

Section Five:

Anticipated Benefits of a Federal-State Partnership

Introduction

A primary purpose of a State and Federal designation focused on the mission of the Mohawk Trail Woodlands Partnership is to obtain additional financial and technical resources for the 21-town region in the Northwest corner of Massachusetts. The municipal and regional meetings held in 2013-2014 identified the need and desire for additional assistance for four priorities: to 1) increase natural resource-based economic development, 2) improve the fiscal stability of municipalities, 3) support sustainable forestry practices, and 4) conserve forest land.



Natural resource-based economic development is a project goal.

Some existing state and federal programs could help to meet these needs in the region, and additional grant programs established since the formation of the Woodlands Partnership have continued to invest in the advancement of these goals. However, many programs are not fully applicable to the stated Partnership goals or have limited resources. **Many grants are extremely competitive and rural communities acting alone frequently lack the clout to secure them. In addition, some grants can be difficult to access, such as requiring local matching funds which many rural towns and non-profit organizations cannot afford. Smaller municipalities can also find it difficult to administer grants and meet all of the reporting, accounting and coordination requirements that often accompany the award of funding.** Town staff usually already have full plates, and it can be challenging to identify volunteers to take on these tasks. Additional financial resources could be provided through the Woodlands Partnership to leverage existing grant programs.

Expectations from the Partnership with the U.S. Forest Service

Within the U.S. Forest Service, executive leadership of the Eastern Region, National Forest System; Northeastern Area, State and Private Forestry; and Northern Research Station and Forest Products Laboratory have recognized the significant promise of a new model for forest

conservation and natural resource-based economic development focused on private forest lands and sustainable rural communities based on the work of the Mohawk Trail Woodlands Partnership. They have assigned a U.S. Forest Service Liaison to assist with the Woodlands Partnership project. The Forest Service has also shown its support by awarding two grants to support projects developed by the Partnership over the past two years. USFS executive leadership provided the following statement:

"The Mohawk Trail Woodlands Partnership enables the Forest Service, America's premier conservation organization, to offer an assistance role through a new model of forest conservation. This unique opportunity in shared leadership provides the U.S. Forest Service an exciting way to help care for the land and improve people's lives. The partnership forms a focal point for conserving private-land forests on a landscape scale among communities willing to share conservation leadership. The U.S. Forest Service can provide skilled capacity in land stewardship allowing a true public-private partnership to flourish, effectively connecting environmental health with community resiliency."

Expectations from the Partnership with the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs

The Mohawk Trail Woodlands Partnership has already resulted in positive collaboration with the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, as the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EOEEA) has created a grant program targeted to the region. **Over the first three years of this program, close to \$1 million through 30 different grants has been awarded directly to member towns, to groups of towns working together for mutual benefit, or to organizations working in the MTWP region to advance Partnership goals (\$260,000 in Feb. 2020; \$225,000 in July 2020; and \$313,500 in Aug. 2021).** EOEEA has also funded a four-year \$475,000 contract, awarded to New England Forestry Foundation, to serve as the Administrative Agent for the MTWP. In addition, two Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) grants developed with the regional planning agencies to address climate change planning – \$1.5 million to Adams, and \$164,575 to Williamstown – have included funding to non-profit conservation partners and forest scientists led by Mass Audubon to develop a Forest Climate Resilience Program being piloted in the region. [See more about climate-smart forest stewardship in Section 3.]

Other potential benefits of partnering with the state include providing matching funds for federal grant programs to be directed towards projects within the region, and improving the management of state-owned forests in the region, a need that was communicated often during the original development of the Woodlands Partnership. For example, since January 2015, the EOEEA and Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) have received

two USDA NRCS grants totaling \$1.5 million to offer incentives to interested woodland owners in the MTWP region to implement forestry projects that will benefit declining species, and to invite the public to their woods to showcase the benefits of forest management via wildlife observation, hunting and fishing activities.

Meanwhile, the Chair and Executive Committee of the MTWP Board have begun outreach to state leaders within Gov. Charlie Baker's administration, as well as the state and federal legislative delegation, to seek support for Northwestern Massachusetts priorities through sustainable funding for the Partnership, either through appropriations, bond revenues, grant programs or other avenues.

Specifically, the state legislation that established the Woodlands Partnership and its Board, also created a MTWP Fund to be administered by the Board, with funds from "public or private sources including, but not limited to, gifts, federal or private grants, donations, rebates and settlements received by the Commonwealth that are specifically designated to be credited to the fund and all other amounts credited or transferred into the fund from any other source." Funds are "to be held in an expendable trust...used solely for implementing the purposes and administration of the Mohawk Trail Woodland Partnership," according to Section 91, and, "Unexpended funds may be carried over from year to year to be expended in subsequent years. No expenditure from the fund shall cause it to be in deficiency." **Based on this law creating the MTWP as a public body, the Woodlands Partnership Executive Committee and Board would like to see the vision of significant state investment in the Partnership realized, in order for the entity to become self-sustaining.**

Examples of Federal Partnerships and Benefits of a New "Special Federal Designation"

Many similar collaborative projects between towns and federal, state and regional agencies have led to successful partnerships that advanced goals parallel to those presented in this Plan. This section outlines examples of other federal partnerships to illustrate the wide variety of existing models, followed by the potential programs that could provide benefits or new funding sources related to the four important categories identified by towns in the MTWP: 1) Natural Resource-Based Economic Development and Tourism; 2) Municipal Financial Stability; 3) Sustainable Forestry Practices; and 4) Conservation of Forest Land.

These successful partnerships around the country have achieved outcomes that could not be fully realized by individual towns or organizations working independently. Only through a collaborative process and collective endeavor were needs of multiple stakeholders and natural resource concerns met simultaneously. These sections identify existing programs and benefits available but also existing gaps in addressing the Woodlands Partnership goals.

New Mexico Collaborative Forest Restoration Program

The New Mexico Collaborative Forest Restoration Program was authorized by Congress in 2000. Legislation established up to \$5 million annually towards cost-share grants to stakeholders for experimental restoration projects on publicly owned lands (including federal, state and municipal forests). These projects were designed collaboratively, to promote healthy watersheds and reduce threats to forests including wildfire and insect infestation. The results of the program have been tremendous, particularly the collaborative aspect. An advisory panel made up of federal and state officials, scientists, conservation groups and community members works to craft projects that are then presented for approval. This has helped to reduce project litigation and conflicts between conservation groups and logging organizations. The program has awarded nearly 150 grants to 99 organizations working in 20 New Mexico counties, resulting in the restoration of over 23,700 acres of forest. Approximately 600 forest-related jobs have been created as a result of the program. While the MTWP contains no federal forest lands, it is envisioned that a Special Federal Designation (see Section 6) could be designed to direct funding to state or private lands. **Given the diverse range of forest types in Northwest Massachusetts, such a model of collaboration to design ecological research projects or direct funding for specific conservation, or climate change outcomes could be useful.**

National Forest Foundation / National Fish and Wildlife Foundation

These foundations were created by Congress to be the official non-profit partners of the U.S. Forest Service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service respectively. In addition to receiving federal funds, these foundations can solicit outside donations, something the U.S. Forest Service and U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service are prohibited from doing. A similar model could be used in the creation of a Trust Fund that would operate in the 21-Town project area to fund forestry and tourism-related projects and forest land conservation as well as to support municipal services. Initial federal and state funding could support an endowment which would help to ensure the long-term viability of the Mohawk Trail Woodlands Partnership.

Highlands Conservation Act

The Highlands Conservation Act helped a four-state region including Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania to protect natural resources and conserve land. Up to \$100 million for land acquisition and \$10 million for technical assistance were allocated for a 10-year period. In 2020, the Great American Outdoors Act fully funded the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund, including \$10 million in annual funds for the Highlands Region.



Valhalla Hemlock Glen is one of many parcels of land conserved via the Highlands Conservation Act.

Land and conservation easements (CRs) were purchased by state entities and had to be consistent with areas identified as having significant resource value. Land or CRs were purchased only from willing sellers. While purchase of land in fee is not being proposed for the Mohawk Trail Woodlands Partnership, this program exemplifies state and federal governments working together for land conservation by providing technical assistance and using CRs as one tool to conserve lands.



The Connecticut River watershed is encompassed by the Silvio Conte National Wildlife Refuge, established to improve wildlife habitat and recreational opportunities. Photo Source: US Fish and Wildlife, www.fws.gov

Silvio Conte National Wildlife Refuge

This wildlife refuge covering the entire four-state Connecticut River watershed has created strong partnerships between landowners, nonprofits and state and federal conservation agencies in Massachusetts. The collaborative approach has worked to help private landowners leverage federal funds to improve wildlife habitat, including fish habitat. Additionally, it has worked to create recreational opportunities including publicly accessible trail development through collaboration with local land trusts and private landowners.

National Heritage Corridor Areas of National Park Service

Although the MTWP formed around a relationship with the USDA Forest Service, other federal agencies have established programs that recognize the special qualities of important regions. The National Park Service has created 55 National Heritage Areas around the U.S., “places where historic, cultural, and natural resources combine to form cohesive, nationally important landscapes,” and, “Unlike national parks, National Heritage Areas are large lived-in landscapes.”¹ Nearby examples include the Upper Housatonic Valley National Heritage Area in Southwest Massachusetts and Northwest Connecticut, The Last Green Valley in Northeastern Connecticut and South Central Massachusetts (founded as the Quinebaug-Shetucket Rivers National Heritage Corridor²), and the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor in Rhode Island. Most Heritage Areas receive more than \$600,000 a year through federal appropriations to which the Areas raise matching funds, though dependence on the federal budget can lead to financial planning challenges. New Heritage Areas typically receive \$300,000 a year, and according to recent information, the U.S. Forest Service could administer a Heritage Area. A consortium works together to support sustainable funding for the program and federal legislation is pending to shore up future funding, to which the Woodlands Partnership area of Northwest Massachusetts could potentially seek to be added.

Federal Partnerships and Benefits of a New Federal Designation

These collaborative initiatives have helped to achieve natural resource and economic goals while creating lasting benefits. Within the Mohawk Trail Woodlands Partnership project area, a

¹ National Park Service: Community Led Conservation and Development.

<https://www.nps.gov/subjects/heritageareas/index.htm>

² Godin, K. and Broderick, S. Partnering with a National Heritage Corridor: A Connecticut Case Study.

<https://archives.joe.org/joe/2001october/a3.php>

Special Designation by the U.S. Forest Service and associated funds could advance the sustainability of rural communities while concurrently improving forests and the social and ecological benefits they provide. Moreover, the opportunity for collaboration has the potential to benefit the region's residents, towns, region and state through the creation of a new model of forest conservation and resource-based economic development.

A search of "woodland partnerships" finds few other such initiatives (the Kennebec Woodland Partnership seems similar in scope and the Rhode Island Woodland Partnership, an active collaboration of foresters and landowners, but neither is focused on towns.)

Massachusetts Specialty License Plate Program

Another potential funding idea researched by the Partnership's Forest Conservation Committee is the Commonwealth's specialty license plate program in which non-profits can raise funds for charitable causes through a surcharge on specially designed vehicle plates that allow donors to show off their support on their car. The possibility of a forest-themed license plate has been discussed as a source of permanent revenue for the Partnership. A plate must be designed and a minimum number paid for before the Department of Motor Vehicles will print the plates (750 plates would need to be purchased by individuals ahead of time at \$40 each). Board members have discussed a crowdfunding campaign which could be a possible route to implementation.

Sustainable Forestry Practices

Several state technical assistance programs are targeted to assist with sustainable forestry and management in northern Massachusetts. While financial assistance helps to prepare forest management plans for landowners, the implementation of these plans is the responsibility of private landowners or municipalities who wish to practice active forest management and sustainable forestry on their property. An additional fund or increased technical assistance may be needed for landowners or towns to support implementation of the forest management plans that increase sustainable forestry practices in the region. Sustainable forestry would also benefit the local economy by sustaining forest-based businesses. These increased activities could also have associated ecological benefits, such as habitat improvement and improved climate change resilience.

- **Regional Conservation Partnership Program (US Department of Agriculture)** - Authorized under the 2014 Farm Bill, the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) is USDA's innovative program that promotes coordination between the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and its partners to deliver conservation assistance. Through this program, extensive

partnerships have been established to assist landowners to conserve working woodlands and to integrate sustainable forestry and energy practices. In January 2015 DCR was awarded \$637,860 from the RCPP for the 20-Town region as well as eight adjacent towns. Only 110 applications were funded nationally. The Mohawk Trail Woodlands Partnership effort was instrumental in the State submitting an application for western Massachusetts and contributed to its national competitiveness. The project provided a number of environmental and community benefits, including:

- Creating and enhancing forest habitat for at-risk species;
- Restoring degraded habitat conditions by landscape-scale invasive plant treatments;
- Increasing the carbon sequestration of the region and reducing carbon emissions by retaining land in long-term forest use;
- Encouraging private forest landowners to apply regional woody material retention guidelines during harvesting operations.

Creating a Buy-Local Model for Working Forests in the Northern Berkshires (MA Department of Conservation and Recreation) - This DCR program, funded through the U.S. Forest Service, helped to build and promote the forest product industry in the northern Berkshires through March 2015. The project worked to create a type of homegrown “Forestry Stewardship Council” certification of Massachusetts wood products through harvesting standards, and included much of the Partnership area. In addition, marketing assistance was provided to wood and forest product producers, and outreach to architects and other professionals encouraged the use of locally available wood products.

- **Small Forest Landowner Outreach Initiative for Communities Located in the Urban-Rural Interface of the Quabbin to Cardigan Priority Landscape (MA Department of Conservation and Recreation)** - This DCR program is funded by the U.S. Forest Service, and provides outreach and technical assistance to engage landowners to train landowners in invasive species removal, safe equipment use, and micro-logging techniques with an emphasis on forest



Lands can be used for timber production while managing for bird habitat for species such as the Eastern Towhee.

improvement. An innovative aspect of the program is the creation of “Wood Banks” in several towns. These Wood Banks follow the food bank model to provide emergency home heating assistance for local residents. Wood is donated by local landowners.

- **Forest Stewardship Program (MA Department of Conservation and Recreation)** - The DCR provides cost reimbursement to individuals, groups and associations who wish to develop a 10-year forest management or stewardship plan. However, this program is only open to landowners with parcels of 10 acres or more and municipalities with parcels larger than 25 acres. Additionally, land enrolled in Chapter 61A or 61B that does not have a current forest management plan is eligible.
- **Foresters for the Birds (MA Department of Conservation and Recreation)** - Landowners can be reimbursed for a Bird Habitat Assessment on their property conducted by a licensed forester. Reimbursement is eligible to those currently enrolled or seeking to enroll in the Forest Stewardship program (through creation of a 10-year forest management plan), and living within the Northern Hardwood focus area towns.
- **Community Forest Stewardship Implementation Grants (MA Dept. of Conservation and Recreation)** - Municipalities that have a town forest or water supply land and are currently enrolled in the Forest Stewardship Program are eligible for 50-50 matching reimbursement grants from DCR of up to \$15,000. This fund helps communities to put forest stewardship into practice and connect residents with their forests and their benefits.
- **Forest Climate Resilience Program** –Developed and piloted through state MVP grants to MTWP towns, by Mass Audubon and conservation partners, working with the Department of Conservation and Recreation, supports municipalities in planning and implementing practices that help forests cope with climate extremes (adaptation) while also locking away greenhouse gases that cause climate change (mitigation). This program provides technical assistance to municipalities within the Mohawk Trail Woodland Partnership (MTWP) region (with expansions to other municipalities and private land coming soon) and allows them to apply for funding to cover the cost of implementing climate-informed forest resiliency practices on town-owned forestland.

Massachusetts landowners and municipalities have options if they wish to practice sustainable forestry and forest management on their woodlands. At the State level, successful grant programs such as the Forest Stewardship Program work to reduce the financial costs that potential applicants face to create forest management plans for their properties. However, property owners may need additional assistance to implement the recommendations of the

forest management plan. At the Federal level, the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service offers partial assistance to private landowners for implementation of forest improvement projects via their cost share programs. The 21-town Mohawk Trail Woodlands Partnership as a collective entity could be more competitive to compete for large federal program grants that could benefit the entire project area.

Land Conservation for Sustainable Forestry Carbon Sequestration and Ecosystem Services

One of the stated goals of the Woodlands Partnership is to conserve forest land in private ownership. The creation of a forest conservation program, comparable to the Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR) program, that would provide funding for the conservation of working woodlands, would be a major benefit to the landowners of the region. Currently, landowners who wish to permanently conserve their land, but cannot afford to donate a Conservation Restriction, have few options. Adopting a forest stewardship plan with management objectives over a 10-year period can help landowners to apply for funding to keep their woods healthy, and consider the potential costs and benefits of sustainably harvesting wood products from their land – which may produce income that allows them to continue ownership, rather than subdividing or selling off parcels to pay taxes or support other life goals. The programs that landowners in the 21-town region can currently utilize if their land is eligible are described below, as well as their limitations.

Agricultural Preservation Restriction Program - The Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources has an active program of purchasing agricultural preservation restrictions (APR's) on active farmland that is comprised primarily of prime agricultural soils or soils of statewide importance. The property involved must also be no more than 2/3 wooded. Much of the land in this focus region does not meet these requirements, especially land that has historically been managed for forest products. A new designation and funding stream for a Sustainable Forestry Conservation Restriction could be created (see the MTWP Model CR, or NEFF's Exemplary Forestry standards as examples). Such a CR focused on sustainable management could be complementary to a CR focused on "Forever Wild" or passively managed forests that might focus on keeping current carbon stored in trees for carbon credits, decisions that are based on the individual goals of each landowner. The creation of a new funding source for the conservation of smaller parcels of forest land that have a history of active forest management would be a huge benefit to many landowners in this region.

- **MA Land Conservation Tax Credit** - Rewards landowners who donate their land, or place a conservation restriction on it, with a State tax credit provided the land is determined by the State to be eligible, based upon its natural resource values. The program pays landowners up to 50% of the appraised donated value of the restriction or

of the land, or \$75,000 whichever is less. This program is currently very popular statewide and has more than a two-year waiting list. In addition, landowners typically need to spend roughly \$5,000 in due diligence costs (appraisal, survey, legal representation, etc.) to take advantage of the program.

- **MA Landscape Partnership Program** - The MA Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs' Landscape Partnership Program will pay up to 50% of the appraised value of land or a Conservation Restriction. This program, however, has a requirement that the application involve a minimum of 500 contiguous acres, and that the interest in land (e.g. Conservation Restriction) be held by more than a single entity (e.g. State, town and/or land trust). The Franklin Land Trust has successfully utilized this program to conserve working woodlands in the region but the projects are very complex and take several years to come to fruition. The successful projects also relied on multiple funding sources, including bargain sales and donations by some of the involved landowners and grants from foundations.
- **US Forest Legacy Program** - The U.S. Forest Service's Forest Legacy Program has been suggested as a potential source of funding for working woodland Conservation Restrictions. This federal program provides funding for the acquisition of Conservation Restrictions with willing sellers on working woodlands in eight designated forested regions in Massachusetts, but the 21-town Mohawk Trail Woodlands Partnership region is not currently one of them. However, the MTWP Board and Forest Conservation Committee have been working to change this. Following a Nov. 2020 Forest Legacy presentation to the Board by Lindsay Nystrom of DCR, the Administrative Agent worked with Board members to collect letters of support for a state application for the MTWP region to become eligible, which is now being submitted. With limited funding and a priority placed on large areas of forested land, the Forest Legacy program is competitive nationwide, however, with full funding of the Land and Water Conservation Fund in 2020, funding levels and the chance for success have recently improved. Massachusetts land trusts seeking Forest Legacy funds must aggregate as many smaller parcels of land as possible, and include multi-state partners if possible. While doable, these projects can take many years to assemble, and carry no guarantee of success, as offers to buy the land or pay for an easement must then be negotiated with the individual landowner. However, at least this important forested region would have a shot to compete for this source of funding, if eligibility is approved.

Municipal Financial Sustainability

The overall financial health and sustainability of communities within the 21-town region is intrinsically linked to the health and sustainability of the region's forests. The ecological benefits that forests supply to people, including clean water, clean air, and flood control, are essential for long-term community health and resilience. Keeping forest lands in tact from development also benefits the Commonwealth and New England by absorbing some of the carbon emissions from human activities that are increasing the threat of climate change to all communities, rural and urban. A robust forest business sector based on sustainable forestry practices could provide jobs that help keep more of the region's population employed, while providing economic incentives to support retaining forest land.

At the same time, efforts to protect forests for these and other benefits must take into account a community's need for an adequate tax base. Towns in the region have little room to expand their tax base because they rely heavily upon residential property taxes for revenue (66% in 2020) and have limited ways to earn revenue from other sources. Lower property values, combined with lower wages and incomes in the region (discussed in Section 4), make it difficult for towns to raise property taxes without placing further financial burden on their residents. In addition, the amount that taxes can be raised each year is constrained by tax levy limits imposed by Proposition 2½, and increases beyond the yearly limits require an override vote (both at Town Meeting and by election ballot) by the town.

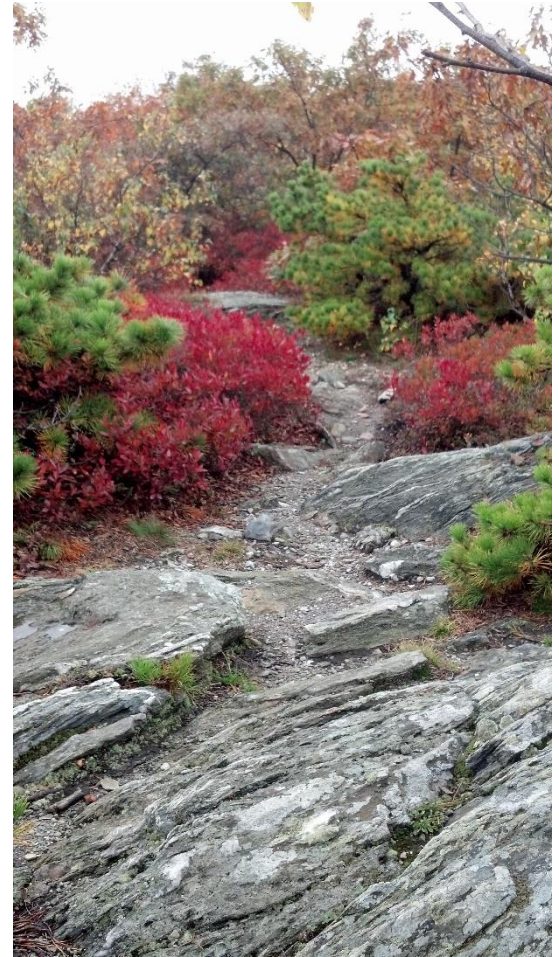
The towns in the region do not have the necessary capacity to increase spending on policing, road maintenance, and other costs potentially associated with increased tourism in this area. Listed below are several programs aimed towards assisting communities with projects that fall within the Partnership's scope.

- **MA Green Communities Program** - Designated Green Communities (Ashfield, Buckland, Conway, Rowe, and Williamstown) can apply for funding of up to \$250,000 for the 2015 Competitive Grant Program (\$7.9 million available). Eligible projects include energy conservation/energy efficiency measures and renewable energy projects (including energy efficient renewable wood heat) on municipal property. Additional technical assistance could be used to help the other towns in the region qualify for Green Community status and resulting grant funds.
- **Volunteer Fire Assistance (VFA) Grants (MA Department of Conservation and Recreation)** - VFA grants are available to non-profit rural call or volunteer fire departments that serve a population of 10,000 or less. The department must be comprised of at least 80% volunteer firefighters. Eligible projects include firefighter safety, technology transfer, and rural fire defense.

Natural Resource-Based Economic Development and Tourism

Central to the Mohawk Trail Woodlands Partnership Project is the goal to support economic development for forestry and recreational tourism. While forests have long played a significant role in economic development, the region lacks some of the programmatic and financial resources necessary to enhance this sector. Listed below are some current programs and initiatives related to natural resource-based economic development and tourism that could be used to accomplish the program goals.³

- **Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program (Natural Resources Conservation Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture)** - This program, authorized under the 2014 Farm Bill, aims to improve wildlife habitat and enhance public access for recreational opportunities on privately held and operated farm, ranch and forest lands.
- **Recreational Trails Program (U.S. Department of Transportation's Federal Highway Administration / MA Department of Conservation and Recreation)** - This program provides funds to states to develop and maintain recreational trails and trail-related facilities for both non-motorized and motorized recreational trail uses.
- **Wood Utilization Assistance Program (Forest Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture)** - The program provides technical and financial assistance to State foresters, tribes, and public and private organizations regarding new and emerging technologies to effectively manage forests and extend the most efficient and effective economic opportunities to forest landowners.
- **Renewable Energy & Energy Efficiency (Rural Energy for America Program, U.S. Department of Agriculture)** - This program provides guaranteed loan financing and grant funding to agricultural producers and rural small businesses to purchase or



Development and maintenance of trails is a necessary investment for improved natural-resource based tourism.

³ For the purposes of USDA programs listed below, farms are considered to be any place from which \$1,000 or more of agricultural products were produced and sold or normally would have been sold during the course of a year. For Massachusetts programs, both 'farming' and 'agriculture' include the growing and harvesting of forest products upon forest lands, as well as forestry and lumber operations performed by a farmer or as incidental to farming operations.)

install renewable energy systems or to make energy efficiency improvements, thereby reducing operating costs.

While there are several grant programs for economic development, renewable energy, and forestry, the challenges in accessing funds are great. For example: 1) agency funding goals may not be well aligned with those of the Mohawk Trail Woodland Partnership, 2) programs are highly competitive and may be limited in scope, 3) many programs are designed for non-forestry farmers or for heavily processed bio-products, 4) programs require a high percentage of matching funds, and 5) there is a limited number of programs available to small businesses, private landowners and/or municipalities.

Summary and Key Findings

- Partnerships between towns and Federal, State, regional and local organizations have realized benefits not possible by individual groups or communities. A Special Designation by the U.S. Forest Service of the Mohawk Trail Woodlands Partnership project area could provide funding to advance the sustainability of local communities while concurrently improving forests and the social and ecological benefits they provide. Moreover, the opportunity for collaboration has the potential to benefit the towns, region and State through the creation of a new model of forest conservation and resource-based economic development.
- The Mohawk Trail Woodlands Partnership has already resulted in positive collaboration with the state, and U.S. Dept. of Agriculture (Forest Service and Natural Resource Conservation Service) with funding and resources being directed to the 21-Town region through various grant programs.
- Some state and federal programs exist that help to meet the needs in the 21-town region. However, not all of the programs are fully applicable to the stated project goals, or have limited resources. They can also be difficult to access, such as requiring a local match for grant funds which many rural towns cannot afford.
- Additional financial resources could be provided through the Partnership to leverage existing grants, and to fill in the gaps within existing programs to better meet the goals of the Partnership. In addition, support from the state and federal legislative delegations could place the Partnership on the path to success by identifying sources of sustainable long-term funding for an Executive Director or Administrator to lead the initiative beyond its formative years.

