

## Conservation Achievement

### Highlands Forests in Connecticut Now Permanently Protected

#### The Challenge

The Highlands Region extends from eastern Pennsylvania through New Jersey and New York to the western hills of Connecticut. The Highlands run through Litchfield County in Connecticut, which contains more than 440,000 acres of forest land. At 75 percent forest cover, this county is the Constitution State's most heavily forested. The Connecticut portion of the Highlands contains some of the most pristine streams and rivers as well as the largest blocks of unfragmented forest found in the State.

This forest resource provides many recreational opportunities, ranging from camping and hiking to bird watching. For example, the Connecticut Highlands is home to a 52-mile section of the Appalachian Trail, garnering much use by both local and visiting hikers. The Highlands is also home to the Housatonic River, which offers anglers some of the best fly fishing in the Eastern States. The Connecticut Highlands is within an hour's drive of Hartford and is less than 2 hours from New York City. On weekends, the populations of towns such as Kent and Sharon increase by as much as 50 percent.

Forest fragmentation following the construction of large lot subdivisions and second home estates is slowly degrading the overall health and utility of the Connecticut Highlands. Its core forest area has decreased by over 8 percent in the past 25 years, resulting in a significant increase in fragmented forest.

#### The Solution

The success of a Forest Legacy Project in Connecticut called Great Mountain inspired many nearby landowners to seek assistance in conserving their land. In 2004, with the support of the Trust for Public Land, several landowners applied to the Connecticut Forest Legacy Program (FLP), which partners with the U.S. Forest Service's Forest Legacy Program administered by Northeastern Area State and Private Forestry.

The resulting Skiff Mountain Forest Legacy Project collectively conserved 705 acres owned by six landowners. The project received \$1.7 million in FLP funding towards



*Six properties in northwestern Connecticut will continue to remain forested and provide wildlife habitat. (Photo by Larry Rousseau)*

its completion. An additional \$6.7 million (80 percent of the project cost) of non-Federal cost share was provided by the participating landowners, which underscored their support and commitment to the FLP.

#### Resulting Benefits

- Providing protection to 705 acres of private forest.
- Linking more than 7,000 acres of currently protected local, State, and Federal land.
- Supplying unfragmented forest habitat for black bear, deer, bobcat, fisher, and coyote populations.
- Providing forest habitat for the northern harrier, Cooper's hawk, wood turtle, Jefferson's salamander, eastern ribbon snake, American kestrel, and barren strawberry, all of which are on the State's list of threatened species.
- Buffering the Macedonia Brook aquifer, a potential drinking water source for the Town of Kent.

#### Sharing Success

The Skiff Mountain Forest Legacy Project brought land conservation to the forefront in Connecticut, particularly in the northwestern corner of the State. As a result of the Skiff Mountain Project's success, a nearby conservation-minded neighbor applied for 2012 Forest Legacy funding for property that directly abuts conserved National Park Service land, local land trust land, and protected conservation easement land held by the Appalachian Trail Conservancy. This tract is part of a much larger, contiguous conserved landscape that collectively totals more than 5,000 acres. Inclusion of this project in the Forest Legacy Program would expand protected acreage in the region by 130 acres.

*A model forest conservation project in the Constitution State.*



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