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**Film Event to Celebrate New England's Oldest Forests**  
*Fisher Museum Screening and Panel Discussion on July 10*

(Petersham, Mass.)—A new film about the history and science of old-growth forests in New England will premiere at the Fisher Museum in Petersham on Tuesday, July 10 at 7:00 p.m. Remarks and a brief panel discussion about the 1-hour documentary will feature the filmmaker, scientists interviewed in the film, and conservation leaders looking to preserve these forests in central Massachusetts. The event is free and open to the public, and will close with an audience Q&A.

Today, far less than 1 percent of forests in New England are considered “old-growth,” meaning they have not been cut since European settlement. Throughout the region, these forests are scattered over only about 100 sites, several of which are in Massachusetts, mostly on ridges that are difficult to access.

The film, called *The Lost Forests of New England*, includes rich footage of these rarely-seen, old trees, and tells the story of what the forests once were, the changes that have taken place since European settlers arrived, and the state of those remnant old-growth forests today. It took two years to make the finished product, which filmmaker Ray Asselin says is his most ambitious to date.

Asselin first met Bob Leverett – a central figure in the film, co-founder of the Native Tree Society, and avid big-tree hunter – nearly thirty years ago, and was surprised to learn from him that there were still old-growth forests in Massachusetts. “He was kind enough to invite me on a hike to see some of what he'd found,” says Asselin. “I've learned an awful lot from Bob. I got to the point that I wanted—no, needed—to spread the gospel about old growth.”

“Five hundred years ago, old-growth forests dominated the New England landscape,” says David Foster, director of the Harvard Forest, also interviewed in the film. “*The Lost Forests* reminds us of their majesty, their importance to nature and people, and the potential that we have to bring more back across the region.”

The invited panel following the screening includes Heidi Ricci, Assistant Director of Advocacy for the Massachusetts Audubon Society. Ricci praises the film's beautiful footage and its effort to “memorialize the great work that went into identifying and documenting these sites that are such a special part of our commonwealth's natural heritage.”

A sense of heritage and conservation were important to Asselin, too, as he made the film. “With so many introduced, non-native diseases and pests killing our forest species,” he says, “our only hope to ever have such spectacular forests again is through a connected network of preserves which only nature will manage. It's simply what works best.”

Leverett has spent hundreds of hours studying the oldest, biggest trees in our region. “These old-growth gems are our living connection to New England's forested past,” he explains. “Walking among the elders, one feels different because the old trees are, themselves, different. Their rings remember events from

centuries past, and their weathered, gnarly forms speak to a genetic heritage stretching for hundreds of thousands of years. Pure magic! Preserving these ancient woodlands affirms that our natural heritage still matters to us."

Asselin says the biggest challenge in making the film was finding ways to film the big trees in a way that does them justice: "Conveying the size and beauty of grand old trees is difficult," he notes, although drone footage of old white pines towering far above the surrounding forest and mountainsides is a good start. "You can't get that perspective from the ground."

He says he'd like people who haven't experienced an old-growth New England forest to know that there are small examples of them still with us. "These are not mammoth redwoods or sequoias," he admits, "but these lush, ancient, green woodlands are what belong in New England." One black gum swamp from the film contains trees that are many centuries old. "Their gnarled crowns, grand stature, and deeply furrowed bark, combined with the thickly vegetated swamp setting, transports you back thousands of years in time," Asselin describes. "It's thrilling to be there."

In addition to Asselin, Foster, Leverett, and Ricci, the event's panelists will include Scott Jackson, board chairman of the Kestrel Land Trust; David Orwig, Forest Ecologist at Harvard Forest; and William Moomaw, Professor of International Environmental Policy at Tufts University's Fletcher School.

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The Harvard Forest, founded in 1907 and located in Petersham, Mass., is Harvard University's outdoor laboratory and classroom for ecology and conservation, and a Long-Term Ecological Research (LTER) site funded by the National Science Foundation. Its 4,000 acre property is one of the oldest and most intensively studied research forests in the U.S. Open to the public year-round, the site includes educational and research facilities, the Fisher Museum, and recreational trails. Learn more at <http://harvardforest.fas.harvard.edu>.