

INTO THE WOODS

NEW ENGLAND FORESTRY FOUNDATION | SUMMER 2020

NEFF Launches Climate Challenge

PAGE 3

MEET THE EASTERN
HEMLOCK

PAGE 7

STAYING CONNECTED

PAGE 9

A CONSERVATION JOURNEY

PAGE 11



NEW ENGLAND
FORESTRY
FOUNDATION

Board of Directors

PRESIDENT

Philip Y. DeNormandie

TREASURER

Robert W. Ackerman

CLERK

Frederick (Rick) J. Weyerhaeuser

ADDITIONAL DIRECTORS

Laurence (Larry) Band

Christopher (Chris) di Bonaventura

Cameron Brandt

Irene Sedgwick Briedis

Andrea (Andi) Colnes

Frederick (Rick) Findlay

Michael Lehner

G. Montgomery (Monty) Lovejoy III

David (Tracy) Moskovitz

Richard (Dick) F. Perkins

Robert (Bob) Perschel

Todd Rodman

Anne Stetson

John van der Stricht

HONORARY BOARD MEMBER

Bayard Henry



**NEW ENGLAND
FORESTRY
FOUNDATION**

32 Foster Street | P.O. Box 1346

Littleton, MA 01460

978.952.6856 | newenglandforestry.org

This publication is printed on Monadnock Astrolite PC 100, a third-party certified, 100% post-consumer recycled paper, produced using 100% clean, renewable electric power. Astrolite PC 100 is an environmentally responsible choice.

Many thanks to Monadnock Paper Mills of Bennington, NH for their support in this endeavor.

Exemplary Forestry and *Exemplary Forest Management* are trademarks of New England Forestry Foundation, Inc.

Dear Members and Friends,

I remember filling a time capsule with objects like yearbooks and a copy of *Catcher in the Rye* in high school as we wondered what students in the future would think of the events that were happening in our world. That's what it feels like to be writing to you from the distant past of early April, because right now, I have little idea what our world will be like in June. In writing these Executive Director letters for NEFF's newsletter, I previously have felt so much more certainty to predict a few months out. Now, I know only that I hope you and your loved ones are well and safe, and the news is more promising than it is today and the path forward clearer.

I hope the natural world has given you some solace; to date NEFF has been able to keep all of our Community Forests open to help you to relax, enjoy and rejuvenate. I hope we are at least beginning to learn that we can meet these kinds of global challenges if we work together, and I hope that we can bring the power of collective action to the threats of both pandemics and climate change.

I hope our journey through the COVID-19 health emergency—and related economic chaos and disruption to our lives—has provided a new appreciation for the beauty and continuity of nature and the need to protect our special places.

Thankfully, there are some things I don't have to hope for. I know that spring came again and that you saw the first shoots break through the muddy ground. I know that the snows melted away from our northern forests and one day the ice went out of the lakes and ponds and your heart rejoiced. I am certain the wild geese returned, slicing through the morning air, calling to you from overhead and announcing—as the poet Mary Oliver said—“your place in the family of things.”

I know that you will have encouraged us to continue our mission to conserve New England's forests and that our staff will have responded by welcoming you outside and doing our best to bring the outdoors to you through new tools and social media. I am certain by June we will have more good things to report on how Exemplary Forestry can mitigate climate change and how our network of supporters for this concept is growing.

Here's to June. Here's to you and NEFF and a new appreciation of what we have, what we want to keep, and a new path forward!

Robert Perschel, Executive Director

3

NEFF LAUNCHES CLIMATE CHALLENGE

7

MEET THE EASTERN HEMLOCK

9

STAYING CONNECTED

11

A CONSERVATION JOURNEY

RIGHT: Interior boat woodwork by shipbuilder James Donovan and his company, First Light Boatworks. See p. 11–14 on how a childhood interest in nature and building wooden boats led to Donovan protecting 350 acres of working Maine forestland.

BACK COVER: Merrill Mountain Community Forest



NEFF LAUNCHES CLIMATE CHALLENGE

Want to help reduce the climate crisis and create a more livable New England? Join the Forest-to-Cities Climate Challenge.

WRITING BY

Jennifer Shakun, Frank Lowenstein and Tinsley Hunsdorfer

New England Forestry Foundation (NEFF) is pleased to announce the official launch of its Forest-to-Cities Climate Challenge, NEFF's newest initiative and a key component of our climate program. The initiative is an explicitly cooperative undertaking that calls on humanity's ability to enact change through collective movements—an approach that is especially relevant today when we've had to pull together as a society to confront COVID-19 and its repercussions.

Throughout this past winter and spring, NEFF staff members refined the Challenge and laid the groundwork for its launch by soliciting feedback from key stakeholders, speaking about the initiative at conventions, and developing a striking and easy-to-use website (see page 6).

Now that all of the pieces are in place and NEFF can fully unveil the Forest-to-Cities Climate Challenge, we hope participants find it an exciting and motivating way to band together and face the climate crisis head-on.



Rhode Island School of Design's North Hall, the first cross-laminated timber-steel hybrid residence hall in New England. Photo by John Horner, courtesy of Rhode Island School of Design.

There's a lot to recommend tall buildings made with mass timber, and their positive impact on climate, urban development and the economy only increases when the mass timber is engineered from sustainably grown and regionally sourced wood. Although common in Europe, such buildings are still in the early stages of market acceptance here in the United States, with relatively small numbers built or under construction. That's where NEFF comes in. The Forest-to-Cities Climate Challenge is designed to break down barriers to mass timber construction and raise awareness of its advantages so that more of these buildings are constructed, and are also eventually made from New England wood.

It also seeks to build an integrated carbon value chain, not just a supply chain based on dollars. By securing carbon in both forests and in buildings, the Challenge seeks to maximize the contributions of New England forests and wood buildings in solving the climate crisis.

The Challenge asks stakeholders—from the forests where the wood is grown to the cities where people will live in tall wood buildings—to voice unified support by signing a simple pledge. The pledge articulates how we can use New England's forests and mass timber construction to grow, build, and live in a way that combats climate change and benefits both rural and urban communities:

We support using New England's forests and building with wood to fight climate change. Please count on us to be part of a community of interest—from our forests to our cities—that is committed to maximizing the climate benefits of forests and wood construction. We pledge to support sustainable mass timber as a climate solution because it is a win for the forest, a win for the rural economy, a win for urban quality of life, and a win for the planet's health.

The Big Picture

NEFF's ultimate goal is to help shape an economic system that links mass timber buildings in New England with the local forests that sustainably generate the wood for them.

At NEFF, mitigating and adapting to climate change is part of our organizational mission, and NEFF's work to conserve New England's forests and ensure their outstanding management has already contributed to a minor degree to abating the severity of the climate crisis. Society as a whole, however, has been slow to respond to scientific warnings that began in the late 1800s. Although by 1992 the nations of the world, including the United States, had committed to "stabilization of greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere" in the landmark UN Framework Convention on Climate Change,



emissions continue to rise and half of all carbon dioxide emissions ever released were produced in just the last 30 years.

Climate change is a deeply systemic problem—the toughest kind to solve. It is related to everything from how we use land and grow our food to how we power our industries, build our cities, and travel for work and pleasure. Solutions that recognize how our natural, economic, and socio-political systems are interconnected are the only way to tackle a problem of this scale.

And this idea is at the heart of the Forest-to-Cities Climate Challenge—an effort to connect our forests to our cities and move the needle on climate change by bringing together a diverse coalition of people who are committed to building a more sustainable future for New England, a future built with wood from our region's forests. The initiative will accelerate the work we have done over the last five years through our Build It With Wood program to promote the use of engineered wood products made from sustainably harvested timber as a climate solution.

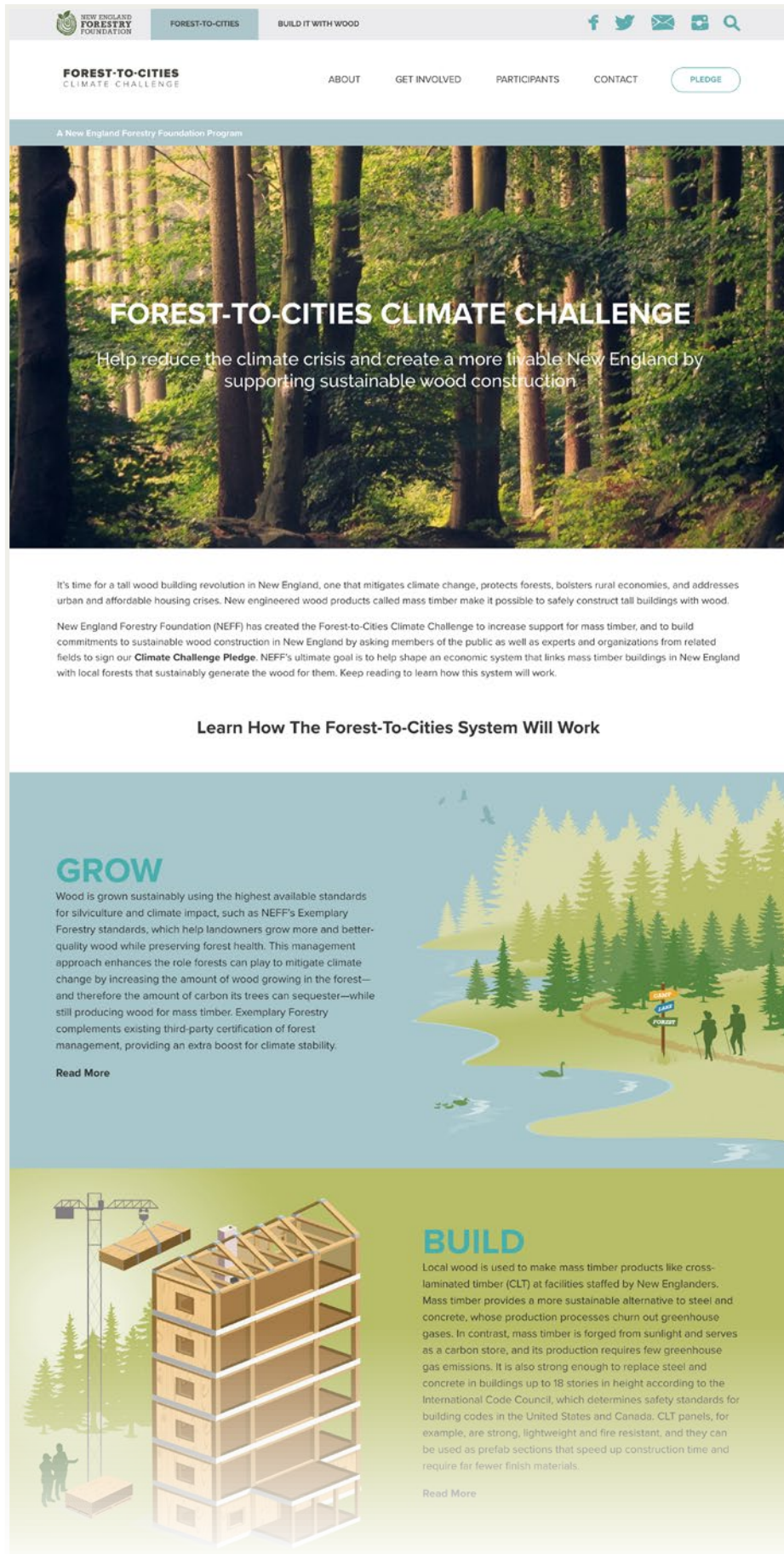
Each segment of the supply chain has a unique role to play in helping bring this vision to reality—landowners and foresters can commit to practicing climate-friendly forestry, architects can educate clients about the aesthetic

and environmental benefits of mass timber, and policy-makers can develop incentives that will drive the use of more sustainable construction materials. NEFF is working to foster a community among the growing group of people who have signed the Forest-to-Cities pledge to identify the common actions that will place sustainably-sourced mass timber at the heart of hundreds of new construction projects in our region.

What makes the Forest-to-Cities approach so promising is that it addresses the environmental, economic, and socio-political aspects of the problem in front of us. It is a solution that will boost rural forest-based economies by creating new markets for local wood; it will also boost urban and suburban areas by creating a more cost-effective way to build mid-rise housing, thereby helping to maintain affordability for families and ensuring that employers can find the workers they need. It is a solution that promotes management of working forests to both produce locally-grown, renewable wood and to maintain high levels of carbon in a vibrant self-renewing forest, and that recognizes the need for ecological reserves as well. And, perhaps most importantly, it is a solution that links rural and urban communities in a positive way that unites constituents who often feel they don't have many interests in common with each other.



LEFT: A fir tree in Downeast Maine. This is one of the trees approved for use in structural cross-laminated timber. Photo by Lauren Owens Lambert. ABOVE: Cross-laminated timber slab. Photo by Charlie Reinertsen. RIGHT: NEFF's New Forest-to-Cities Climate Challenge website



The key to developing solutions to climate change is recognizing interconnections. We can't have truly climate-friendly wood products for construction without a local wood supply, because shipping in wood from a world away involves high transportation emissions and hidden environmental costs. Likewise, we can't have climate-friendly wood products without ensuring that they come from well-managed forests that continue to store carbon and provide other forest ecosystem services like clean air and water. We can't practice good forestry without forestland conservation because an ever-more developed and fragmented landscape makes harvesting logistically and financially impossible. Nor can we have policies that incentivize low-carbon construction without the necessary political support, which means that rural and urban constituencies need to see a positive future for themselves in the Forest-to-Cities landscape.

Head to foresttocities.org to explore the new website and take the pledge.

Tackling the challenge of climate change will require participation and cooperation across all sectors of society, and the Forest-to-Cities Climate Challenge is a powerful opportunity to unite stakeholders toward a common goal. More than 50 individuals and organizations have already signed the pledge, including landowners, foresters, architects, engineers, and other supporters. With our new Forest-to-Cities website, we are poised to grow the ranks quickly. Everyone who is inspired by this vision is invited to sign the pledge and help us spread the word. Together we can push forward a promising climate change solution for New England that leverages one of our most precious assets as a region—our forests—to combat one of the world's biggest challenges—a changing climate. 🌿

MEET THE EASTERN HEMLOCK

WRITING BY NEFF Director of Forest Stewardship Chris Pryor

The Eastern Hemlock is the tree with the longest lifespan in the eastern forest. It can live to be more than 800 years old, rivaling some of the giant trees of the Pacific Coast—the Coast Redwood, the Sitka Spruce, and the much larger Western Hemlock.

Eastern Hemlock naturally occurs as far north as the southern portions of Canada from Nova Scotia west through Ontario and into the lake states of Wisconsin and Michigan. It extends south through the mid-Atlantic states and continues south along the Appalachian Mountains into Tennessee, North Carolina, and the northern reaches of both Georgia and Alabama.

IDENTIFICATION

Eastern Hemlock is an evergreen conifer and so retains its needles year-round. Its short, shiny, dark green needles are flat with two parallel white lines along the underside. The bark on mature hemlocks becomes a reddish-brown with wide, flat ridges. Hemlock bark was the primary source of tannin for the leather industry in colonial America, which led to widespread harvesting of hemlock simply for its bark. Synthetic tanning agents replaced hemlock in the early 20th century.



Future Challenges

An invasive insect called the Hemlock Woolly Adelgid (HWA) poses a major threat to the Eastern Hemlock's future. It is native to Asia and is thought to have been brought to the United States in the mid-1900s on nursery stock from Japan. HWA is a tiny insect that feeds on the sap of hemlocks by inserting its straw-like mouthpart at the base of the hemlock's needles, stealing the nutrients needed by the needles and causing them to fall off. Without needles, the tree rapidly dies. The adelgids cover themselves in a white, cottony substance for protection, which makes identification easy.

The insect's northward spread was thought to be constrained by sustained, cold winter temperatures, but the effects of

climate change threaten to remove that barrier and open up more of New England's forests to the HWA. With no natural predators in New England and little to no natural resistance in Eastern Hemlock, it is difficult to control this insect in a forest setting. Pesticides and horticultural oil can be used on high-value ornamental trees, but they are not viable for widespread use. Biological control using either fungal pathogens or other predatory or parasitic insects show potential but requires more research. The loss of the Eastern Hemlock would be a serious blow to the beauty and biodiversity of New England's forests, so we can hope these efforts are successful.

AGE

Eastern Hemlock is one of the most shade-tolerant trees in New England. This trait allows it to retain its lower branches much longer than other species and survive for many years in the deep shade of the forest canopy. An Eastern Hemlock tree growing in deep shade that is shorter than a person and scarcely thicker than a thumb may be fifty years old, awaiting an opening that will provide it with the light to grow taller.

GROWING CONDITIONS AND MANAGEMENT

Across its range, the Eastern Hemlock can grow on a variety of sites. It is more often associated with moist sites like those along streams, wetlands, and seeps, but can also be found on drier, shallow soils on top of ledges.

Eastern Hemlock is not a particularly valuable species from a timber perspective, so it is not often managed for harvesting, but instead for its ecological value. Hemlock can be managed and regenerated using both even-aged and uneven-aged management techniques, but both require starting regeneration under a partial canopy. Hemlock would be outcompeted by faster growing hardwoods and softwoods under full sunlit conditions. New research at the University of Massachusetts may open up opportunities to use hemlock in cross-laminated timber buildings, which could create new markets for the wood.

SIZE

60-70' Typical height
1-2' Normal diameter

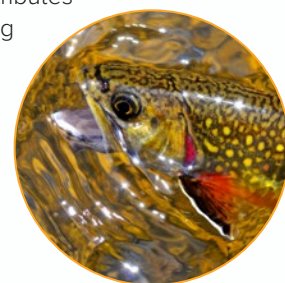
However, the Eastern Hemlock can be more than 3 feet in diameter and more than 100 feet tall under the right circumstances.



WILDLIFE HABITAT

Hemlock is an important component of the forest when it comes to wildlife habitat, and numerous mammals both large and small feed on it. Deer and moose will browse the new growth and needles, while squirrels, chipmunks, voles, and other rodents will eat the seeds. Porcupines are known to clip off branch tips while feeding in the canopy. The Black-throated Green Warbler and the Blue-headed Vireo depend on forests that contain hemlock.

Hemlock stands also provide critical winter habitat for White-tailed Deer; their dense canopies and strong branches will hold snow overhead, allowing the deer to move more easily and to access forage in the shallower snow depths below the canopy. Hemlock also contributes to aquatic habitats as well by providing dense, year-round shade on streams, which keeps water temperatures colder—a critical feature required for native brook trout.



STAYING CONNECTED

A MESSAGE FROM NEFF Communications Manager Tinsley Hunsdorfer

NEFF's staff wants to stay in touch with our community during the COVID-19 pandemic and provide whatever support we can. Learn what to expect from NEFF communications in the coming months, and explore ways to stay connected with us.

While the *Into the Woods* issue you hold in your hands arrived in June, NEFF staff members finished writing it in April in order to leave time for production and shipping. Not knowing what would happen in those intervening months, I gave thought this spring to how the newsletter's articles would play out in various future COVID-19 scenarios, and concluded there's not really a bad time to learn about hemlocks, and signing the Forest-to-Cities Climate Challenge pledge would be meaningful whether or not it was done while sheltering at home.

This piece, about staying connected during the time of the coronavirus, presented a bit more of a challenge. While it's guaranteed to be relevant this

summer, we live in fast-moving times, and what our community needs from NEFF and the natural world will likely change between April and June. The best I can do is share NEFF's current plans for supporting and staying engaged with our community, and pledge to keep our communications respectful and helpful if plans do change down the road.

NEFF's most basic communications goal for the COVID-19 outbreak is to help our community weather the storm. We will stay in touch, regularly share new material in hopes of providing moments of respite and wonder, and keep everyone up to date about NEFF's ongoing Exemplary Forestry, climate, and conservation work—and listen to your stories in turn.

Stuck inside? Our land stewardship team has launched a photo-heavy "Updates From the Field" series on NEFF's website. Bored? We've got a variety of interesting blog posts lined up, and you can always visit our website's fascinating publications

section. Stressed and heartsore? We regularly share soothing, beautiful and fun videos and photos on social media.

As of April 2020, NEFF is using email newsletters, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and various NEFF website features to connect with our supporters and friends, and we hope you'll use them to stay in touch with us. I particularly encourage you to sign up for NEFF's email newsletter, which is our best tool for sharing urgent news and also serves as a digest for blog posts and major stories. You can explore these ways to stay connected using the links below.

On the opposite page, we have also included example NEFF stories and posts from the COVID-19 era. If they appeal to you or seem helpful, I can say with confidence that you will appreciate the posts we are currently sharing with NEFF community members like you, even if the topics and tone have shifted somewhat to reflect changes in the wider world. After all, at heart, NEFF is always about the forests.

As I wrap up this piece from my home in Rhode Island—with a tabby cat curled by my side and a spring storm rattling my windows—know that I am wishing with everything I've got that by the time my words reach your mailbox, you and those you hold dear will be healthy, safe and secure. No matter what happens, however, you are in my thoughts, and the thoughts of all of us at NEFF. May we all find solace in the green and growing things of summer. 🌿

EMAIL NEWSLETTER SIGNUP AND STAFF CONTACT FORM:

newenglandforestry.org/connect/contact-us

BLOG POSTS:

newenglandforestry.org/connect/blog

NEFF PUBLICATIONS:

newenglandforestry.org/connect/publications

SOCIAL MEDIA:

facebook.com/neforestry

twitter.com/neforestry

instagram.com/neforestry

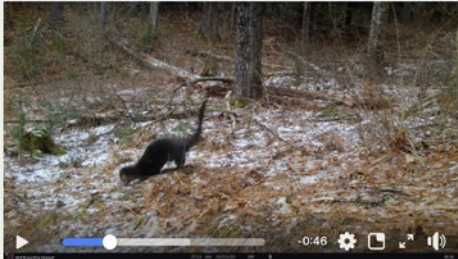
COMMUNITY FOREST UPDATES:

[newenglandforestry.org/
explore/explore-our-forests](http://newenglandforestry.org/explore/explore-our-forests)

Facebook

New England Forestry Foundation
April 1 · 🌐

We recently placed remote, motion-activated cameras on land in the Berkshires that will soon be protected by a NEFF conservation restriction. Throughout March, the cameras documented beavers, bobcats and playful otters. Have some vicarious fun by watching a compilation of the otter footage.



EXAMPLE NEFF
STORIES AND SOCIAL
MEDIA POSTS

Blog Post



By New England Forestry Foundation Posted April 17, 2020

Notes From The Field: Rocky Pond Community Forest

Writing and photography by NEFF Stewardship Associate Beth Gule

During the first month of spring, NEFF's land stewardship department usually ramps up field-based work, in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic, however, we've instead been scaling back in order to keep ourselves and the public safe. Limiting travel distance, as well as close contact with others and the potential for injury, has meant that we are sticking closer to home. **Just like we recommend NEFF Community Forest visitors do.**

I picked a sunny, warm day this week to head over to **Rocky Pond Community Forest**, a NEFF property in Boylston, MA, just a few exits south off I-495 from our office. My task was to GPS trails to improve our property maps and assess conditions after the previous days' wind storm. Associated perks of the job included enjoying the fresh air and scenic views of the pond, and finding signs of the forest waking up after winter dormancy.

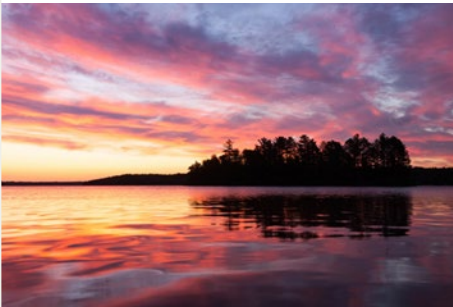


Rock tripe, a large disc-shaped lichen, covers many of the huge boulders scattered across the landscape



Email Newsletter

NEW ENGLAND FORESTRY FOUNDATION



We've never walked this trail before—let's walk it together.

I'm reaching out to you today because I, and the entire NEFF community, value you as a friend. You have demonstrated your care for us and we, in turn, want to show that we care about you.

You have supported NEFF in different ways and at various times, but now it's most important to make health and safety for yourself and loved ones your top priority. Yes, our work will go on because our extended family is made up of people like you. We want to help you do just that. Perhaps the most tangible thing we offer is the opportunity to be outside on any of our **150 Community Forests**. Nature remains open for business. In a time of social distancing, there is still much to enjoy in the natural world. Nature heals and replenishes us. Whatever else may happen in the world, the sun rises and sets. Leaves sprout in the spring and the forests come alive. We hope to see you on the trail. Every one of us will wave a friendly hello from the safety of six feet away.

We pledge to continue our work to protect New England's forests and advocate for Exemplary Forestry in whatever form is possible in the coming weeks and months. Yes, our work will go on because our extended family is made up of people like you. I know you are committed to the vision and mission no matter what. In good times and bad, I know you are with us, and that bond will support our staff and the work they do in these most challenging times.


I will be in touch again to bring you up to date on what's happening at NEFF soon. But for now, please take care of yourself and those you hold dear. My best wishes for safety, good health and greater ease in the coming weeks.

Bob Penschel
Bob Penschel, NEFF Executive Director

Twitter

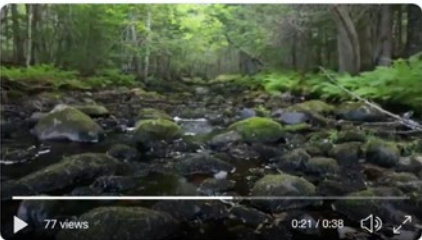
New England Forestry @NEForestry · Apr 14

We recently spotted insect-eating pitcher plants in our Chamberlain Reynolds Memorial Forest. #Spring Check out this @NorthWoodlands story about carnivorous plants to learn more: [northernwoodlands.org/outside_story/...](https://northernwoodlands.org/outside_story/)



New England Forestry @NEForestry · Mar 17

Enjoy a peaceful moment from NEFF's new Reynolds Family Forest in Downeast Maine



77 views 0:21 / 0:38

Instagram

neforestry



56 likes
neforestry Signs of spring: fiddleheads in Westford, MA. What plants are growing in your area?

neforestry



62 likes
neforestry While NEFF offices are closed to keep staff and the public safe, our land stewardship team is still out in the field working to care for and monitor forestland. A staffer spotted this skunk cabbage yesterday at a @sudbury_valley_trustees property where NEFF holds a conservation restriction

neforestry



52 likes
neforestry We give you... a shy porcupine in a log pile. This little guy was spotted at a NEFF Community Forest in New Hampshire



A CONSERVATION JOURNEY

WRITING BY NEFF Communications Manager Tinsley Hunsdorfer

How a childhood interest in nature and building wooden boats led to James Donovan protecting 350 acres of working Maine forestland

This past winter, NEFF celebrated a land-protection win that served as the perfect cap to our 75th anniversary year. James Donovan, co-owner of First Light Boatworks in Chatham, Massachusetts, contacted NEFF in August 2018 looking to purchase and conserve recently harvested Maine timberland. NEFF staff steered him toward a variety of tracts, including one in Hiram. James went on to purchase 353 acres in Hiram, and in December 2019 donated the land to NEFF. The property is now known as the Merrill Mountain Community Forest.

While Merrill Mountain came together in a year and a half, the journey that led to James becoming an active

conservationist was decades in the making. NEFF staff members listened to James' account of this journey—complete with tales of sailing the high seas—during a recent interview, and we're pleased to include a condensed version here.

As the interview made clear, James doesn't just share NEFF's commitment to forest conservation, but also NEFF's belief that wood is an eminently useful, versatile and beautiful material. He makes use of it in a very different field: NEFF advocates for tall mass timber buildings and other sustainable wood products, and James expertly handcrafts wooden boats.

Planting the Seeds

James grew up on Cape Cod in Harwich facing Nantucket Sound, and spent his childhood immersed in nature, whether he was playing in the woods or out on the water. He also enjoyed early, hands-on lessons from his grandfather.

"My grandfather was a lifelong commercial fisherman and part-time boat builder," James said. "When I was 11 years old, my older brother and I were dropped off at our grandparents' place every Saturday for six months to build a 10-foot wooden boat with him, and then I went on to build and sell several dinghies on my own."

While James was giving boatbuilding a trial run as a career, his grandparents were also broadening his geographic horizons by taking the family on regular trips to a camp in Lexington, Maine.



RNEY

“I didn’t travel as a kid, so going to central Maine was a big deal for me, and it was basically mind-blowing to see the difference in ecology and geology,” he said. “I remember to this day encountering that rich conifer smell for the first time.”

The family made this trip two or three times a year until James was 15, and spent their time there hiking, climbing mountains, canoeing, and learning about the woods.

“My grandfather went to Maine every November to hunt, and was able to teach us about different trees and animal tracks,” James said. “Between his lessons and how different Maine was from Cape Cod, I was completely enamored of northern New England forests as a child. So that’s where some of those seeds of conservation came from.”



LEFT: James Donovan compares his company’s line of modern power boats to cross-laminated timber. They use glue and plywood, but still offer the wood-related benefits of his traditionally crafted boats: ‘They’re a much better product than boats built with fiberglass, and smell like wood and natural oils instead of synthetic materials.’ Photo by Christopher Smith Photography NY/Cape Cod

ABOVE: Merrill Mountain Community Forest

In his early teen years, James also started paying attention to conservation back home on the Cape, where a number of land conservation efforts were underway.

“I privately celebrated each victory, but didn’t get involved at that point,” James said. “What struck me most at that age was seeing a forested piece of land I played on as a kid get bulldozed.”

James soon turned much of his attention to career development, and ended up working at the nearby Arey’s Pond Boat Yard from the ages of 16 to 23; he learned the “yacht-building side of things” and other key skill sets. The owner let him build a 30-foot wooden sailboat during his spare time, and it ended up being “one of the defining experiences” of James’s life.

He built the boat traditionally with wood and metal—and without modern materials like plywood or glue. The hull was caulked with cotton and fastened with copper rivets.

“I discovered that my real passion is traditional wooden boat building,”

“Wood makes a better product for boats than fiberglass, and while it’s a little more expensive, there’s an artistry to wood.”

James said. “It’s a process that requires extensive and unique skills, and where every piece is shaped by human hands.”

While James had come to prefer the traditional approach, he was still happy to build wooden boats of all types.

“Wood makes a better product for boats than fiberglass, and while it’s a little more expensive, there’s an artistry to wood,” James said. “I just feel like wood is legitimately a better material for a lot of things.”

An Overseas Adventure

James launched his boat in 2004, and in 2005 headed south, made it to the Caribbean, and then decided to just keep sailing for another four years. He visited Europe, Central American and the South Pacific, and wrapped up his journey in Hawaii.

“I had this wonderful experience of travelling around the world and being on the oceans,” James said. “I think one of my longest voyages was 24 days in the South Pacific without any sightings of land, other boats, or airplanes. I was really interacting directly with nature.”

James’ handcrafted boat helped him establish a professional reputation, and so after selling it in Hawaii in 2009, he was able to set up a custom woodworking and boatbuilding business in the U.S. Virgin Islands. While his business kept

him busy and he enjoyed being able to surf regularly, after a few years, James was missing his family and not finding his work satisfying.

“I had a period where I built vacation villas on mountain sides, which meant tearing out tropical jungle with track machines,” James said. “I started losing heart in that pretty quickly.”

Between feeling homesick for New England and upset about this environmental degradation, James decided to sell his house and business, and moved back to Massachusetts in 2016.

Setting up Shop on Cape Cod

James partnered with Woody Metzger, a friend from Arey’s Pond Boat Yard, to open First Light Boatworks in 2017; the company builds custom wooden boats, offers a line of modern wooden power boats, and runs a boatyard. Soon after opening, they started work on one of James’ all-time favorite projects: the Empress of Blandings, a 34-foot custom sailboat. It was built traditionally with Atlantic White Cedar and White Oak from New England.



James Donovan

When using traditional methods to shape planks and steam-bend frames for boats like the Empress, James explained, the process truly starts with personally picking out woods that will bend correctly.

“Some of my earliest experiences with forestry came from going up to a forest in northern Connecticut and looking at oak trees and thinking about how they would work on the boat,” James said. “That’s where I made the connection between wood as a building material and the trees and forests.”

When James was getting First Light Boatworks up and running, he was also jumpstarting his engagement with the conservation movement. While he had always loved nature and long felt concern for the environment, returning to Massachusetts served as a wakeup call.

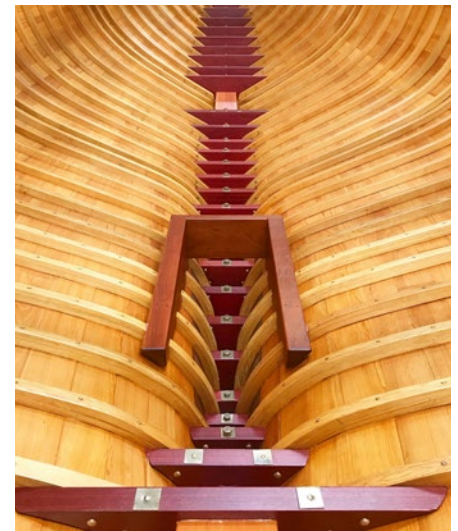
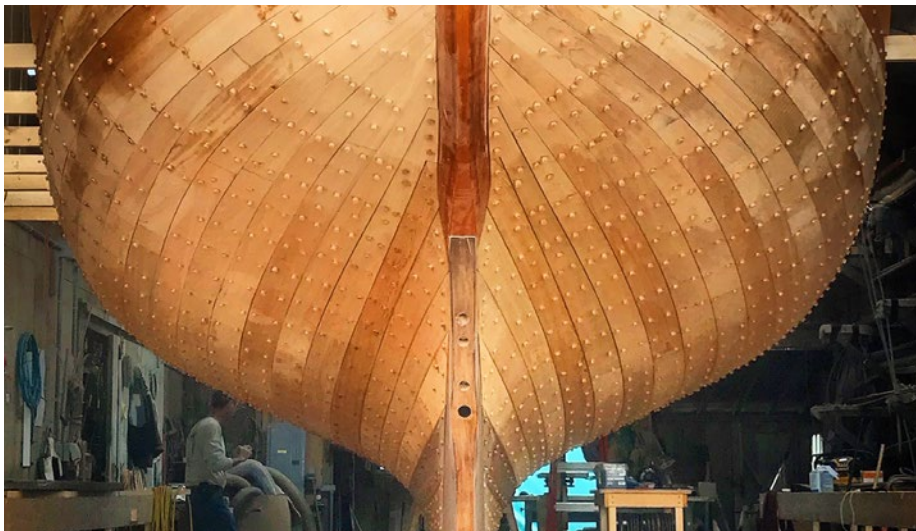
“Some of my earliest experiences with forestry... came from looking at oak trees and thinking about how they would work on the boat. That’s where I made the connection between wood as a building material and the trees and forests.”

“I went into early adulthood saying to myself, the adults have got these environmental issues under control, so I can go off on my adventure,” James said. “Then I came back to Cape Cod and very dramatically noticed that was not the case, that so much had been lost since my childhood, even though plenty of people and organizations fought to conserve land here.”

His conclusion? “It was my time to get seriously involved.”

Taking Action

James first wanted to make a difference in his community, and he has certainly made headway at home, where he now serves on the Harwich Conservation Commission and supports the Harwich Conservation Trust. He then turned his attention to the wider region.



Exterior (left) and interior woodwork for the Empress of Blandings. Photos by Woody Metzger


“Protecting the Hiram lands seemed like one of the most impactful things I could do personally, and I also wanted to have a connection to that impact,” James said. “I’ve already gotten to know the land by hiking around, going hunting, and studying the forest.”

Merrill Mountain Community Forest is part of the Hiram Hills, which have been identified by the State of Maine and The Nature Conservancy as a priority connected and resilient landscape with known concentrations of rare or unique species and communities. Due to the area’s geology, topography and microclimates, species will be able to migrate within this area to find new, suitable habitat as the climate changes.

James is pleased that NEFF will not only provide long-term protection for the property and its critical habitat, but also ensure the forest produces timber in keeping with Exemplary Forestry standards.

“One of the most striking parts of my relationship with the planet has been witnessing what a remarkable resource we have in trees,” James said. “As a boat builder, I use dozens of different types of wood, and it’s astounding to see first-hand the varied properties of wood and how amazingly they work in different specialized ways.”

And when it all comes together?

“Seeing the finished product of a wooden sailing vessel at sea is a wonderful experience, with the spruce spars lightly bending from the pressure of the wind in the sails, transferring the load to strong oak ribs and backbone timbers, the carefully fit cedar planking swollen tight keeping the interior dry,” James said. “Sometimes it feels like a wooden boat is more like a living being than a feat of human engineering.” 

CARES ACT

With so much happening in the world around us, it’s important to find points of stability and calm. NEFF’s staff and Board of Directors are working hard to keep New England forests as one such point of stability. Trees take decades to grow, requiring constancy and dedication in management. And they reward the community with the feeling of peace and tranquility that comes with a walk in the woods; NEFF’s 150 Community Forests across New England have remained open through the COVID-19 crisis, whether for quiet contemplation or a challenging trail run. NEFF’s mission is important to us all, and with your support, we’re making tremendous progress. We are bringing thousands of additional acres into NEFF ownership during the next few months and our work to ensure forests make their greatest possible contribution to abating damaging climate change is gaining ground. Now more than ever before we need your support to ensure NEFF’s work on climate, conservation and Exemplary Forestry continues.

We hope you’re in a position to take advantage of the enhanced charitable giving incentives that were put in place through the government stimulus bill—the CARES Act. These temporary changes were designed to encourage more charitable giving in 2020 by providing additional tax relief for donors, which makes it easier to give to your favorite charity and save at the same time.

Charitable Giving Incentives include:

- | **Temporary Universal Charitable Deduction:** Taxpayers who do not itemize their deductions can take a one-time deduction of up to \$300 for gifts made to charitable organizations. The deduction is only for gifts of cash made in calendar year 2020 and does not cover other types of gifts or contributions made to donor-advised funds or private foundations.
- | **For those who itemize their taxes,** the CARES Act suspends the 60 percent adjusted gross income (AGI) limitation for individuals’ charitable contributions for the year 2020. In a typical year, individuals can only take a charitable deduction of up to 60 percent of their AGI, no matter how much they give. For 2020, the limit is 100 percent of AGI. Again, this change does not apply to contributions made to donor-advised funds or private foundations.
- | **Increased cap on how much corporations may deduct for charitable gifts** from 10 percent of taxable income to 25 percent. In addition, the limitation on deductions for in-kind donations of food by corporations increases from 15 percent to 25 percent in 2020.

You may be able to contribute from your IRA or other tax-deferred savings account for further tax benefits or donate appreciated stock to NEFF avoiding tax for the gain and receiving a charitable deduction. Please consult your tax or legal advisor to see which options might suit your circumstances best. NEFF also offers a number of planned giving options, including our Pooled Timber Income Fund.

Please contact Penny Flynn for more details via email at pflynn@newenglandforestry.org or by phone at 978-952-6856, x101.



NEW ENGLAND
FORESTRY
FOUNDATION

32 Foster Street | P.O. Box 1346 | Littleton, MA 01460
T 978.952.6856 | F 978.952.6356 | newenglandforestry.org

NONPROFIT ORG
U S POSTAGE
PAID
THE MAILING CENTER
05641

