

Opening Remarks  
given by

**Theodore Roosevelt IV**

at the May 19, 2010  
Harvard Kennedy School event  
celebrating the publication of

*Wildlands and Woodlands:  
A Vision for the New England Landscape*

The first thing that struck me when I read the New York Times piece on this project was that Dr. Foster sure likes to walk, and he was smart enough to take a NY Times writer along with him. This is right out of the Teddy Roosevelt play book.

President Roosevelt loved nothing better than taking friends and opponents alike out into the woods and exhausting all argument out of them. Even John Burroughs once complained: describing a *bird* walk with the President as a “*forced march*”.

This walking penchant of Dr. Foster’s seems to me emblematic of his entire approach. According to the Times, Dave feels that “we need to get back into the woods on an everyday basis with both walking stick and ax.”

Dr. Foster envisions a working woodland in New England, anchored around state and federal wildlands. Working woodlands mean that communities would harvest at least some of their wood products from their own backyard, versus exporting deforestation to more vulnerable forests; a working woodland means that forest owners would be compensated for CO2 sequestering benefits, and apparently the Harvard School of Forestry has discovered that is considerable in our New England forests; a working woodland means that owners would be compensated for forgoing certain development rights; and, finally, a working woodland keeps our water healthy without expensive infrastructure and our communities refreshed in every sense of the word.

This is about property values, ecological values, and community values; it is about our particular corner of the world; it is about place values.

There has long been a duality in our country between liberty and community. We react poorly to anyone thinking they are better than the rest and presuming to tell the rest what to do, but our individualism and fierce love of liberty isn’t enough to keep our democracy healthy -- it requires joining together; it requires a vigorous engagement with one another.

What is becoming increasingly clear to me is that we work out this duality best when we work it out as close to the ground as possible -- in what the western writer, Dan Kemmis, calls place-based democracy.

There is nothing more powerful than when the American people freely join together around a vision for themselves and their neighbors. This is in fact a New England tradition. It began 400 years ago when the founders of Boston did something extraordinary for a revolutionary-inclined

people. Long before their heirs brewed up a tax revolt against empire, Bostonians took the unprecedented step of self-taxation for conservation.

They taxed themselves in order to purchase the first public park in the English-speaking world, the Boston Commons (later they would also found this University). This was not a tax or a mandate imposed from afar; this was a vision embraced by the people, paid for by the people, regulated by the people, and maintained by the people.

No one should underestimate the American people's ability to pitch remote overlords into the briny, even those only so far away as D.C, but neither should we underestimate our ability to come together to manage our own business and protect our community interests. We can not impair choice without rousing Americans, but we *can* work with communities to lend information and support toward larger goals.

We need a new kind of leadership in the conservation community. Leadership that can hold a vision for the present and future that is not coercive, but a vision shaped by the community and its values; leadership that can walk\_out into the fruited plain once again and find its way home to the American people.

If you don't care about the people, it's almost guaranteed you will lose the resource. As the Scottish thinker, Raymond Williams wrote: "It will be a sign that we are beginning to think in some necessary ways when we can conceive of ecology and economics becoming, as they ought to become, a single discipline."

"Wildlands and Woodlands" is one of the best documents that I have seen in a long time because it does not impose itself on New England; it braces and strengthens this place. In aligning economic and ecological values, it is heart and soul New England -- the home of the conservative revolutionary.



*L to R: Henry Lee (Harvard Kennedy School), David Foster, James Levitt (Harvard Forest), Theodore Roosevelt IV*