

Executive Summary

THE CONNECTICUT STATEWIDE FOREST RESOURCE PLAN IS DESIGNED TO SERVE AS AN OVERVIEW FOR PLANNING FUTURE ACTIVITIES WITHIN THE FOREST COMMUNITY OF CONNECTICUT. The plan identifies issues as perceived by various stakeholders regarding the State's forestlands, and provides the basis for putting limited available state and federal funds, as well as participating groups and individuals time, to the best and most urgent uses through a series of action steps. The Connecticut Statewide Forest Resource Plan's action steps can be incorporated into stakeholder's programs and goals where appropriate.

Stakeholder participation was gained through a series of ten focus group meetings, in which perceived issues were discussed and possible action steps compiled based on overall "visions" for the state. After the initial gathering of information, an Advisory Committee was formed to condense the thoughts and ideas into a workable document. A first draft of the plan was sent out for peer review to 221 individuals and organizations for comments. At the same time, the opportunity was given for participants to volunteer to partner for plan implementation. Participants were also given the chance to identify and prioritize what they felt were the top action steps listed in the plan.

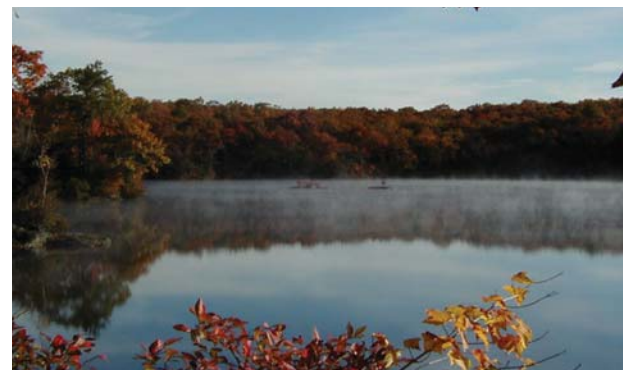
Comments were reviewed and worked into a second draft, along with partnering organizations. To provide a more thorough understanding of Connecticut's forest resources, informational sections were added to the second draft of the plan. These sections included a history of Connecticut's forests, trends in Connecticut's forests over the last 50 years, wildlife and fisheries information as pertaining to the forests of Connecticut, and a section explaining the relationship between forests and the Connecticut economy.

An Advisory Committee meeting was called to evaluate the second draft and address any remaining issues. At this time, the initial stages of plan implementation and creation of the Connecticut Forestlands Committee was outlined. The draft was then sent out to all respondents of the first draft for review. Comments on the plan were analyzed one final time and finishing touches were added before the document was sent out for publication.

Priority action areas are summarized in the plan. Means of implementing all action steps are addressed under the Program of Action section of this plan.

In order to most accurately represent the different characteristics that make up the forests of Connecticut, all aspects and action steps were thought to fall under any of eight different subject areas. They are as follows:

- Forest Ecosystem Health
- Public Forest Stewardship
- Private Forest Stewardship
- Recreation
- Sustainable Forest Based Economy
- Education and Outreach
- Planning and Policy
- Research



For each of these subject areas, a vision statement was created describing what the IDEAL conditions should be regarding that topic area. These statements were crafted by over 30 forestry professionals in Connecticut, and reviewed by over 200 interested stakeholders for relevancy to the perceived goals in regards to Connecticut's forestlands.

The DEP Division of Forestry along with several partnering organizations and individuals will determine strategies to implement the Connecticut Statewide Forest Resource Plan. The success of this plan lies in the partnerships formed between the various forestry organizations in the state and the numerous stakeholder and user groups.

One of the most anticipated outcomes of this planning process is the formation of a Connecticut Forestlands Committee representing the various stakeholder groups. A highly influential committee will include the many types of forest users that depend on the forests of Connecticut. The primary responsibility of this committee will be to monitor the progress of plan implementation through a series of semi-annual meetings over the ten-year life span of the plan.

Eleven members will be invited to serve on this committee. Eight of the members will each act as a liaison for one of the eight subcommittees formed to address the above listed subject areas and the related action steps. There will also be a designated leader to preside over the meetings, a scribe, and a DEP liaison. The DEP Division of Forestry will provide this liaison. This person will spearhead initial efforts of organizing potential partners and coordinating early committee meetings. The DEP contact will not be responsible for executing actions steps. Committees implementing individual action steps will decide the best means of implementation.

The Connecticut Forestlands Committee will host a five-year review of the plan in 2008, and also work to determine a system for a ten-year retrofit to assure continuation of a Forest Resource Plan into the next decade (2013). Funding requests will be submitted in years four (2007) and nine (2012).

The eight subcommittees will be comprised of individuals and representatives of organizations that have volunteered to partner with this plan, as determined through an August 2003 questionnaire. Additional partners will be sought throughout plan implementation to expand the reach and scope of this plan of action. These subcommittees will each be directly associated with a vision and the related action steps.

It is recommended that these subcommittees meet at least four times a year. Each group will be able to use the summary of priority areas to help guide their own plans of action. Each subcommittee will organize themselves with the help of the DEP liaison, educate themselves on the present status of issues and foreseeable roadblocks to success, and determine and carry out the best means of implementing listed action steps.





Introduction¹

In the year 2003 the State of Connecticut celebrated the 100th anniversary of Connecticut's State Forests. This occasion was commemorated by a series of yearlong events including a poster contest for Connecticut schoolchildren, an educational letterbox series, television specials, a family oriented forestry field day, and updates to educational brochures and presentations concerning forestry. Some of you might ask, "Why was this such a special occasion?"

The answer lies in the fact that just a short hundred years ago Connecticut did not have the forested landscapes that we now take for granted. Instead, trees were barely able to reach a commercial size before they were cut for charcoal, firewood, or lumber. Trees that were not cut down were susceptible to large wildfires that ravaged the landscape, sometimes burning thousands of acres a year. Together, these factors left Connecticut's forests in a terrible shape. Not much thought was given to the future of the forests.

It took a group of concerned citizens, and an act of the Legislature to change things. The position of State Forester was created in 1901, followed shortly by the creation of State Forests in 1903. The State Forests were meant to serve as demonstration areas to educate landowners in forest management techniques and to encourage landowners to practice these techniques on their own land. Much time was spent reforesting these public areas and protecting them from wildfires. Over the last hundred years, the State Forests have grown to include over 150,000 acres, and have provided Connecticut's population with recreational opportunities, economic products, fish and wildlife habitat, watershed

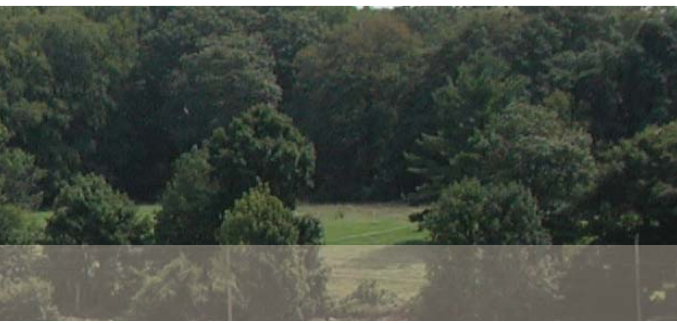
protection, and aesthetics. The model provided by the protection of State Forest lands has most definitely contributed to the astounding fact that Connecticut is currently over 60% forested.

Statewide, these last hundred years have not been easy ones for Connecticut's forests. Introduced and natural elements have often threatened the valuable forestlands of Connecticut, in some cases permanently affecting the landscape. American Chestnut, which made up 25% of Connecticut's forests at the turn of the century and was prized for its decay-resistant wood, nuts, and wildlife value, was lost from our forestlands over a few short decades to an introduced chestnut blight. In more recent years, gypsy moth, hemlock adelgid, red pine scale, and hemlock scale have all contributed to major losses of important forest trees.

Weather events have also affected the health of the forests. The hurricane of 1938 hit southern New England with a fury, and toppled trees of all sizes in Connecticut. An estimated one-fifth of Connecticut's timber was lost, with the eastern part of the state being hardest hit. In fact, our present mature forests in Connecticut are the seedlings and saplings that survived that hurricane. Other hurricanes, tornadoes, ice storms, and droughts, coupled with the wildfires that typically follow these events have also negatively impacted the land throughout the years.

Despite past catastrophic events and chronic problems, our resilient forests continue to grow from young seedlings into mature forests. This has not always been accomplished by nature alone. Conservation efforts by government, organizations, and individuals have often played a major role in protecting Connecticut's forest resources and shaping management goals

¹Summarized from an article provided by Huber Hurlock, District Forester, Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection, February 12, 2004.



and activities. These efforts have resulted in many beneficial programs that we now take for granted.

For instance, there are ample resources available to private landowners for forest management advice and education through both state programs and private consultants. There are state tax programs that exist to assist the private landowner in retaining forestlands. Various research projects continue to expand our knowledge of the forests that surround us, and are used to study possible solutions to current forestland issues. Voluntary “Best Management Practices” now exist for logging activities conducted in the state. A state run certification program is in place for foresters and loggers participating in harvesting activities on Connecticut’s forestlands. The DEP fire control program provides direct support to local fire departments in terms of suppression assistance, training, and equipment purchases, which in turn has greatly diminished forest fire as an issue in Connecticut.

These are all noteworthy accomplishments, but the work can not stop here. Progress has been made in some areas of forest management and protection, and ground has been lost in others. Respondents of an August 2003 questionnaire were asked to identify the five highest priorities of this plan. Topping off the list is the need for education and outreach regarding the forestlands of Connecticut. This need is due to a disconnect between an increasingly urbanized society and the forested landscape we live in. Next mentioned is the need for a baseline in forest ecosystem health to monitor both positive and negative changes in forest health. A further concern is that the current lack of staffing and funding in state government is preventing our public lands in Connecticut from acting as a showcase for qual-

ity land use and management. Issues regarding private lands revolve around that fact that the average landowner in Connecticut is aging, and land ownership sales and transfers are increasing. Something needs to be done to assure the incentives remain to continue management of private forestlands, so that prime forestland does not always fall into development or be degraded through indiscriminate harvesting. Related to this issue is whether the role of the DEP service forester needs to be clarified or staffing increased to help private landowners with these decisions.

The issues in this plan do not stand alone. According to Ward and Worthley, (2003) there are currently five major challenges to forest management identified in Connecticut at the landscape level. These include invasive species, coping with deer, fragmentation and parcelization, maintaining habitat diversity, and the stewardship of private lands.² In regards to the future, it is apparent that there will always be room for improvement for protection and management of our forest resources, especially as pressure from development and demands from user groups increase.

The Department of Environmental Protection’s Division of Forestry has often been considered the leader of forestry issues in Connecticut. The Division has many types of programs including the Forest Protection Program, the Forest Practices Act Program, the Forest Land Taxation Program, the Private and Municipal Lands Program, and the State Lands Program. Over the last several years, cuts in funding and staff have affected the focus and quality of service provided by the Division of Forestry to lead and assist in forestland management. In just the past three years the Division of Forestry has lost 9 positions and experienced the closure of the State Forest Nursery after 95 years

²Jeffrey S. Ward and Thomas E. Worthley. Forest Regeneration Handbook. 2003. page 9.

of service. The Division of Forestry no longer has the personnel to fulfill existing programs and must have others both lead and support to make changes in our forest resource.

For too long now, organizations working towards forestland protection and management have lacked cohesiveness. The DEP Division of Forestry has often worked on it's own. Many other organizations, forest interest groups, and individuals have also been working alone to improve various facets of the forest ecosystem. The time has come for these different entities to join forces. If efforts were combined, the forestry community could work to improve our forests in ways that are desired by all stakeholders. Together these groups can find ways to increase both professional and interest group involvement in forest management decisions. This could result in long term ecological gains to the growing and dynamic forest resource, as well as increased benefits to the wildlife, landowners, forest practitioners, and recreational users.

This Connecticut Statewide Forest Resource Plan has been an opportunity for all interest groups to share thoughts and ideas, and to create goals to strive towards. By working in both small groups and as a unified team, common forestland protection and management objectives can be planned and met for the next ten years, with benefits carrying into the next 100 years. While there will be committees formed to help implement listed action steps, these actions steps can also be incorporated into the goals of stakeholder organizations where appropriate.

As users of the forestlands we have a responsibility to our children, our community, and the world to implement a strong environ-

mental ethic here in Connecticut. We have a responsibility to soundly use and manage the forests we live in, to reduce pressure in third world countries that often bear the burden of our demands, and to provide a clean, healthy environment for future generations. Therefore, a challenge is being issued for all interested stakeholders to work with this plan: to form a unified environmental voice, to create a growing and moving force under different flags, and to leave a better forestland for those that follow.



Visions of Connecticut

In order to most accurately represent the different characteristics that make up the forests of Connecticut, all aspects and action steps were thought to fall under any of eight different subject areas. They are as follows:

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These visions are broad goal statements, meant to be the guiding force behind the actions listed in this plan. These visions should be viewed as a whole. They are not mutually exclusive, nor is each one intended to apply to every forest landowner or situation.

This said, it is important to note that for the purposes of this plan, it is understood that improving forest ecosystem health is the overarching issue. Maintaining large unfragmented forest blocks is critical to all of the other goals of this plan, such as sustaining a forest-based economy, maintaining wildlife diversity, promoting forest-based recreation, and providing clean drinking water. Ideally stated, healthy forests provide a stable

ecosystem in which other activities may take place with predictable results. In conjunction with that, education is to either: 1) change peoples' attitudes regarding forest ecosystem health, or 2) change peoples' actions to improve overall future forest ecosystem health.

FOREST ECOSYSTEM HEALTH

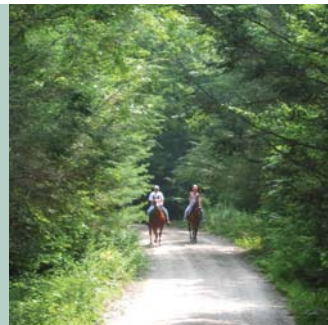
Vision:

Connecticut's forests contain healthy and sustainable populations of native plants and animals. Biological diversity is exhibited through a full range of native plant communities and age classes, and diverse, stable animal populations on both public and private land. Forests are dynamic and resilient, and the processes of a healthy ecosystem overcome the damaging effects of adverse weather, wildfire, erosion, invasive exotic species, and outbreaks of insects and disease. A healthy forest promotes clean air, clean water, and a better-regulated climate. Forest management is a recognized tool for improving forest ecosystem health, while continued forest fragmentation, as defined in this plan, is recognized as one of the most detrimental factors currently affecting forest ecosystem health.

PUBLIC FOREST STEWARDSHIP

Vision:

Publicly owned forestlands are managed to promote clean air, water, and sustainable ecosystems, protect unique and fragile areas, model sound forest management techniques, provide a variety of forest products, and offer many types of recreational activities.



Urban forests are managed to enhance the quality of life in Connecticut communities. Retention of large tracts of forestlands is ensured through supportive public and private programs and policies.

PRIVATE FOREST STEWARDSHIP

Vision:

Connecticut landowners value forestlands for all their uses: aesthetic, recreational, economic, and environmental. Programs and policies are in place and sufficiently funded to promote a continual flow of public benefits including clean air and water, productive habitat, wood products, and other essential public benefits derived from privately owned forests. Connecticut landowners understand the impacts of forest fragmentation and land parcelization, and actively participate in programs that curtail development of existing forestlands.

RECREATION

Vision:

Connecticut's forests provide recreational activities for both residents and visitors. Examples include hiking, fishing, hunting, camping, horseback riding, and mountain biking. More passive opportunities exist in the ability to enjoy the scenery, and observe wildlife. These opportunities allow individuals to experience the forests in a personal way. Opportunities also exist for public recreation on private property, allowing quality outdoor recreation to be available to everyone close to home.

These factors foster a conservation ethic among Connecticut residents from all walks of life.

SUSTAINABLE FOREST BASED ECONOMY

Vision:

Connecticut's forests are able to provide quality forest products from sustainable and diverse forest resources. Connecticut's forests will contribute to our nation's supply of forest products, while locally ensuring employment for those involved with these activities. Proper management and use of forest resources locally will reduce worldwide pressures in more sensitive and less sustainable habitats. Sustainable forest based economy allows the landowner to offset the cost of owning land, while also providing other benefits including protection of land from development and as a means of increasing diversity within forests. Recreation and tourism suppliers will benefit from well-planned forest management.

EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

Vision:

Opportunities exist for all sectors of Connecticut's population to understand Connecticut's natural resources. Education in both schools and public settings promotes awareness and appreciation of Connecticut's working forests. This includes the historical aspects, the role of management and harvesting activities, biological diversity, and recreational values of forests. Private forest landowners, who



control 85% of Connecticut's forests and the public benefits those forests provide, have adequate access to advice and technical assistance on both forest stewardship and family estate planning.

PLANNING AND POLICY

Vision:

Cooperation between different sectors including the government, forest users, and forest landowners results in participation by all of society in developing and implementing public policy. Long term comprehensive planning for state owned land occurs in collaboration with Connecticut's citizens and local government. Connecticut municipalities have the knowledge and resources to build forest sustainability into their community growth plans and patterns. Regional plans of conservation and development build on these local plans, and in turn become the foundations of the state plan of conservation and development.

RESEARCH

Vision:

Continuation of ongoing research, along with implementation of new research by both public and private entities provides a better understanding of Connecticut's forests, and our relationship with them. Findings of such research are disseminated to the general public and interested parties in a way that the public can understand and use.