

Wildlands and Woodlands

Gaining Ground

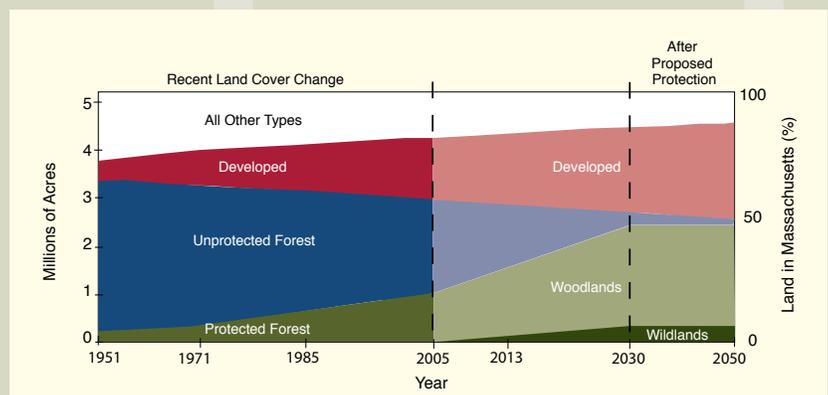
www.wildlandsandwoodlands.org

2008 Update

Wildlands and Woodlands Vision

In 2005 a group of Harvard Forest colleagues formulated a long-term conservation vision for the New England landscape. *Wildlands and Woodlands: A Vision for the Forests of Massachusetts* argues that the state's existing protected land base of one million acres should be increased to include 2.5 million acres of forest, an area equal to half of the land in the state. The conservation effort envisioned in *Wildlands and Woodlands* (W&W) would ensure that the extraordinary environmental, social, and economic values of the landscape are sustained for generations to come. It would reverse the recent trend of deforestation and fragmentation and provide clean air and clean water from natural systems at a much more reasonable cost than serving these needs with human-engineered systems. The protected lands would be held by private, public and non-profit landowners, with 5% of the state's land area conserved as wildland reserves embedded within protected woodlands managed for diverse purposes, including sustainable forestry.

Since 2005 a diverse constituency has banded together in the Wildlands and Woodlands Partnership to promote the larger W&W vision. This group has encouraged the formation of regional partnerships focused on land protection and forest stewardship, promoted new policy initiatives to fund broad-scale land protection and has worked with a large group of landowners in western Massachusetts to develop a regional forest protection effort. For additional information go to: www.wildlandsandwoodlands.org.



Wildlands and Woodlands – Perspective

by David R. Foster

When the first draft of *Wildlands and Woodlands* was complete in 2005 we circulated it for review to scientists, conservationists, and forest professionals nationally. Along with many positive comments came two pessimistic perspectives. First, we heard that our timing was atrocious: the Romney administration in Massachusetts was disinterested in conservation, while national political support for a new vision on land protection was non-existent. Second, the conservation community asked: “Who would lead this unfunded effort?”

Our response regarding timing was straightforward. *Wildlands and Woodlands* is not written for any specific political moment: it is a vision for the future and forever. If this proposal is compelling – that 50% of the land cover of Massachusetts and much of the eastern U.S. should be permanently protected forestland – it warrants circulation regardless of political climate. Politicians come and go and there will be a time when new ideas are needed.

Regarding leadership we observed that given the preponderance of small private ownerships in New England, W&W will only succeed if it motivates individual landowners, local communities, diverse organizations and public agencies. W&W cannot be top-down or prescriptive, it must emerge from the grassroots and engage communities, people and groups that care for the land and life.

This Update underscores the difference that two years and many individual and group efforts can make. On a state and even national level old politicians are going or gone and support for conservation and the environment is rebounding. In Massachusetts, the Patrick administration is promoting a major bond bill to increase land protection and a joint House-Senate committee supports establishment of a Study Commission as proposed by the W&W finance roundtable to explore innovative mechanisms for financing forest conservation.

Meanwhile, on-the-ground support for W&W efforts



is strong and diverse. Hundreds of private landowners have declared their desire to protect their forest lands from development and nearly 50 people are engaged in a novel aggregation project to protect approximately 21,000 acres in western Massachusetts, coordinated by Keith Ross of LandVest and the New England Natural Resources Center. Funding for innovative efforts including aggregation, landscape-level land protection, Woodland Councils, other regional partnerships, and outreach to landowners and small communities, has come from private foundations, individuals, state and federal sources. A coalition of more than 30 organizations comprises the Wildlands & Woodlands Partnership that meets quarterly to exchange information and coordinate efforts, led initially by the Kendall Foundation and The Nature Conservancy. Highstead, a Connecticut-based reserve and conservation organization, has hired Bill Labich as Regional Conservationist to promote W&W-like efforts across southern New England and to coordinate the Partnership. Meanwhile, the scientist authors of W&W are advancing research and educational efforts to enhance and utilize the protected wildlands and woodlands emerging across the region.

Our vision for the forest's future, like the concrete that covers newly developed landscapes, is forever. This *Update* highlights some of the tremendous steps that many individuals and groups are taking to keep that vision and future alive.



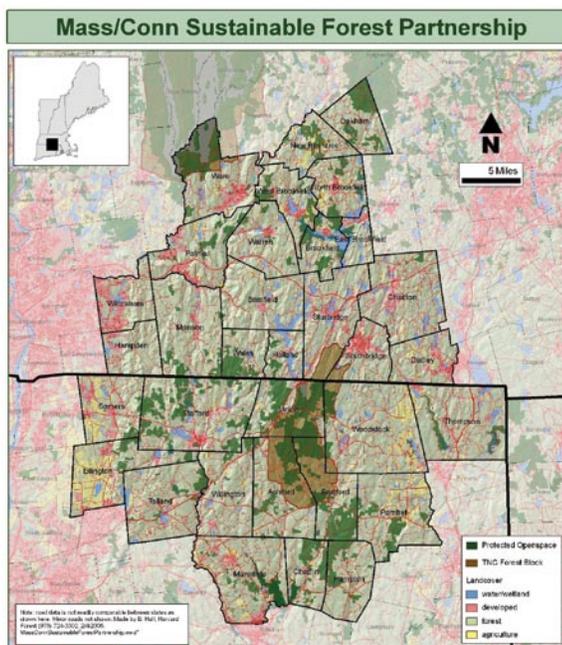
Wildlands and Woodlands Partnership Gains Momentum

The W&W initiative has grown since 2006 from a small group of devotees to an informal collaboration among 30 organizations, agencies, and funders, spanning southern New England known as the Wildlands and Woodlands Partnership. The group leverages the power of partnerships to ensure that more of our regional and landscape-scale natural resources might be conserved for current and future generations.

The Partnership was formed in 2006 of leaders in conservation and environmental restoration at the local to national scales; in higher education; and, in the forestry and the forest products industry. Together the groups are using the *Wildlands and Woodlands* vision as a platform for growing, refining, coordinating and implementing forest conservation strategies and attracting private and public funding. Through this collaboration partners stay informed, work efficiently on their own organization's priorities and develop collaborative relationships in a community that has often worked at cross purposes.

In 2007, the Partnership met three times and developed a draft mission statement and priority activities. Partners are working together to:

- ▶ support existing and emerging woodland councils in Massachusetts and Connecticut,
- ▶ promote statewide conservation finance initiatives,
- ▶ develop maps to help engage a greater community of conservationists, and
- ▶ create a new web-based interface to facilitate communication between partner members and to help local groups conserve their landscapes.



The members of the Wildlands and Woodlands Partnership include the following organizations and agencies:

- Appalachian Mountain Club
- Berkshire Environmental Action Team
- Berkshire Natural Resources Council
- Brandeis University
- Community Foundation of Western Mass
- East Quabbin Land Trust
- Ecologic: Analysis & Communications
- Environmental League of Massachusetts
- Franklin Land Trust, Deerfield Land Trust
- Harvard Forest
- Henry P. Kendall Foundation
- Highstead
- Kohlberg Foundation
- LandVest
- Massachusetts Audubon Society
- Massachusetts Dept. of Conservation & Recreation
- Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs
- Massachusetts Forestry Association
- Massachusetts Woodlands Cooperative
- Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust
- New England Forestry Foundation
- Norcross Wildlife Foundation
- North Quabbin Regional Landscape Partnership
- Northeast Wilderness Trust
- Open Space Institute
- Sierra Club
- The Forest Guild
- The Nature Conservancy
- The Trustees of Reservations
- Trust for Public Land
- University of Massachusetts at Amherst
- USDA Forest Service
- Wildlands Trust of Southeastern Mass
- Windham Country Extension Office

For information contact Bill Labich – blabich@highstead.net.

Highstead Helps Propel W&W Vision

Inspired in large measure by the *Wildlands and Woodlands* vision, Highstead, in Redding, Connecticut has created a new Regional Conservationist position to advance the protection and stewardship of wooded landscapes throughout southern New England and adjoining New York and to help lead the W&W Partnership. This new effort seeks to identify innovative models of forest conservation, distribute these broadly, and assist forest conservation stakeholders in applying these to the northeastern region.

After a national search, Bill Labich of Shutesbury, Massachusetts was hired as the Regional Conservationist in October 2007. With a background in forestry, environmental education, and regional land use planning, Bill has been active in steering committees for the Wildlands and Woodlands Partnership, Quabbin to Cardigan Conservation Collaborative and the North Quabbin Regional Landscape Partnership. In his new position he is meeting with leaders in the environmental and conservation communities, researching attributes of existing land conservation and watershed organizations, learning of the successes, challenges, and needs of existing regional conservation partnerships, supporting the development of new forest partnerships where strong partners and needs co-occur, and coordinating the Wildlands and Woodlands Partnership. These activities will continue and expand in 2008.

Bill welcomes any ideas, input or questions at blabich@highstead.net or through www.highstead.net.

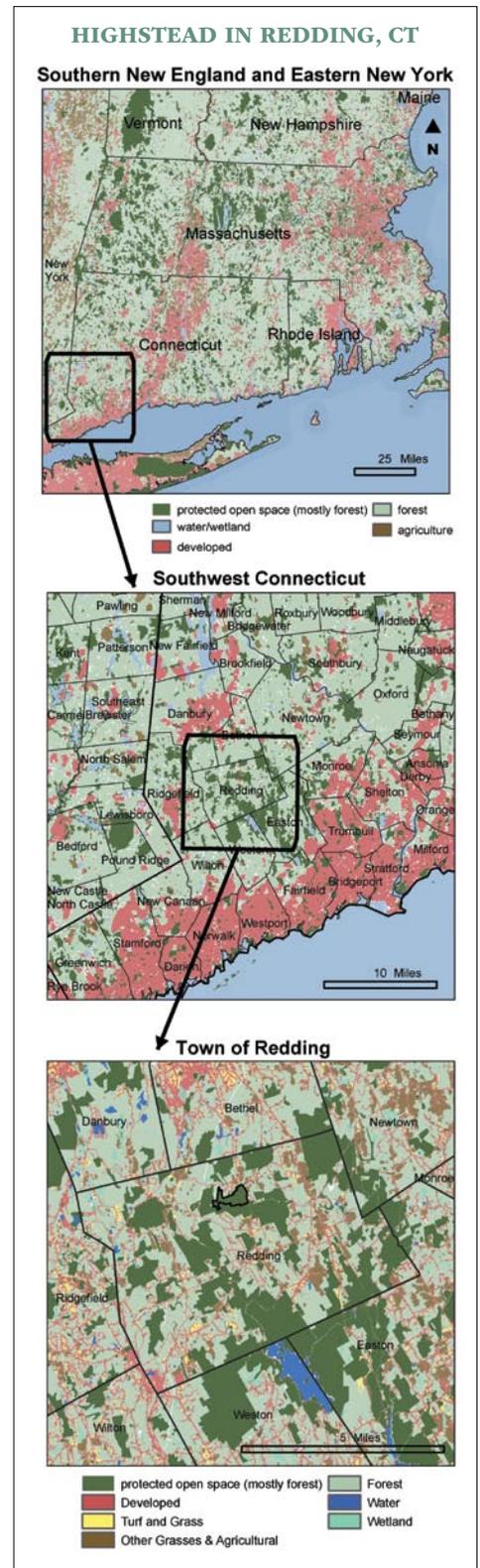
Conservation Finance Bill Advances

From the time the W&W proposal was released it has been clear that funding resources would need to be substantially increased in order to achieve the proposal's ambitious goal. Massachusetts has a long and distinguished history as the home of globally-significant land conservation innovations. Following the recommendation of a W&W finance roundtable convened at the Harvard University Center for the Environment in 2006, the state now has an opportunity to explore new sources of financing for land protection and stewardship through establishment of a Legislative Study Commission that will focus on innovations in forest conservation finance. Senate Bill 477, which would create the Study Commission, was submitted by Senator Steven Brewer in January 2007 and heard before the Joint Legislative Committee on the Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture in September 2007, with supporting testimony coming from a broad diversity of organizations and individuals from the Berkshires to Belmont and Boston.

In November of 2007 proponents of the Study Commission, coordinated by Jim Levitt, Director of the Program on Conservation Innovation at the Harvard Forest, received the good news that Senate Bill 477 was favorably reported out of the Joint Committee's executive session. It will now be considered by the Senate Rules Committee. With continued support from the conservation community, our hope is that the legislation will be passed and signed into law, enabling the Committee to get to work considering new opportunities to fund critical conservation projects throughout the state.

The Commission would include representation from the public, private, non-profit and academic sectors to consider a range of intriguing possibilities, possibly including: budgets, bonds and ballot initiatives; new tax incentives; opportunities to strengthen limited development initiatives; enhanced forest-based economic opportunities; the systematic use of funds from regulatory proceedings and legal settlements; opportunities to expand mitigation markets; and opportunities associated with emerging carbon trading markets.

To view the complete text of Senate Bill 477 visit: <http://www.mass.gov/legis/bills/senate/185/st00/st00477.htm>.



Wildlands and Woodlands Land Aggregation Pilot Project

To help advance the W&W vision, the New England Natural Resources Center is engaged with multiple partners in a pilot project to aggregate existing and proposed conservation easements of predominately private forest lands in one large project consisting of approximately 21,000 acres in western Massachusetts. In turn, the aggregation project will seek funding from a variety of sources including federal, state, local and private philanthropy and a matching donation from the landowners to compensate the landowners for the development rights on their property. The motivation for this effort and the steps required for its completion are outlined below.

Why aggregate land protection projects?

- ▶ Most small land trusts in Massachusetts lack qualified professional staff to complete land conservation projects that require significant fundraising.
- ▶ A recent lack of funding for land conservation projects has resulted in a large number of landowners who are interested in protecting their land.
- ▶ The 1.5 million acre goal of W&W requires protecting many forest properties that have great value in aggregate, but that would be challenging to fund as individual projects.
- ▶ Aggregating multiple land conservation projects from a broad region results in a broader array of conservation values being protected on a larger number of acres.
- ▶ Economies of scale for appraisal, and other due diligence costs can be achieved to reduce overall acquisition expenses.
- ▶ A 25% contribution by a majority of participating landowners will provide a substantial contribution toward purchase of conservation restrictions (CRs).
- ▶ CRs will require written forest management plans, monitoring of forest harvesting, regular communication with landowners, and other activities to ensure sustainable management of private lands.
- ▶ Most, but not all properties, will permit some level of public access.

What has been accomplished to date?

- ▶ Broad criteria for conservation projects were established that accommodated a variety of local, regional and statewide objectives within the W&W vision.
- ▶ Twelve land trusts submitted a total of 129 properties totaling nearly 21,000 acres.
- ▶ Most of the properties have been mapped using GIS, which allows examination of the properties from a variety of natural resource perspectives.



- ▶ Submitted projects are currently being appraised. Appraisals for individual properties are being paid for by sponsoring land trusts.
- ▶ Once appraisals are completed each participating landowner will be asked to sign an 18 month Option Agreement with the sponsoring land trust. The Option specifies the price paid at 75% of the appraised value and the terms of the CR.
- ▶ A qualified conservation intermediary is being sought to serve as the applicant for CR purchases, monitoring endowment, and closing expenses. It is anticipated that the intermediary will be guided by an advisory committee consisting of representatives of each of the sponsoring land trusts that wish to participate.
- ▶ Funding for this initial pilot project work has come from grants from individuals and foundations. Funding for the Aggregation project will be sought from local, state and federal programs as well as private philanthropy from foundations and individuals.
- ▶ Completion of all appraisals is expected by early 2008 with funding applications to begin in the spring of 2008.

Next Steps

- ▶ Proceed to complete the individual conservation restrictions.
- ▶ Analyze the results of the project in terms of numbers or parcels and landowners, acreage, and geography of the protected lands with regards to major conservation criteria.
- ▶ Develop a summary of the aggregation project for distribution and application elsewhere.
- ▶ Explore the interest among land trusts, funders, and the state in replicating the aggregation project in other parts of the state.

Wildlands and Woodlands

New *Wildlands and Woodlands* Project: Massachusetts Forest Zones

The *Wildlands and Woodlands* proposal calls for permanently protecting one half of Massachusetts and southern New England in forest land. But this would not mean a uniform 50% across the state—some regions would have more protected forest, some less. To illustrate this variation the W&W Partnership developed a map depicting one plausible future for Massachusetts based on W&W.

The resulting map depicts four “forest zones” within which different minimum levels of forest protection are achievable, given the current amount of forest. These include: Urban Forest (10%), Suburban Forest (25%), Rural Forests (50%), and Woodlands & Wildlands (75%). Together, these zones add up to half of Massachusetts remaining in protected forest. Forests in each zone would provide different, but equally important environmental and social benefits.

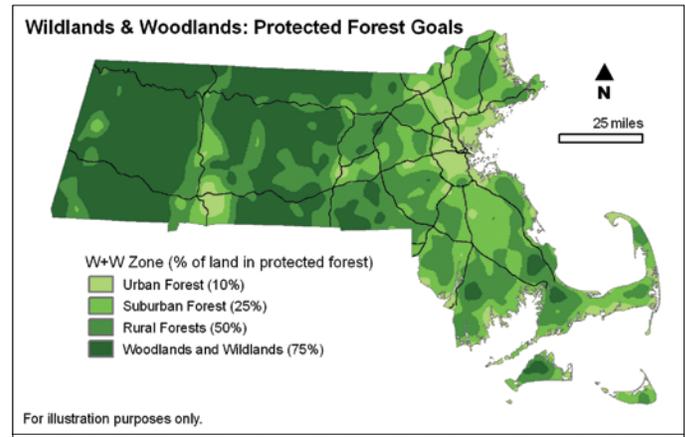
Urban Forest Zone – (10% protected forest). City parks, trees in yards and along streets, and forest corridors along urban streams yield enormous benefits. Urban forests improve air quality, cool the environment, protect water, and add incalculable beauty to our cities. Their acreage may be small, but urban forests touch many people.



Suburban Forest Zone – (25% protected forest). Town forests, greenways, and other conservation lands protect water quality, support wildlife, and provide recreational opportunities for walking, horseback riding and biking. Although limited in acreage, suburban forests are easily

accessible to most residents of Massachusetts, are home to many woodland species, and provide environmental education and demonstrations of responsible stewardship for students of all ages.

Rural Forests – (50% protected forest). Rural woodlands are comprised of a wide variety of public lands and private forests protected by easements, including farm woodlots. These woodlands are part of an attractive pastoral landscape and are extensive enough to provide connected habitat for most forest species, and the base for a viable forest economy.

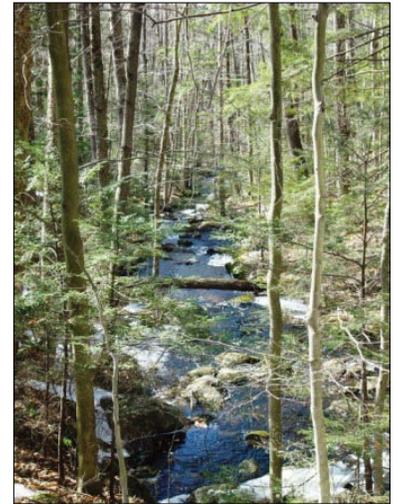


Woodlands & Wildlands – (75% protected forest).

These extensive forests lie mostly in the western part of the state and include both public lands, such as state forests and parks, and private woodlands protected by easements.

They provide a connected matrix for the full range of forest species, the foundation of a thriving forest products economy, the wellspring for pure water for the state’s inhabitants, and the location for large wildland reserves.

These four zones would all include wild reserves of various sizes as well as forest available for productive management. The protection goal of 50% of the land in protected forest also retains ample room for commercial and residential development. Rather than “locking up” the forest the resulting plan protects forests as the essential foundation for an economically and environmentally healthy way of life. Every city and town in Massachusetts can contribute to this goal, and all will benefit by it.



Woodland Councils and Regional Partnerships Take Hold

The *Wildlands and Woodlands* vision calls for woodland councils or regional conservation partnerships to engage and educate forest landowners and community leaders concerning the values of woodlands in their region and tools to conserve them for the future. Five such partnerships formed between 1998 and 2007 that are leveraging fantastic investments in conservation. One effort that emerged specifically from the *Wildlands and Woodlands* initiative is the MassConn Sustainable Forest Partnership (see map, page 3).

The MassConn Sustainable Forest Partnership was formed in 2007 and includes regional and statewide conservation land trusts and environmental organizations from north central Connecticut and south central Massachusetts. The new Partnership is in the process of reaching out to additional partners as well as initiating efforts to establish its own regional aggregation land conservation initiative.

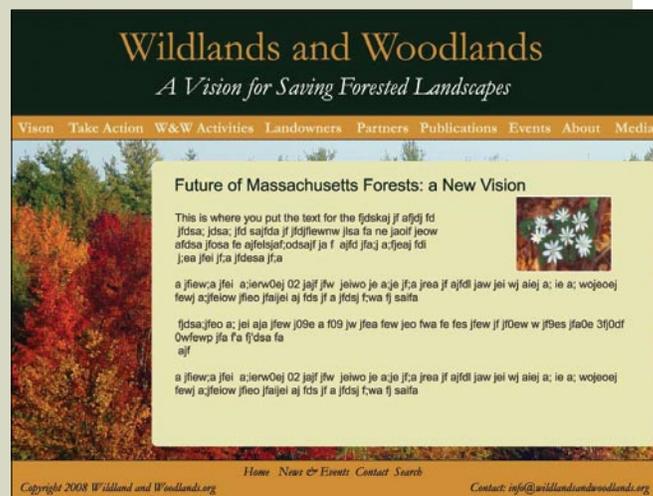
Other conservation partnerships and woodland councils include:

- ▶ The North Quabbin Regional Landscape Partnership (www.nqpartnership.org)
- ▶ The Highland Communities Initiative (HCI) (www.highlandcommunities.org/)
- ▶ The Taunton River Watershed Campaign (www.campaign.savethetaunton.org/)
- ▶ The Westfield Highlands Forest (WHF) Partnership (www.westfieldhighlandspartnership.org)

New W&W Website Launched

The Wildlands and Woodlands Partnership will be launching a new *Wildlands and Woodlands* website in early 2008. Packed with information on collaborative conservation, and updated often, the site will provide partners and others with news about upcoming events; descriptions of innovative models for conservation, financing, and partnerships; and how to get involved in exciting conservation activities all around southern New England.

www.wildlandsandwoodlands.org



Looking Ahead – *Wildlands and Woodlands* Priorities for 2008

- ▶ Advance *Wildlands and Woodlands* science. Working with scientists from across the northeast the W&W authors are developing a publication outlining the rationale, application and protocols for a flexible approach to measuring critical ecological dynamics and conservation attributes across landscapes of protected wildland reserves and managed woodlands.
- ▶ Advance the Legislative Study Commission, including: passage of enabling legislation, appointment of Commission members, and initiation of Commission research and hearings.
- ▶ Launch the new *Wildlands and Woodlands* website to serve landowners, land trusts and citizens, engage a broader regional and national community, and enable on-line information sharing among W&W partnership participants.
- ▶ Promote the *Wildlands and Woodlands* vision to other groups across southern New England including Conservation Commissions, Public Water Supply Commissioners, regional planning agencies, hunters, etc.
- ▶ Develop mapping presentations for woodland councils, regional partnerships and smaller land trusts and hold one for at least two regional partnerships that are in need of mapping support.
- ▶ Facilitate workshops for woodland councils and partnership coordinators.
- ▶ Collaborate on financing and policy initiatives.

Wildlands and Woodlands

Support *Wildlands and Woodlands*

Your tax-deductible contributions help support *Wildlands and Woodlands* research and outreach. To join the effort, donations may be made payable to "Harvard Forest – Harvard University" and sent to Harvard Forest, 324 North Main Street, Petersham, MA, 01366. Thank you.

About the Harvard Forest

The Harvard Forest in Petersham, Massachusetts has served as Harvard University's rural laboratory and classroom for research and education in forest ecology since 1907. The Forest is situated on 3,000 acres of mixed hardwood and conifer forests with ponds, streams, swamps, fields and forest plantations that provide diverse ecosystems for study and teaching, and habitat for a wide array of plant and animal species. A facilities complex including laboratories, classrooms, historical archives, and offices

supports the research, education and administrative activities of approximately 40 students and staff. The Fisher Museum of forestry contains the world-renowned dioramas depicting the history of landscape changes in New England since Colonial settlement. Research at the Harvard Forest focuses on plant and animal ecology, landscape history, and conservation biology and management. The Harvard Forest is part of the National Science Foundation Long Term Ecological Research Network (LTER), a collaboration of 25 sites across the United State that investigate major ecological questions and critically important environmental processes.

The Fisher Museum is open to the public daily during business hours and on weekend afternoons in the summer and fall. Visitors are welcome to walk the more than 40 miles of woods roads and self-guided nature trails connected to the Museum.

For additional information about the Harvard Forest and Fisher Museum please visit the Harvard Forest website at: harvardforest.fas.harvard.edu.

Contributors to 2008 Update

Brian Donahue, David Foster, Brian Hall, Bill Labich, Kathy Fallon Lambert, Jim Levitt, Keith Ross, and Loring Schwarz.

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Harvard Forest

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Wildlands and Woodlands – Gaining Ground in 2008