

INTO THE WOODS

NEW ENGLAND FORESTRY FOUNDATION | ANNUAL REPORT 2024

Pivotal NEFF Leader Robert Perschel Announces Retirement

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FORESTRY
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Dear Friends and Supporters,

By my count, I have written fifty Executive Director letters for NEFF's newsletter, spanning over 12 years. Each of them has consisted of my words and thoughts—not crafted by a ghostwriter or an artificial intelligence tool. This may be my last one, as NEFF begins the transition to a new Executive Director. I've tried to be creative and informative in each letter, tying in our latest activities and accomplishments in programs, conservation, and land stewardship with what was on my mind at the time—and always, always expressing the thanks we at NEFF have for you, our supporters and community. I've enjoyed writing these letter and I hope you've enjoyed reading.

During my first day in forestry school in 1977, I signed on as a scribe for the Yankee Forest Conference, which brought experts together to discuss sustainable forestry and its implementation in New England. Here I am, 47 years later and still working—on the same issue—and experts continue to discuss what it means to practice sustainable forestry.

NEFF has its own answer to this question; we call it Exemplary Forestry™ and use its standards to guide the management of our lands, and have also made it available to other landowners. I expect such discussions about how to define sustainable forestry will never stop, and they should not. As society changes and as we learn more about how forests develop, forests' value to our well-being, and the consequences of forestry, we need to continue to re-define sustainable management goals.

The forestry profession in the U.S. has confronted these watershed moments by coming together for eight national forestry congresses since the 1880s. It is time for the Ninth Forestry Congress.

This Ninth Congress would consider forestry in the context of the climate crisis. What we considered sustainable forestry only a few decades ago is not always sufficient to account for climate change. Now is the time to see how forests can help mitigate climate change in the next 30 years, because if we do not stave off the worst predictions, our forests and most of our management strategies will be in peril.

If we lose the climate mitigation game in the next 30 years, our losses will be unacceptable.

That 30-year window should figure prominently in any new definition of sustainability. We also need to manage our forests to be more adaptive and resilient to climate change, but mitigation remains a top priority. Fortunately, there are already forestry and climate-science teams working on new management strategies. Exemplary Forestry, climate-smart forestry and NEFF's current Climate-Smart Commodities incentive programs are all examples of their work.

But now is the time to come to broad agreement on the predicament we face and reorient forest management to meet that challenge—this is where a Ninth Forestry Congress is indispensable. NEFF can supply crucial experience to seed the conversation. NEFF has authored a white paper titled "Redefining Sustainable Forestry in a Climate Emergency" that could be the congress' blueprint, and our work shows the results of what one region can accomplish in 12 years if it tackles climate change head on. We correctly identified the challenge, codified climate-smart Exemplary Forestry standards and modeled them to show a 30 Percent Solution. We created innovative programs like the Pooled Timber Income Fund and Exemplary Forestry Investment Fund to implement the practices more broadly. We won a \$30 million grant from USDA to prove our concept through a pilot program and identify a long-term, 30-year approach.

History shows that when the United States sets its mind to making a difference in times of era-defining crisis, we can accomplish remarkable things. Now, our nation is faced with a new challenge, and together we need to rise up and address it. Forestry is one of many answers to this challenge, but it is the one I was trained for and NEFF was founded for 80 years ago. We can meet this challenge, too, if we work together at common purpose at the next forestry congress. I expect NEFF will be in the lead.

Robert Perschel, Executive Director

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**PIVOTAL NEFF LEADER ROBERT PERSCHEL
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OUR DONORS

I have been fortunate to have worked with Bob over the years in many different situations, but the most memorable was way back when he was Chair of the board of the Northern Forest Alliance. Bob was Chair, Walter Graff from AMC was Vice Chair, and the two of them together were real super heroes! They pulled together a group of organizations at a time when such alliances weren't as prevalent as they are today. And as a part of the success, a number of major national funders were attracted to the alliance, many of whom continue to be involved today. The long-term impact can be seen in so many subsequent land protection projects that probably would not have happened, especially in Maine, if not for the ground breaking work of the Alliance.

**Andrew Falender | Former
President | Appalachian
Mountain Club**

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 all NEFF Forest Stewards for their hard work!

Massachusetts:

Warren Dimmick
Rick Findlay
Forest Lyford
Rick McNeil
Bob Moore
Susan Phillips
Scott Rogers

Andrew Sammarco
Kenneth Sydow
John Van Heynigen
Brian and Paula Waldron

Maine:

Garry Hinkley

New Hampshire:

Mark Accomando, Jr.
Bob Marshall
Al Vachon

Connecticut:

Dianne Bryce-Bronk
Penny Foisey

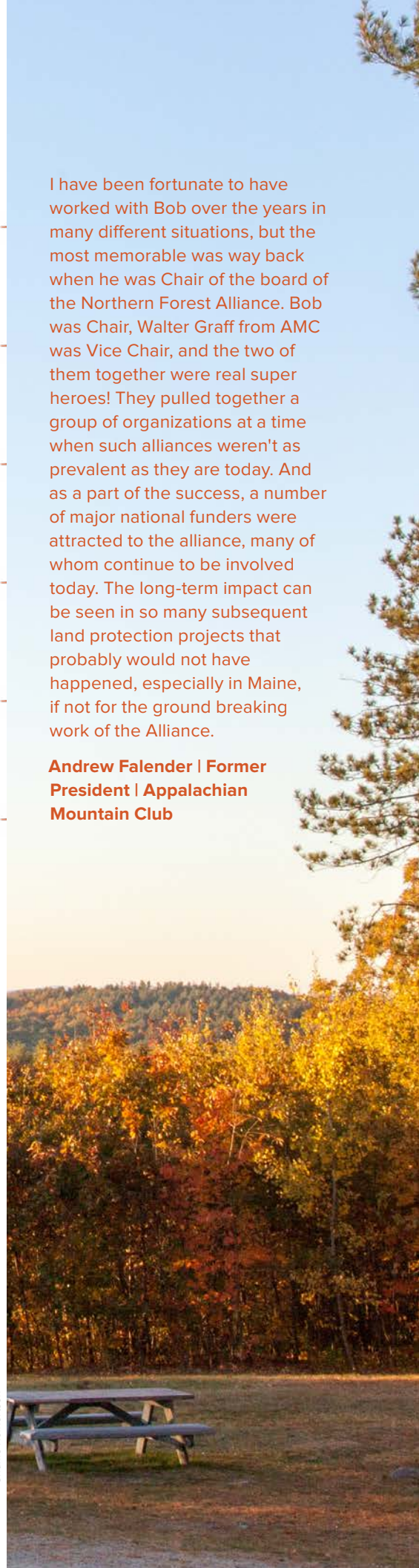
Vermont:

Paul Kendall
Rick LaDue

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 2023.

Front cover: Bob attends a NEFF-led Exemplary Forestry field trip focused on restoring globally important wildlife habitat using climate-smart forestry. Photo by Twolined Studio.

Charlie Reimertsen





Bob attends a NEFF-led Exemplary Forestry field trip. Photo by Twolined Studio.

PIVOTAL NEFF LEADER ROBERT PERSCHEL ANNOUNCES RETIREMENT

WRITING BY

NEFF Communications Manager Tinsley Hunsdorfer,
NEFF Executive Director Bob Perschel, and
NEFF Board of Directors President Rick Weyerhaeuser

This spring, I announced my plans to retire as Executive Director of New England Forestry Foundation (NEFF) by the end of the year. I've spent 45 years as an environmental professional, and I'm glad that in this final stretch, I have been able to help NEFF step fully into a regional leadership role on forest-based climate solutions. After 12 rewarding and exciting years at NEFF, it feels like the right time to turn NEFF's reins over to a new Executive Director.

Our \$30 million Climate-Smart Commodities grant has allowed NEFF to put together a spectacular team, and I know NEFF's forestry leadership is in place to carry the organization forward in implementing climate-smart forestry across the entire region. NEFF's new Executive Director will be able to take advantage of a solid programmatic path, great momentum and terrific supporters to keep this going. I'm not leaving the conservation forestry space, but this transition will give NEFF new creative energy to keep the innovative spirit of its work going.

For me, this change will provide a chance to concentrate on personal writing projects and spend more time with my one-year-old granddaughter and family.

—Bob Perschel

Robert Perschel's leadership has utterly transformed NEFF.

When he was hired, much of NEFF's small staff worked in land conservation and stewardship—crucial components of the organization, make no mistake—while NEFF offered little in the way of programs and outreach. Bob had a vision for NEFF, however, and set out to grow and transform its programming into a sophisticated vehicle for natural climate solutions that complemented the carbon storage potential of NEFF's conserved working forests.

Thanks to Bob's ability to inspire others and see his visions through to completion, NEFF began to grow its staff and launched 10 initiatives over time, almost all nested under the umbrella of natural climate solutions—though some overlap with the conservation of working forests (an

opportunity to spread climate-smart forestry) and with habitat restoration (rooted in climate-smart forestry).

These programs further NEFF's mission in new ways, and, indeed, they led NEFF to expand its mission statement when Exemplary Forestry and climate change mitigation had clearly become fundamental components of NEFF's work. And just like that, Bob had reshaped the very foundation of NEFF.

The Years Before NEFF

Bob walked a long path to reach NEFF, though forests and forestry were a recurring theme on it. Throughout his career, Bob has worked for the forest industry, had his own forestry consulting



Twolined Studio

business, co-founded the Forest Stewards Guild, and fully embraced the nonprofit world with positions at The Wilderness Society and Northern Forest Alliance. He finds two of his professional experiences from before joining NEFF particularly meaningful.

NORTHERN FOREST ALLIANCE

Both NEFF’s Bob Perschel and Andrea Colnes were involved in the Northern Forest Alliance (NFA), which had the ambitious vision, “To achieve a sustainable future for the 26 million-acre Northern Forest, in which its wildlands are permanently protected, its forests are sustainably managed, and its local economies and communities are strong and vibrant.”

Over the course of about 15 years, the NFA delivered game-changing results: driving a shift toward sustainable forest management across the four-state



NEFF headquarters at Prouty Woods Community Forest. Photo by Charlie Reinertsen.

“What originally fascinated me about forestry has never left me; the opportunity to engage with a living ecosystem in a way that was sustainable and required my full attention as a human being. I’ve written about this—if you practice forestry and apply your full scientific and emotional self—your heart and your mind—you will leave the forest a different person than when you entered. I know that has been true about my career and my time at NEFF.” —Bob Perschel

of the NFA vision. The future is ours, and the dream is very much alive.”

Millions of acres of land were conserved in the decades following Bob’s time at NFA, and NEFF’s 339,000-acre Downeast Lakes Forestry Partnership easement in Maine contributed to that tally.

region, securing millions of acres of newly protected wild and working forestlands through innovative fee and easement programs, and beginning to support an economic transition for the region’s forest-based communities.

Bob describes the days he spent at NFA as “momentous,” and fundamental to establishing the course of conservation and forestry in New England.

“I now believe it is eminently possible to complete most of the Alliance’s

vision in the next few decades,” Bob said. “I look at NEFF’s work over the last 12 years as an extension of the Alliance days, as NEFF and a few others have provided the continuity

LAND ETHIC PROGRAM

Bob has an undergraduate degree in psychology from Yale, and this shouldn’t surprise anyone who reads his

Over the last few decades, Bob has been a role model for me. I have tried to learn from and follow his thoughtful connection to forests and the people who depend on them. I remember clearly how he integrated his on-the-ground experience as a forester with the policy insights from his time at The Wilderness Society during our efforts to develop science-based, practical guidance for forest biomass retention.

Alexander ‘Zander’ Evans, PhD (he/him) | Executive Director | Forest Stewards Guild

letters in the NEFF newsletter, where he often ties together his thoughts on forestry, climate, human cognition and emotion, creativity, art and writing. When he worked for The Wilderness Society, he had an opportunity to bring several of these areas of interest together into one program.

“I created a Land Ethic Program to honor the environmental ethics of Wilderness Society founders like Aldo Leopold,” said Bob. “The goal of our program was to explore the maxim that if human beings don’t change their connection to the natural world, we won’t be able



Bob gives a hopeful speech at NEFF's 2023 Annual Meeting, photo by Lauren Owens Lambert

to achieve a balanced human-nature interface and we certainly wouldn’t be able to reach our wilderness or any of our conservation goals.”

Under this land ethic work, Bob engaged with writers, poets, artists, religious figures, ethicists, scientists, and practitioners like foresters; he convened a groundbreaking conference at Yale called “The Good in Nature and Humanity” and published The Land Ethic Toolbox.

For 35 years, I have worked with, observed, and appreciated Bob’s vision and tenacity on behalf of forest health. Beginning with Northern Forest Alliance and recently through the Maine Mountain Collaborative and Exemplary Forestry Investment Fund, Bob has advocated for the importance of well-managed forests. This is a difficult topic with a broad array of strongly held views. It takes courage and commitment to remain in this field for decades and to make a difference as Bob has done.

Karin R. Tilberg | President/CEO | Forest Society of Maine

Bob planned to continue in this field until it became clear climate change had arrived and that Bob had inadvertently developed a specific skill set that was greatly needed: how to practice sustainable forestry in a climate emergency, and how to lead that change. He decided to go back to work with the Forest Stewards Guild to help, and then later applied at NEFF.

According to current long-time NEFF staffers, once Bob set up his office in NEFF’s Prouty Woods headquarters in 2012, it didn’t take long for staff to discover two key facts about him: he is an excellent manager who values his staff and their opinions, and he is a man with a vision.

Bob has always been good with and supportive of NEFF’s staff, and quickly after his hiring, he set up an office open-door policy so staffers were always welcome to talk things through with him, spend time as a group with him, or just say “hi.” No matter how many new projects Bob has undertaken in the intervening years, he remains a very approachable and supportive boss.

“The best thing about the actual day-to-day job at NEFF is seeing staff blossom in their work and accomplish things they maybe didn’t even envision when they started,” said Bob.

He supported staff members who wanted to try their own new ideas, and indeed encouraged everyone to try new things as NEFF itself worked to grow and change at an organizational scale. NEFF’s creative environment and Bob’s open-door policy led to many a brainstorming session in Bob’s office where he would break out a marker and start jotting down and mapping out plans on his whiteboard to help himself and a group of staff members figure out their next steps.

Bob’s passion for forestry and land conservation came through in those brainstorming sessions, but staff members also picked up on it because of how often he took to the trails in the nearest woodland.

Bob Joins NEFF

Several NEFF staff and Board members had met or were familiar with Bob before he joined the organization because of his presence in New England’s land conservation and forestry fields. Once Bob accepted the Executive Director position, that previous experience boosted NEFF’s credibility, and also gave Bob credibility with the public, NEFF’s supporters, and NEFF’s staff and Board.



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a measurable part of the progress, tree by tree, acre by acre, landownership by landownership. Let's keep it going.”

What's Next?

While Bob does plan to stay involved in NEFF's 30 Percent Solution however he can be helpful, he's ready to turn his attention to observing the world and writing. He already has two interconnected projects ready to go.

First, Bob wants to complete a book he started on Environmental Leadership about 20 years ago that he made significant progress on before returning to his climate-change and forestry work. Bob's time with the Guild and NEFF has since provided him with more real-world leadership experiences, and he's ready to finish the book. His second project is simply doing more writing, particularly poetry.

“I've had experiences that are hard to describe, and personal reactions to events like climate change that I feel are best addressed through poetry or prose-poem forms,” Bob said.

“Bob loves being in the woods, and we've always had fun going out with him and hearing about why foresters do what they do,” said Penny Flynn, Development Manager and a NEFF staff member since 1995.

“In Bob's early years at NEFF, it was really helpful when he started providing interesting explanations of forestry in layman's terms for staff without forestry backgrounds, and in the context of that day's walk. Those sorts of walks have remained popular with all of the new staff we've hired over the years.”

My partnership with Bob has been profoundly important and rewarding. When Bob and I began advocating for a 'Say Yes to Wildlands and Woodlands' mindset, stemming from our joint efforts with Wildlands, Woodlands, Farmlands & Communities, many questioned our approach. They wondered why NEFF was collaborating with NEWT and vice versa. Bob, more than anyone, understands that a holistic approach to land conservation—embracing both expanded wildlands and well-managed woodlands—is crucial for a resilient future for wildlife, people, and the planet. Our world isn't zero-sum—we need both, and Bob deeply believes in this vision. His passion for wild forests is genuine, not mere lip service. It has been an immense honor to collaborate with Bob for nearly a decade, amplifying our shared message, and I will sincerely miss our partnership.

**Jon Leibowitz | President and CEO
| Northeast Wilderness Trust**

These walks also demonstrate the kinds of communications and outreach efforts Bob has long championed and that now underpin much of NEFF's work on natural climate solutions. Before NEFF can get key audiences to invest in, champion and use NEFF's 30 Percent Solution, staff must address these challenges: key audiences must first know climate-smart forestry exists, and second, NEFF must make climate-smart forestry and its benefits comprehensible and engaging to key audiences.

“This is good work to be involved in and I believe we're providing the NEFF community with ways to make a difference in the climate crisis,” said Bob. “NEFF has demonstrated how a relatively small group of supporters and practitioners can show the world how New England's forests can contribute, and each of us are close enough to be



Bob describes Exemplary Forestry. Photo by Tinsley Hunsdorfer

An Example of Bob's Writing

In May of 2024, I joined 70 foresters from Europe for the ProSilva annual meeting in Slovakia. ProSilva is a collaborative of foresters working to introduce close-to-nature forestry on the continent and a sister organization to the U.S. Forest Stewards Guild, which I co-founded. Each year, ProSilva visits a different country, and I joined the Slovakia meeting as the U.S. representative

During one trip to an old age beech grove, I was listening to the local foresters' description—via translator—of how they like this grove best and would come to it and lie down under the trees. When I heard the translator call out loudly, “lie down,” this poem began to write itself under the beech trees.

LIE DOWN: A FORESTER'S DIRECTIVE

Lie down and let the falling leaves cover your garments
If you time it right
You can disappear
In minutes
This isn't shinrin-roku,
Or the next big thing to settle your mind
No one does this
It doesn't have the dry husk of ritual
If it's a forester's communion
It's not your first
And while it may be your last
That's not for you to decide.

Take your marking gun and Biltmore stick
Set them on the altar of a rock
Remove the paint-stained orange cruising vest
Fold it, neatly, like a flag
Place it on the ground
Make strange signs with your hands
Asking the sympathetic ash
To drop her leaves, first and fast

Lie down in a shallow place
Stare up through the yellow branches
Into the blue sky
Wait
Breathe, the rhythm of the small things
It's all around you
All around you

Robert T Perschel | May, 2024 | Myjava, Slovakia

Bob's Legacy

Bob Perschel has been a godsend to the New England Forestry Foundation. In his 12 years at the helm, NEFF has grown from a successful regional land trust to a regional and national leader in promoting sustainable, climate-smart forest management as well as large-scale land conservation. Bob's vision of Exemplary Forestry has struck a chord, and it was key to securing the Climate-Smart Commodities grant that has raised our efforts to a new level.

Under Bob's leadership, NEFF has also been accredited by the Land Trust Alliance, increased the acres it conserves via ownership by 50 percent, cemented strong partnerships both regionally and nationally, helped launch two new creative financial vehicles that promote land protection—the Exemplary Forestry Investment Fund and the Pooled Timber Income Fund—and developed a superb staff of talented and dedicated professionals. Personally, I have developed a deep respect for Bob and value his friendship. He will be missed.

—Board President Rick Weyerhaeuser 🌿



NEFF headquarters. Photo by Charlie Reinertsen.



NEFF's Fiscal Year 2024 was another year of outstanding financial performance. The organization saw substantial changes in revenue, expenses, and overall net assets, and NEFF demonstrated solid financial growth in strategic investments and effective expense management. This resulted in positive gains despite economic uncertainties.

FINANCIAL PROFILE

WRITING BY NEFF Executive Director Bob Perschel

Revenue increased by 26% from the prior year. This was driven primarily by a 68% increase in grant revenue. This increase was due to the launch of NEFF's Climate-Smart Commodities project, a five-year, \$30 million award from the USDA that gives NEFF the funds to pilot a regional program to improve and spread the use of climate-smart forest practices, introduce new biobased wood commodities, and mitigate climate change. The new grant played a key role in increasing total revenue, and it offset moderate fluctuations in contributions, timber sales, and other income. Investment income also showed a healthy increase, contributing to revenue growth.

Expenses increased by 30% from the prior year mostly due to increased programmatic work under the USDA grant. Fundraising expenses saw a slight increase, reflecting efforts to secure more funding sources. However, there was a 3% decrease in management and general expenses that indicates efficient cost management across administrative functions. NEFF's programmatic efficiency continues to increase and went from 80% to 84% for the fiscal year.

Total net assets decreased to \$45.6 million in Fiscal Year 2024 from \$46.4 million the year before, resulting in a change of \$(858K). This decline primarily reflects a Board strategic

decision to donate land to a partner conservation organization that could make better public use of the property. NEFF's balance sheet continues to remain strong with high liquidity and no long-term debt. Fixed assets are still significant at \$32.6 million, emphasizing NEFF's strong financial stability and commitment to its mission.

Moving forward, NEFF is poised to capitalize on the momentum of increased grant funding while continuing to improve operational efficiencies. Strategic priorities include enhancing fundraising effectiveness and continuing pragmatic investment strategies to maintain financial stability and support long-term conservation and educational goals.

Moving forward, NEFF is poised to capitalize on the momentum of increased grant funding while continuing to improve operational efficiencies.

NEFF remains committed to its mission of conservation, education and bringing Exemplary Forestry practices to all of New England's working forests. By using its financial strengths, NEFF will continue to navigate future challenges and opportunities to continue to position the organization as a national thought leader in climate-smart forestry and wood markets. 🌿

Left: View From Wilderness Hill at Prouty Woods Community Forest. Photo by Charlie Reinertsen.

FY23 & FY24 Consolidated Results

Sources of Revenue	AUDITED FYE April 30, 2023	PRELIMINARY FYE April 30, 2024
Contributions	946,084	1,043,028
Grants	728,315	2,244,532
Timber Sales	736,198	861,559
Land Contributions (Net)	816,343	107,129
Investment Income	230,207	319,768
Other Income	6,357	135,647
Sale of Conservation Easement	—	—
Total Revenue	\$3,463,504	\$4,711,663

Expenses

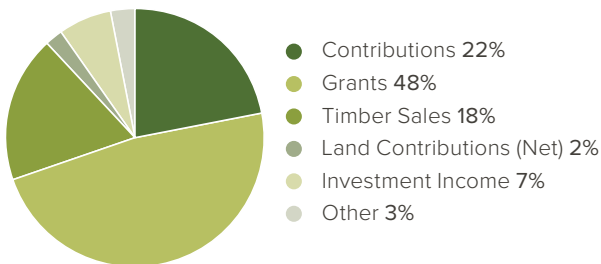
Conservation and Education	3,189,297	4,752,448
Fundraising	458,291	635,071
Management and General	326,867	300,331
Total Expenses	\$3,974,455	\$5,687,850

Gains (Losses)

Net Realized and Unrealized Gain(loss) on Investments	(83,233)	1,004,423
Net Realized and Unrealized Gain(loss) on Land Sale	—	(757,400)
Unrealized Gain(loss) on Beneficial Interest in Trust	(53,844)	(128,344)
Total Gains (Losses)	\$(137,077)	\$118,679

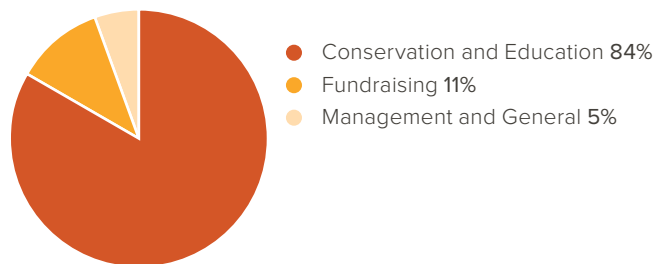
Revenue FY24

May 1, 2023–April 30, 2024



Expenses FY24

May 1, 2023–April 30, 2024











BEGINNING NET ASSETS	47,083,180	46,435,152
CHANGE IN NET ASSETS	(648,028)	(857,508)
TOTAL NET ASSETS	\$46,435,152	\$45,577,644

*Total Net Assets includes Fixed Assets of \$32,641,506

CONSERVATION REPORT

Completed Projects MAY 1, 2023–APRIL 30, 2024

Project Name	Location	Type	Acres	Date
Beals Family Memorial Forest	Ashburnham, MA	 Community Forest	589	8/22/23
Winchendon Forest, LLC – Beals Addition	Ashburnham, MA	 Community Forest	119	9/20/23
Pine Knob Easement II	Whitefield, NH	 Conservation Easement	95	12/15/23
Smokey House Center – Lewis Farm Easement Addition	Danby, VT	 Conservation Easement	93	12/27/23
KP Auto Easement	Morristown, VT	 Conservation Easement	130	12/27/23
Johnson Family Trust Easement	Waterville, VT	 Conservation Easement	92	4/15/24
Steele Easement	Bakersfield, VT	 Conservation Easement	113	4/23/24
Hildreth Easement	Montgomery, VT	 Conservation Easement	43	4/24/24



Top: View of Cold Hollow Mountains from Steele Conservation Easement. Photo by Corey Wrinn. Above: Johnson Family Trust. Photo by Andrew Bentley.

*The PTIF is a planned giving tool through which participants donate their land to NEFF, and the timber on that land is contributed to a pooled income fund; participants can also donate cash to the PTIF. In turn, donors receive an even stream of lifetime income and tax benefits. All donated land receives permanent protection and is managed to NEFF's Exemplary Forestry standards.

Project Highlights

BEALS FAMILY MEMORIAL FOREST

NEFF Board and long-time staff member Whitney “Whit” Beals generously donated this property to NEFF as part of the Pooled Timber Income Fund* (PTIF) shortly before he passed in September 2023 after a courageous fight with cancer. It’s part of a 3.5-mile corridor of protected land, and the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) holds a conservation restriction on it.

Wildlife habitat is abundant and diverse on the property, which features an 8.8-acre beaver pond, open shrub swamps, spruce bogs and seasonal streams. The Natural Heritage Endangered Species Program has listed the forest as a Priority or Core Habitat, and identified species like the Dwarf Mistletoe, Slender Cotton Grass, and Common Loon on site. Timber stand improvement practices, commercial thinnings, and shelterwood harvests have produced multiple tree age classes within the forest.

WINCHENDON FOREST, LLC – BEALS ADDITION

This 119-acre property is located across the street from the Beals Family Memorial Forest, and NEFF has now combined the smaller parcel with Beals to create a 700-acre NEFF forestland in Ashburnham. NEFF purchased the 119-acre property using a PTIF cash donation and has brought it into the PTIF to be managed with other PTIF timber. The property has about 102 acres of productive forestland and about 17 of wetlands. Massachusetts DCR also holds a conservation restriction on the parcel, which allows for long-term management focused on ecologically based forest practices.

PINE KNOB CONSERVATION EASEMENT II

Bethlehem Woods, LLC donated a new 95-acre conservation easement (CE) to NEFF that adjoins their existing 792-acre CE in Bethlehem. Tanya and the late David Tellman originally donated the 792-acre easement—referred to as Pine Knob I—to NEFF in 2016 before selling the land to Bethlehem Woods in 2020; Pine Knob I in turn abuts a 180-acre CE the Tellmans protected with NEFF in 2017, known as Tellman Hill Farm by its new owners. These three easements now form a more than 1,000-acre block of contiguous conserved land. The new Pine Knob II easement protects wetlands along Bog Brook, and northern-hardwood conifer and lowland spruce-fir forest types.

SMOKEY HOUSE CENTER – LEWIS FARM EASEMENT ADDITION

Smokey House Center (SHC) donated a 93-acre addition to their existing NEFF conservation easements, which compose NEFF's largest assemblage of conservation easements in Vermont. SHC is a nonprofit educational institution that has worked with youth and the local community for 50 years to advance ecologically sound farming and forestry practices.

KP AUTO CONSERVATION EASEMENT

KP Auto Center LP protected 130 acres of a 139-acre parcel that borders NEFF's 300-acre Mowry Memorial Forest in Vermont. The forest is mainly made up of hemlock and northern hardwoods, and a licensed forester has previously thinned the woods to encourage other diverse growth. Mowry Memorial Forest and this new easement are in an area under threat from development due to proximity to the popular Stowe Mountain Resort.

JOHNSON FAMILY TRUST CONSERVATION EASEMENT

Scott and Sally Johnson granted this conservation easement to protect their forestland and old fields, which they call Laraway Farm for the breathtaking views the land provides of Laraway Mountain to the east. The Vermont Agency of Natural Resources (ANR) classifies their forestland as part of a "Highest Priority" Forest Connectivity and Interior Forest Block, and it has been managed for several decades as a working forest. The property is located in the Cold Hollow Mountains, as they're known locally, that make up the tip of the Green Mountain ridge line in northern Vermont, and it's also situated in the broader Northern Green Mountains biophysical region ("distinct regions based on differences in elevation, climate, geology, topography, hydrology, land-use history, and vegetation").

The additional land is known as Lewis Farm, which has scenic views of Dorset Peak to the south and has been owned by SHC since 2001 and managed by partner farmers. Adding this year's 93 new acres to NEFF's existing Smokey House easements creates a total of nearly 4,800 conserved acres, including 935 acres under an agricultural CE and 3,757 acres under a forestry-focused CE.



Hildreth Conservation Easement.
Photo by Corey Wrinn.

STEELE CONSERVATION EASEMENT

Timothy Steele inherited this hillside woodlot from his late mother Ruth Gjessing, who had purchased it in 1967 and was passionate about protecting the property and its associated memories. This parcel also sits in a "Highest Priority" Interior Forest and Connectivity area and hosts rare species as well as a dramatic cliff with panoramic views of the surrounding mountains and valleys. The forest lies along the western edge of the Northern Green Mountain biophysical region and in the Cold Hollow Mountains. The water that flows through the parcel is part of the greater Missisquoi River watershed, as it drains into Tyler Branch, which then flows into the Missisquoi River.

HILDRETH CONSERVATION EASEMENT

This property is also located at the southern edge of a forest block classified by the Vermont ANR as "Highest Priority" for both Interior Forest and Forest Connectivity; this block extends north to the Canadian border and beyond. Bill and Joan Hildreth manage the property as a working forest, and their goals as landowners also focus on protecting wildlife habitat. Their management has helped to enhance migratory songbird habitat and climate resilience. This area of Vermont is characterized by relatively small land parcels, which makes this overall connectivity zone tricky to protect, and even more important to help conserve. 🌿

NEFF INITIATIVES

NEFF is pursuing a bold premise: we believe we can manage forests with an eye to climate as well as biodiversity and habitat, and in so doing unleash powerful, natural climate solutions right here in New England that set a national example and inform global climate solutions.

If we manage our forests to climate and ecological standards, NEFF's research shows that forests could deliver 30 percent of the carbon emissions reductions we need to meet our region's net-zero goals and be a key input to a growing, sustainable bioeconomy.

HERE, TAKE A DEEP DIVE INTO THREE INITIATIVES THAT ARE ACCOMPLISHING NEFF'S BOLD PREMISE.

Realizing the carbon-benefits of forests requires combining ecological and climate objectives, and success comes from a comprehensive, region-wide and systemic approach. We need to stop net loss of forests, conserve important wildlands and wilderness areas, spread use of climate-smart forestry, and expand our bioeconomy by using wood and other natural materials to replace carbon-intensive steel and concrete, and we're making progress: newenglandforestry.org/climate-initiatives

1 WESTERN MAINE HABITAT RESTORATION

As the lead partner in the Western Maine Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), NEFF is responsible for recruiting 3,000 acres and 15 landowners into active forest and habitat management during a five-year project window. During the previous NEFF fiscal year—also the second year of the project—NEFF staff not only completed project design and negotiations with the NRCS, but also worked one-on-one with 62 family landowners to recruit more than 11,000 acres for management, so we're already seeing immense success.

This forest management will be a hybrid approach that uses NEFF Exemplary Forestry standards for the Acadian Forest cross-referenced with NRCS forestry practices that provide financial incentives directly to landowners. In the next fiscal year, NEFF expects most landowners who complete the planning process to move to the second phase of the project: to apply for NRCS funding and technical assistance to complete active on-the-ground management.

NEFF staff attribute the high recruitment rate to using landowner engagement strategies from a variety of disciplines and professions, including: One-on-one interaction, active listening, and place-based factual storytelling about the natural history and history of land use in the Western Maine landscape and how it relates to the parcel in question; and adjusting the pace, procedure, and language choice to the target audience.

Under a companion project funded by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, NEFF and project sub-

Recent pre-commercial thinning (PCT) in which short-lived fir has been targeted for cutting and long-lived spruce and pine retained and released. This is one of the ways to make PCT more climate-smart. Photo by Colleen Ryan.



awardee Maine Audubon developed and launched a songbird data collection project with trained volunteers on three project properties to collect baseline songbird data that can be used to measure the impact of their forest and habitat management on songbird habitat in the near and long term. NEFF and partners are concluding the first successful field season with the help of 14 trained volunteers and two Maine Audubon ecologists.

2 COMMERCIAL LANDOWNER INCENTIVE PROGRAM

As of part of NEFF's \$30 million Climate-Smart Commodities project, NEFF released a Request for Proposals (RFP) in spring 2024 that invited commercial landowners—defined by NEFF as those managing more than 10,000 acres—to apply for the first round of our Commercial Landowner Incentive Program. It offers participating landowners and land managers financial incentives that support management practices that improve climate outcomes in the forest.

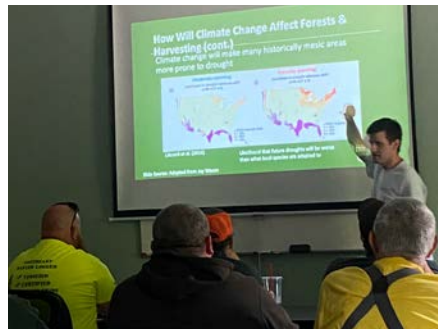
When the RFP application period closed, NEFF's forestry and climate teams were pleased to receive an excellent set of proposals from 10 landowners in Maine and Connecticut. The response of industrial forest managers in Maine was particularly encouraging, with some of the largest and most influential companies in the state submitting proposals.

NEFF's technical evaluation committee carefully assessed the proposals and decided to invite six Maine landowners to join the program: Seven Islands Land Company, the Baskahegan Company, Robbins Lumber Company, the Maine Bureau of Parks and Lands, Fallen Timber LLC and Clayton Lake

Woodlands. NEFF also received two strong proposals from Canadian-owned companies with forests in Maine, and is investigating the feasibility of including them in a USDA project.

Finally, NEFF's commercial lands team referred an excellent proposal they received from northwest Connecticut to the staff working on a tailored incentive program for forestlands in southern New England—stay tuned to learn more.

The six Maine projects NEFF has selected will put climate-smart forestry on the ground across 12,000 combined acres of commercial forestland. NEFF is presently working with the Maine landowners to agree on the parameters and costs of such climate-smart practices as pre-commercial and early commercial thinning, crop tree release, planting of spruce in degraded mixedwood forests, and retention of exceptionally large trees during timber harvests. NEFF anticipates that the first practices will begin in autumn of 2024.



Ted Wright/TCNEF

3 CLIMATE-SMART LOGGER TRAININGS

In the past fiscal year, NEFF and Trust to Conserve Northeast Forestland (TCNEF) led four in-person logger training workshops focused on climate-smart logging. They gave NEFF and TCNEF the opportunity to introduce practices that will be the foundation of the Climate-Smart Logging Incentive Program NEFF and TCNEF are launching later this year.

Held in Maine and Vermont, the full-day workshops included presentations from industry experts on technical logging topics as well as field stations designed to:

- sharpen logger's skills on implementing climate-smart logging techniques
- test loggers' skills in adhering to forest management policy and regulation
- test new technologies like mobile mapping and data collection programs

More than 100 loggers attended, with many coming away with a strong interest in how their work impacts forest carbon sequestration and storage rates. Each workshop also gave NEFF and TCNEF the opportunity to engage with loggers and seek feedback on climate-smart logging practices. Our conversations with professional loggers yielded valuable insights into how these practices would be implemented under a variety of harvest conditions and with different logging equipment.

NEFF and TCNEF have many more trainings ahead of them, and are focused on launching the Climate-Smart Logging Incentive Program with the goal of implementing climate-smart practices on thousands of New England acres. 🌿



Elysa Walk and Dan Fuller. Photo by Caitlin Kelly Photography.

DONOR PROFILE

TAPPING INTO SUCCESS

A SMALL VERMONT BUSINESS EXPANDS MARKET FOR MAPLE PRODUCTS

WRITING BY
NEFF Development Communications Specialist David Ayers

industries. Her love for outdoor recreation is a source of inspiration, rejuvenation, and focus that drives her strong reverence for nature.

Fuller, born and raised in Waterbury Center, Vermont, where the business is based today, comes from a family with a long tradition of tapping trees. His time in the woods has instilled in him a deep respect for and a commitment to preserving nature. “Tapping and caring for trees is a hands-on experience that has given me a profound connection to the forest and a deep appreciation for its natural cycles,” said Fuller.

Together, Walk and Fuller have created a forest-to-skin approach to the bioeconomy, harnessing the purity of maple water to fill a need for natural and sustainably produced hand creams, lotions, and soaps. The opportunity to educate the public about the value of forests was an added benefit and a major reason the pair was drawn to NEFF.

“As a brand rooted in Vermont forests, our support for NEFF contributes to the protection and stewardship of these vital ecosystems and, consequently, the health of the U.S. maple industry,” said Walk.

By donating to NEFF, Walk and Fuller are ensuring future generations can continue enjoying all that Vermont’s maple trees offer—from climate-smart wood to ethically sourced skincare products and everything in between. 🌿

Vermont, with its unique climate and abundant forests, is a leader in maple syrup production, accounting for nearly half of all U.S. production of this liquid gold—a true showcase for its unmatched expertise in the industry. But there’s another prized resource from the mighty maple that has, until now, largely gone untapped: maple water.

Founded by Elysa Walk and Dan Fuller, local skincare company Clean Maple wants to change this.

“Clean Maple was founded to expand the maple industry beyond traditional maple syrup production,” said Walk. “We were captivated by the research on the benefits of maple sap water for the skin and began learning from the few existing skincare products using this precious ingredient.”

Maple sap water, which contains electrolytes, minerals, and antioxidants, is extracted from maple tree trunks in spring through a system of tubes and taps. Once collected, the sap water is filtered and boiled at a processing facility, aka “sugarhouse,” to create refined maple water. Clean Maple sustainably harvests and produces all sap water for its products on-site, which allows the certified organic business to guarantee product quality and consistency.

Walk, an avid outdoor enthusiast who enjoys mountain biking, snowboarding, hiking, and snowshoeing, has more than 20 years of experience in outdoor



GET INVOLVED

Learn how your company can partner with NEFF at newenglandforestry.org/support/corporate-opportunities and discover how the bioeconomy is crucial to a comprehensive climate strategy at newenglandforestry.org/bioeconomy-initiative

OUR DONORS

MAY 1, 2023–APRIL 30, 2024

Generous support from the individuals and organizations listed below has allowed us to continue and expand our efforts to conserve the forest landscape and the environmental, social, and economic benefits it supports, as well as to advance our 30 Percent Solution at a pivotal moment for natural climate solutions. While we have listed gifts of \$100 or more, we want you to know that every gift is important to us and helps us fulfill our mission.

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