



NEW ENGLAND
FORESTRY
FOUNDATION

STRATEGIC PLAN

2026





Call to Action

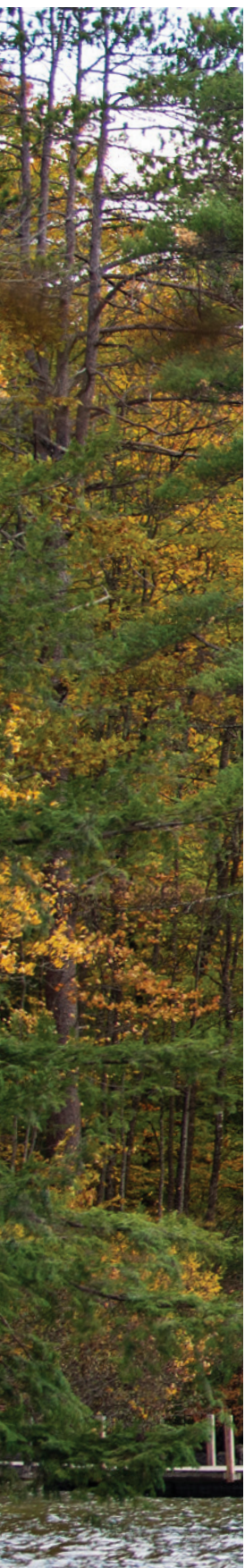
New England's forests are among the region's most vital assets — an ecological, economic, and cultural cornerstone that sustains both people and nature. They provide critical habitat for wildlife, moderate flooding, filter and safeguard drinking water for millions, and offer outdoor spaces for recreation. They sequester and store vast amounts of carbon, helping to stabilize our climate. They provide jobs that sustain rural communities and a thriving forest products sector that has long shaped New England's identity. And they supply renewable, locally grown materials that can build a more sustainable bio-based economy.

Yet the full value of these forests is not reflected in today's markets. Landowners who manage for long-term public good — with careful practices that maximize carbon storage, enhance biodiversity, and protect watersheds — often see a lower short-term financial return for the broad social and ecological benefits they provide than those who follow conventional practices. Without financial mechanisms that recognize and reward the full suite of forest benefits, truly sustainable forestry cannot compete at scale.

This mismatch between public value and private return represents a fundamental market failure. Markets, including those for low-grade wood, have weakened, threatening the economic system that enables forest management to occur. At the same time, emerging markets for carbon and other ecosystem services offer great promise yet remain fragmented, inconsistent, or misaligned with practices that sustain working forests over time. As a result, even well-intentioned landowners face real financial pressure to prioritize short-term returns at the expense of ecological and climate benefits.

Compounding these economic challenges is the continued rise of anti-timber harvesting sentiment and erosion of the “social license” to practice forestry. Public misunderstanding, polarized debates about forest management, and opposition to active stewardship threaten the ability of landowners to manage forests in ways that sustain both ecological health and rural livelihoods. The question of whether to manage forests or let them grow wild is a false choice; New England can and must have both.

The path forward requires leadership, innovation, credible data, learning, and collaboration to realign economic incentives with ecological stewardship. New England Forestry Foundation (NEFF) has proven itself to be uniquely suited to tackling these challenges.



Why NEFF?

For more than 80 years, New England Forestry Foundation has been a trusted leader in conserving and managing the region's forests for the benefit of both people and nature. Today, NEFF is harnessing that legacy and expertise to shape a new, durable model of sustainable, climate-smart forestry — one that makes sound forest management economically viable while advancing climate, biodiversity, and community goals.

- **PROVEN REGIONAL LEADERSHIP.** NEFF has conserved more than 1.2 million acres and manages 155+ Community Forests, giving it a uniquely credible land base to test and demonstrate climate-smart forestry across New England.
- **STRATEGIC POSITIONING.** At the landscape scale, New England's existing protected lands are embedded in a matrix of managed private forestland, and NEFF operates uniquely at the intersection of sustainable forestry and land conservation. By focusing on the conservation and responsible management of private forests, NEFF helps ensure a connected, functional network of both working woodlands and wildlands across the region.
- **FORESTRY INNOVATION.** NEFF's expert foresters conduct a range of groundbreaking forestry research, modelling, and analysis, including the development of Exemplary Forestry, a forest management approach that prioritizes forests' long-term health and follows the highest standards of sustainability for three key goals: enhancing the role forests can play to mitigate climate change, improving wildlife habitat and biodiversity, and growing and harvesting more sustainably produced wood.
- **CLIMATE SOLUTIONS.** NEFF investigated the potential of New England's forests to be a powerful force in mitigating climate change, culminating in the 30 Percent Solution. Four forest-based climate actions — stopping net forest loss, expanding Exemplary Forestry and other climate-smart practices, substituting wood for steel and concrete, and sequestering carbon in long-lived wood buildings — can provide nearly one-third of the reduction in energy-related CO2 emissions New England needs by 2050.
- **ECONOMIC AND DATA INNOVATION.** NEFF is testing new financial and analytical tools — from carbon and ecosystem service pilots to market-based late-successional and old-growth (LSOG) forest conservation — to show that good forest management can be both environmentally sound and economically competitive.
- **A TRUSTED PARTNER.** NEFF works across the forestry value chain — engaging family and commercial landowners, forestry professionals, mills, manufacturers, developers, conservation organizations, universities, and government partners — to create the shared systems, policies, and markets needed to sustain the region's forests at scale.
- **COMMUNITY INFORMED.** NEFF's staff and board are part of the forest economy they seek to strengthen. We approach this work with humility, recognizing that durable solutions must be informed as much by practitioners, landowners, and communities as by science and policy.





New England Forestry Foundation

Our Vision

A New England landscape where responsibly managed forests sustain ecological integrity and biodiversity, strengthen regional economies, and mitigate climate change.

Our Mission

We harness the power of New England's forests for the good of nature, climate, and communities.

Our Operating Principles

STEWARDSHIP. We conserve and manage forests for long-term ecological health, climate change mitigation, wildlife habitat enhancement, and sustainable wood production. We encourage and empower others to do the same.

BALANCE. Although we champion working woodlands and active forest management, we also recognize that wildlands are a critical part of a healthy and functional regional landscape.

COLLABORATION. Durable solutions emerge through partnerships across sectors, disciplines, and ownerships.

SOLUTIONS-ORIENTED LEADERSHIP. We seek to provide leadership on forestry issues in New England by developing and promoting effective solutions.

ECONOMIC REALISM. Sustainable, climate-smart forestry must ultimately be financially viable for landowners and others in the forest products economy.

HUMILITY AND LEARNING. We recognize that no single organization has all the answers; progress depends on listening, learning, adapting, and collaborating.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF THE PAST. We acknowledge that Indigenous groups are the region's original land stewards, and we seek to support and learn from them.

Strategy

If sustainable and climate-smart forestry delivers so many benefits, why aren't all forests in New England managed that way? NEFF's theory of change recognizes that economic, cultural, and market barriers — not lack of knowledge alone — limit adoption. To implement this type of forestry at scale will require understanding the needs of diverse stakeholders, positive financial returns, building public support for active forest management, and science-based innovation.

THEORY OF CHANGE

Forest Benefits



Wood



Outdoor
Recreation



Wildlife
Habitat



Climate
Change
Mitigation



Jobs



Clean
Water

Risks

- Limited support, awareness, and incentives for landowners to practice Exemplary Forestry
- Lack of markets for low-grade wood
- Exemplary Forestry is profitable only over a multi-decade horizon
- Opposing viewpoints towards timber harvesting and active forest management
- Declining forest acreage



Our Vision

NEFF aspires to shape a New England landscape where responsibly managed forests strengthen regional economies, sustain ecological integrity and biodiversity, and help to secure a climate-resilient future.



NEW ENGLAND
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Our Mission: Keep New England Forested

We harness the power of New England's forests for the good of nature, climate, and communities.

Strategies

- **Incentivize Exemplary Forestry practices.** Advance and champion a variety of market drivers, including ecosystem services and innovative forest products.
- **Demonstrate benefits of Exemplary Forestry on NEFF forests.** Utilize data-driven research to practice Exemplary Forestry at scale and communicate findings.
- **Keep New England forested.** Increase conserved forest acreage and steward conserved lands to the highest standard.

Decision Makers



Large-scale
commercial
forest landowners



500–5,000
acre forest
landowners



Conservation
partners

Measures

- Wildlife habitat
- Marketable timber
- Outdoor recreation opportunities
- Forest acres protected and managed
- Carbon storage
- Income
- Jobs



Beneficiaries



People



Climate



Nature

NEFF cannot — and should not — attempt to lead on every component of this regional system. But NEFF does have distinctive assets: a forest ownership base large enough to serve as a credible laboratory, decades of forestry expertise, deep partnerships, and a growing body of intellectual property from research initiatives. Building on these strengths, NEFF will focus on three mutually reinforcing strategies:

Strategy A.

Conserve and steward an enduring forest base for New England

A thriving future for New England's forests requires durable, long-term legal conservation paired with high-quality stewardship of land under conservation ownership or protected by conservation easements. NEFF's role is to help secure that forest base — and to ensure that the protections over land in our care are upheld in perpetuity. To do this effectively, we will:

- Focus discretionary land protection resources where impact is greatest and most aligned with the mission.
- Ensure our financial and staffing capacity are adequate to meet all stewardship obligations.

This approach strengthens NEFF's role as a trusted land steward while ensuring that donor investments achieve maximum conservation and climate impact.

Strategy B.

Test, refine, and promote Exemplary Forestry across the region

Spreading Exemplary Forestry, NEFF's approach to sustainable and climate-smart forestry, broadly across New England is the most important step in achieving the organization's 30 Percent Solution, representing more than 80 percent of the potential carbon mitigation gains anticipated by the vision. NEFF is uniquely positioned to show what Exemplary Forestry looks like in practice, prove that it can work financially, and disseminate the practice to other landowners. NEFF will:

- Transition all NEFF-owned properties to Exemplary Forestry management over time.
- Invest in demonstration and educational programming at select NEFF forests.
- Serve as a learning and information hub for landowners, policymakers, partners, and the public to promote the adoption of Exemplary Forestry across the region.
- Support private and institutional landowners, municipalities, and other partners in their transition to Exemplary Forestry and pursuit of other conservation outcomes.
- Build public support for forest management that delivers the full suite of forest benefits.

By understanding the true implications of Exemplary Forestry on its own lands, demonstrating the approach in practice, and promoting its broad adoption across the region, NEFF will help to shift norms and expectations for how New England's forests can — and should — be managed for maximum ecological, community, and climate benefits.

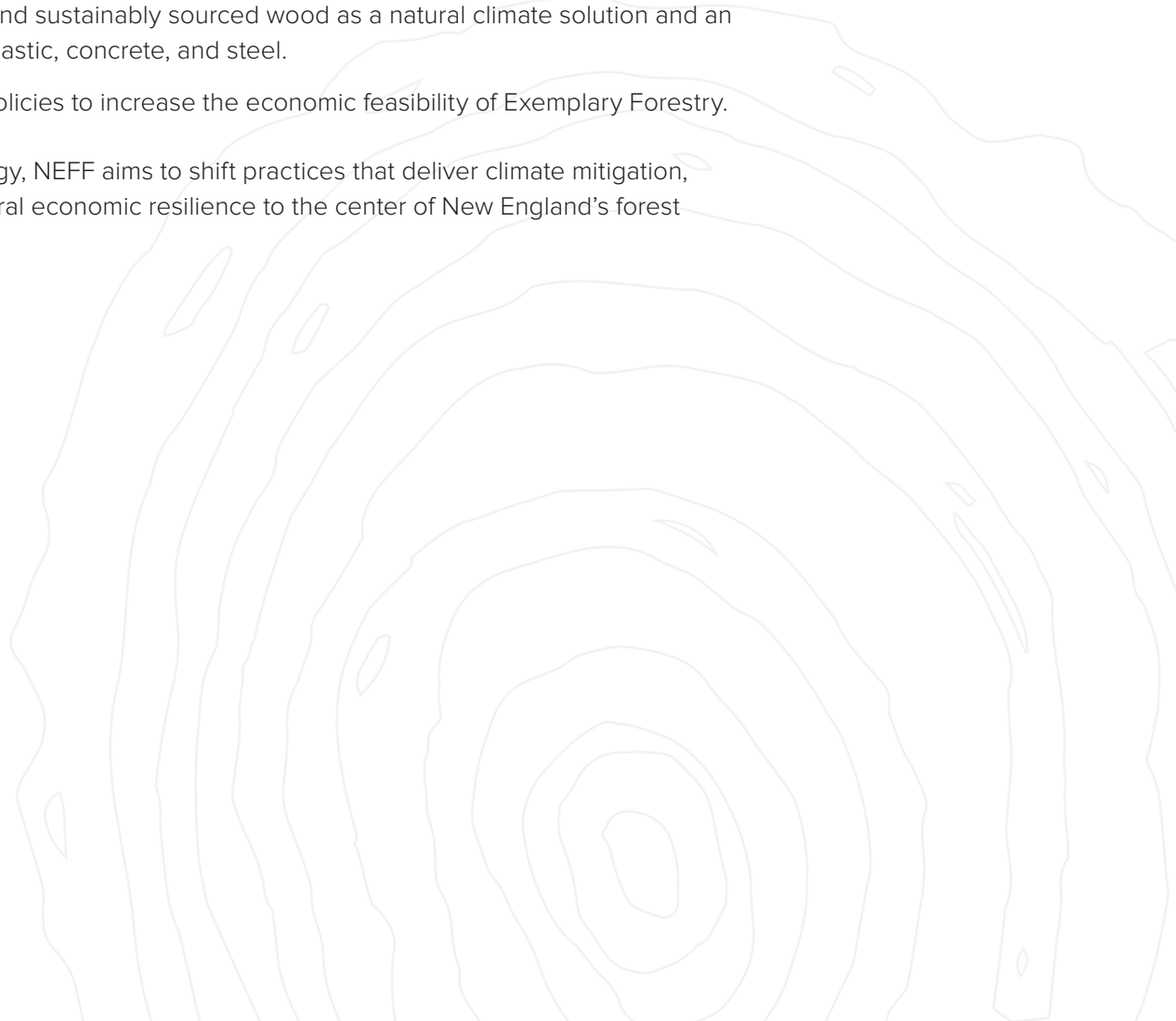
Strategy C.

Overcome market barriers to the adoption of Exemplary Forestry practices

Deploying Exemplary Forestry and similar approaches on a landscape scale across New England requires reshaping the financial landscape for landowners. Though effective in the short term, public funding to incentivize good forest management, such as NEFF's Advancing Markets for Producers initiative, is not a viable long-term solution; more durable mechanisms must be identified and developed. Accordingly, NEFF is leading efforts to develop new markets, revenue streams, and incentives that make long-term, climate-smart, sustainable forestry the clear economic choice. NEFF will:

- Develop and test a new carbon offset market product to serve as a long-term mechanism to reward Exemplary Forestry.
- Monitor and support other options to compensate landowners for the unmonetized benefits provided by forests.
- Grow market demand for diverse, regionally sourced wood products, including those made from low-grade wood.
- Develop allies and champions within the building sector focused on the use of climate-smart and sustainably sourced wood as a natural climate solution and an alternative to plastic, concrete, and steel.
- Advocate for policies to increase the economic feasibility of Exemplary Forestry.

Through this strategy, NEFF aims to shift practices that deliver climate mitigation, biodiversity, and rural economic resilience to the center of New England's forest economy.



Goals

The following goals will guide NEFF's work over the life of this strategic plan. Together, they identify where we will concentrate time, energy, and resources so that staff, board, and partners are working toward a shared set of outcomes and advancing the strategies most important to our long-term impact.



Impact Goals

1. Implement, test, refine, and demonstrate Exemplary Forestry at scale

New England needs practical, credible models of forestry that can sustain healthy forests and also remain economically viable for landowners. NEFF will put Exemplary Forestry into practice across its own forests, establish demonstration sites to test and show what works, and use those sites for research, learning, and outreach.

2. Increase the adoption of Exemplary Forestry practices across the region

Our impact in New England will depend not only on how NEFF manages its own forests, but also on whether more landowners, partners, and communities across the region adopt better forestry practices. NEFF will encourage more landowners and partners to adopt Exemplary Forestry by focusing outreach on the people most able to put it into practice.

3. Advance the financial viability of Exemplary Forestry

Sustainable, climate-smart forestry will only take hold across the region if landowners can afford to do it and see a clear long-term economic path. NEFF will help make that possible by developing practical funding approaches through the ongoing Forest Carbon for Commercial Landowners project; developing products and programs for carbon and other ecosystem service markets; supporting better markets for wood products; and exploring conservation incentives, policies, and other funding sources that support long-term stewardship.

4. Grow demand for regionally sourced wood produced by Exemplary Forestry and similar climate-smart practices

To expand the adoption and financial viability of Exemplary Forestry, NEFF must help grow market demand for a diversity of regionally sourced wood products, including those made from low-grade wood, and in doing so support a gradual shift toward a more wood-based New England bioeconomy. NEFF will do so by working with the building sector to encourage stronger sourcing standards, support demonstration projects, and improve transparency across the regional wood supply chain.

Organizational Goals

1. Implement a balanced, durable, and financially sustainable operating model

To achieve the above Impact Goals, NEFF needs a stronger, more flexible financial foundation that can sustain our priorities through changing funding conditions. We will build that foundation by increasing unrestricted support, strengthening reserves and endowment, improving financial planning and revenue forecasting, and aligning staffing, systems, and governance with our strategic goals. We will also evaluate assets, partnerships, and cost structures to sharpen our focus, reduce risk, and ensure we have the resources to steward our lands, meet our commitments, and support a durable future for the organization.

2. Increase engagement and build support among stakeholders

NEFF's long-term success depends on building broader understanding of, trust in, and support for our work. NEFF will strengthen engagement by communicating more clearly and strategically with priority audiences, expanding our visibility, and creating more effective ways for people to connect with and support our mission.



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