

Section Seven: What's Next for the Woodlands Partnership? Proposed Projects and Recommendations

Throughout the planning process for the Mohawk Trail Woodlands Partnership, local residents and stakeholders participating at the Advisory Committee, Board meetings and regional public meetings, have been asked how a potential special designation could benefit the Northwest Massachusetts region. Specifically, participants were asked to provide suggestions in the following focus areas:

- Economic development projects
- Technical assistance for landowners
- Assistance to municipalities
- Conservation priorities
- Potential locations for a demonstration forest and/or forest-focused visitor center in the region

On the following pages is a compilation of proposed projects and recommendations, which emerged from the multi-year planning process as well as from baseline research conducted to complete this Partnership Plan. It is envisioned that many of these recommendations could be pursued (and in some cases *are* being pursued) whether a Special Federal Designation is adopted or not, but that a more fully realized partnership with the U.S. Forest Service could provide much needed funding and resources to move these initiatives forward.

Below is a key to the abbreviations used for potential partners in the tables on the following pages.

| | |
|-----------|--|
| BCC | Berkshire Chamber of Commerce |
| BRPC | Berkshire Regional Planning Commission |
| DCR | Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation |
| DCS | Division of Conservation Services |
| EOEEA | Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs |
| FCCC | Franklin County Chamber of Commerce |
| FLT | Franklin Land Trust |
| FRCOG | Franklin Regional Council of Governments |
| MCLA | Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts |
| MOTT | Massachusetts Office of Travel & Tourism |
| MWI | Massachusetts Woodlands Institute |
| USFS NFS | United States Forest Service National Forest System |
| USFS R&D | United States Forest Service Research and Development |
| USFS S&PF | United States Forest Service State and Private Forestry |
| UMass | University of Massachusetts |

Economic Development in the Region

| PROJECTS OR RECOMMENDATIONS | PARTNERS |
|--|--|
| Forest Products | |
| Build local markets for wood products, including those made from low-grade wood. Develop a marketing campaign for locally produced wood products, modeled on successful buy-local food campaigns. | EOEEA, DCR, USFS R&D, UMass, MWI |
| Provide funding for new forest products business start-up costs and for upgrades to equipment at existing businesses. | DCR, USFS R&D |
| Provide technical assistance to forest product businesses including training on low-impact logging techniques and portable sawmills, and marketing and business plan development. | DCR, USFS R&D |
| Conduct a study of the local wood industry to determine equipment, infrastructure and marketing needs and strategies to address them, and explore opportunity for wood banks to utilize local wood for home repairs. | DCR, UMass |
| Conduct education and outreach to landowners and the public about the benefits of forest management and sustainable forestry practices. | DCR, USFS S&PF, FLT, UMass Extension |
| Tourism | |
| Provide funding for outdoor recreation tourism infrastructure improvements, including accessible trail development and maintenance, public restrooms, parking, signage, and maps. | EOEEA, DCR, USFS NFS |
| Work with local and regional partners on collectively marketing the region. Bring together tourism and outdoor recreation businesses to develop travel packages, and provide training and business assistance, potentially through a regional multi-purpose Forest Center. | DCR, MOTT, county CDC's business associations and chambers of commerce |
| Ecosystem Services | |
| Provide assistance to interested landowners with accessing carbon markets and other ecosystem markets as applicable. Provide education and training for foresters and landowners on best practices in forest management for carbon sequestration and other ecosystem services. | DCR, USFS S&PF, USFS R&D |

Economic Development in Specific Towns

During earlier community meetings, participants were given the opportunity to identify specific economic development projects that would benefit their town. Following are the town-specific projects identified.

| TOWN | PROJECTS OR RECOMMENDATIONS |
|-------------|--|
| Adams | Create a campground and visitor center at Greylock Glen. Great progress has been made on this goal with ground breaking of an Education Center expected in 2022. |
| Charlemont | Work with the Regional Health Agent and the DEP to obtain water quality records of existing public water supplies in Town to develop strategies for increasing the water supply needed in the village center to support new development and redevelopment related to tourism. |
| | Determine a funding source to pay for police during the rafting season on the Deerfield River. |
| | Improve and create visitor amenities such as parking, public restrooms, ATMs, and trash collection. |
| | Create a visitor/education/technical resource center (Forest Center) in one of the vacant downtown buildings. The town of Charlemont was the location for several potential Center sites recommended in the Dec. 2021 Williams College student report. [See report in Appendices.] |
| | A bike path (perhaps next to Rte 2) from Shelburne Falls through Charlemont on to Mohawk Trail State Forest. |
| Cheshire | Create links from the rail trail to conservation lands, and extend the trail north. Establish demonstration forests on several town forests for local landowners, residents and tourists and establish a virtual forest center ahead of an actual center. |
| Monroe | Develop a designated paid parking area for Deerfield River users, with restrooms and possibly a food stand. Rafting companies could pay for reserved parking spaces and the facility could provide revenue to the town. |
| North Adams | Develop a North Adams entrance to the Mt. Greylock State Reservation. |
| | Complete design and pursue construction of a bike/pedestrian path that will serve as an extension of the Ashuwillticook Rail Trail linking the city with Adams to the south and Williamstown to the west. |
| Savoy | Re-open and expand the Shady Pines campground. |
| | Provide assistance for trail development and maintenance. |

| | |
|--------------|---|
| | Create improved or additional signage to highlight attractions, tourism and recreation in Savoy such as fishing, hiking, hunting, and snowmobiling. |
| Williamstown | Provide planning and implementation assistance to connect existing trails. |
| | Complete design and construction for a bike/pedestrian path in Williamstown that will lead to future extension of the Ashuwillticook Rail Trail in North Adams. TO BE COMPLETED 2022 |

Technical Assistance / Research and Development in the Region

| PROJECTS OR RECOMMENDATIONS | PARTNERS |
|---|--|
| Conduct research and provide technical assistance to landowners and foresters on invasive species, climate change impacts and adaptation, and emerging best practices in forest management. | DCR, USFS Northern Institute of Applied Climate Science, Mass Audubon, New England Forestry Foundation, The Nature Conservancy, BRPC, FRCOG and MWI, Licensed and trained consulting foresters |
| Provide funding and assistance to landowners for writing forest management plans. | DCR, USFS S&PF, Licensed consulting foresters |
| Conduct research on new wood product technology. | DCR, USFS R&D, UMass |
| Improve the forest management of the State forests, including road, trail and facility maintenance. | DCR, USFS S&PF |

Municipal Assistance in the Region

| PROJECTS OR RECOMMENDATIONS | PARTNERS |
|--|-----------------------|
| Provide maintenance assistance for town-owned and State Forest gravel roads. | DCR, USFS S&PF |
| Provide funding for equipment and training for fire departments and first responders related to tourism. | DCR, USFS S&PF, EOEEA |



Forest areas surrounding water bodies were identified as priority protection areas

Land Protection in the Region and in Specific Towns

When asked about land protection priorities in their town or the region as a whole, the following priorities emerged:

- forest areas surrounding water bodies
- wildlife corridors and BioMap2 Core Habitat
- recreation corridors and trails

Town-specific land protection projects and priorities were also identified during the community meetings, shown in the following table.

| TOWN | LAND PROTECTION PROJECTS AND PRIORITIES |
|-----------|--|
| Colrain | Green River Valley |
| | West Branch of the North River / North River Watershed |
| Heath | Funding and technical assistance to manage Town-owned conservation land – FOREST STEWARDSHIP PLAN COMPLETE; CLIMATE UPDATE DUE IN 2022 |
| Rowe | Re-establish communications with Yankee Rowe regarding the future of the approximately 2,000 acres of forested land surrounding the former nuclear power plant site. This land is not currently protected. |
| Savoy | Hiking corridors |
| | The old Shady Pines campground |
| | Areas surrounding sensitive water bodies |
| Shelburne | Old growth forests |
| | Wildlife corridors along the eastern part of town |

Visitor / Education / Technical Resource Center – A Mohawk Trail Forest Center

Through discussions at the community meetings and with the Advisory Committee, the concept of a visitor center for the Mohawk Trail Woodlands Partnership 21-town region evolved into an idea for a center that would not only provide information to visitors about the region, but would also provide educational programming for the people in the region, be a clearinghouse for technical assistance for landowners, and a showcase for local wood products. Following are some of the functions that the center could serve. It is envisioned that the center would be staffed by forestry experts who could be a resource to visitors, residents, and landowners interested in forestry.

The Partnership could continue to work on a "virtual forest center" to provide web-based programs and technical assistance to towns and landowners as well as to residents and tourists, while continuing to work on finding the preferred site for the actual forest center and begin a needs analysis and design for the building. Demonstration forests could also be developed and expanded at key sites throughout the region, or co-located with a Center depending on the site chosen.

| POTENTIAL VISITOR/EDUCATION/TECHNICAL RESOURCE CENTER POTENTIAL FUNCTIONS, PROJECTS OR RECOMMENDATIONS | PARTNERS |
|---|--|
| Provide information to visitors and residents about the outdoor recreation and nature-based activities in the region, as well as local accommodations and businesses. | Berkshire Chamber of Commerce, Franklin County Chamber of Commerce, Mohawk Trail Association, MOTT |
| Provide technical assistance to landowners about forest management (see also Technical Assistance / Research and Development). | DCR, USFS S&PF, UMass Extension |
| Create educational exhibits and materials about the forests of the region and sustainable forestry practices (see also Economic Development). | DCR, USFS S&PF, FLT, UMass Extension |
| Develop educational programming for schools about the forests of the region and their benefits, including sustainable forestry practices, ecosystem services and tourism. | DCR, USFS S&PF, Williams College, MCLA |

| | |
|--|--|
| Display local wood products with information about where each product came from and who made it. | DCR, USFS R&D, FCCC, BCC, wood product businesses and artisans |
| Use local wood and/or mass timber in the construction/renovation of the visitor / education / technical resource center. | EOEEA, DCR, local landowners and wood product businesses |

The location for a visitor center was also discussed during community meetings and at the Advisory Committee meetings. There was general consensus that the center should be located either on Route 2 or within easy access from Route 2. It could be housed within an existing building or a newly constructed building. As noted in the table above, there is a strong desire to make the center a showcase of local wood, including as part of the construction or renovation of a building for the center. The idea of housing the center within a school, such as the Mohawk Trail Regional School in Buckland, was also suggested as a way to better leverage the educational component of the center.

| TOWN | LOCATION |
|-------------|-----------------------------------|
| Adams | Greylock Glen |
| Buckland | Mohawk Trail Regional High School |
| Charlemont | Charlemont Inn |
| New Ashford | Former Brodie Mountain Ski Area |
| Savoy | Former Shady Pines campground |

There were also several specific places suggested for the center, listed to the right. It is important to note that these are just ideas and more study is needed to determine the feasibility and appropriateness of using any of these locations.

Envisioning a Center to Celebrate and Enhance the Region's Forests – 2021

From the regional deliberations that formed the Woodlands Partnership, one idea emerged as a prominent, though ambitious goal. Opinions coalesced around the need for a central location to bring together people and resources to support and promote not only the Woodlands Partnership itself, but more importantly, the forest resource on which all of its goals are centered.

Thus the vision to create a Forest Center was born. As it is described in the MTWP enabling legislation:

“...(ii) A multi-purpose center, known as the "Mohawk Trail Forest Center" to provide tourism services, technical assistance to forestry and tourism businesses and forest landowners, technical assistance on implementing sustainable forest management practices, technical assistance with selling carbon credits from private and municipal forests credits, research and development, marketing, public education and space for the Administrative Agent ...;”

On the Berkshire County side of the Partnership, a project has picked up steam to create an Outdoor Educational Center at Greylock Glen with ground breaking on a new building that will house a large gathering space, café and education center expected in spring 2022. This project received MTWP regional grants from the Executive Office of Energy & Environmental Affairs to create educational kiosks explaining the important role of forests in protecting people – and the need for people to protect and care for forests.

Highlights of the Greylock Glen Visitor/ Outdoor Education Center in Adams, Massachusetts include:

- Goal for educational programs, camping, an outdoor amphitheater, and environmentally friendly lodge with conference facilities;
- Site includes 1,063 acres of woodlands, open fields, wetlands, mountain streams, ponds and waterfall;
- Trails used by hikers, naturalists, skiers, snowshoers, mountain bikers, and snowmobiles;
- Programming will include speakers, films, and environmental education;
- Field study opportunities for nearby educational institutions including public schools and MCLA;
- The Performing Arts Amphitheater will offer concerts, plays, festivals and other events to appeal to visitors and local residents alike.

To complement the Greylock Glen center, the MTWP Executive Committee has begun to focus on a Franklin County site for a Forest Center in the eastern half of the Woodlands Partnership. MTWP has been welcomed to give input into programming at the Greylock Glen Center which has used three MTWP small grants to help develop signage and curriculum aspects of the center.

Board Chair Henry Art, a professor emeritus at Williams College who is aware of the strength of the region’s academic institutions, developed several focused student research projects to advance MTWP goals over the course of 2021. The first of these was a fall semester study and needs assessment conducted by two Williams College students to bring the Forest Center concept into greater focus (to be followed by a separate Conway School riparian restoration study, and an analysis of the region’s waste wood in summer 2022 by MCLA and partners).

Completed by Williams College students Sabine Brismeur and Abigail Matheny, the resulting 94-page report: “Envisioning the MTWP Forest Center,” included results of more than 20 interviews with Board members and local residents and stakeholders and even initial exploration of potential sites where a physical Center could be located. As a result of their research, the students recommended “the following uses: a tourism/visitor center, public education center, conservation area, and forestry assistance center.”

The students prioritized locations “directly on Route 2 and along the Deerfield River, since they have the greatest potential for drawing in visitors passing through the area,” and their analysis highlighted the following possible Center locations for additional evaluation:

- Whitcom Summit in Florida, directly off Rt. 2
- Hall Tavern Fall, a sawmill on Rt. 2 in Charlemont with 350 acres of forest and interest in selling local wood products
- Mohawk Trail State Forest, a 6000-acre state forest on Rt. 2 in west Charlemont
- Berkshire East, a 150-acre, four-season resort and ski area located a half mile away from Rt. 2

To date, the MTWP Board has not voted to formally endorse the concept of the Forest Center, or any specific location, deciding to first prioritize securing long-term funding to sustain the Woodlands Partnership as an entity. Should the Board decide to move forward with planning, the following steps, as outlined by the students, would likely be involved in design and construction of a free-standing Forest Center:

1. Consulting company to conduct a needs assessment
2. Purchase or lease of a property lot*
3. The hiring of a design/architecture and construction team
4. Clearing, leveling, and/or maintenance of the property area*
5. Purchase of locally-sourced construction materials
6. Furnishing and decorative purchases
7. LEED or equivalent accreditation
8. Heating, electricity, water, waste disposal, etc.
9. The hiring of a museum consultant for exhibits
10. Staff or contracted employee salary and wages

** Not applicable if housed in an existing building.*

WE MUST PROTECT THE FOREST

Stewardship

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Overuse & Misuse



This photo of Mount Greylock from the early 1900's shows heavy clear cutting. It also shows one of the effects of overuse. Three major landslides occurred during a single storm in August of 1901 because there were not enough trees to hold the soil in place.

Development

Forests are threatened by development pressure for homes and businesses. But there are ways we can live WITH nature. Green Infrastructure (GI) and Low Impact Development (LID) strategies design communities with connected, healthy forests, smart stormwater management, and higher property values.

Invasive Species

As the climate warms and our winters get shorter, more pests are able to survive and threaten our forests. Emerald Ash Borer and Hemlock Woolly Adelgid are two insects that were not a problem before but they have no natural predators here and are now killing trees across the Northeast. Bittersweet and multiflora rose are examples of plants that are able to thrive in our warmer climate and they are outcompeting native plants for sunlight, space, and resources. Reducing climate change is one tool for controlling some invasive species.



Sustainability

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Appropriate Use



Forests can and should be used appropriately to combat climate change, provide ecosystem services such as clean air and water and summer cooling, and bolster the local economy. Programs such as Climate-Smart Forestry and Foresters for the Birds help foresters to work with landowners toward forest conservation goals while maintaining a natural resource-based economy.

Eco-Tourism

Forests provide excellent opportunities for year-round eco-tourism for visitors from around the world. Spring maple syrup season, summer camping and hiking, fall leaf "peeping", and winter skiing and snowshoeing are some of the activities that draw visitors to our forests.



How You Can Help

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Volunteerism



If you enjoy spending time in the forest, consider volunteering. Helpers are always needed for trail maintenance and clearing, invasive plant removal, and monitoring.

Education

The more people who know about the importance of forests, the more likely these amazing places are to survive.



Co2 Reduction

If we really want to help forests, and all ecosystems on the planet, we'll need to slow climate change by decreasing the amount of greenhouse gases we put in the atmosphere and increasing the amount of greenhouse gases that are taken out.

Transportation- Reduce and phase out the amount of fossil fuels, like gasoline and diesel, that we burn through transportation with alternate fuel vehicles, public transportation, and walking or biking.

Energy - Reduce and phase out the amount of fossil fuels we burn for energy, like natural gas and oil with alternate energy such as solar, wind, and geothermal.

Protecting Land- Conserve and restore land to enhance the ability of forests to store carbon and protect us from the worst impacts of climate change.

Food- Tackle our carbon footprints by supporting sustainable plant-based diets, food production, and reducing food waste.

Advocacy- Use our voices to push critical policies and legislation that address and fight climate change and help communities adapt to its existing impacts.

Talk about it - Discuss, learn, and engage with each other to act on climate change together.

GREYLOCK GLEN
EDUCATION

Educational Kiosk at Greylock Glen Center, funded by an EOEEA/MTWP grant.

Demonstration Forest

A demonstration forest in the region could serve as both an educational tool and a research laboratory. Visitors, school groups, landowners, and residents could learn about forests and different forestry practices. Partnerships between the schools in the region could result in stimulating research and training opportunities for students interested in careers in the forestry industry. Forestry businesses could benefit from demonstrations on new logging techniques and equipment.

Several themes about the ownership structure of a demonstration forest emerged from the public outreach for the Woodlands Partnership including:

- The U. S. Forest Service could partner with a private landowner to focus on education, research and technical assistance for private forest landowners.
- Existing State Forest land could be utilized for a demonstration forest and could serve as a model for improved State Forest management in the region, a need that was repeatedly expressed throughout public meetings.
- Even without establishment of a formal new “demonstration forest site,” existing conserved forests, whether private or public, could be the site of organized efforts to host woods walks and other educational programs for private family forest owners, forestry professionals and town and state forest managers, focused on climate change resilience, managing for carbon storage and wildlife habitat and overall ecological health. Many outreach and education programs support and encourage peer learning among landowners, such as when owners share their stories and experiences in caring for their land, by hosting events on their own wooded property. The Partnership could support and help coordinate these landowner programs.

In the 2015 Partnership Plan, several specific locations were suggested as possible sites for a demonstration forest, listed to the right. As with the visitor center, these sites require more study as to their feasibility and appropriateness for a demonstration forest.

| TOWN | LOCATION |
|--------------|---|
| Adams | Greylock Glen |
| Charlemont | Mohawk Trail State Forest |
| Heath | Town-owned conservation land |
| Williamstown | Partner with Williams College to utilize the Hopkins Forest |

Conclusion

The Executive Committee of the Mohawk Trail Woodlands Partnership Board, echoing its earlier Advisory Committee, recommends a Special Federal

Designation for the 21-town region of Northwest Massachusetts, including Northern Berkshire and Western Franklin Counties. This Special Designation would recognize the 21-town region as an important area of the Commonwealth and create a new model for forest conservation and natural resource-based economic development. A primary purpose of a State and Special Federal Designation would be to obtain additional financial and technical resources for the Northern Berkshires and Hilltowns region. The community and regional meetings held for this project identified the need and desire for additional assistance 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. This Chapter summarizes the many projects and recommendations that the Partnership can pursue and Chapter 6 outlines other potential benefits that a Special Federal Designation could provide: collaboration between towns, their regional and non-profit partners, and Federal and state agencies, in order to advance the goals of the Mohawk Trail Woodlands Partnership with respect to natural resource-based economic development and forest conservation.