

Harvard Forest Director Earns Award for Preserving Landscape for Public Use

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With an ambitious plan to protect the environment and promote landscape development, Director of the Harvard Forest David R. Foster and his colleagues were recently honored with the Charles Eliot award.

The Harvard Forest is a 3,000-acre research forest in Petersham, Mass.

The Trustees of Reservations, the first private nonprofit conservation organization in the country, presents the Charles Eliot award to an individual or organization who advances their mission of preserving the landscape for public use, according to Trustee President Andrew W. Kendall.

The Harvard Forest's "Wildlands and Woodlands: A Vision for the New England Landscape" report promotes a 50-year conservation effort to protect 70 percent of the 42 million acres of forests in New England from development. The forests would be divided with 10 percent as wildland reserves and 90 percent as managed woodlands. This component of the plan was a sequel to an original campaign, released in 2005, that focused on the conservation of forest exclusively in Massachusetts.

"Our feeling is that the efforts that David has spearheaded not only in Massachusetts but also throughout New England are serving a vital role of laying out a bold, ambitious vision for the future of our land," Kendall said.

Foster—who served as an associate professor of biology at Harvard from 1983 to 1990 before he became director of the Harvard Forest—echoed similar sentiments on the benefits of such a far-reaching project.

"By being ambitious, it forces people to think very hard about the future. One way to look at it is ambitious, but it also allows almost doubling of the amount of development already in New England and accommodates economic growth," Foster said.

Compared with other conservation policies, "Wildlands and Woodlands" represents an interdisciplinary effort by scientists and policy makers alike, Foster added.

The “Wildlands and Woodlands” report was co-authored by 20 forest ecologists and policy experts, many of whom are based at Harvard.

Those involved in the project stressed its importance in light of the high decline of forests today.

“The forest of every New England state is in decline for the first time in 150 years,” said Clarisse M. Hart, a co-author and communication manager for the project.

“I found it great that the project wanted to conserve large sections of land. Once the land is developed, it’s difficult to go back,” said Lisa N. Chen ’12, who worked at Harvard Forest last summer.

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