

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 10, 2014

Mr. Chairman, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee, we are grateful for the opportunity to submit testimony today on behalf of the New England Forest Policy Group and the 60 conservation, forestry, and recreation interests listed below

We respectfully request an increase in overall funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund to the Authorized level of \$900 million, including \$100 million for the Forest Legacy Program, \$647.81 million for the federal LWCF, and \$48.1 million for the State Grants Program in the FY 2015 Interior and Environment Appropriations bill. We also respectfully request a minimum of \$5 million for the Community Forest and Open Space Conservation Program, \$34.145 million for the North American Wetlands Conservation Act, \$58.7 million for the State and Tribal Wildlife Grants Program, \$10 million for the Recreational Trails Conservation Assistance Program, \$31 million for Urban & Community Forestry, \$48 million for the Cooperative Forest Health Program, \$29 million for Forest Stewardship, \$15 million for Woody Biomass Utilization Grants, and \$25 million for the Urban Park and Recreation Fund.

These levels are based upon the Administration's Proposed FY 2015 budget or level funding from FY 2014, whichever amount is larger. In a few select cases they reflect the priority needs of New England to grow an underfunded program – most notably the Community Forest Program – to a level that will begin supporting the demonstrated need. The suite of conservation and forestry programs in this testimony has proven to provide great benefits to the communities of New England that depend upon our region's forests and to the nation as a whole. Anything less than the requested funding will impact the effectiveness of the Programs, particularly given that many of these programs have already experienced notable funding declines over the past five years.

The New England Forest Policy Group is an informal collaborative of diverse forestry, recreation, and conservation organizations and businesses united by our efforts to conserve and utilize the forested landscapes that characterize our region. New England's forests are the backbone of our forest products and recreation economies, and provide 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. New England's forests are 85% privately owned, mostly in relatively small parcels, and landowners are facing profound challenges from rising land prices, escalating development pressures, and other threats that have the potential to significantly diminish this irreplaceable landscape.

We strongly believe that programs vital to our region's future must be sustained, including forest conservation and stewardship, recreational planning, and utilization of our forests in new and innovative ways. New England has compelling need for the programs in front of your Subcommittee.

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 \$900 million.**
Funding at the recommended \$900 million is critical for the conservation of the natural legacy of New England and the country. All six New England states will receive funding for critically important LWCF projects if the requested level of \$900 million is provided in FY 2015. If this amount is not supported, many opportunities will be lost.
2. **New England Needs for Federal Land Acquisition under LWCF.** In Fiscal Year 2015, less than half of New England's proposed projects are found in the highest priority "Discretionary" sections, which means that more than half of New England's FY 2015 LWCF projects are not likely to receive funding unless close to full funding is appropriated.
 - a. *National Park Service LWCF Acquisitions—Collaborative Landscape Planning for National Trails at \$25 million total (\$11.2M Discretionary & \$13.8 Mandatory), including \$3.76 million for the Appalachian National Scenic Trail in New Hampshire & Vermont and \$0.25 million for the New England National Scenic Trail in Massachusetts.* The proposed FY 2015 LWCF funds are necessary for conserving and expanding two iconic trail corridors in New England—the Appalachian National Scenic 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 provide healthy recreation for the people who live here and necessary urban respite for more than 60 million people overall.
 - b. *U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service LWCF Acquisitions—The Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge at \$5 Million (\$2M Discretionary & \$3M Mandatory).* Securing protection of these ecologically rich watersheds and habitat corridors is a top regional priority. The Conte refuge encompasses the Connecticut River watershed—a critical four-state habitat corridor and a treasure trove of ecological diversity, recreation, and economic opportunity.
 - c. *National Park Service LWCF Acquisitions—Acadia National Park at \$0.76M(Mandatory).* This project will secure an inholding that provides high priority access and protection to the paddling gem, Round Pond, on the west side of Mount Desert Island.
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 \$100 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 needs in New England and New York, this highly successful program has expanded to 53 states and territories without expanding the available funding. \$100M would provide 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 Proposed FY 2015 Budget, including two of the top ten projects nationally and four of the top 20 projects in the national rankings. However, The Program must receive the full \$100 million requested to ensure that all of New England's projects are retained. New England's full FY 2015 interests include:

- \$4.56M in “Discretionary” Forest Legacy funding for Dowsville Headwaters in VT; Gulf Hagas Whitecap in ME; and partial funding for Whip-Poor-Will Woods in CT.
 - \$11.955M in less secure “Mandatory” Forest Legacy funding for Whip-Poor-Will Woods in CT (project funding is divided between Mandatory and Discretionary lists); Groton Forest Legacy Initiative in VT; Big Six Forest in ME; Connecticut to Quabbin Reservoir in MA; Windham Region Working Forest in VT; and Oliverian Valley in NH.
- b. USFS Community Forest Program needs a minimum of \$5 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 FY 2012, the program drew 49 applications from across the country seeking \$14.53 million. This was far beyond the available funding of \$3.5 million, which included funding pooled from FY 2010, 2011, and 2012 appropriations. Funding the Community Forest Program at the \$5M level will much better match demand. Although this program is somewhat small on a national budgetary scale, it is critical to New England’s community character and economic vitality.
4. **North American Wetland Conservation Act (NAWCA) needs Administration’s full request of \$34.145 million.** The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s premier wetland conservation program for habitat protection and restoration, NAWCA, is vitally 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 with the memory of events like Hurricane Irene and Superstorm Sandy still fresh. This funding is vital to support New England projects that conserve critically important wetland areas and improve flood resiliency.
 5. **State and Tribal Wildlife Grants Program (SWG) at \$58.7 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. \$58.7M will keep funding level and ensure that states are not forced to make deep cuts into this critical work. Keeping species off the Endangered Species list helps landowners and is critical to the work of State Fish & Wildlife Agencies and to the 36 species on the eastern list.
 6. **Rivers and Trails Conservation Assistance Program (RTCA) at \$10 million.** RTCA partners to protect 700 miles of rivers, create 1,300 miles of trails, and conserve over 60,500 acres of open space annually. RTCA allows the NPS to support private conservation organizations as well as local and state governments, usually in coalition, to foster important recreation, river protection, and land conservation efforts without the permanently adding lands and trails to Federal ownership.
 7. **Cooperative Forestry Program (including Urban & Community Forestry at \$31 million, Cooperative Forest Health at \$48 million, Forest Stewardship at \$29 million).** These programs fund landowner services provided by State Foresters and Cooperative Extension Foresters. The proposed funding levels reflect the critical needs for the nation’s private forestlands as recommended by the National Association of State Foresters. Levels lower than these will result in curtailing of vital services that help family forest landowners sustainably manage and protect their land – of real concern in a New England landscape that is predominantly in private family ownership. The programs provide key educational services to landowners and communities, and help ensure that our forested landscape remains healthy, resilient, and economically viable.

8. **Woody Biomass Utilization Grants Program at \$15 million.** This program (which now includes the Community Wood Energy Program) will help communities use their wood resources for renewable energy. It funds grants to develop community wood-to-energy plans and acquire or upgrade wood-based energy systems. This program is ripe to benefit the forest-based communities throughout New England.
9. **Urban Park and Recreation Fund (UPARR) at \$25 million.** UPARR provides matching grants and technical assistance to urban communities. It helps provide Federal assistance for rehabilitation of critically needed recreation facilities and recreation planning. This program is essential to support healthy living and vibrant urban communities.

In closing, we thank the Subcommittee for your continuing leadership on federal land conservation matters and for the opportunity to provide this testimony. Signatory organizations represented by this testimony:

Appalachian Mountain Club	Massachusetts Association of Conservation Commissions
Appalachian Trail Conservancy	Mass Audubon
Audubon Connecticut	Massachusetts Rivers Alliance
Audubon Society of New Hampshire	Massachusetts Land Trust Coalition
Audubon Vermont	Middlesex Land Trust (CT)
Bear-Paw Regional Greenways (NH)	Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust (MA)
Berkshire Natural Resources Council (MA)	MA Woodlands Institute
Connecticut Fund for the Environment/Save The Sound	Monadnock Conservancy (NH)
Connecticut Land Conservation Council	The Nature Conservancy
Connecticut Forest and Park Association	Natural Resources Council of Maine
Connecticut Ornithological Association	New England Forestry Foundation
The Conservation Fund	New England Wild Flower Society
Cornwall Conservation Trust (CT)	New Hampshire Land Trust Coalition
East Haddam Land Trust (CT)	The Newtown Forest Association (CT)
East Quabbin Land Trust (MA)	Northeast Wilderness Trust
Environmental League of Massachusetts	Northern Forest Center
Essex County Greenbelt Association (MA)	Northland Forest Products, Inc.
Forest Society of Maine	Open Space Institute
Friends of the Silvio O. Conte NFWR (VT, NH, MA, CT)	Quabbin to Cardigan Partnership (MA, NH)
Friends of Pondicherry (NH)	Rangeley Lakes Heritage Trust (NH)
Highstead	Redding Conservation Commission (CT)
Housatonic Valley Association (MA, CT, NY)	Rensselaer Plateau Alliance
Kestrel Land Trust (MA)	Ridgefield Conservation Commission (CT)
Litchfield Hills Greenprint Collaborative (CT)	Salisbury Association Land Trust (CT)
Littleton Conservation Trust (MA)	Sharon Land Trust (CT)
Loon Echo Land Trust (ME)	Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests
Lower CT River Valley Council of Governments	Trust for Public Land
Lyme Timber Company	Vermont Land Trust
Mahoosuc Land Trust (ME)	Vermont Natural Resources Council
Maine Coast Heritage Trust	Vermont Woodlands Association