



Environmental Affairs with Douglas Rooks

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Harvard Research Paints Accurate Picture of New England Forests

Sportsmen are not alone in taking the environment where they hunt and fish pretty much for granted. True, there are longstanding concerns about the balance between logging and wildlife, between the pollution of rivers and streams and about global warming, which still receives skepticism though the facts indicate otherwise. But every so often, it's a good idea to take a look not only at the trees in the deeryard but at the forest that still defines Maine and even much of New England.

That is the mission, satisfyingly carried out, of a new report called "Woodland and Wildlands." Written by numerous authors from all over New England, the report reflects research done at Harvard University. Though that suggests a certain remoteness, even stuffiness, it is in fact an engaging document that's easy to read with many thought-provoking charts and photos.

The report confirms some of what we thought we know about New England and Maine, while deepening our understanding and appreciation for this unmatched resource, without which life and recreation as we know it would literally be impossible.

"Today there is more forest cover between Long Island Sound and the Canadian border than at any time in the past two centuries," is a typical sweeping and evocative passage. There are "33 million acres of trees" in New England, it reports, and one might add, 19 million of them in Maine.

Chief Virtue

One of the chief virtues of the report is to emphasize how similar Maine really is to the region of which it comprises, in land area, one half. It's much easier to see where we are today by recalling the changes

in the landscape since European settlement began. The report shows that deforestation - largely from land-clearing for farms - reached its peak in 1850, which then led to 100 years of increasing forest acreage in every state.

Around 1960, things turned around again - not from a return to agriculture, but to what we now know as sprawl, the automobile-driven style of development that has devoured so much of the countryside around major cities and towns. Since 1960, all other New England states have lost forest cover. Maine's remains fairly constant, though we have 91,000 acres, mostly to development, from 1990-2006.

The overall increase in forest cover has taken place even as the population of the region has grown from 4.8 million 100 years ago to 14.4 million today. We're so used to hearing New England described as a "slow growing" region that we lose sight of how rapid its growth really has been.

The report - far more comprehensive in terms of background, environmental scope, and descriptions of the various uses of the forest - is similar in its prescriptions to other recent reports.

- One from the New England Governors Association's group of state foresters.

- The Keeping Maine's Forests group sponsored by the University of Maine.

Strong Tradition

What "Wildlands and Woodlands" makes particularly clear is that New England already has a strong tradition of conserving forestlands, but it does so through different means than the national forests and parks that dominate the rest of the country.

The two national forests in New England, the Green

Mountain unit in Vermont and the White Mountain tracts in New Hampshire and Maine, are small by national standards, and the only national park, Acadia, was a gift from local philanthropists.

This difference explains why there is so much hostility and so little reasoned argument about such plans as that for a Maine Woods national park. In theory, there is nothing wrong with such a park - it's pretty clear that tourism could benefit hugely - but it simply doesn't fit with the way Maine and the rest of New England have gone about the ownership and management of land over the past four centuries.

Though the report is fixed squarely on the forest, it also takes note of the value of preserving farmland as part of the landscape which can produce notable sporting activities as well. And here we can see dramatic differences between states.

Vermont and Maine, which have valued and supported dairy farming and other agricultural uses for many decades, have preserved a good deal of their historic farming regions, while New Hampshire has taken a laissez faire attitude and let them disappear. As a result, by one recent estimate, both Maine and Vermont produce about 40 percent of the food needed to feed the people who live within their borders, while New Hampshire produces only 6 percent.

Visionary, Practical
So the report's emphasis on conservation includes both a visionary and practical streak. On the vision side, it would like to preserve 70 percent of New England's land area as forest 50 years from now. Of that forest, 90 percent would be managed and 10 percent pre-

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Self-Propelled (Cont. from previous page)

worked together to line the loaded boats through the ledge-drop. Meanwhile the girls checked out the campsite on the high bank above us.

Uproarious Laughter

As we tied up the canoes down in the eddy pool below the ledge - Bill cocked his head in a listening gesture. I could hear it too. It was the girls - we could hear them laughing uproariously together above the noise of the rapid.

We glanced at each other and shared a relieved smile.

Bowhunting (Continued from page 36)

30 minutes after sunset before moving toward the road.

Bowhunters who are consistently successful put forth 100-percent hunting efforts at dawn and dusk. Others start walking back to camp or their trucks well before dark and miss out on this key hunting time frame.

Landowner Permission

Also, hunters should ask landowners where to park and then, place a note on the vehicle, explaining that they are camping out overnight.

Likewise, it's important for hunters to tell someone where they plan to hunt and when they will return.

My wife couldn't explain to rescuers where I was no matter how well I gave her direction, so I circle the area on a topographical map and ask her to tell the search party to look there.

Gearing Up

A backpack is the key to a successful outing. I use an extra-large, 3,000-cubic-inch, bow-and-rifle pack. It carries everything I need for a weekend bowhunt, but more importantly, it carries my bow and has a small pack that detaches and can be used while hunting. Also, it has a 2-liter hydration reservoir - something archers will need while hiking and hauling.

A light-weight, one-man tent and tarp and a sleeping bag and pad add to enjoyment and success as well.

A light-weight gas pack stove is important because I have never met a landowner who was comfortable with a stranger starting a campfire on his or her land. When backpackers explain that they will use a stove and not start campfires, that information helps them get permission to camp and hunt on private land.

Next, include a water purifier or tablets, water bottle, headlamp, small flashlight and extra batteries, compass and GPS with map.

Of course, archers must include personal and first-aid items and medications as well as all the bowhunting gear. I generally don't hunt from a treestand while bowhunting but prefer make-shift ground blinds or still hunting.

Backcountry deer will be more relaxed because 1) the bow season comes before firearms hunting and 2) remote country deer have less contact with humans. These deer will move and feed more during daylight hours and be less spooky than deer living closer to civilization.