

TESTIMONY TO THE UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT AND RELATED AGENCIES
by
THE NEW ENGLAND FOREST POLICY GROUP
EMILY BATESON, CHAIR

APRIL 25, 2013

Mr. Chairman, and distinguished members of this Subcommittee, we are grateful for the opportunity to submit testimony today on behalf of the New England Forest Policy Group and the 59 forestry and conservation organizations listed below

We respectfully request a substantial increase in overall funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund to \$600 million, including \$84.8 million for the Forest Legacy Program, \$338 million for the federal LWCF, and \$60 million for the State Grants Program in the fiscal year 2014 Interior and Environment Appropriations bill. In addition, we respectfully urge the Subcommittee to provide a minimum of \$4 million for the Community Forest and Open Space Conservation Program, \$39.4 million for the North American Wetlands Conservation Act, and \$61.4 million for the State and Tribal Wildlife Grants Program. These are the numbers from the President's budget proposal, and this suite of programs will provide pivotal benefits to the communities of New England and to the nation as a whole.

The New England Forest Policy Group is an informal collaborative of diverse forestry and conservation organizations united by our efforts to conserve the forested landscapes that characterize our region. New England's forests are the backbone of our forest products and recreation economies, as well as providing other services of incalculable value including water and biodiversity protection, climate mitigation, and flood resilience. As the most forested region in the country, New England's economy is strongly dependent on the health and integrity of its forests. Communities across the region depend on our wooded landscapes for their health and well-being, as do the 60 million people within a days drive. But our forests are 85% privately owned, mostly in small parcels, and landowners are facing profound challenges from rising land prices, escalating development pressures, and other threats that have the potential to significantly fragment and diminish this irreplaceable landscape.

While recognizing that this is a difficult fiscal time for our nation, we strongly believe that programs vital to our country's future must be sustained, including forest conservation and stewardship. New England has compelling need for the programs in front of your Subcommittee today.

As the Subcommittee crafts its Interior & Related Agencies Appropriations bill, there are several key points we respectfully request you to consider:

1. Overall Funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) at \$600 million:

Funding at the recommended \$600 million is critical for the conservation of the natural legacy of New England and the country. There are Federal LWCF units targeted to receive funding in CT, MA, ME, NH, RI, and VT if the requested level of \$600 million for FY14 is funded. If this amount is not supported, many of these opportunities will be lost. We also strongly believe that LWCF should be funded at the full authorized level of \$900 million by FY 2015 due to the clear need that has been demonstrated in New England and across the nation.

2. **New England Needs for Federal Land Acquisition through FY2014 LWCF.** All of New England's federal acquisition projects within the FY2014 proposed budget (including projects in every New England state) fall within the less advantageous "Mandatory" spending authority under the President's proposal. This means that New England's FY2014 federal acquisition projects are not likely to receive funding unless the full \$600 million is appropriated.
 - a. *National Park Service LWCF Acquisitions—Collaborative Landscape Planning: National Trails Funding at \$53.3 million total, including \$3.7 million for the Appalachian Trail and \$4 million for the New England National Scenic Trail:* The proposed FY2014 LWCF funds are necessary for conserving and expanding two iconic trail corridors in New England—the Appalachian Trail and the New England National Scenic Trail. New England's outdoor recreation economy is worth approximately \$43 billion/year and supports more than 330,000 jobs, according to the Outdoor Industry Association. In addition, our region's trails and waterways provide healthy recreation for the people who live here and necessary urban respite for more than 60 million people within a day's drive.
 - b. *U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service LWCF Acquisitions—The Chafee National Wildlife refuge at \$900,000 and the Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge at \$4.6 Million.* Securing protection of these ecologically rich watersheds and habitat corridors is a top regional priority. The Chafee refuge is a jewel of the Rhode Island coast that will be greatly enhanced by further acquisitions. The Conte refuge covers the Connecticut River watershed, recognized as a national priority through designation as the first National Blueway—a critical north/south habitat corridor and a treasure trove of ecological diversity and recreational opportunity.
 - c. *National Park Service LWCF Acquisitions—\$4.745 million for Multi-State Greenways and Blueways:* Funding to enhance conservation and recreational opportunities along the rivers and landscapes that make up Greenways and Blueways will greatly benefit the associated recreation and tourism economies and help connect more people to the outdoors.
3. **US Forest Service Programs of Special Importance to New England—USFS Forest Legacy and USFS Community Forest Program.** These two programs in the Interior Appropriations bill are particularly important to New England given our region's high percentage of private forestland ownership and the intense development pressures on these lands.

a. *USFS Forest Legacy needs full \$84.8 million Appropriation to meet New England's needs.* Forest Legacy has protected more than 1 million acres of forestland in New England since its establishment in the 1990 Farm Bill—a remarkable and vital accomplishment. Originally created to help address the specific needs of the six New England states and New York, this highly successful program has expanded to 53 states and territories without proportionally expanding the available funding. \$84.8 million is a solid start toward rebalancing available funds to the number of states now in the program and the rising number of applications and pressing conservation need.

New England has an outstanding group of Forest Legacy Projects in the President's FY2014 Budget, including the number 3, 4, and 6 projects nationally for a total of \$16.715 million in proposed funding. However, The Forest Legacy Program must receive the full \$84.8 million requested to ensure that all of New England's projects are retained. New England's full FY2014 interests in the program include:

- The proposed Budget includes \$18.9 million in "Discretionary" Forest Legacy funding for Mahoosuc Gateway in NH; Cold Stream Forest in ME; Quabbin Reservoir to Wachusett in MA; Moosehead-Seboomook In-holding in ME; and partial funding for Groton Forest Legacy in VT.
- The proposed Budget includes \$4.99 million in less secure "Mandatory" Forest Legacy funding for Groton Forest Legacy in VT (project funding is divided between Mandatory and Discretionary lists); Windham Region Working Forest in VT; and Thorpe Mountain in CT.

b. *USFS Community Forest Program needs a minimum of \$4 million.* The Community Forest Program is a 50-50 matching grant program to help local governments, tribes, and non-profit organizations expand the region's proud tradition of locally owned and managed lands, such as town forests. The program has drawn strong interest nationally—in its first grant round in FY2012, the program drew 49 applications from across the country seeking \$14.53 million dollars. This was far beyond the available funding of \$3.5 million, which included funding pooled from FY2010, 2011, and 2012 appropriations.

Funding the Community Forest Program at the President's full FY2014 request of \$4 million will keep it a robust source for future New England projects. In its first year of funding, FY2012, the Community Forest Program funded two projects in New England, including the nation's top ranked project, for a total of \$772,000 dollars. Although this program might appear small on a national budgetary scale, it is critical to New England's landscapes.

4. US Fish & Wildlife Service, National Blueways System—\$3.3 million for the Cooperative Watershed Management Program. The US FWS will administer funds to support a landscape level conservation approach to river systems throughout the Country under the Administration's National Blueways System. Rivers play a vital role in connecting Americans with the lands and waters that provide economic, recreational, social,

cultural, and ecological value to their communities. The National Blueways System will provide a new emphasis on the unique value and significance of a locally-led headwaters to mouth approach to river management and create a mechanism to encourage stakeholders to integrate their land and water stewardship efforts.

5. **North American Wetland Conservation Act (NAWCA) needs President's full request of \$39.4 million.** The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's premier wetland conservation program for habitat protection and restoration, NAWCA, is very important for our region. New England's remarkable marshes and coastal and estuarine habitats support the region's commercial and sport fisheries and myriad wildlife species. These lands are also important to protecting coastal communities—a priority in the wake of Hurricane Irene and Superstorm Sandy. Funding at the President's FY2014 request of \$39.4 million for NAWCA will maintain this program as an essential funding tool for New England projects that conserve critically important wetland areas and improve flood resiliency.
6. **State and Tribal Wildlife Grants Program (SWG) at \$61.4 million.** This important U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service program provides federal grant funds for developing and implementing programs that benefit wildlife and their habitats, including species not hunted or fished, and provides core funding for research, habitat restoration, and monitoring under the State Wildlife Action Plans. Keeping species off the Endangered Species list helps landowners avoid the difficulties that listing can create. This program is critical to the work of State Fish & Wildlife Agencies throughout the region and to the 36 species on the eastern list.

In closing, we thank the Subcommittee for your continuing leadership on federal land conservation matters. The New England Forest Policy Group and the undersigned organizations stand ready to work with you to secure full and consistent funding for the LWCF, Forest Legacy, and the other critically important programs that help protect the irreplaceable economic, environmental, and community values of the forested landscapes and natural areas in New England and across the nation. Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony.

Signatory organizations represented by this testimony:

Androscoggin River Watershed Council
Appalachian Mountain Club
Aspetuck Land Trust
Audubon Society of New Hampshire
Audubon Society of Rhode Island
Audubon Vermont
Bear-Paw Regional Greenways
Berkshire Environmental Action Team
Connecticut Fund for the Environment
Connecticut Land Conservation Council

Connecticut River Watershed Council
Connecticut Audubon Society
Connecticut Forest and Park Association
Connecticut Ornithological Association
The Conservation Fund
Eastern Quabbin Land Trust
Environmental League of Massachusetts
Franklin Land Trust
Friends of the Conte
Friends of Minuteman

Friends of Pondicherry
Highstead
Housatonic Valley Association
Kestrel Land Trust
Land Conservancy of Ridgefield
Littleton Conservation Trust
Lower CT River Valley Council of
Governments
Lyme Timber Company
Mahoosuc Land Trust
Mass Audubon
Maine Appalachian Trail Land Trust
Maine Coast Heritage Trust
Massachusetts Association of Conservation
Commissions
Massachusetts Rivers Alliance
Mass Land Trust Coalition
Middlesex Land Trust
Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust
MA Woodlands Institute
Monadnock Conservancy

The Nature Conservancy
Natural Resource Council of Maine
New England Forestry Foundation
Northeast Wilderness Trust
Northern Forest Center
Northland Forest Products, Inc.
Open Space Institute
Rangeley Lakes Heritage Trust
Redding Conservation Commission
Rensselaer Plateau Alliance
Sharon Land Trust
Society for the Protection of New
Hampshire Forests
Sudbury Valley Trustees
Trust for Public Land
Urban Ecology Institute
Vermont Land Trust
Vermont Natural Resources Council
Vermont Woodlands Association
The Wilderness Society
Woman's Club of Danbury/New Fairfield