Job Description: Special Assistant for the Maine High Peaks Regional Conservation Partnership Program

About New England Forestry Foundation

New England Forestry Foundation (NEFF) is the only non-profit organization with a region-wide geographic focus and a pro-forest mission. We conserve forests and promote sustainable forest management to permanently protect the character of New England and the region’s primary source of clean water and air, native wildlife habitat, diverse recreational opportunities, and rural economic opportunity. In the last 16 years NEFF has protected one of every three acres of land conserved in New England and currently manages more than 140 properties that the organization owns outright and more than a million acres of conservation easements. The organization is in a period of growth, having nearly doubled staffing and budget since the start of 2013.

About the position

The purpose of this position is to drive forward an innovative approach to improving forest management and land conservation in Maine’s western mountains. More specifically, the successful candidate will, first and foremost, assist the New England Forestry Foundation (NEFF) in implementing the aspects of the High Peaks Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) project relevant to NEFF – these include principally paying landowners to implement improved forest management (see Attachment 1 for a description of the RCPP); and secondarily, to assist NEFF in coordinating this work with other aspects of the RCPP project (land acquisition, engaging small landowners in management planning, improving upstream fish passage at road crossings and streams).

NEFF’s work on improving forest practices was originally planned as a reverse auction in which landowners would bid for access to conservation funding. Those projects which accomplished the most for the funding available were to be selected. However, based on ongoing discussions with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), it does not appear that a pure reverse auction will be possible given NRCS legal constraints. Instead, 10 year contracts under either the Healthy Forest Reserve Program (HFRP) or the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) appear to be the likely mechanisms to use in paying for improved forest management. The successful candidate will be responsible for negotiating those agreements.

The work of improving forest management will center on improving habitat for state and federal listed wildlife species, as well as more generally, improving habitat conditions for wildlife and protection of biodiversity.

The steps NEFF currently contemplates as being involved in this effort include the following:

- Determining priorities among what practices are most important in the High Peaks area – that is, which are the highest priority given habitat conditions in the area
- Determining which of these efforts are best suited to the HFRP program or conversely the EQIP program
• Working with NRCS to refine or supplement their “cost share practices” to cover the habitat improvement needed
• Screening preliminary statements of interest from landowners for those that are likely to have the most impact
• Working with the NRCS staff to develop plans for the practices involved.
• Working with the landowners to arrange for the necessary work to be conducted on the ground
• Supervising the work being conducted
• Reporting to NRCS on the results

The principle challenge in this position, as regards this work, will be to achieve as much of what was originally intended in the RCPP proposal as possible in the final activities. That is

• Payments which are attractive to landowners (small, medium and large) for improving forest management to benefit wildlife and diversity on as many acres as possible
• A 30 year commitment to these practices (if possible)
• Minimizing expenditures and administrative costs for things such as appraisals, surveys, hazmat investigations, etc., so that funds for practices on the ground are maximized

Regarding coordination with other aspects of the RCPP, these other aspects include:

• The acquisition of easements and fee interests in certain lands
• Engaging small landowners in promoting active forest management aimed at improving forestry consistent with the Maine Audubon program entitled “Forestry for the Birds”
• Improving upstream fish passage at road crossings

Compensation and Other Information

The position reports to the New England Forestry Foundation’s Maine Representative, and works closely with other senior leadership staff. The position is a full time position. Salary will be commensurate with experience. New England Forestry Foundation offers a comprehensive benefit package for full time employees and a friendly working environment. The successful candidate could work from any location in the region – however, a location in central Maine is preferred and substantial time interacting with landowners in the High Peaks region will be is required.

New England Forestry Foundation is an equal employment opportunity employer that does not discriminate on the basis of actual or perceived race, creed, color, religion, alienage or national origin, ancestry, citizenship status, age, disability, marital status, veteran status, sexual orientation, gender, or any other characteristic protected by applicable federal, state or local laws.

To apply please send a cover letter, resume, and writing sample via email to Alec Giffen at agiffen@newenglandforestry.org
### RCPP Narrative Elements for Preproposal (4700 character limit per item)

**Project Name:**

| Improving Inadequate Fish and Wildlife Habitat from the White Mountains to Moosehead Lake |

| Funding Pool: | National | State: | ME |

1. Describe how each partner meets the eligibility criteria in Section II.A. of the announcement.

The American Forest Foundation (AFF) is a non-profit forest conservation organization that works with and through non-industrial private forest (small woodland) owners to achieve environmental, economic, and social impacts on the ground. AFF represents more than 22 million small woodland owners across the country through several on-the-ground programs. One of these programs, the American Tree Farm System (ATFS), is a third-party audited certification system specifically designed to promote sustainable forest stewardship on small, family-owned woodlands. In the ATFS program, there are 86,000 Tree Farmers responsible for the stewardship of 26 million acres.

New England Forestry Foundation (NEFF) is a non-profit founded in 1944 to encourage more prudent use of New England's forests. Having protected more forestland than any other organization in New England, NEFF is nationally recognized for its bold conservation achievements. Through community and private forest landowner education, NEFF successfully cultivates sustainable forestry practices and fosters broad-reaching economic, recreational and environmental benefits. NEFF helps forest landowners and conservation-minded communities avoid deforestation and fragmentation through innovative conservation techniques and practices. The implementation of these tools furthers conservation, economic, and recreational goals, while improving natural habitat and enhancing highly productive and healthy timber growth.

Maine Audubon, founded in 1902, is a non-profit wildlife conservation organization. Over the past 30 years, Maine Audubon has worked with a variety of partners and landowners to promote forest habitat protection, stewardship, and sustainable management including riparian and aquatic habitat protection and restoration. We have been integrally involved in identifying high value landscapes and habitats for protection through acquisition and easements. We have led efforts to create sustainable management standards regarding wildlife and biodiversity; developed Habitat Management Guidelines for management around vernal pools; created the Focus Species Forestry program to assist foresters and landowners with managing for biodiversity; and are currently working with foresters, loggers, land trusts, and landowners to encourage managing forests "with birds in mind" through our Forestry for Maine Birds program. Over the past 4 years, Maine Audubon has been leading training efforts for contractors, engineers, landowners, and foresters across Maine to replace poorly functioning stream crossings with new crossings that "let the stream act like a stream" through our Stream Smart program to improve passage for fish and other aquatic species and reduce road damage from heavy storms. We have partnered with many other organizations and agencies to survey road-stream crossings statewide and rank them as a barrier, a partial barrier, or not a barrier in order to work with landowners to develop a prioritized barrier replacement plan.

The Trust for Public Land was founded in 1972 as a national non-profit with goals of protecting land for people, working from Main Street to mountain tops. Over the years, our broad experience has made us a national leader and innovator in landscape conservation, park creation, state and local conservation funding, and using GIS for conservation planning. The Trust for Public Land has been working in Maine since 1993 and has conserved over 156,000 acres across the state. The Trust for Public Land brings the full resources of the national organization to Maine to identify conservation opportunities, negotiate and secure land transactions, structure long-term ownership for a variety of outcomes, and raise the public and private funding necessary to see the opportunities to completion.
2. Specify the geographic focus of the project area. This can be based on habitat type, land uses, political jurisdiction of State or local government, or any other appropriate method to identify the project area. Note that the project area does not need to be contiguous, but all areas should have a common primary resource concern that the project addresses.

The focus is a 2.7 million-acre, nationally significant wildlife-corridor primarily defined by the upper Androscoggin River and Kennebec River watersheds of New Hampshire and Maine. The southern geographic extent is defined by the southern edge of the Mahoosuc Range and the White Mountain National Forest to the large conserved land base around Moosehead Lake. This area is designated as a pilot area under the New England Forests and Rivers Landscape for the America's Great Outdoors Initiative.
3. Identify the project objectives and the natural resource concerns that the project will address and how the partners identified those concerns, see listing of priority resource concerns in Section II.B. A complete list of NRCS approved natural resource concerns may be found on the RCPP Web site at:

This RCPP proposal builds on a remarkable legacy of land and habitat conservation success across the nationally significant habitat corridor of Maine’s Northern Forest. The proposal puts a new focus on the important need - a need also recognized across New England’s broader Northern Forest - to improve fish and wildlife habitat. The primary goal of this project is to increase the financial and technical assistance available to private forest owners via two RCPP opportunities, Healthy Reserve Forest Program (HRFP) and Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), to tie forest and aquatic habitat improvement outcomes with triple bottom-line outcomes for forest landowners: maintain healthy intact forests, keeping forests as forests, including working forest conservation easements on 10,700 acres, increase the productivity and the flow of products and services from the working forests and forest-based local economies, and support biodiversity and other key ecological values.

Our outcomes will maintain contiguous blocks of forests, improve their management for both rare (federal and state listed) and more common species of wildlife, and will protect and enhance water quality, aquatic habitat, and aquatic connectivity for the benefit of multiple species, including:

- Rare, threatened and endangered species, including Atlantic salmon and Canada Lynx, and Northern Long-eared bat;
- Candidate species for listing, the Bicknell’s thrush; and
- Umbrella species representative of the habitat needs of the great majority of wildlife species that use the Northern Forest for all or a portion of their life cycle.

This RCPP proposal grows out of an established set of nested partnerships working together in a region connecting Maine and New Hampshire’s White Mountains to Maine’s Moosehead Lake region, including the community-centered Mahoosuc Initiative and High Peaks Alliance; the White Mountains to Moosehead Lake Initiative, which seeks to link the benefits of habitat, recreation, and the forest products industry in an area of 2.7 million acres, and the efforts of the Mountain Conservancy Collaborative to conserve a broad Northern Appalachians habitat corridor. The partners working together in these different initiatives are already delivering at different scales an array of fish and wildlife habitat protections, efforts to restore aquatic connectivity, recreational improvements, and activities aimed at strengthening communities across the landscape. This is an effort to coordinate, strengthen and supplement them.

To maximize success, we will focus efforts geographically, combine partner and NRCS expertise in forest management practices, improve landowner outreach tools, provide innovative financial incentives for improved forest management, and provide access to the latest scientific support and data management systems. Since our project addresses multi-state scale issues that are common across northeastern borderlands, in subsequent years, after piloting these activities in the areas focused in Maine’s high peaks, project partners intend to expand the work geographically to, and achieve similar outcomes at a multi-state scale.

The region that is the focus of this proposal includes the mountain corridor where New England’s Northern Forest narrows between a 14 million acre block of the Northern Forest in Maine and 12 million acres of large Northern Forest habitat areas in Vermont and New York. This region has been identified in various analyses on climate change, including The Nature Conservancy’s “Resilient Sites for Terrestrial Conservation” (Anderson, Clark, and Sheldon, 2012), as a priority area for maintaining climate-resilient habitats. In addition, Two Countries, One Forest prioritizes the corridor as a key point of connectivity under the “Staying Connected” initiative. Additional work supporting proposed outcomes include: work by the Cooperative Forestry Research Unit of the University of Maine on Canadian lynx and pine marten, Maine State Wildlife Action Plans, State fishery plans, and US Fish & Wildlife Service analysis of the needs of Atlantic salmon. The landscape is designates a pilot area under the New England Forests and Rivers Landscape for the America’s Great Outdoors Initiative, and The North Atlantic Landscape Conservation Cooperative designated this landscape and the partnership under this RCPP as a formal “demonstration project” with a grant awarded in 2012.
4. A general description of the plans for evaluating outcomes, including plans for monitoring and modeling, and for reporting on progress to achieve the objectives of the application.

Outcomes will be evaluated by reporting:

- Acres covered by perpetual working forest easements drafted to manage properties for the benefit of federal and state agency-listed rare, threatened or endangered species.
- Scope of monitoring agreements in place under these easements consistent with the partners' standard protocols to ensure compliance.
- An evaluation at the end of the project period of how the habitats covered by these easements differ from those in the surrounding landscape subject to business as usual management and projections of results in 10 years.
- Acres covered by 30 year contracts to manage properties consistent with standards to benefit forest wildlife species more generally. These specifications cover such topics as species of trees, stocking, growth > to harvest, management for umbrella wildlife species, protection of special habitats, etc. A draft of these specifications will be provided in a full proposal if selected.
- Acres covered by 30 year contracts to maintain and increase stocking to move older stands toward late successional old growth status and rehabilitate stands with low stocking.
- A projection of how compliance with the specifications for management to benefit habitat may affect timber harvest and carbon storage in 10 and 30 years.
- Average and number of new acres under forest management plans designed to improve fish and wildlife habitat.
- Number of stream habitat miles reconnected for Atlantic salmon
- Number of stream barriers removed or replaced with Stream Smart solutions
- A tracking and delineating of a “pathway” of engagement for landowners from initial outreach to implementation of conservation activities on the ground.

The partners in this proposal will use cutting-edge Geographic Information Systems (GIS), drawing from the expertise of The Trust for Public Land, the Nature Conservancy, and others, to prioritize work with landowners under this proposal, and to quantify and track outcomes against the above listed metrics. For example, a North Atlantic Landscape Conservation Cooperative grant was used to help develop a “public platform” using DataBasin. This portal contains myriad spatial data sets corresponding to our conservation objectives. These data include defined habitat for species, watershed data from the U.S. Forest Service Forests to Faucets Initiative, forest soils data from U.S. Geological Survey, and a host of modeled results, developed by collaborating partners.

The project will also take advantage of and expand a Measures of Progress tool that tracks actual conservation progress against metrics at the project level and cumulatively for a number of projects over time. Users can click a particular metric, such as “Private Workable Forests” and see the number of acres of that objective achieved on each project, cumulative accomplishments on that metric by year and historical (starting from 2007 baseline). Finally, the tool allows users to see the rate of progress toward meeting objectives based on reported results, and shows the cumulative accomplishments against the total number of acres for that feature in the entire landscape.

These two tools together have are already proven effective in both helping to target coordinated conservation efforts and align work with forest landowners and forest manufacturers to enhance the regional forest economy. Looking to the future, these tools will help provide an overall evaluation as to whether or not the activities under this RCPP have measurably improved fish and wildlife habitats and the scale of activity that would be needed to enhance habitat over a broader region.
5. A brief description of the types and sequence of implementation of conservation practices that the project will implement, for example: conservation activity plans (EQIP only), enhancements (CSP only), wetland restoration activities (ACEP, HFRR, sponsor-held floodplain easements), easement acquisition activities (ACEP, HFRR, sponsor-held floodplain easements), other partner activities to be implemented during the project timeframe.

Easements to enhance the habitats for federally and state “listed” species:
Partners propose to utilize HFRR to acquire easements designed to improve habitats for federally and state “listed” species from large, non-industrial landowners. There are three opportunities to protect about 10,700 acres with value for these species in 2016: Perham Stream (6,400 ac), Lone Mountain (1,255 ac), and Saddleback Mountain (3,455 ac). Protection of these parcels will make possible specific outcome-oriented forest management practices and riparian corridor restoration investments to achieve critical conservation objectives.

All three projects will leverage public and private sources at least 1:1. They are eligible for a currently allocated $2,000,000 in Department of Defense Readiness and Environmental Preparedness Initiative (REPI) funds, and an application is pending for additional funds through the REPI Challenge Grant. Private grant applications are also pending.

TPL and the New England Forest Foundation (NEFF) will work together to acquire the Perham Stream property, subject to a permanent easement. Lone Mountain is currently owned by a private party interested in managing for biodiversity consistent with HFRR objectives, and the objective for the Saddleback parcel is to replicate the Perham ownership structure. NEFF’s objective is to manage Perham as a model of forestry designed to enhance habitat for listed species and biodiversity in the face of climate change, while also enhancing long-term timber management outcomes.

Improved forest habitat management through targeted outreach and innovative financial incentives:
Project partners will also deploy innovative strategies to engage private forest owners in improving wildlife habitat. The goal is to provide a matrix of well-managed forests that explicitly address habitat improvements around already protected parcels by:
- Utilizing GIS capacity, integrated with work of the Mountain Conservancy Collaborative to identify priority habitat areas to identify priority areas with important habitat values.
- Implementing an innovative marketing strategy, led by American Forest Foundation, to engage landowners, align their timber objectives with conservation outcomes, and implement a sustained strategy for follow-up.
- Employing a natural resource professional to work with interested landowners and regional consulting foresters to make best use of resources available to improve forest management practices,
- Utilizing existing EQIP-approved practices and resources to help landowners create or update Conservation Activity Plans for forestry and fish and wildlife management, including: implementing improved forest practices using Maine Audubon’s “Forestry for Maine Birds, “ enhancing riparian forest buffers and removing in-stream barriers for Atlantic salmon habitat, managing for early successional habitat areas to benefit Canada lynx, and incorporating best management practices for northern long eared bat based on best available science.
- Providing payments to landowners willing to commit to improved forest management for 30 years. Partners will draw from NRCS experience elsewhere (using HFRR and EQIP) to create an innovative “reverse-auction” to determine a price landowners would need to be paid in exchange for 30-year contracts to manage the forests consistent with Acadian Forest specifications to enhance biodiversity in a changing climate and work toward age class distributions that optimize forest habitat values.
- Creating a “stakeholder” group to help shape the program, which will be comprised of landowners, land stewardship experts, NGO partners, and provide the opportunity to involve underserved constituencies and Native Americans.
- Evaluating the effectiveness of these measures, progress and impact through time, and making adjustments.

Restoring and maintaining habitat connectivity:
Maine Audubon and partners will build on past efforts to educate landowners about Stream Smart road crossings and their benefits for both habitat and road infrastructure. Stream Smart outreach is an innovative multi-organization collaboration led by Maine Audubon, which provides training for landowners and professionals responsible for road-stream crossings (streamsmartmaine.org). Maine Audubon will use its spatial inventory of impacted corridors and stream barriers to prioritize locations for habitat conservation and restoration activities. Partners will work with landowners to access EQIP’s aquatic organism passage stream crossing cost-share program, and estimate replacing and/or removing approximately 30 culvert road-stream barriers over a two year period.
6. If applicable, indicate how the project will “assist producers in meeting or avoiding the need for natural resource regulatory requirements.” Section 12718(d)(4)(A) of the 1985 Act.

A benefit of this project for landowners will be to help reduce for regulatory requirements associated with listed species and candidate species on a regional and property level by improved habitat for these species, and hence, the need for regulatory approaches. Listed species of relevance in this landscape include Atlantic salmon and Canada lynx, and potential future candidate species include Bicknell's thrush. Helping to promote effective management of habitats, specifically through enrollment in HFPR, which contains “safe harbor-like” protections, for these and other sensitive species will reduce future conflicts.
7. A description of any requested program adjustments of terms (adjustments to regulations or policy), including AGI waivers, by covered program, with an explanation of why the adjustment of terms is needed in order to achieve the objectives of the project.

Our application anticipates requesting two adjustments to the terms of the program:

1) Implementing this proposal will likely require increasing acceptable adjusted gross income levels and will require adjustments necessary to allow the reverse auctions and practices called for to implement improved forest habitat.

2) Meeting the priority goal of improving fish and wildlife habitat will require developing management plans for landowners that incorporate key wildlife considerations and forest management activities into forest management plans. To streamline for efficiency and ensure success meeting the priority goal, we will need to develop forest management plans concurrently with fish and wildlife management plans. Therefore we are requesting a waiver of the requirement that Conservation Activity Plans (CAPS) for forest management and fish and wildlife plans not be funded in the same year under NRCS EQIP.
8. Whether and how the project requests alternative funding arrangements.

N/A
9. Any additional information that has not specifically been requested but will help reviewers understand your proposal.

The overarching theme, which all proposed elements address, is improving “inadequate fish and wildlife habitats.” The projects will be regional in scope, but targeted in practice. The project will pilot the approach and strategy in a Maine-centered priority geography, with the goal of replicating successes across the landscape in the future. This project is scalable with discrete budgets for specific activities.

The partners have come together to integrate and expand their efforts through collaboration with each other and with NRCS. Many of the proposed activities reflect innovations developed by partners, either independently, or in collaboration with other potential partners in the region. Innovative aspects include:

- The Stream Smart program as a highly innovative, successful and collaborative project with over a dozen active partners contributing significant technical expertise. Since 2012, Stream Smart has held 28 workshops training over 750 road professionals including contractors, engineers, consultants, landowners and foresters statewide. The newly launched website (streamsmartmaine.org) provides tools, resources, and videos to practitioners.
- Because 92% of the forested land in the area is privately owned and less than 40% of those owners have sought professional forestry advice on woodland management (Butler et al., 2014), implementing these conservation activities on a landscape-scale will require effective outreach to private woodland owners.
- Outreach must include messages relevant to the reasons why individuals own their land, be sustained over a sufficient time period, include follow-up that provides for consistent communications and support for landowners, and provide education, tools and incentives that reduce landowners’ perceived barriers to action (Sustaining Family Forest Initiative; 2007, 2014, 2015). The American Forest Foundation’s successful landowner outreach pilot programs across 10 U.S. landscapes has confirmed and deepened our understanding of these principles (Greenberg, 2014).
- The “public platform” GIS for integrating and visualizing landscape information and the “Measures of Progress” GIS tool were developed specifically for this landscape to track conservation progress against metrics at the project level and cumulatively over time. In combination these tools will help partners’ work in this landscape conserve whole systems and deliver their respective missions, tie parcel-level actions to landscape-level objectives, and move the finish line from acres to outcomes.
- The New England Forestry Foundation has developed a draft of simple and measurable specifications for forestry practices that promote biodiversity in the face of a changing climate. These draft specifications have been developed with input from wildlife biologists and silviculturists knowledgeable in recent scientific findings on the most effective practices. The final specifications would be developed with a group of advisors convened for this purpose. The specifications can become the basis for consideration for restoration plans for landowners who seek to participate in reverse auctions.
- The proposed reverse auctions as a basis for 30-year contracts will be an innovative tool to provide both effective conservation outcomes and ensure the maximum effectiveness of conservation dollars spent.
- If possible, the partners would like to explore ways of providing for longer-term evaluation of the environmental outcomes of these measures over 30 years, such as through access to dedicated funding through an escrow account or some other mechanism that will assure that the funding is available when needed. For example, a final evaluation of compliance and impacts at the end of the 30-year period would be extremely useful.
- A stakeholder group will be formed to ensure the implementation and connections with other related efforts and local interests. Invitations to participants will be extended to underserved constituencies (e.g., small landowners) and Native Americans.

This project would complement others underway, including:

- Efforts of local, regional, and national organizations to acquire easements on forest lands throughout the region in Maine.
- The Wildlands and Woodlands vision for retaining 30 million acres of forest land in New England.
- State and local zoning and land use controls – e.g., by the Land Use Planning Commission in Maine.
- State Natural Heritage Program efforts to maintain and enhance biodiversity.
- Efforts by the region’s environmental nongovernment organization’s community to enhance wildlife habitats – e.g., Maine’s Beginning with Habitat program.