

# INTO THE WOODS

NEW ENGLAND FORESTRY FOUNDATION | ANNUAL REPORT 2023

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NEW ENGLAND  
**FORESTRY**  
FOUNDATION

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**NEW ENGLAND  
FORESTRY  
FOUNDATION**

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## Dear Supporters and Friends,

When I was a consulting forester, learning my craft in the woods, I bought a small orange leather pouch threaded with rawhide cord and hung it around my neck while I did my forest inspections. During my days in the woods, I would find some object—a rock, a leaf, a feather, a piece of bark—and place it in the pouch. During the evening when I sat at my desk to write the management prescription for the property, I would take the object out and lay it on the computer.

It was my way of keeping my heart—my connection to place—in the game with my brain. I knew that my cruise would reduce the beautiful and engaging forest I had just visited to a set of numbers, and those numbers and charts and graphs would instruct me in how to manage the property. I knew those numbers were invaluable to foresters in making decisions, but I didn't want to leave my feelings for the place out of the decision either. I wanted to operate in that place between heart and mind. For me, it was like operating in the place in the forest where we find the "edge effect"—the phenomenon that yields greater species variety and density along the boundary where two ecosystems meet.

In forestry, this phenomenon is most notable where open grasslands meet the edge of the forest. In this narrow, but extensive linear ecotone, we find a heightened energy and abundance that draws on and replenishes each of the different ecosystems it separates. Since it occurs only as a boundary, this energetic edge exists only because of the existence of its larger neighboring ecosystems. Yet, things happen in these narrow corridors that are impossible to replicate elsewhere.

That is exactly where we must locate ourselves if we are to find our path through climate change. We need to do things that have never been done, to rally people together that have never come together before, to break new ground and set yet-to-be-imagined public policy and long-term funding mechanisms in a world overly focused on the short term.

To produce that level of leadership, we need to keep one foot firmly planted in science, facts and data, and one foot firmly connected to the emotional energy that drives people to action. That's where we can account for those brief moments in our lives when we had experiences that are simply impossible to express, the ones where we and the forest seemed to have much in common and for a moment we and the forest just are, and we have moved beyond the measures of economics and endless debate. Those are the moments that capture us for all time, and we chase in our vacations and daydreams. That is the place where the energy comes from to do the impossible. We need to keep one foot there.

This has been a tough summer with the devastation in Vermont, heat domes in the south, and wildfire smoke from Canada in the air. Climate change is here. We will need to use everything in our arsenal to win. That includes the kind of scientific analysis that allows us to say that better forest management can offset 640 million metric tons of atmospheric carbon and relieve 30 percent of the carbon pollution in New England over the next 30 years. Those are eye-opening numbers and data points. We will use them—and with your support, refine and build on them. But in order to meet this challenge, we will have to find a way to speak in a forgotten language, one that has the power to convey our science and economics as well as represent our emotions, intuitions, and intimate connections to our forests. Please watch for and track our efforts in this subtle shift in our communications and let us know how we are doing.

Robert Perschel  
Executive Director

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OUR DONORS

## NEFF Forest Stewards

Forest Stewards volunteer their time to help care for New England Forestry Foundation (NEFF) Community Forests. Their efforts include monitoring conditions and usage, maintaining trails, and sharing information with local communities about their nearby Community Forest's history, conservation and management. Thanks to this year's Forest Stewards for their hard work!

### Connecticut:

Dianne Bryce-Bronk  
Penny Foisey

### Maine:

Garry Hinkley

### Vermont:

Steve Barlow  
Claire Walton  
Eve Waterfall

### Massachusetts:

Warren Dimmick  
Rick Findlay  
Clifford Grimm  
Tom LaPointe  
Forest Lyford  
Rick McNeil  
Robert Moore  
Andrew Sammarco  
Scott Shumway  
Ken Sydow  
John Van Heynigen

### New Hampshire:

Mark Accomando, Jr.  
Stephen Bradley  
Barry Fougere  
Bob Marshall  
Eric Thatcher  
Martha Twombly  
Al Vachon  
Laura Wimmer

*This list includes volunteer Forest Stewards who have been engaged in stewardship or submitted a monitoring report for their assigned NEFF Community Forest for calendar year 2022.*

Photo by Kari Post





# A LONG-AWAITED CELEBRATION

WRITING BY NEFF Communications Manager Tinsley Hunsdorfer  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY Lauren Owens Lambert

For its first full Annual Meeting Picnic Celebration since summer 2019, New England Forestry Foundation (NEFF) decided to shake up its usual program by giving attendees more opportunities to connect with each other, and skipped a formal guest speaker in favor of a birding workshop and excursion—while still inviting some exciting, high-profile guests to the event.

When Executive Director Bob Perschel took the stage and spoke from the heart about the hope offered by climate-smart forestry, when NEFF staff and Board members and volunteers gathered around small tables to chat and plan and laugh, when longtime donors introduced themselves to new NEFF partners, when all this and more unfolded over a gray and drizzly afternoon—NEFF’s ambitious goals and growing programs felt entirely feasible, because this vibrant and committed community is the well-laid foundation on which NEFF continues to build skyward (with wood, or course).

## A Momentous Award Ceremony

Bob and NEFF Board Chair Rick Weyerhaeuser kicked off the awards ceremony by presenting outgoing Board member Rick Findlay with the Board Outstanding Service award (see page 14), and Receptionist and Administrative Assistant Donna Sibley—who has worked at NEFF for 19 years—with the Staff Outstanding Service award. Next, Bob and Rick presented Tom Lapointe with the Forest Steward Award for his volunteer service at Mary A. Herrick Memorial Forest, and Steve Barlow with the Forest Steward Award for his volunteer service at Wellington Wells Memorial Forest.

Bob then turned to the Forest Champion Awards, which recognize exemplary efforts in forest conservation and sustainable management, presented one each to Wil Merck and Sandy Buck for their support of the Forest Carbon for Commercial Landowners initiative. The initiative's work led to the March 2023 publication of a report stating northern Maine's commercial forestlands could store at least 20 percent more carbon each year by changing forest management practices, and without reducing harvest levels.

"Wil Merck and Sandy Buck are long-time NEFF supporters and champions of environmental causes who are now looking to the future with projects like this crucial report on how improved forestry can help the climate," said Bob. "It was through Wil and Sandy's leadership and love of Maine forests that we were able to bring together many large landowners to determine ways their management could help mitigate climate change."

U.S. Senators Edward J. Markey and Elizabeth Warren were both also honored with a Forest Champion Award for their outstanding support of sustainable and climate-smart forestry, as well as forest conservation. As the Senate was in session during the Annual Meeting, two of the Senators' staff members headed to Littleton in their stead: Regional Director Liam Horsman of the Office of U.S. Senator Markey, and Regional Director Allyson Huntoon of the Office of U.S. Senator Warren.



Ms. Huntoon (left) and Mr. Horsman (right) bracket Andrea Colnes as they display the awards.

Mr. Horsman and Ms. Huntoon accepted the awards for Senators Markey and Warren, read statements on the Senators' behalf, and presented NEFF with Certificates of Special Recognition.

Senators Markey and Warren provided regional leadership in making the case for New England to play a prominent role in the USDA \$3 billion Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities, and they also worked to secure support for the Woodlands Partnership of Northwest Massachusetts, a regional, multi-partner collaboration to promote conservation and natural resource-based recreation and economic development for 21 rural towns in the most forested corner of the Commonwealth.

"Senators Warren and Markey have long been champions of Massachusetts and of climate change solutions, and NEFF was honored to present this award to them both for their climate-action leadership and for their help in securing our Climate-Smart Commodities award to serve New England as a whole," said NEFF Deputy Director and Climate Fellow Andrea Colnes. "Thanks to their work we can now say, 'We've got a plan for that!'"

## Speaking With Friends, Old and New

After lunch and the awards ceremony, bird mimic Dan Gardoqui of Lead With Nature led a 30-minute workshop, and then NEFF offered guests three fun options as the day started to wind down: join a group of attendees heading into Prouty Woods with Dan to bird by ear, talk to the range of fascinating people who were happy to just kick back and sip an iced tea, or get a sneak peek of NEFF's new mass timber explainer video and speak to NEFF Bioeconomy Director Jen Shakun about it.

Finally, the day ended with laughter, waves goodbye, and the stacking of chairs.

While much of the wider NEFF community wasn't able to attend the Annual Meeting, several conversations touched on those who couldn't be there, and staff and the Board of Directors are grateful to each and every person and organization that makes NEFF's work possible. Together, we can accomplish astonishing things—and there are many exciting opportunities ahead. 🌿

View NEFF's mass timber explainer video and footage of the Senators' statements at [newenglandforestry.org/2023-annual-meeting](https://newenglandforestry.org/2023-annual-meeting), where we've posted a digital version of this article.



# FINANCIAL PROFILE

WRITING BY NEFF Executive Director Bob Perschel

Fiscal Year 2023 was transformative for NEFF programmatically and financially. We applied for and were awarded a \$30 million grant from the USDA to pilot a region-wide program to improve forest practices and mitigate climate change by growing and harvesting our forests for climate-smart products.

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## Fiscal Year 2023 was transformative for NEFF programmatically and financially.

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This grant became active the first day of May 2023 and will continue for five years. While much of the funding is designed to pass through to forest landowners and other forest-sector professionals as incentive payments, the remainder will enter and appear in NEFF's expanded budget and program work for years to come. Our yearly budget and the portion of the budget derived from government funding will grow.

The tremendous effort required to win this grant, market volatility and rising inflation contributed to a 19% decrease in revenue over the fiscal year and a 20% rise in expenses. Throughout this challenging year of opportunity, our donors and philanthropic partners continued to provide tremendous support for NEFF's mission. The year ended with \$3.5 million in total revenue, and total net assets of \$46.5 million. NEFF's net assets include \$34.1 million of land, buildings and equipment.

Looking forward, NEFF's financial standing remains strong. Our revenue remains nicely balanced between Contributions (27%), Grants (21%), Timber (19%) and Land Contributions (23%). Our combined balance sheet remains strong and liquid, and programmatic efficiency increased

from 75% to 80%. We have augmented our staff for the increased programmatic work under the USDA grant as well as made

investments in technology, talent management and fundraising. This growth reflects the organization's commitment to maximizing our impact during this decade of heightened urgency for our mission.

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## Looking forward, NEFF's financial standing remains strong.

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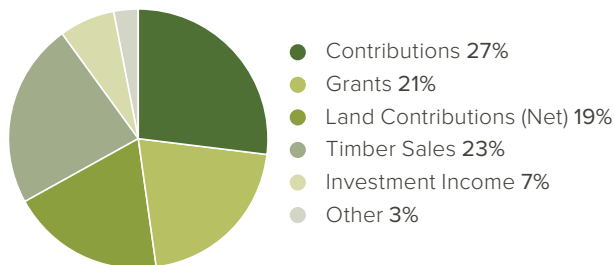
In the year ahead, our momentum will continue to build as we mobilize our resources to achieve ambitious future goals. We will capitalize on federal Inflation Reduction Act funding opportunities, create new avenues for corporate engagement with NEFF, and lay the groundwork that will position this organization to be a national thought leader in wood markets and conservation. 🌱

## FY22 & FY23 Consolidated Results

Sources of Revenue	AUDITED	PRELIMINARY
	FYE April 30, 2022	FYE April 30, 2023
Contributions	1,127,261	946,084
Grants	970,295	728,313
Timber Sales	910,104	648,264
Land Contributions (Net)	951,000	816,343
Investment Income	230,025	230,207
Other Income	109,863	134,924
Sale of Conservation Easement	3,000	91,725
<b>Total Revenue</b>	<b>4,301,548</b>	<b>3,460,936</b>
<b>Expenses</b>		
Conservation and Education	2,419,262	3,089,299
Fundraising	450,481	458,290
Management and General	364,569	326,862
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>3,234,312</b>	<b>3,874,451</b>
<b>Gains (Losses)</b>		
Net Realized and Unrealized Gain(loss) on Investments	(981,990)	(136,952)
Net Realized and Unrealized Gain(loss) on Land Sale	(42,791)	-
<b>Total Gains (Losses)</b>	<b>(1,024,781)</b>	<b>(139,952)</b>

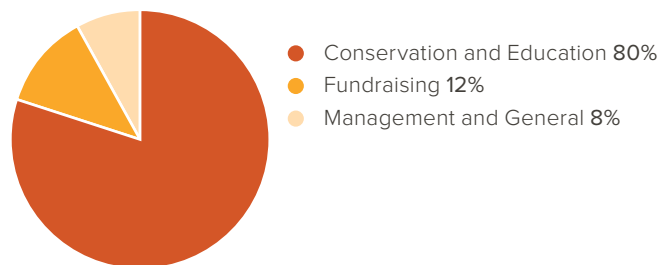
### Revenue FY23

May 1, 2022–April 30, 2023



### Expenses FY23

May 1, 2022–April 30, 2023



<b>BEGINNING NET ASSETS</b>	<b>\$47,040,725</b>	<b>47,083,180</b>
<b>CHANGE IN NET ASSETS</b>	<b>42,455</b>	<b>(550,467)</b>
<b>TOTAL NET ASSETS</b>	<b>\$47,083,180</b>	<b>\$46,532,713*</b>

\*Total Net Assets includes Fixed Assets of \$34,098,474

At the time of printing, FY 2023 numbers were preliminary pending audit completion. Audited numbers are available upon request.

# CONSERVATION REPORT

## COMPLETED PROJECTS

MAY 1, 2022–APRIL 30, 2023

Project Name	Location	Type	Acres	Date
Heart of Poland Amendment	Poland, ME	 Conservation Easement	5	June 21, 2022
Willey Woods Easement	Burke, VT	 Conservation Easement	283	December 14, 2022
Gardner Brook	Readfield, ME	 Community Forest	326	February 1, 2023
Shirley Bog	Shirley, ME	 Community Forest	525	February 1, 2023
Close Easement	Monkton, VT	 Conservation Easement	195	March 30, 2023

Willey Woods Easement. Photo by Matt Peters.

## PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

### WILLEY WOODS EASEMENT

The Town of Burke has long identified the 283-acre Willey Woods property, located in the village of West Burke, as an ideal conservation opportunity with good public access and important natural resources. In collaboration with the Town, the Trust for Public Land helped fundraise for the property's purchase, and also asked NEFF and the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board to co-hold an easement on the land.

"We were honored to partner with these organizations and the Town of Burke to establish this vital community forest and help protect its range of benefits, from public recreation to carbon sequestration," said Will Brune, NEFF Chief Conservation Officer. "It's a truly beautiful addition to our suite of conserved Vermont land, and it feels like part of the NEFF family, given that it offers many of the same opportunities and protects many of the same sorts of resources as NEFF's Community Forests do."

The new Willey Woods Community Forest is the first unit of public land in West Burke and is part of a more than 2,000-acre block of connected forestland. This means its conservation helps prevent forest fragmentation, ensure water quality and flood resilience, and prevent the loss of biodiversity. Willey Woods also provides wildlife habitat, allows for sustainable timber harvesting and offers a wide range of opportunities for public recreation, including hunting, fishing and snowmobiling.

### HEART OF POLAND AMENDMENT

NEFF currently holds an approximately 100-acre conservation easement on the publicly accessible Heart of Poland Conservation Area owned by the Town of Poland; the Town donated the easement to NEFF in 2017. Through this year's Heart of Poland amendment, the Town added 5 acres to their current easement with NEFF, including land along Hilt Hollow Road that will provide new trail access to the conservation area, and also protect a vibrant wooded vernal pool. NEFF is happy to partner with the Town once again, and to see continued growth of the area's conserved land, which also includes Poland's Bragdon Hill Conservation Area, made up of Poland Town Forest and NEFF's Bragdon Hill Community Forest, and NEFF's True Farm Living Forest in nearby Mechanic Falls.



## CLOSE EASEMENT

NEFF has been working with The Nature Conservancy (TNC), the Town of Monkton and several conservation-minded individuals in the area to conserve about 460 acres in the Monkton area. Monkton is a part of the Pond Brook Watershed, which is a 19,000-acre area of Northern White Cedar swamps, oak-covered ridgetops, and prime agricultural soils. More than 95 percent of the Pond Brook Watershed is in private ownership and the town has prioritized the conservation of this area. The first landowner in the area to move forward with donating a conservation easement on his property is Peter Close. Peter has graciously donated an easement on 195 acres of his 231-acre property, which borders TNC's Raven Ridge Natural Area, and he will hopefully be the first of several landowners who will perpetually protect their land and increase conservation in the area.



Gardner Brook

## SHIRLEY BOG

Bounded to the east by two miles of the West Branch of the Piscataquis River and cut through by Birch Brook from northwest to southeast before it enters the Piscataquis River itself, this Community Forest is a property run through with water. Its gently rolling terrain is filled with wet runs and brooks, most of which drain into the river.

The property's wetlands and early successional habitat make for spectacular wildlife habitat. The property was recently harvested by a previous landowner, so it will take some time for the forest—dominated by mixed softwoods—to fully regenerate. In the interim, NEFF will manage Shirley Bog in a way that ensures a robust future forest with high-value habitat. In keeping with NEFF's Exemplary Forestry™ standards, when forestry is conducted on-site, it will be done with the utmost care so as to ensure biodiversity and forest health are protected.

Shirley Bog has 263 acres of significant inland waterfowl and wading bird habitat along the bog portion of the river, which is also critical to its Tall Sedge Fen, located specifically in the West Shirley Bog and a source of important habitat for varied wildlife. The river itself, a true ecological hotspot, also provides critical habitat for Atlantic Salmon and has a high density of natural brook trout. The area may even provide habitat for Canada Lynx.

Shirley Bog. Photo by Credere Associates, LLC



## GARDNER BROOK

Gardner Brook forest abuts the existing 78-acre NEFF Luce Memorial Forest, as well as an adjacent 424 acres owned by the Kennebec Land Trust and the 110-acre Readfield Town Forest. By taking ownership of this large “hole in the doughnut,” NEFF has created a new 402-acre NEFF forest in Readfield as well as an overarching, connected habitat block of 936 conserved acres.

Even standing on its own, NEFF's new Readfield parcel is nothing to sneeze at: more than 82 percent of the property can support productive forestry, its forests are stocked with mixed hardwoods at over 30 cords per acre (that's a lot), and it still hosts 57 acres of wetlands and inland waterfowl and wading bird habitat, as well as supports 170 acres of deer wintering habitat. The property also offers established trails that wind through Beech, Balsam Fir, Hemlock, Paper Birch, Red Maple, Red Oak, White Ash, White Pine, Yellow Birch and Sugar Maple. 🌿

# MEET NEFF'S NEW STAFF MEMBERS

In coordination with our emerging Climate-Smart Commodities program, NEFF has been able to significantly expand our team. We can now offer new resources to the region to support healthy forests and climate action thanks to the addition of senior forestry expertise; new forest biometrics, modeling and science capacity; outreach staff; and project coordination and fundraising capacity.

For more information, visit [newenglandforestry.org/about/our-team](http://newenglandforestry.org/about/our-team)

## **KERRY CASTORANO** CHIEF DEVELOPMENT OFFICER

Kerry joined NEFF to design and implement strategies that raise community support and awareness of NEFF and its important mission. Kerry's entire career has been spent in the nonprofit sector, primarily serving museums with natural history or STEM-focused collections. She has a master's degree in anthropology from Brandeis University and completed her undergraduate work at the University of Notre Dame.

## **KATE LINDROOS CONLIN** WOODLANDS PARTNERSHIP COORDINATOR

As Coordinator for the Woodlands Partnership of Northwest Massachusetts, Kate helps facilitate NEFF's work as the Administrative Agent for the Partnership, which focuses on forest conservation and nature-based economic development. Kate has experience in nonprofit program development, writing, editing, publishing, and teaching, and holds a B.A. in history from Hampshire College, a M.A. in English from Central Connecticut State University, and a M.F.A in poetry from the UMass Amherst.

## **DANIEL HOHL** PROGRAM FORESTER

Dan oversees forest management on all NEFF Community Forests and supports implementation of the Climate-Smart Commodities program. He is familiar with New England forests and the management of forest stands, including the economics of timber harvests, forest health, invasive species threats, and silvicultural prescriptions. He brings a wealth of expertise through his work with the Maine Coast Heritage Trust and USDA Forest Service, and forestry work in other regions. Dan has a B.S. in forest management from SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry.

## **DARREN JOHNSON** SENIOR FORESTER

Darren leads NEFF's forestry team and oversees NEFF's efforts to implement Exemplary Forestry standards across the region, including major components of our Climate-Smart Commodities

program. He is a licensed professional forester and fire ecologist, and holds a BSc in forestry and M.S. in forest ecology. He has more than 20 years' experience working in North America, Asia and Africa on forest and fire management, conservation, and climate change-related activities. Darren has collaborated with government agencies, indigenous groups, and nonprofits including the World Bank, UN, The Nature Conservancy, US Forest Service – International Programs, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

**VANESSA KOMADA (THEY/THEM)**  
**WOOD SOURCING SPECIALIST**

Vanessa works to develop, document, and promote a climate-smart wood supply chain in New England as part of the market development team of NEFF's Climate-Smart Commodities program. Their interests range from forest economics, disturbance regime guided silviculture, and environmental justice, with experience in the forests of the Midwest and West Coast. Vanessa has had

the privilege to work with a variety of stakeholders, nonprofits, government organizations, and private landowners over the years and holds a B.S. from the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point and a M.F. from UC Berkeley.

**DAVID RAY**  
**FOREST BIOMETRICIAN**

David uses forest biometrics to address quantitative aspects of NEFF's scientific undertakings, and he is a forester with experience in applied research and management of Northeastern forests. His interests range from ecological and intensive silviculture, to growth and yield modeling and fire ecology. He has worked for several conservation organizations, including Woods Hole Research Center, The Nature Conservancy, and Tall Timbers Research Station. David has a B.S. and Ph.D. from University of Maine, and a M.S. from SUNY College of Environmental Science, all in forestry.

**CATRINA VEAR**  
**GRANT WRITER & CSC**  
**PROJECT COORDINATOR**

Catrina is responsible for coordinating the many moving parts that make up NEFF's \$30 million Climate-Smart Commodities program, and facilitates timely completion, documentation and reporting to the USDA. She also researches and pursues new federal funds to empower NEFF's mission. Previously, Catrina built her development, grants management, and project management skills at nonprofit organizations with focus areas like international human rights and animal welfare, as well as at a museum of science and nature. She holds a bachelor's degree from Boston University. 🌱

# CLIMATE INITIATIVES

## CLIMATE-SMART COMMODITIES: THE VIEW FROM THE STARTING LINE

WRITING BY Andrea Colnes, NEFF Deputy Director and Climate Fellow

As New England faces unprecedented weather patterns and smoke from Canadian wildfires darkens our skies, it's good to know New England Forestry Foundation (NEFF) sits at the starting line of a major climate-mitigation effort. As climate change arrives at our doorstep, NEFF is taking action to implement our 30 Percent Solution to keep more than 646 million metric tons of CO<sub>2</sub> out of the atmosphere over the next 30 years, or nearly one-third of the total energy-related CO<sub>2</sub> emissions reductions needed across New England by 2050.

NEFF's signature achievement in the past year has been to secure \$30 million to pilot climate-smart forestry and carbon storage both in the forest and in wood products used to replace carbon-intensive steel and concrete. NEFF's Climate-Smart Commodities award from the USDA provides the resources to work with more than a dozen partners and a multitude of landowners across the region to put climate-smart forest practices on the ground and carbon reduction on the table.

Our climate-smart forestry work builds directly on the successes highlighted below, from NEFF publishing a peer-reviewed scientific article that documents the case for carbon drawdown through improved forest management, to NEFF partnering with commercial forestland owners to define and model climate-smart forest practices that can be economic on the landscape through the Forest Carbon for Commercial Landowners initiative.

It has been a challenging year for climate, but NEFF has risen to the occasion and is bringing forward powerful solutions for New England.

NEFF is taking action to implement our 30 Percent Solution to keep more than

646 million MT CO<sub>2</sub>

out of the atmosphere over the next 30 years

Exemplary Forestry calls for select mature tree stands, like the one shown here, to be set aside to benefit wildlife and biodiversity, and in some cases to be managed to speed up the development of old-growth characteristics. Photo by Michael Perlman.

NEFF Bioeconomy Initiative Director Jen Shakun visited a glulam manufacturer during the 2023 International Mass Timber Conference. Glulam is a type of mass timber.



# NEW ENGLAND FORESTRY FOUNDATION CLIMATE INITIATIVES

## WRITING BY

Conservation Project Manager  
Sophie Anthony, Director of Outreach  
and Engagement Lisa Hayden,  
Western Maine Project Specialist  
Christine Parrish, Forest Scientist  
Colleen Ryan, and Bioeconomy  
Initiative Director Jen Shakun

## EXEMPLARY FORESTRY

Exemplary Forestry remains at the heart of everything NEFF does. Over the past year, we have focused on spreading the word about Exemplary Forestry and its potential to combat climate change while also enhancing habitat for the full suite of native wildlife species in New England, producing renewable materials for building and other uses, and supporting sustainable livelihoods.

Exemplary Forestry remains at the heart of everything NEFF does.

Following the November 2022 publication of NEFF's first peer-reviewed scientific paper, which built on NEFF's previous forest modeling and financial analysis to quantify the climate benefits of switching from conventional forest management to Exemplary Forestry, several members of NEFF's science team presented on Exemplary Forestry and its applications at the New England Society of American Foresters (SAF) meeting in the spring. NEFF also has two presentations on the program at the upcoming SAF National Convention in Sacramento, where we will share the remarkable progress we have made in New England, and put forth Exemplary Forestry as a national model.

## BIOECONOMY INITIATIVE

The Build It With Wood program and Forest-to-Cities Climate Challenge have entered their next phase as part of NEFF's broad Bioeconomy Initiative—an effort to create a sustainable, lower-carbon economy that uses renewable, biological materials produced from our forests.

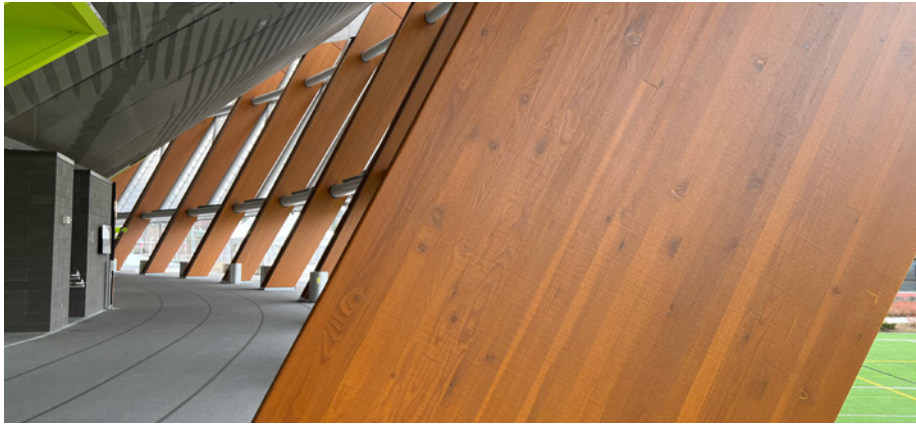
This year marked a significant expansion in NEFF's network of partners in the Northeast and beyond, especially around the topic of sustainable sourcing for mass timber. As mass timber construction continues to rise in popularity, so has interest in this topic, and this is presenting NEFF with new opportunities. NEFF staff members led or contributed to several initiatives that are creating

tools and information to help architects and builders maximize the positive impact of mass timber construction through their wood procurement policies; NEFF was also invited to speak on a panel at the International Mass Timber Conference with several exceptional co-presenters from the U.S. and Canada. With a record number of attendees, that meeting was a bellwether of the positive momentum behind sustainable building materials. The USDA-funded Climate-Smart Commodities Partnership also put significant additional resources behind this work—setting us up to accelerate our impact and deepen our collaborations along the supply chain over the years ahead.

## OUTREACH

NEFF's Outreach programs are preparing for ambitious work. Planning is underway to ramp up technical assistance to woodland owners interested in how they can pursue climate-smart forest stewardship on their property through the five-year USDA grant. Meanwhile, NEFF's work serving as Administrative Agent for the Mohawk Trail Woodlands Partnership—created in 2018 state law—is in a time of transition. This volunteer Board voted in October 2022 to change its name to the Woodlands Partnership of Northwest Massachusetts. They are now preparing to fund forestry practices to promote climate resilience, seeking legislative support to recognize the new name, and in June, voted to expand membership to include an organization representing Indigenous Peoples, the Ohketeau Cultural Center of Ashfield, Mass.

"We have worked closely with the Woodlands Partnership to increase Indigenous voices, perspectives, education, and inclusion," said Ohketeau Co-Director Rhonda Anderson, Iñupiaq, who joins the Partnership Board. "Our relationship is essential in furthering reciprocity between the state and town forest management, land conservation, sustainable ecological practices, and accessibility with Indigenous communities. We look forward to our future together."



Jen Shakun toured the University of Oregon's Hayward Field to see its beautiful glulam elements made from Doug Fir.

## POOLED TIMBER INCOME FUND

Donors who have joined the Pooled Timber Income Fund (PTIF), now officially in operation for four years, are able to take advantage of timber markets and retain a more regular flow of timber revenue. The larger benefits of the PTIF have also become more apparent in recent years, especially with the current focus on forests as a great natural solution to climate change. The PTIF has been shown to enhance the permanent protection of cherished land, utilizes NEFF's expertise on Exemplary Forestry, and increases engagement of landowners as an important partner in a landscape-scale and regional approach to solving the climate and biodiversity crises. The PTIF continues to grow and is working on bringing in about 700 acres of land in this upcoming year.

## EXEMPLARY FORESTRY INVESTMENT FUND

The Exemplary Forestry Investment Fund (EFIF) expects to close on its first forest acquisition this year: a 3,000-acre property in Greenville, Maine near Moosehead Lake. The EFIF is a stand-alone land conservation management fund created by NEFF and our partners in the Maine Mountain Collaborative, and NEFF's Bob Perschel and Alec Giffen now serve on its Board of Directors. Its mission is to acquire 100,000 forestland acres or more in Maine, protect them under easement and manage the forest for the long term under NEFF's Exemplary Forestry standards. While the EFIF is a for-profit entity, the lands will be managed by a nonprofit management group. The fund uses a blended finance approach, including philanthropy, private equity, federal funding, and program-related investments and low-cost loans from foundations to deliver a modest rate of return for major conservation value. The EFIF is also now considering a second purchase in western Maine. 🌿

## FOREST CARBON FOR COMMERCIAL LANDOWNERS

NEFF has played a key role in the Forest Carbon for Commercial Landowners (FCCL) initiative, whose first phase of research demonstrated improved forest management—including management like Exemplary Forestry—could increase carbon storage on northern Maine's commercial forestlands by 15-26 percent without reducing wood harvest volume. Maintaining harvest is important to avoid "leakage," or the spillover of in-forest carbon sequestration gains and losses from one economic market to another.\*

The research also found that these carbon results could be achieved at a lower cost than many other approaches to mitigating climate change. NEFF is currently preparing to launch a second phase of the FCCL initiative to refine the silvicultural modeling—in part to more accurately model the carbon outcomes of Exemplary Forestry—and design an approach for implementing improved management on Maine's commercial forestlands at scale. As the majority of New England's forestlands are owned by large, for-profit enterprises, this effort is an exciting opportunity to spread the principles of Exemplary Forestry more widely and to make a much bigger impact on the climate than can be achieved by nonprofit and public landowners alone.

NEFF is preparing to launch a second phase of the FCCL initiative to refine the silvicultural modeling and design an approach for implementing improved forest management.

## WESTERN MAINE HABITAT RESTORATION

Based on NEFF and partners' successful 2016 project to restore native wildlife habitat on privately owned forest in western Maine, NEFF launched a new five-year Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) with NRCS in July 2023 that will prioritize private forest ownerships greater than 75 acres that also link vital habitats across ownerships in the Acadian Forest landscape. NEFF's new role as a primary NRCS partner in the 2023-2028 Western Maine RCPP allows NEFF to shape the project while striving to make Exemplary Forestry accessible, affordable, and easy to implement. Other project notables include: training and mentoring Professional Foresters and establishing one demonstration forest and three forest songbird habitat study sites to monitor changes before and after harvesting, and collecting and analyzing social and economic data related to the project.

\*The wood products we all use have to come from somewhere, so if the United States or a U.S. region reduced its wood production, any progress we claimed to make in also reducing atmospheric CO2 levels by storing more carbon in unharvested U.S. trees would be eclipsed by CO2 emissions from other forestry markets that increased harvesting to meet the United States' unchanged demand for wood products.



# NEFF'S OWN WEED WARRIOR

A June 2023 field dispatch from  
NEFF Development Communications  
Specialist David Ayers

I knew Rick from his time on the NEFF Board. When I was but eight months into my role, Rick was just stepping down from his after 10 years. Rick was recognized for his outstanding achievements at NEFF's 2023 Annual Meeting; when I attended the June 8 event and watched Rick receive his awards, little did I know the extent to which he deserved those honors. That would soon change.

In Rick's case, his sterling reputation precedes him through no self-promotion or want of recognition.

The weekend after NEFF's Annual Meeting, I met Rick in the field for the first time. The Littleton Conservation Commission in partnership with Sudbury Valley Trustees was hosting a Weed Warrior program at Brown's Woods in Littleton. Two things became abundantly clear to me at that event: one, everyone knows Rick, and two, everyone respects Rick. These are not mutually exclusive qualities, though in their unanimity they may as well be. In Rick's case, his sterling reputation precedes him through no self-promotion or want of recognition.

In early June, it was Burning Bush, Multiflora Rose and Garlic Mustard. Today, just a few weeks later on June 28, it's Porcelain Berry, Japanese Knotweed and Norway Maple. These may not be household names, but they elicit an immediate and disdainful reaction from the dedicated few who combat invasive plants in New England. And who are these dedicated few? The land trusts, public agencies, and conservation commissions that formally work to contain invasives, and locals who care enough to do something—and are

able to do something—for their nearby ecosystems. Locals like former NEFF Board of Directors member Rick Findlay.

Rick does some formal invasives work, but primarily sticks to volunteering in Littleton, and is the local invasives guide for me and two other volunteers this afternoon at Prouty Woods Community Forest. Rick is one of those people who cares enough to take action against invasives, and to such a degree that he has become the de facto invasive plant expert in town.

Back to our invasives outing on June 28: Rick greets us wearing a "Findlay" t-shirt. This is *the* weed warrior himself—the shirt suits him like a cape does a superhero, even if his quiet modesty would normally never allow it. It was a gift from a friend, he says, explaining the connection to the University of Findlay in Ohio.

He opens the hatch of his Subaru Outback. Within lies the weed warrior's arsenal of tools: A weed wrench, a heavy-duty tool that closely resembles

a car jack, a tri-blade weed whacker for the Japanese Knotweed, some miscellaneous bobs and bits, and the occasional glove. He shows us a couple of brush hogs in the barn, and mentions the tractor outside the barn once belonged to his mother-in-law. This all seems uniquely Rick. As willing as he is to dole out his encyclopedic knowledge, he is just as willing to lend a hand or tool. A few folks pass us on the trail. Rick acknowledges them, weed wrench in hand. The gentleman of the group yells back, “go get ‘em, Rick!” I’m reminded once again of Rick’s celebrity.



Lauren Owens Lambert

As willing as he is to dole out his encyclopedic knowledge, he is just as willing to lend a hand or tool.

Walking down one of the side trails at Prouty, Rick makes a comment that surprises me. “I had been somewhat a loner growing up, making my own fishing rod as a five-year-old and cruising the Bronx River.”

Unlike his siblings, Rick admitted to struggling at school and initially balked at the opportunity to go off to prep school. He ultimately followed his brother to the Pomfret School in Connecticut where he would make some of the most meaningful connections in his life.

One of those connections was Seaver Leslie. Rick and Seaver spent years together as teenagers and young adults fishing Maine’s lakes, ponds, and streams. Rick, an avid fisherman who was given his own fly rod at age 7, was quick to hitchhike from New York to Maine, year after year. The Leslies became his second family and provided him with his first introduction to NEFF by way of the Sortwell Memorial Forest, which was donated by Seaver’s grandparents.

Through family connections, Seaver met one Roger Prouty during a trip to Colorado and immediately introduced him to Rick. The three became quick friends, and by chance Rick moved to Littleton, Roger’s birthplace. Roger introduced him to family and friends, and soon he was on the board of the Littleton Conservation Trust.

These names are at once familiar to me and now, suddenly, richly illustrated. *That* Prouty. The family for which this Community Forest is named. The family whose former home now serves as NEFF’s stately headquarters. It dawns on me that Rick was instrumental in NEFF acquiring the Prouty estate. The rest is history—NEFF history.

Before leaving for the day, Rick gives the three of us our directive. It’s simple: keep the stone wall clear on both sides, from the trail’s kiosk to just past the community farm. “An hour here and an hour there,” he says. To Rick, this is considered “whittling.” To me, almost forty years his junior, it feels like a wrestling match. He makes it sound so



David Ayers

easy and with a ring of optimism, I find encouragement in his words.

The only fair comparison between invasives and Rick is their widespread influence on the land. Rick is everywhere, all at once. Invasives, sadly, the same. I wonder to myself: if there were enough Rick Findlays in the world, would there be any invasives at all? Rick’s devotion to ridding or at least managing these pests is just that remarkable. Feeling inspired, I tackle the weeds around a Prouty outbuilding. I think about the connections between Rick, Seaver and Roger, as well as their respective legacies. A tremendous sense of gratitude comes over me. Surely, I can carve out 30 minutes before lunch. What’s a little whittling, anyway? 🌿



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