

## Forests and Watershed Health Education Project



### BACKGROUND

Southern New England's forests provide the essential backdrop for clean water, one of the region's most overlooked forest products. The public rates protection of water resources as one of the most important environmental issues in the region. In spite of this, the public is strangely unaware of the role that forests and forested watersheds play in protecting and enhancing water resources. There is a need for a vehicle to increase public understanding of the linkages between forests and water in order to sustain the health of our forests, watersheds, and the future of our forestry programs.

### LOCATION

The project will be implemented in Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island, but be applicable across all NA States.

### ISSUES BEING ADDRESSED

The lack of awareness about the role of forests in watershed health is a serious issue among the non-landowner public, including key leaders in business, government, and environmental organizations.

Healthy forests are being reduced to small woodlots and suburban backyards. Since 1985, Massachusetts has lost 85,000 acres of forestland to development and Rhode Island has lost 33,450 acres. Fragmentation threatens to reduce the many benefits that forests provide. Authorities in each state worry that forests are being fragmented into tracts too small to be managed effectively and that forest ownership may become uneconomical. As this land becomes fragmented, watershed health is seriously threatened and the ability of forests to protect water and soil quality is diminished.

### GOALS

Informational and educational materials will be produced to describe the role of forests and forest management in watershed protection and water quality maintenance.

Land use decision makers, such as forest landowners and local officials, as well as a broader audience of natural resource professionals and the general public, will be targeted.

The project will demonstrate the contribution of trees and forests in forested watersheds to the protection and enhancement of water resources by:

- Protecting soil and water quality.
- Protecting the sustainability of present and future drinking water supplies.
- Controlling storm water runoff.
- Protecting stream corridors and forested wetlands.
- Reducing nonpoint source pollution.
- Enhancing the quality of community life.
- Telling the story of the role forests play in water quality and maintaining fisheries.

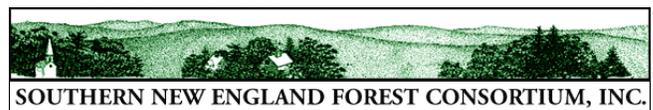
The project is designed to help provide information to individual landowners, the general public, and communities so that they can integrate forest resource conservation into local planning and development strategies.

There is also an emerging interest on the part of community leaders who are seeking advice regarding their community's open space resources. Many communities are looking for direction on how they can take positive action to conserve open space.

### METHODOLOGY

The Southern New England Forest Consortium (SNEFCI) will implement the project. The following methods will be used to achieve the goals:

- Gather existing information about how forested watersheds contribute to the protection and enhancement of water resources. SNEFCI will put together a panel of advisors from across the Northeast to serve as the steering committee for the project. The panel will be responsible for project direction, content, and preparing different sections of the project. Data will be gathered from a variety of technical experts and resources.
- Develop and provide project information in a production-ready format so that the materials can be published in a variety of presentation modes, such as written publications, web sites, and interactive CDs.
- SNEFCI will provide project partners with the information.



Since 1999, the Northeastern Area and the Northeastern Area Association of State Foresters have sponsored a cooperative challenge grants program to promote watershed health and restoration through the conservation, restoration, and sound stewardship of trees and forests.

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## OUTCOMES AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The intended outcome is to develop and provide information to project partners and other users in a format that can be published in a variety of vehicles.

- A panel has been formed to provide guidance to SNEFCI. The panel has met and determined the scope of work, defined the audience, and proposed various media formats.
- The proposed media formats include:
  - Printed materials in the form of a book or booklet and a companion brochure of highlights.
  - A short video describing the role of forest stewardship in watershed protection.
  - An interactive CD based on the contents of the printed information.
  - A 35-mm or PowerPoint slide show based on the contents of the printed materials.
  - A web site.
- The University of Connecticut Cooperative Extension System has been contracted to perform literature searches for information needed about forests and forest health. Most of the literature search has been completed. Photographs are being gathered to illustrate some of the topic areas.
- The contractor is designing a publication layout and importing text into it.

Members of the forestry and conservation communities will use the results to help communicate the importance of forests and watershed health. Local governments will use this material to support open space conservation and to integrate open space conservation into local planning. Watershed Councils will use the material to tell the story of forests and watershed health to the non-forestry public. Public water supply officials will use the information to enhance their watershed protection efforts. Other states will use the final report for similar efforts in their areas.

## PARTNERS

- NA State and Private Forestry
- State Foresters (CT, MA, and RI)
- University of Rhode Island – Natural Resource Science Department
- University of Massachusetts – Department of Forestry and Wildlife
- Northeast Association of Watershed Forest Managers
- University of Connecticut Cooperative Extension System

## FUTURE PLANS

- The contractor will continue to gather information, conduct literature searches, and compile the text of the publication.
- Monitor the use of the media formats.
- Help communities promote watershed health and restoration by integrating forest resource

conservation into local planning and development strategies.

- Focus communities on the need to take steps to reduce sprawl and fragmentation.
- Provide information to local and state officials to create public policies that protect open spaces and forestland and offer voluntary incentives for improving land stewardship.
- Increase public awareness of how forest stewardship and forestry activities can contribute to clean water goals.
- Produce and distribute materials that tell the story of the value of trees and forests in restoring water quality and sustaining watersheds.
- Expand the project in other states.

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