

Keeping Maine's Forests

For almost a year now, many of Maine's state officials, landowners, recreational and conservation organizations have been working on a project to "protect" Maine's forests. I use the word protect lightly because many of

Interior Salazar's visit to Maine last summer where he described the need to protect what he called "treasured landscapes" to a group of state officials and environmental organizations.

At this meeting, Secretary



Sally watching over the woods.

(Photo by V. Paul Reynolds).

us believe that Maine's privately owned forests are already being protected and sustainably managed, despite the constant outcry by those who don't appreciate active forest management or other uses such as motorized recreation.

The project began under the name the Great Maine Forest Initiative and was later morphed into an effort which is now called Keeping Maine's Forests. The Great Maine Forest Initiative started after Secretary of the

Salazar was presented with information on the importance of Maine's forests ecologically, for fiber, and as a recreational resource. The group also expressed concern about the uncertainty of the land, due to global economic challenges and sales from industrial owners and mills to investment organizations.

That said, it is very important to point out that many of these so called "investment organizations" who have bought large

chunks of forestland in Maine are also contractually tied to paper mills to supply wood, and have been among the first to sell large scale conservation easements. These trends begin to dispel some of the myths that investment companies buy timberland to "cut and run." In fact, they have proven in

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As the group began to take shape, many voiced concern that private landowners, and consump

place among the group which allow them to have a foundation of understanding about the dynamics of private landownership in the North Woods, before proceeding with any proposals.

The focus of this group has been mainly on large tracts of land in the Unorganized Ter

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most cases to be excellent stewards of the land, and our fish and wild life resources.

In any case, former Department of Conservation Commissioner McGowan, began to spearhead the effort (Great Maine Forest Initiative) that would develop a new model for federal, state, and private cooperation to conserve these areas by convening a group of stakeholders who would begin to develop a proposal for Secretary Salazar. The request would be aimed at attracting federal funding to buy conservation easements and fee purchases. The proposal is not in any way intended to be a national park. Rumored at the time was a pot of federal money in the scale of hundreds of millions of dollars. Since that time, we have

tive recreational users, such as snowmobilers and sportsmen, were not at the table to participate in the discussion. As a result, my employer, the Maine Forest Products Council, and a few representatives of private landowners were asked to participate in the workings of the group. The participation of private landowners has been important and allowed the group to begin a more sophisticated discussion about conservation realities in Maine. It was important that landowners point out how much wood needs to get to the mills, how costly habitat management can be with no public support, and the concerns over recreational access. Many discussions have taken

ritory: northern, eastern, and western Maine. However, several members of the group have stated that it is also important to focus on conservation needs in southern Maine, where many would argue that conservation is much more valuable and necessary.

Recently, a draft of the proposal was developed. Members of the forest products industry voiced concern about the scale of the proposal, which appeared to be far too expansive, the need for conservation easements with simpler terms, and the lack of recognition of wood supply demands. After more discussion and work, the group has endorsed a scaled

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Woods Watch

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THE GREAT OUTDOORS BEGINS AT