



## Wildlands and Woodlands

### *A Vision for the Forests of Massachusetts*

#### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Harvard Forest, Harvard University  
*Petersham, Massachusetts*

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A group of nine ecologists and historians affiliated with the Harvard Forest recently published a report on the status and future of forestlands in Massachusetts. Based on their assessment of the changing landscape, they developed a vision to protect the Commonwealth's forests and the important economic, recreation, habitat and ecosystem services they provide. What follows is a summary of their report, "Wildlands and Woodlands: A Vision for the Forests of Massachusetts".

Massachusetts offers an unusual and urgent opportunity for forest conservation. Following widespread agricultural decline in the 19th century, the landscape reforested naturally and currently supports a wide expanse of maturing forest. Despite its large population, the state has more natural vegetation today than at nearly any time in the last three centuries. With its extensive forests supporting ecosystem processes, thriving wildlife populations, and critical environmental services for society, there is a great need to protect this landscape for the future.

However, this historic window of opportunity is closing as forests face relentless development pressure. After decades of forest protection by state agencies and private organizations, patterns of land conservation and forest management are still inadequate to meet future societal and environmental needs. Large areas of protected forestland are uncommon, conserved forests are largely disconnected, important natural and cultural resources (including many plant and animal species) are vulnerable to loss, logging is often poorly planned and managed, and old-growth forests and reserves isolated from human impact are rare.

We urge the people and Commonwealth of Massachusetts to launch a bold, comprehensive initiative to conserve these precious Wildlands and Woodlands and the ecological and social values they possess. We propose a forest conservation strategy that extends a simple design from conservation biology in important new ways. This approach consists of

large forest reserves in which natural processes dominate and human impact is minimized (Wildlands), embedded within expansive forestland that is protected from development but is actively managed in an ecologically sustainable manner (Woodlands).

Specifically, the Wildlands and Woodlands vision urges that we:

- Add approximately 1.5 million acres to the state's existing protected land base of 1.0 million acres, to reach a target of 2.5 million acres – roughly half the state of Massachusetts.
- Set aside 250,000 acres of forestland as Wildland reserves that would be large “unmanaged” lands situated predominantly on existing public lands.
- Protect from development an additional 1.5 million acres of forest largely in private ownership.
- Establish a network of woodland councils to serve as an information resource and project catalyst to support local communities in their efforts to protect and sustainably manage their forests.

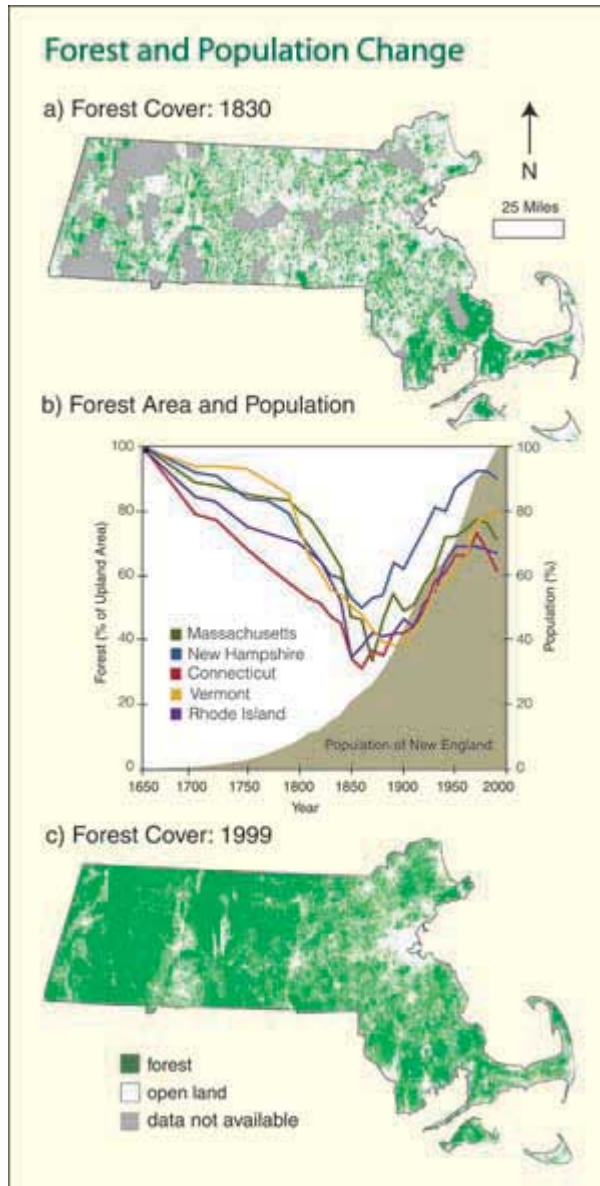
The Wildlands and Woodlands approach has many benefits:

- It employs a two-pronged strategy in which Wildland reserves and managed Woodlands *together* form continuous expanses protected from development and provide the full range of ecological and social benefits.
- It calls for large Wildland reserves (5,000 to 50,000 acres), predominantly on public lands, which support natural forest dynamics, landscape-scale processes, mature forests, and interior forest habitats and wildlife.
- It promotes extensive areas of Woodlands on private and public land managed for diverse conservation, economic and aesthetic purposes.
- It complements “smart growth” that concentrates residential and commercial development by permanently protecting the surrounding forest.
- It is consistent with previous plans, including the Statewide Land Conservation Plan and BioMap, and expands on the recent reserves proposal by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

We hope our proposal for an interconnected Wildlands and Woodlands approach will build the collaborative spirit needed to reach these goals. Achieving the long-term vision will require investment by many generations, as stewardship of land demands a permanent human commitment. This enterprise can only succeed if it inspires the widespread dedication of individual landowners, communities, businesses and non-profit organizations, and receives the support and encouragement of state and local governments. To retain and enhance the diverse values of the forest will require us to forge new connections with the land and new collaborations across the landscape. The people and forests of Massachusetts deserve nothing less.

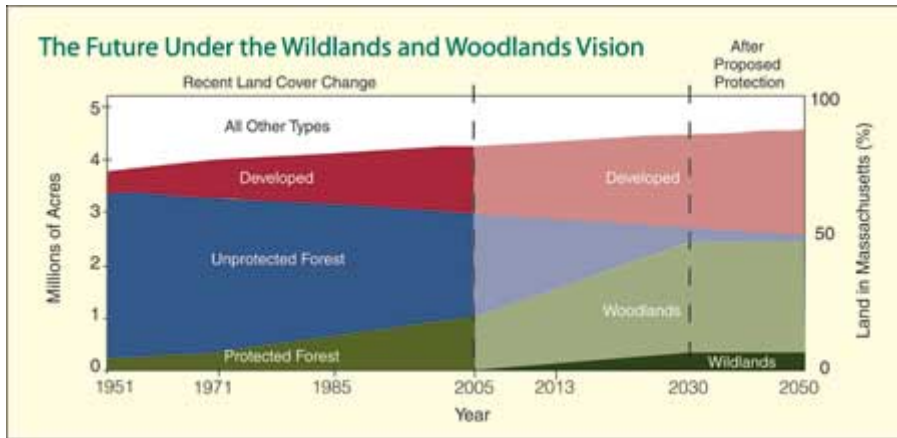
For more information about *Wildlands and Woodlands*, visit the Harvard Forest web site <http://harvardforest.fas.harvard.edu/wandw>. To request a hard copy, contact the Harvard Forest at tel. 978-724-302 or [wandw@fas.harvard.edu](mailto:wandw@fas.harvard.edu).

Figures for “Wildlands and Woodlands” summary:

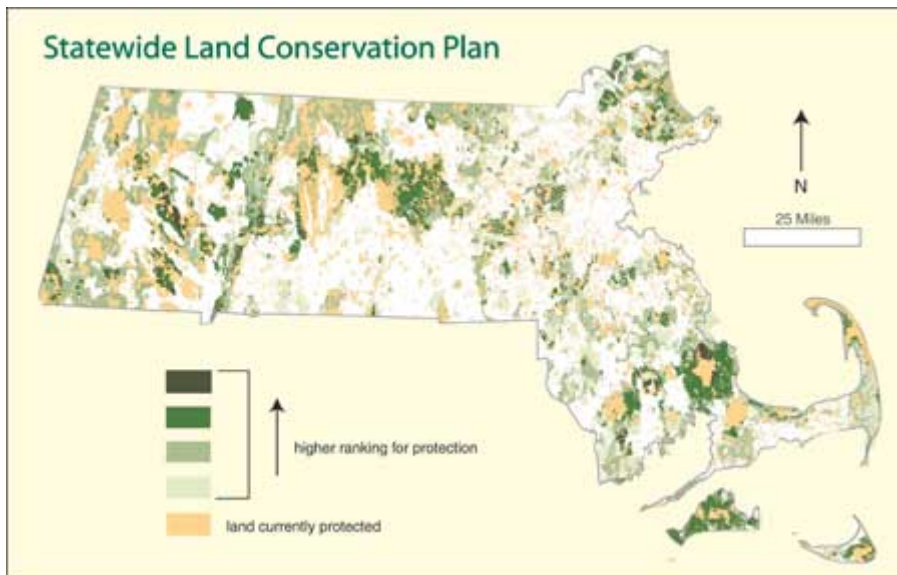


Sources: Hall, B., G. Motzkin, D. Foster, M. Syfert and J. Burk. 2002. Three Hundred Years of Land Use Change in Massachusetts, USA. *Journal of Biogeography*. 29:1319-1335.

D. Foster and J. Aber. (Eds.). 2004. *Forests in Time: The Environmental Consequences of 1000 Years of Change in New England*. Yale University Press.



Source: Foster, D.R. et al. 2005. Wildlands and Woodlands: A Vision for the Forests of Massachusetts. The Harvard Forest, Harvard University.



Sources: Land Conservation Plan Task Force (2003) and MassGIS.