

# INTO THE WOODS

NEW ENGLAND FORESTRY FOUNDATION | SUMMER 2022

## Gaining Climate Momentum

PAGE 3

---

MEET THE WHITE ASH  
PAGE 7

---

WOODLAND NARRATIVES  
PAGE 9

---

A FOREST-FOCUSED FUTURE FOR  
NORTHWEST MASSACHUSETTS  
PAGE 11

---



NEW ENGLAND  
**FORESTRY**  
FOUNDATION



# Board of Directors

## PRESIDENT

Frederick J. (Rick) Weyerhaeuser

## VICE-PRESIDENT

David (Tracy) Moskovitz

## TREASURER

Robert W. Ackerman

## CLERK

Anne Stetson

## ADDITIONAL DIRECTORS

Laurence (Larry) Band

Whitney (Whit) Beals

Christopher (Chris) di Bonaventura

Cameron Brandt

Philip Y. DeNormandie

Frederick (Rick) Findlay

Michael Lehner

G. Montgomery (Monty) Lovejoy III

Jacqueline Perry O'Connor

Robert (Bob) Perschel

Todd Rodman

John van der Stricht

Byron Stutzman

Elizabeth Swain

## HONORARY BOARD MEMBER

Bayard Henry



**NEW ENGLAND  
FORESTRY  
FOUNDATION**

32 Foster Street | P.O. Box 1346

Littleton, MA 01460

978.952.6856 | [newenglandforestry.org](http://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 Supporters and Friends,

We've had four very important breakthroughs since I last wrote. First, the latest assessment from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) said what we realized years ago—in order to meet climate goals, we will have to remove carbon from the atmosphere even as we implement sharp emissions reductions. That puts the focus directly on the world's forests.

Second, the USDA announced a \$1 billion grant program to produce more climate-smart commodities from our farms and forests. This opportunity is directly aligned with the New England Forestry Foundation (NEFF) mission and the multi-faceted suite of climate-mitigation programs we have built over the last 10 years. It's almost as if they wrote the grant for us, and this May, we submitted a \$38 million partnership proposal to pay landowners to practice climate-smart forestry and place the resultant products into tall wood buildings. We expect to hear back in late summer. For a deeper dive into how NEFF built our climate programs, turn to page 3.

Third, NEFF, the Maine Mountain Collaborative and Quantified Ventures launched the Exemplary Forestry Investment Fund in April. This Fund will access private equity and other traditional funding to purchase large tracts of land in western Maine, manage the forest according to Exemplary Forestry™ standards and return a reasonable profit to investors. The Fund has a 100,000-acre goal, and we are on track to purchase our first property within the year.

And fourth, interest in NEFF's 30 Percent Solution has jumped and media and funding sources are now contacting us for more information. This spotlight on the role of forest management as an essential element of achieving climate goals marks a breakthrough moment in our work—and it comes not a moment too soon. Specifically, efforts to address climate change have usually ignored two important pathways to success that are related to NEFF's historic mission:

- Forest management has tremendous potential to mitigate climate change over the next 30 years. In addition to reducing emissions via energy-related solutions like wind turbines, solar power and electrifying our transportation fleet, carbon removal through natural-land solutions like improved forestry is now also understood as essential. Here's an example: A tremendous amount of attention, money, and policy work has gone into the bitterly divisive attempt to bring renewable energy from Canada to Massachusetts. That entire program will deliver less than 20 percent of the carbon benefits as compared to those available through NEFF's forestry solution for the region. As noted by the IPCC, climate change policy needs to include natural climate solutions, and that's starting to happen.
- A major focus of climate policy is making buildings climate-smart, and in addition to energy efficiency, it is critical to pay attention to a building's embodied carbon, or the CO2 pollution generated by the construction process and the production and shipping of building materials. For example, 11 percent of all annual global CO2 emissions come just from building materials and construction. But to effectively reduce embodied carbon in buildings, we need to create new elements of building certification and wood certification that include climate-related criteria. The solution to lower embodied carbon in buildings runs through forest products, Exemplary Forestry and the 30 Percent Solution.

Robert Perschel  
Executive Director

3

GAINING CLIMATE MOMENTUM

7

MEET THE WHITE ASH

9

WOODLAND NARRATIVES

11

A FOREST-FOCUSED FUTURE FOR  
NORTHWEST MASSACHUSETTS



## NEFF's Alec Giffen Receives Integrity in Conservation Award

This spring at the New England Society of American Foresters (NESAF) annual meeting in Portland, NEFF Senior Forest Science and Policy Fellow Alec Giffen was recognized during the Awards Banquet and presented with the Integrity in Conservation Award.

The award recognizes, “an individual or organization working with natural resources who demonstrates adherence to principles and high standards in the face of adversity.”

“Alec richly deserves this recognition for his full body of work, including his tenure as Director of Maine’s Forest Service,” said NEFF Executive Director Bob Perschel. “However, we think his ten years of NEFF accomplishments alone are enough to have won him the award. He’s just that talented and committed.”

Cheers to Alec!





Photo: Lauren Owens Lambert

# GAINING CLIMATE MOMENTUM

WRITING BY NEFF Executive Director Bob Perschel  
and NEFF Communications Manager Tinsley Hunsdorfer

After years of developing, practicing and promoting forest-based solutions to climate change, New England Forestry Foundation (NEFF) is now perfectly positioned to take advantage of exciting, once-in-a-lifetime opportunities like this year's \$1 billion USDA Partnerships for Climate Smart Commodities Grant Program, which is to say, opportunities that will help us accomplish our 30 Percent Solution and sequester 646 million metric tons of CO<sub>2</sub>.

Learn how NEFF built up its climate-mitigation programming and strategy to reach this point, and read about our next steps and hopes for the future.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is the United Nations body assigned to steer the world away from the damaging consequences of climate change, and every several years, it releases updates on global climate change. The reports come in a series: the first covers the human contribution to the crisis, the second pinpoints the damage that is occurring, and the third and final report provides strategies for dealing with the problem.

This year, the IPCC rolled out its latest assessments. The first two were alarming—human-generated carbon pollution is still rising and the damage to the earth's ecosystem is happening faster than we thought it would. The third report revealed for the first time what we at NEFF suspected 10 years ago: we can no longer meet our climate goals by reducing emissions, and now have to find ways to remove carbon from the atmosphere.

---

## IPCC CLIMATE CHANGE 2022 REPORT: MITIGATION OF CLIMATE CHANGE

In their April 2022 Working Group III Climate Change Mitigation Report, the IPCC spotlights carbon removal as key to limiting warming to 2°C and states that forests lie at the center of how to do this. The IPCC identifies three main methods of carbon removal—and restoring forests through forest management practices along with utilizing sustainably produced wood to substitute for carbon-intensive building materials are identified as powerful nature-based carbon solutions.

---

The IPCC identified sustainably managed forests as a powerful existing and immediate opportunity to remove carbon from the atmosphere. The climate spotlight is turning to forests and forest management, and NEFF is ready thanks to the work we started 10 years ago to investigate forests and climate change, and develop a pathway for forestry to be helpful. The result is our 30 Percent Solution: The combined climate-mitigating impact of expanding the practice of Exemplary Forestry, halting forest conversion, and building with wood amounts to 30 percent of New England's necessary energy-related carbon reductions in the next 30 years.



# What We've Done, Where We're Going

Here's a timeline of our work leading right up to—and briefly looking beyond—the possibilities presented by the 2022 \$1 billion USDA grant program, which will fund pilot projects that create market opportunities for commodities produced using climate-smart practices. We've broken down projects and accomplishments by the five NEFF program areas that support the 30 Percent Solution: Science, Policy, Outreach and Coalition Building, Communications, and Innovative Conservation Finance.

Photo: Lauren Owens Lambert



NEFF staff members walk through Frenchman Bay Community Forest, where NEFF is implementing Exemplary Forestry in support of songbird populations.

## 2012

### Outreach and Coalition Building:

Harvard Forest began developing its Wildlands and Woodlands vision in 2005, with an assessment of forest loss and the pace of conservation in Massachusetts. In 2010, the vision went region-wide and identified the need to ramp up the pace of conservation to protect forests' benefits to New England residents. The NEFF Board of Directors formally endorses the Wildlands and Woodlands vision in 2012.

## 2013

### Science, Communications:

NEFF releases *The Path to Sustainability*, a fully researched report about New England forests' existing contributions and future potential to support New Englanders' lives and lifestyles, and it lays out 12 of these current and future benefits as well as pathways to protect them and the sustainable future they represent. In compiling the report, NEFF concludes the connection between forests and climate change could potentially yield extraordinary climate-mitigation benefits—it is clearly the most important and immediate societal benefit of forests. NEFF's strategic direction is set.

### Outreach and Coalition Building:

There are more than 215,000 forest owners of more than 10 acres in New England and the ability of our forests to respond to climate change depends on them. The conservation community needed a more effective and efficient way of reaching these landowners and working with them to change practices. In response, NEFF and partners launch the MassConn Woods Landowner Outreach Initiative in 2013 to learn how to perform more effective outreach by developing and testing a replicable model for engaging, educating, and supporting family forest landowners to embrace the values of better forest management and large-scale land protection.

## 2014

### Science, Outreach and Coalition Building:

NEFF joins the nascent Maine Mountains Collaborative to bring forest management expertise to an ongoing partnership that uses cross-sector collaboration and innovative financing to accelerate the pace and scale of land conservation in the Maine Appalachian Corridor. This relationship allows NEFF to understand the biodiversity goals of the conservation community and the financial management goals of large commercial landowners in order to construct climate-smart forestry practices that serve both.

## 2015

### Science:

NEFF identifies consistent, scientific and transparent forest management standards as the missing ingredient in efforts to determine the magnitude of sustainable forestry's climate benefit, as well as in efforts to align forest landowners with the goal of increasing in-forest carbon sequestration. NEFF commits to codifying our in-house forest practices and calls together an expert panel to advise us on the development of Exemplary Forestry standards.

## 2016

### Innovative Conservation Finance:

Working with our Wildlands and Woodlands partners, NEFF staff determines that two types of new, targeted programs and financing models are needed to increase the pace of conservation and bring more land under Exemplary Forest management: one that could serve southern New England's smaller landholdings, and one for the large, northern commercial landholdings. We begin investigating and developing two new funds that would later launch as the Pooled Timber Income Fund and Exemplary Forestry Investment Fund.

### Science, Outreach and Coalition Building:

We extend our climate-mitigation analysis beyond the forest to investigate the impact of forest products, and uncover an additional mitigation pathway that expands forests' overall climate benefits: sustainably harvest wood grown locally under climate-smart management, make engineered mass timber with it, and then use the mass timber locally in long-lived products like tall buildings. NEFF launches the Build It With Wood program to advocate for building tall urban structures with mass timber to mitigate climate change, build rural economic opportunity, and improve housing quality and equity.

## 2017

### Innovative Conservation Finance:

NEFF and the Maine Mountain Collaborative partner to begin the formal creation of the Exemplary Forestry Investment Fund, designed to utilize private equity investments to buy large parcels of Maine timberland—and to compete with other investment interests—and manage them for climate benefits under Exemplary Forestry. Boston law firm Ropes and Gray assists with the financing arrangement's complex structure by providing pro bono advice.

## 2018

### Science:

NEFF releases Exemplary Forestry standards for the Acadian Forest, and the standards' specific and measurable practices make it possible for NEFF to model the climate impact of Exemplary Forestry being implemented across the landscape. The results are astounding: New England could sequester 540 million metric tons of CO<sub>2</sub> by expanding Exemplary Forestry.

## 2019

### Outreach and Coalition Building:

NEFF utilizes a federal grant to launch the Western Maine Habitat Restoration initiative with organizational partners. NEFF staff engages in strategic outreach to family forestland owners and helps those who enroll to create or restore important wildlife habitat on 12,000 acres of privately owned forest using Exemplary Forestry.

### Innovative Conservation Finance:

NEFF launches the Pooled Timber Income Fund (PTIF). Participants donate their woodlands to NEFF, and the woodlands' timber is then contributed to a pooled income fund trust. Donors receive a stream of lifetime income and an initial charitable tax deduction, and on the death of their beneficiaries, the timber reverts to NEFF. Three properties—with a fourth in the works—and 1,740 acres have now been donated to NEFF through the PTIF, two individuals have donated cash directly into the PTIF, and an additional two properties have been leased from The Nature Conservancy. All donated properties join NEFF's network of Community Forests and receive Exemplary Forestry management, which helps us demonstrate climate-smart forestry in new communities.

### Communications:

*The New York Times* runs a NEFF op-ed in both print and digital editions that touts Exemplary Forestry and locally sourced mass timber as pathways to a better future and more livable climate.

### Communications, Outreach and Coalition Building:

After years of hard and innovative work, we publish "From Engagement to Action: Supporting Woodland Owners in Decisions About Their Land," a report on NEFF's MassConn landowner-outreach successes and lessons learned from communicating about climate change with landowners in preparation for expanding use of the program's outreach format.

## 2020

### Communications:

NEFF's Exemplary Forestry program receives global attention on Prince Charles' RE:TV video platform, which showcases inspiring sustainability innovation from around the world. The website launches with a feature video about NEFF and Exemplary Forestry on the homepage.

### Policy:

To help state governments meet their climate goals by using forests to help mitigate climate change, NEFF becomes actively involved with both the Maine Climate Council (MCC) and the companion effort in Connecticut, the Governor's Council on Climate Change (GC3), and when appropriate, brings Exemplary Forestry to the table as an example of a workable model for climate-smart forestry and a potential path forward.

### Science:

NEFF expands its climate-mitigation modeling research to all of New England, and examines how and to what degree forests in each New England state could be managed to contribute to climate change mitigation. Our science team determines NEFF's forest-based climate-mitigation approach can meet 30 percent of those reduction goals, and the term "30 Percent Solution" is born.

### Outreach and Coalition

#### Building:

We launch our Forest-to-Cities Climate Challenge program, the public engagement partner to our Build It With Wood initiative. The Challenge works to help reduce the climate crisis and create a more liveable New England by supporting sustainable wood construction. We build a broad network of experts and supporters—including architects, builders, foresters, forest owners, and others—who commit to this vision by signing our Climate Challenge Pledge, and we provide them with ways to take action and make a difference by working collaboratively across different sectors.

## 2021

### Innovative Conservation Finance:

NEFF helps form and participates in the Forest Carbon for Commercial Landowners dialogue, which then creates and funds a project team of scientists and policy experts tasked with determining which practices might improve carbon storage on large forest ownerships and how to pay for those practices.

### Communications:

NEFF is featured on an episode of Chronicle, a Boston-based TV show, that focuses on our own Exemplary Forestry standards, forestry and recreation in the Maine North Woods, and how sustainable local wood can be used in urban tall wood buildings.

## 2022

### Science:

We release our second set of Exemplary Forestry standards, this time for Central and Transition Hardwood forests.

### Policy:

The U.S. Department of Agriculture offers a \$1 billion Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities grant opportunity, and NEFF responds with a \$38 million proposal to provide incentives to family and commercial forest landowners, loggers and foresters to sequester significant amounts of carbon through improved forest management and to support mass timber building.

### Innovative Conservation Finance:

NEFF and partners launch the Exemplary Forestry Investment Fund to purchase and manage large forest tracts in Maine. NEFF chairs the Fund's Board of Directors and the Fund targets a first property purchase near Moosehead Lake.

## 2023 and Beyond

Now that our analysis shows the major role forestry can play in mitigating climate change and improving biodiversity, NEFF has reached a moment of tremendous opportunity for New England's forests, and the IPCC reports signal it is past time for action. The pathway forward calls for targeted financial incentives for landowners to implement climate-smart practices on their forests, and programs that verify these practices are working. The USDA grant opportunity may provide New England with a significant pilot program, but NEFF's job is to ensure long-term funding is available to complete the job.

This is an exciting time: we can accomplish NEFF's foundational mission of bringing Exemplary Forestry to New England while we help solve a major part of the climate mitigation burden. 🌿



# MEET THE WHITE ASH

## AGE AND SIZE

Normal age of mature trees is around **200 YEARS OLD**

The species grows to around **70-80'**

in height with a tall, straight bole and narrow, tapered crown when grown in a crowded forest stand.

**WRITING BY NEFF** Director of Forest Stewardship Chris Pryor

White Ash is considered a pioneer to intermediate-successional species that thrives following natural and man-made disturbance to an ecosystem. It is a common species throughout New England, and is found in the Spruce-Fir and Northern Hardwood forest types covered by NEFF's Exemplary Forestry standards for the Acadian Forest, as well as in the Oak-Pine, Oak-Hickory, and Lowland/Riparian forest types covered by the Exemplary Forestry standards for Central and Transition Hardwoods.

## RANGE

The White Ash ranges from the Canadian Maritime Provinces in the north to northern Florida in the south, and from the Atlantic coast to the eastern edge of the Great Plains. It commonly grows in stands with Sugar Maple, Yellow Birch, Red Oak, Eastern Hemlock and American Beech among others, but White Ash typically does not dominate the stand.

## GROWING CONDITIONS AND MANAGEMENT

White Ash typically grows in the most productive, nutrient-rich soils. It grows best in well drained soils and does not do well in dry ridgetops or poorly drained lowlands where Green or Black Ash dominate. White Ash is tolerant of shade while very young, but becomes intolerant as it grows older. This allows seedlings to become established in the understory of a stand and grow quickly to outcompete other shade tolerant trees like maple, hemlock and beech. But White Ash needs an opening in the canopy relatively soon in its lifecycle to take advantage of its early head start. Without such an opening, its growth slows and it can be overtaken by those other shade-tolerant species.

White Ash pollination and seed dispersal is dependent on the wind. It produces light seeds with a single wing, as opposed to the double winged-seeds of maples, which can travel as far as 500 feet.

Ash can be regenerated within a natural mix of species using a variety of silvicultural techniques including single and group tree selection, clearcutting, and seedtree.\* It is often grown using the shelterwood system that allows seedlings to become established under a full canopy and then gradually increasing sunlight to the forest floor through multiple reductions in the overstory over a few decades. Like many hardwoods, it can also regenerate from stump sprouts following logging or fire, although sprouting abundance decreases with the tree's age.

## IDENTIFICATION

White Ash is a deciduous tree with oppositely leaved, stout branches. Leaves are

**8-15" LONG**

and compound in form, with usually seven—but sometimes between five to nine—oval leaflets off the main leaf petiole. The bark of White Ash is a light gray color that forms into interweaving ridges that reveal a distinct diamond-shaped pattern.



## FUN FACTS

White Ash lumber has a wide range of uses including furniture, tool handles and canoe paddles, but its most celebrated use has historically been supplying America's pastime with baseball bats. The woods grain pattern contributes to its resistance to splintering while its light weight allows hitters to get the bat around quickly, making it ideally suited to this use. But the future of ash baseball bats is in peril.







## WILDLIFE HABITAT

Seeds of White Ash are eaten by a wide variety of birds including Wood Duck, Wild Turkey, Purple Finch, Ruffed Grouse, Cardinals, and Pine Grosbeak. Twigs are browsed by White-tailed Deer and the bark of seedlings can be eaten by mice, rabbits, and porcupines. Beaver will also cut, store, and eat White Ash bark when it occurs near their ponds and other, more preferable tree species are unavailable.

White Ash is often used by both primary and secondary cavity nesting birds due to its tendency to form cavities following crown damage in mature trees.

These birds include woodpeckers, the Wood Duck, and owls.

## THREATS

White Ash, particularly in New England and the northeast, has been under siege for the past few decades. A combination of diseases, fungi, insects, and air pollution has been contributing to what is being called ash decline, which in turn has created pockets of mortality throughout the region. Add the exotic, invasive Emerald Ash Borer (EAB) on top of that, and the outlook is not good for ash trees. EAB is identified by its unique D shaped exit hole when the adult insects emerge in June or July. Other signs of damage are dieback in the crown, excessive epicormic branching, and “blonding” on the main stem where woodpeckers are flecking away bark in search of larvae below.

Could ash follow the same fate as American Elm and American Chestnut? Foresters are working to conserve the healthy ash populations that remain while scientists develop bio-controls and other methods of stopping the spread of EAB.

---

\*The seedtree approach removes most of the stems in a stand except for 5-10 large, well-formed trees per acre to provide the seed to create a new cohort of seedlings. This approach is best used for species with light seeds that are dispersed in the wind. Seedtrees can later be harvested or retained as legacy trees.





# WOODLAND NARRATIVES

## Connections and Conservation Successes Five Generations in the Making

WRITING BY NEFF Communications Manager Tinsley Hunsdorfer

Patrick Whalen and NEFF Conservation Easement Director Andrew Bentley tour the Whalen forestlands during NEFF's 2022 easement visit. Photo by Tinsley Hunsdorfer

When the extended Whalen family recently set out to create a conservation legacy in Mount Holly, Vermont, they connected five past-and-present generations with those yet to come. They also ended up connecting two pieces of newly protected forest to a landscape-scale wildlife corridor.

In 1919, Mary and Thomas Whalen purchased the first of these pieces of land, the 43-acre Healdville Farm, and in 1994, their great-grandsons bought an adjacent 61-acre parcel NEFF simply calls the Whalen property. Learn the stories behind these woodlands, and how John M. Whalen—grandson of Mary and Thomas—championed having the parcels permanently protected by NEFF and worked with his family to see them conserved.

The Whalens' two beautiful, contiguous Mount Holly woodlands—one of which borders Okemo State Forest—are tucked in the Ludlow Mountain foothills. They feature high-quality habitat like horizontally complex Northern Hardwood and Spruce-Fir forest stands, and are cut through by seeps, wetlands and cold-water streams like the rushing and rock-strewn Branch Brook. They also host a Vermont Association of Snow Travelers snowmobiling trail.

“Engaging in recreation on private lands is something of a Vermont tradition,” said John. “I hoped the family would conserve these properties, not only to preclude development, but also for the sake of the woods themselves. I also hoped that in the future, the family would continue its decades-long policy of welcoming public use of the properties for responsible recreation, trail-based snowmobiling and hunting included.”

Due to the parcels' adjacency to Okemo State Forest, NEFF's 2020 protection of both woodlands with conservation easements made them part of Vermont's crucial 100-mile Okemo Wildlife Corridor. It stretches nearly two-thirds the length of Vermont and connects Green Mountain National Forest to Okemo State Forest, providing a pathway of protected habitat for wild animals simply in need of room to roam, and for wildlife threatened by development and shifting climactic conditions.

The Mount Holly Conservation Trust (MHCT) has led the charge on stitching together the corridor in the Mount Holly area, and when John let MHCT President Brigid Sullivan know the Whalens were pursuing conservation, she says she was “thrilled,



because the family sets such a good example for other property owners,” and at a time when Mount Holly was seeing development pressure due to demand for more ski lodging.

“The Whalens’ approach to conservation was brilliant and unique, because the whole family on down to the teenagers was involved in deciding what to do with the land,” Sullivan continued. “This let everyone see how conservation can keep family traditions going, and provided a sense of ownership in the family’s future.”

## Family and Forest History: Finding Magic in the Woods

Tom and Mary Whalen met and married in Mount Holly in the 1890s and purchased Healdville Farm in 1919. Tom worked as a railroad station agent and Mary as a teacher and later, the town’s post-mistress, and their sons worked the farm. After they moved to Healdville Farm, Mary relocated the post office to the building’s first floor.

“In the 1920s, everything around us was agricultural land, and I remember walking property lines and being able to see clear across to our neighbor’s house,” said Mary Whalen Leonard, granddaughter to Mary Whalen. “Farmers were heading for the Midwest, and by the mid 1940s, our family had stopped most farming activities—and now, except for a meadow we keep open, the land is almost all grown up.”

Patrick Whalen, Mary Leonard’s nephew and one of the owners of the 1994 Whalen property, has fond childhood memories of Healdville and its young forests.

“This land has always been a special place for us, especially for my generation when we were growing up,” Patrick said. “When we visited, the woods would always feel like this separate world. Things were quieter there, and felt more magical.”

One memory in particular sticks out.

“My grandfather took me through the woods to the spring that once served as a water source for the house he grew up in,” Patrick said. “He wanted to share this connection to the past and the family with me.”

Now that Patrick’s an adult, he’s come to appreciate the land from a different perspective.

“The forests’ magic hasn’t diminished, but my understanding of them is more refined, and I’ve ended up feeling connected to

“Forests are transformative—you go into the woods a different person than the one that walks out.” — John M. Whalen

these larger forces,” Patrick says. “Out here, the seasons become part of your rhythm, from spring vernal pools to getting a sense of the forest structure in winter when the leaves are down.”

Like Patrick, John believes forests can have a positive impact on the people who explore them, and that belief has proved galvanizing.

“Forests are transformative—you go into the woods a different person than the one that walks out,” said John. “I love the magic of the woods, and my wish for more people to experience that magic motivated me to approach my family about easements. Additionally, I felt like we owed it to the land, the town’s residents, the family that came before, and future generations.”

John contacted NEFF in 2018 about potential easements, as he had come to trust the organization while serving as a Board Member of Smokey House Center. The Center sustainably stewards 5,000 acres of working lands in Danby, Vermont, and NEFF holds easements on 4,700 of those acres.

In 2019, John and Mary Leonard held a Conservation Day in Mount Holly attended by 14 family members that featured presentations from Sullivan and NEFF Conservation Easement Director Andrew Bentley, a session where lawyers were available to advise family members, and a walk led by forester Curtis Rand. After several months’ discussion and a vote, the family agreed to conserve the properties.

“The family’s initial purchase of the Healdville property has always felt like a gift to later generations, and it was important to honor that act of generosity by choosing conservation,” said Patrick. “Keeping the woodlands in the family while contributing to land conservation at a time when the climate and natural systems are in trouble seemed like our best option, particularly because the land would become part of a wildlife corridor.”

And now that the land is protected?

“The great joy for me is that it’s a hundred years later, and we’re on to the fifth generation of kids who have enjoyed these woods,” Mary Leonard said. “Currently, it’s the 12- to 22-year-olds that love coming for walks and snowshoeing trips in the woods.”



# A FOREST- FOCUSED FUTURE

## for Northwest Massachusetts

NEFF is helping the Mohawk Trail Woodlands Partnership kickstart the local forest-based economy

WRITING BY NEFF Outreach Manager Lisa Hayden

A view down Northwest Hill Road, Williamstown, MA, where a Sugar Maple hedgerow lines this scenic road in Hopkins Memorial Forest, formerly monitored by USFS and now by Williams College.

Forests blanket the Northern Berkshire Mountains and rolling foothills, where the Hoosic and Deerfield Rivers wind their way down slopes and across valleys, enriching the soil for crops. For millennia, Indigenous Peoples inhabited these hills, traversing hunting grounds and fishing from the rivers. Later, newcomers settled on farms and in villages, often along the river banks, where the force of the water was harnessed to power mills and factories. Following an east-west foot path made by Indigenous Peoples, the Route 2 scenic highway was built in 1914 and dubbed “The Mohawk Trail,” becoming a popular motor tour route in the 1950s.

More than 80 percent forested, this landscape is home to a new model of regional collaboration that could be

called “tree-roots to tree-tops,” for it spans many limbs of civil society.

The Mohawk Trail Woodlands Partnership (MTWP) was organized a decade ago by local leaders with support from county planners, regional non-profits, academic partners, and state and U.S. Forest Service officials. NEFF began serving as Administrative Agent for the Partnership in 2021 through a four-year contract with the Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EOEEA); this entails coordinating public meetings, managing MTWP Board priorities, supporting fundraising and administering grant activities.

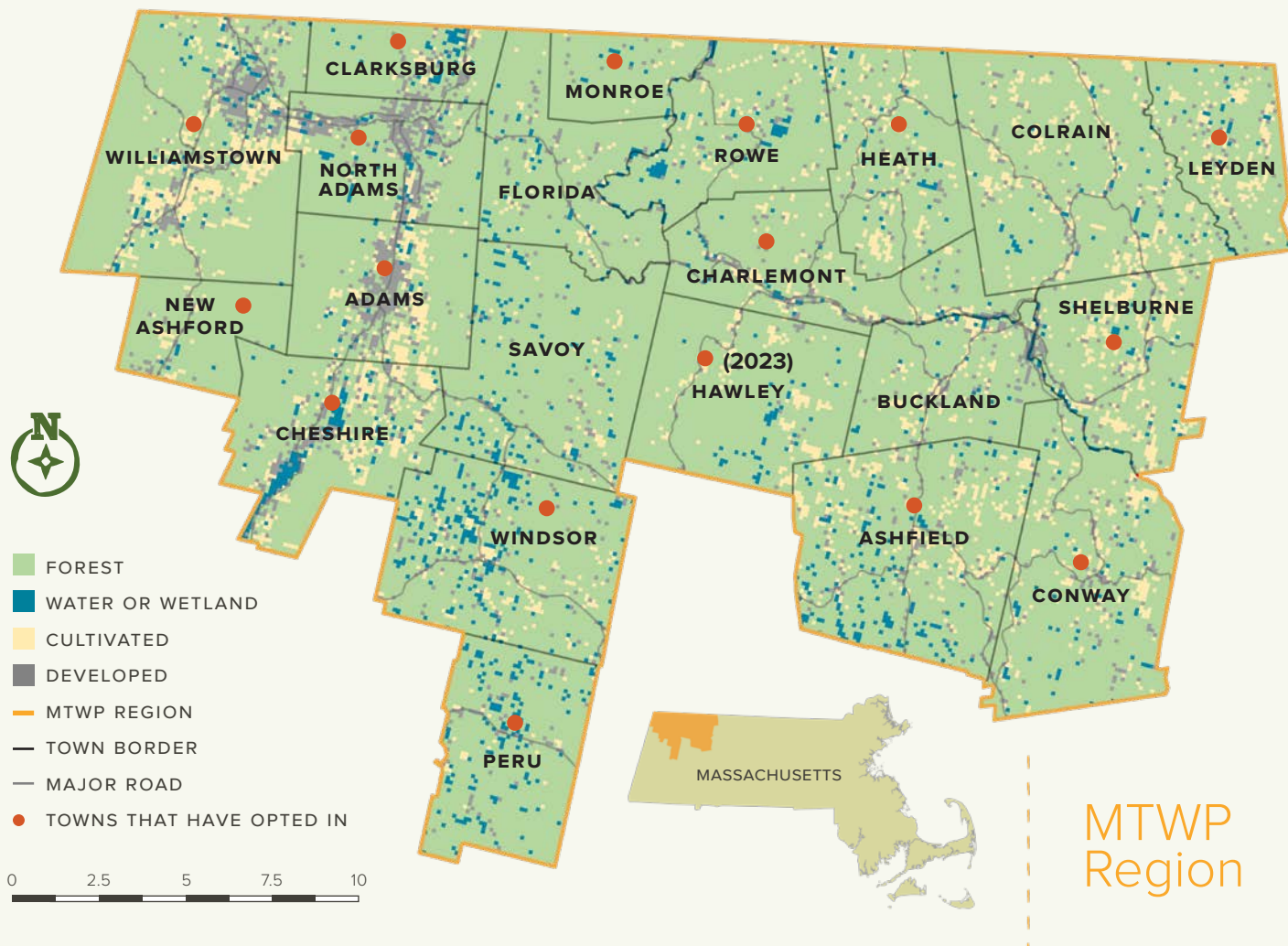
The fledgling Partnership is now working to invite diverse stakeholders to the

table, including local tribal organizations, community development agencies, and the owners of family farms and woodlots, to comment on an updated Partnership Plan for the next 10 years.

“We’re trying to revitalize the forest-based economy of the region in a sustainable fashion,” sums up Board Chair Henry W. Art, the Williamstown representative.

Passage of a 2018 Massachusetts law created the Woodlands Partnership as a public body, and to date, 17 of 21 eligible towns have voted to join. A 31-member Board began meeting in 2020 (two U.S. Forest Service representatives are non-voting), picking up the work of an earlier Advisory Committee. NEFF has supported





Map: Sophie Argetsinger, NEFF MTWP Assistant

the Board in activating committees on forest conservation; economic development; municipal stability, outreach and education; and finance.

The Partnership reached an important milestone in November 2019 when leaders of MA EOEAA and the U.S. Forest Service signed a Shared Stewardship Framework pledging cooperation on outreach and education to Partnership communities, research and demonstration of “exemplary sustainable forest management practices,” and technical assistance related to local recreation and tourism. The vision was to create a model of state and federal stewardship of a forested landscape—without designation of a national forest, as there was local opposition to federal ownership.

The region’s rural municipalities face challenges of limited tax bases, as many are already host to large areas of state forest land. The regional economy has struggled, partly due to closing paper mills and sawmills. Town leaders say many young people do not stay local because there are few jobs. One non-profit with a seat on the Board, Lever Inc., has won state grants focused on job creation by funding entrepreneurial competitions, with the benefit of assistance, among locally owned businesses.

Chair Art notes that the Northern Berkshire County/Western Franklin County location of the Partnership is well-suited to host demonstration forestry projects

because of the convergence of several economically important forest types common from the Canadian border to the Mid-Atlantic states.

The geography “coupled with the varied topography and relief conspire to produce a diversity of forest types from montane, boreal forests dominated by Red Spruce and Balsam Fir at elevations above 2,000 feet, to Northern Hardwood forests dominated by Sugar Maple, American Beech, and Yellow Birch on moist, north- and east-facing sites at lower elevations, as well as Oak-Hickory forests dominating on south and west-facing slopes and ridges,” said Art. “Over a distance of but a few miles, one can encounter forest types typical of environments hundreds of miles away.”

The forests of Western Massachusetts are also recognized for storing large amounts of carbon, underscoring the need for Exemplary, climate-resilient and ecologically based forestry in order to carefully steward this landscape and the benefits it provides. Climate change has been an early focus of the Partnership, as its impacts become apparent: severe weather, more frequent floods, droughts and forest health threats from pests and invasive plants that thrive with warmer temperatures. NEFF worked with Mass Audubon, the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation and many other partners, to launch a pilot Forest Climate Resilience Program in the MTWP region, resulting in grants to a half dozen municipalities to receive climate-smart forest stewardship plans for town-owned properties.

Art says the Woodlands Partnership “is really a team effort between a lot of people with real passion,” for the sustainable use and protection of forests, coupled with rural economic development. He continued, “they are emotionally invested and committed enough to put up with ambiguity,” that can accompany volunteer collaborations and hang in there until sustainable funding for the regional entity can be secured.

NEFF, which also owns nine Community Forests in the region, is excited to support the closely aligned mission of the Woodlands Partnership as it takes root and extends its branches into the clear mountain air.

Learn more at [mohawktrailwoodlandspartnership.org](http://mohawktrailwoodlandspartnership.org)



Williams College students in Williamstown participate in “Mountain Day,” an annual tradition dating back to the 19th century, when classes are canceled on a warm October Friday so everyone can go for a hike. Photo by H. W. Art.



## First Chair Leads Partnership Board Toward Sustainable Vision

Henry W. Art has brought his perspective as emeritus college professor to his role as the first Board Chair of the Mohawk Trail Woodlands Partnership. So far, he has recruited three different student teams to apply their intellectual energy and research skills to projects designed to advance goals of this regional consortium.

In fall 2021, two Williams College students interviewed stakeholders and explored potential sites and uses for a Forest Center as a flagship community and education resource for this heavily forested corner of the Commonwealth. This spring, three Conway School of Landscape Design students identified riparian restoration sites appropriate for climate-adapted tree-planting in the Deerfield River watershed. And this summer, students from Williams, and Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts, will study how much waste wood is produced from towns and utilities in the 21-town region, and how it might be better utilized.

Partnering with academic institutions benefits both the Woodlands

Partnership, and provides real-life learning opportunities for the students. “It’s been an absolute joy to interact with the students,” says Art.

One of the goals in forming the Partnership was to relieve burdens on Northwest Massachusetts towns, and to avoid any costs for their participation. “I think we’ve lived up to that promise,” said Art, noting both the investment of \$1 million in state grants over the past three years, and the synergy of bringing together so many non-profits and agencies for common purpose.

The Robert F. Rosenburg Professor of Environmental Studies & Biology at Williams College from 1970 to 2020, Art started to teach right out of graduate school at Yale University. “We feel the Northern Berkshires and Williamstown are really home,” said Art, who also serves with his local Conservation Commission and land trust. “I’ve lived here two-thirds of my life or more... I came here at the age of 26 and this is really home.”



# HELP NEFF SOLVE THE CLIMATE CRISIS

NEFF's Exemplary Forestry standards are at the heart of our powerful 30 Percent Solution that can help avert climate disaster, but we need more voices and people in support of this approach, and we need to continue to build a coalition of individuals and organizations that support putting forests to work for the climate. NEFF's approach is this generation's chance to use forests to save the planet.

---

You can help. We need your financial support—and we hope you will make a donation today—but we also need you to talk to your family, friends, and neighbors about the 30 Percent Solution, Exemplary Forestry and building with mass timber. If you believe in NEFF's mission and approach, please share

your enthusiasm for our work with others. We need people to understand that conserving land is necessary and not enough. By putting forests to work and building with wood, we can do so much more to help the earth. And in the process, we can revive rural economies and provide improved habitat for wildlife. 🌿



Photo: Camille Lizcano

Legacy giving can allow your support to extend even further.

Please also consider including New England's forests and NEFF in your estate planning. There are many ways that you can help protect forests and advance NEFF's mission while meeting your own financial and family succession goals, including through NEFF's Pooled Timber Income Fund. Contact Penny Flynn for more information: [pflynn@newenglandforestry.org](mailto:pflynn@newenglandforestry.org)



NEW ENGLAND  
**FORESTRY**  
FOUNDATION

32 Foster Street | P.O. Box 1346 | Littleton, MA 01460  
T 978.952.6856 | F 978.952.6356 | [newenglandforestry.org](http://newenglandforestry.org)

NONPROFIT ORG  
U S POSTAGE  
**PAID**  
THE MAILING CENTER  
05641

