programs geared toward a variety of publics. An estimated 300 workshops were offered to natural resources professionals since 1996. UNH Cooperative Extension helps landowners make informed decisions, influencing an estimated 65,000 acres each year. NH Public Radio's Something Wild and regular releases in the state press inform the public at large about state conservation efforts.

Acquiring and managing public lands and easements.

Government ownership of land in the public interest is a changing concept. Since private ownership remains vulnerable to development, the burden to provide certain ecological values continues to shift to public lands. The Land and Community Heritage Investment Program (LCHIP) and Forest Legacy are new means of acquiring public lands to meet these increasing responsibilities. In July 2001 Governor Shaheen and Senator Judd Gregg created the Connecticut Lakes Headwaters Partnership Task Force to address the sale of 171,000 acres of industrial forest land in northern New Hampshire. This public/private partnership developed strategies to ensure the protection and continuation of traditional forest uses on this land. The Forest Legacy and LCHIP programs will play an important role in this effort.

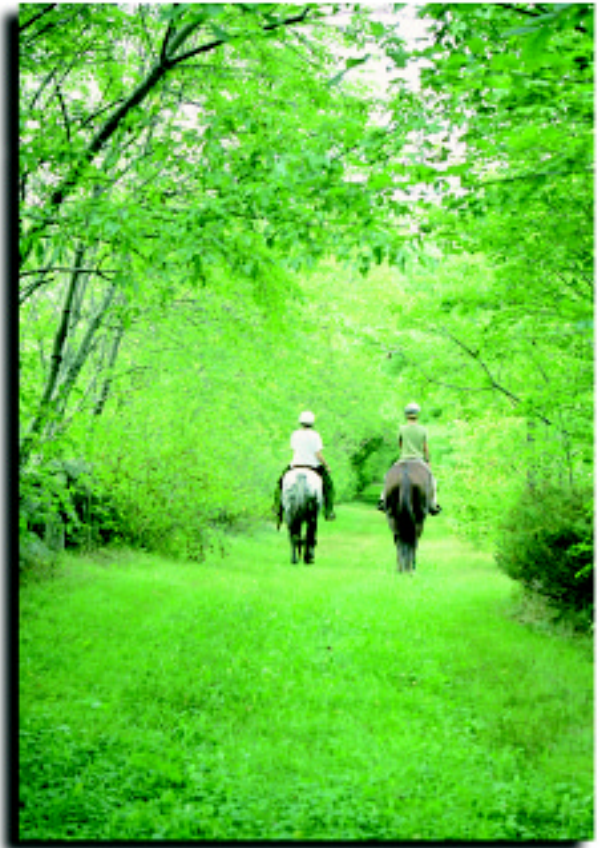


Photo by: Kathy Barrett



Photo by: UNH Cooperative Extension

For land owned by the state, the Cooperative Land Management Program provides a coordinated approach to policy and management by the state's natural resource agencies. The program includes Fish and Game, Forests and Lands, Parks and Recreation, and Water Resources. The Forest Management and Protection Fund (RSA 227G:5) has been successful in providing much needed resources for stewardship of state lands.

Conserving community forests.

The Community Forestry Advisory Council, a citizen's advisory group, was established in 2000 to provide direction to the Division of Forests and Lands. Each year, 125 communities are helped through workshops, publications, telephone responses, community meetings and technical assistance on topics including natural resource inventories, land use planning, community tree assistance, and town forest management.

Volunteerism makes for a vibrant program. The Community Tree Stewards, with 130 trained volunteers, logged over 5,000 hours working in 30 communities in the 1998-999 biennium alone.

Developing forest policy collaboratively.

In July of 1996, the Division of Forests and Lands revitalized the New Hampshire Forest Advisory Board (FAB). Authorized under RSA 227-I:5, FAB advises on "factors affecting the use, ownership, and management of forest resources." Advocating implementation of the recommendations of the New Hampshire Forest Resources Plan, and coordinating forest policy development are among its primary goals.

A Vision for the Future

At present, our most pressing issues are low grade wood markets, responding to global economic conditions, loss of forest land, and water quality and availability. Though much remains to be done, in the last five years there has been much progress in achieving the plan's stated objectives. Agencies, organizations and individuals have worked collaboratively to undertake the actions that will realize the vision set forth in the Forest Resources Plan.

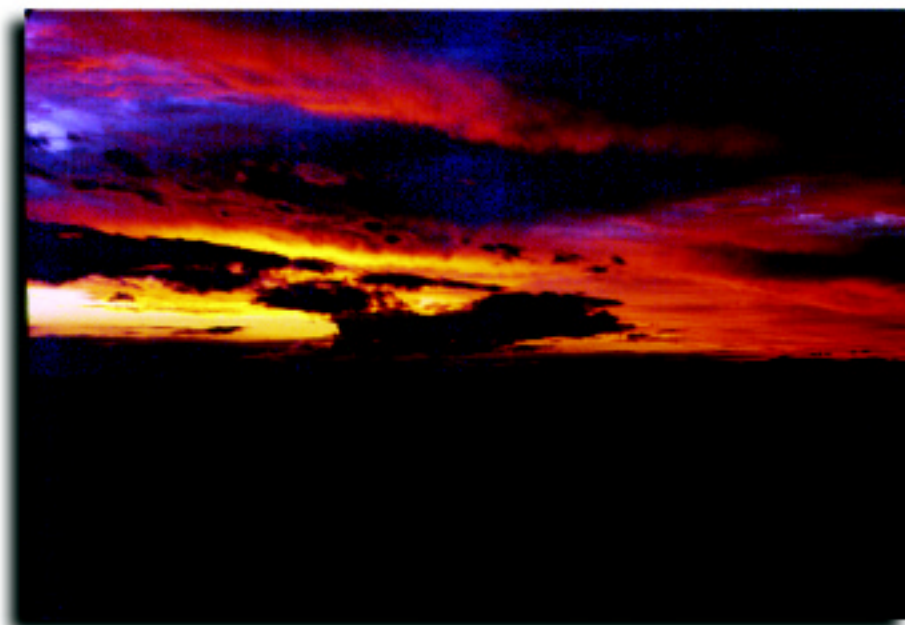


Photo by: UNH Cooperative Extension

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