

**Broadening Partnership Participation:**

**RESILIENCE** FOR THE **FOREST**  
AND OUR **COMMUNITIES**

Panel hosted by

**Woodlands Partnership of Northwest Massachusetts**

**Regional Conservation Partnership Network Gathering**  
**November 14, 2024**

# Today's Panel:

**Lisa Hayden (Facilitator)**, Admin. Agent;  
Outreach Director, New England Forestry  
Foundation

**Robert O'Connor**, Conservation Div. Dir.  
(retired)  
MA Ex. Office of Energy & Environmental Affairs

**Thomas Matuszko**, Ex. Director  
Berkshire Regional Planning Commission

**Art Schwenger**, Volunteer Board Member  
Heath  
**Dicken Crane**, Board Chair, Windsor

- Woodlands Partnership -  
Mission & programs
- Origins of the Partnership; Reaching  
new stakeholders
- Benefits of regional approaches;  
Growing pains
- Municipal perspectives & challenges



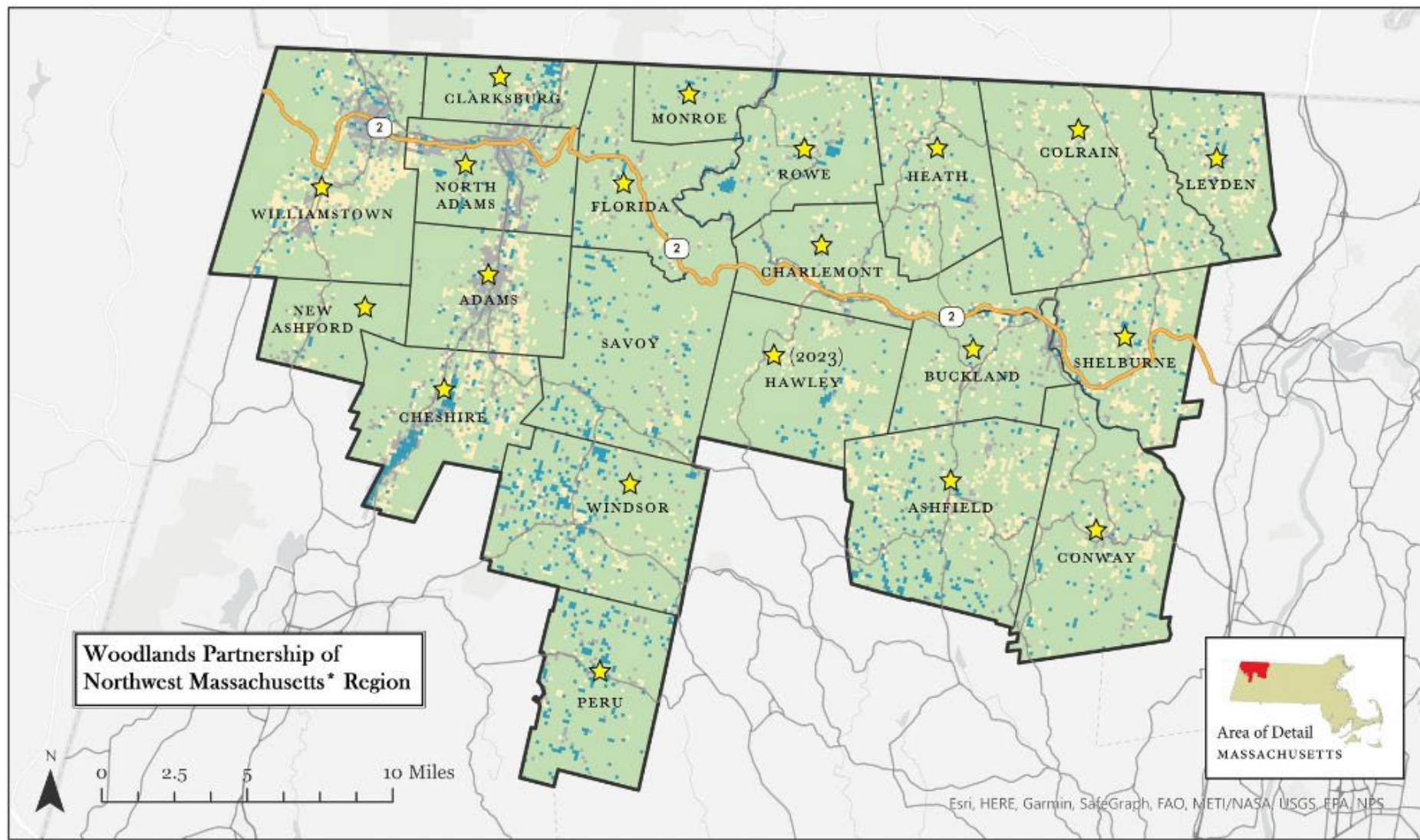
# Woodlands Partnership of Northwest Massachusetts





# Woodlands Partnership

- 36-member Board
- 20 municipalities
- 16 organizations – land trusts, RPAs, watershed, CDC, academic & econ. development
- New England Forestry Foundation (NEFF) current Administrative Agent contract with EOEEA



LEGEND			Scale: 1:300,000
<span style="color: green;">■</span>	FOREST	<span style="border-bottom: 1px solid black; width: 20px; display: inline-block;"></span>	MTWP REGION
<span style="color: blue;">■</span>	WATER OR WETLAND	<span style="border-bottom: 1px solid black; width: 20px; display: inline-block;"></span>	TOWN BORDER
<span style="color: yellow;">■</span>	CULTIVATED	<span style="color: orange;">—</span>	MA RTE. 2 / MOHAWK TRAIL
<span style="color: grey;">■</span>	DEVELOPED	<span style="color: orange;">—</span>	MAJOR ROAD
		<span style="color: yellow;">★</span>	TOWNS THAT HAVE OPTED IN

\*On Oct. 11, 2022, the Board of the public body created in 2018 voted unanimously to change its name from the “Mohawk Trail Woodlands Partnership” in its bylaws to operating as the “Woodlands Partnership of Northwest Massachusetts” and requested the state legislature and USDA Forest Service to officially establish and recognize the new name.



# Mission priorities:

- ❖ Increase forest land conservation and stewardship to support intact forest ecosystems.
- ❖ Support and increase sustainable natural resource-based economic development and employment.
- ❖ Promote the long-term social and fiscal sustainability of the participating municipalities in the area.

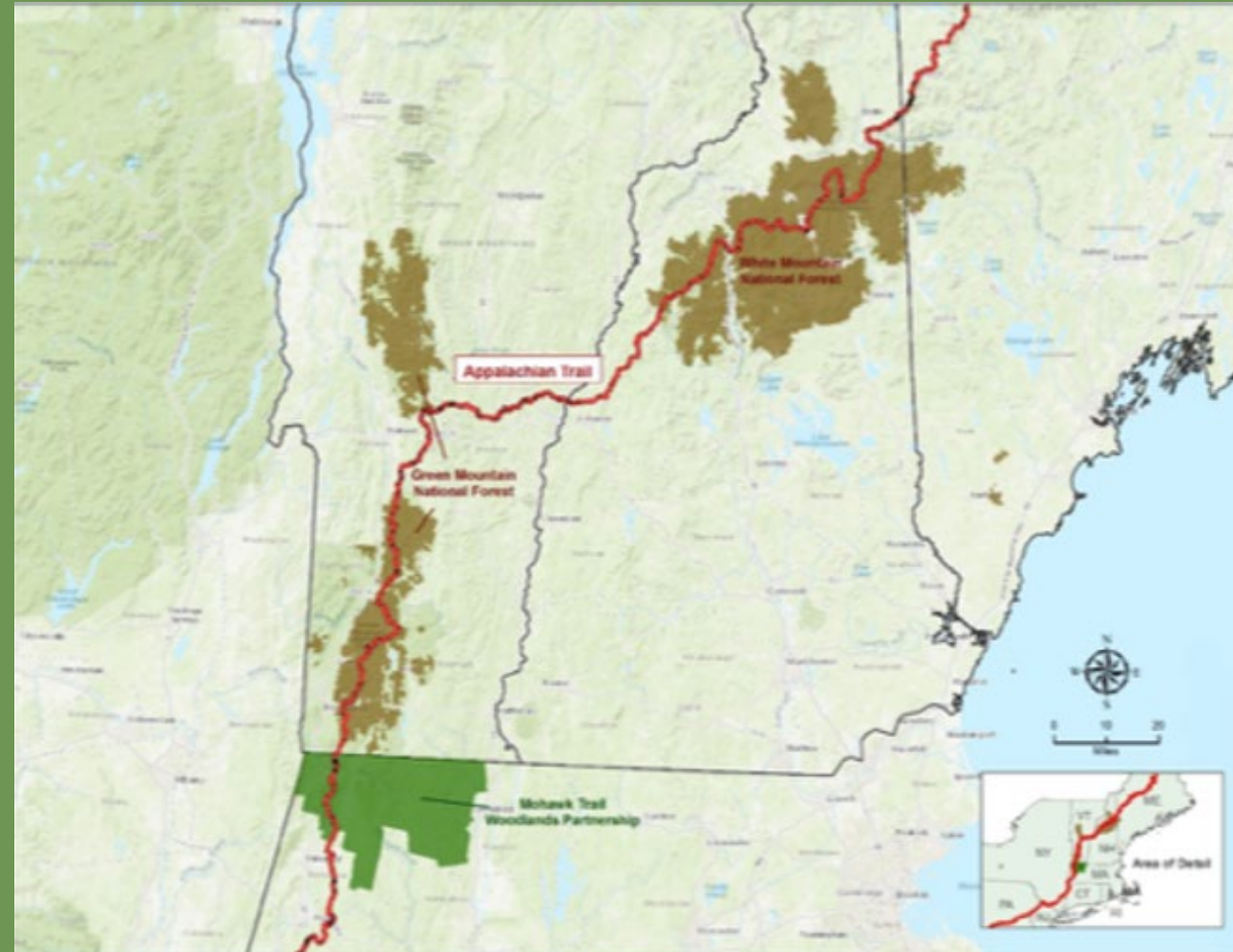
A unique local effort to both conserve our forests and enhance our region's rural, land-based economy...

across the Northern Berkshire Mountains, Hilltowns, and riverside villages of northwestern Massachusetts...



# Extensive Forest Cover for Wide-Ranging Wildlife

- Opportunities to Connect Corridors and Multi-state Trails
- Thinking beyond boundaries – county & state





# Board Includes Diverse Perspectives

## **Nonprofit** organizations:

- Berkshire Natural Resources Council
- Deerfield River Watershed Association
- Franklin Land Trust
- Franklin County Com. Development Corp.
- Hoosic River Watershed Association
- Lever, Inc.
- Massachusetts Forest Alliance
- Ohketeau Cultural Center, Ashfield, MA
- Society of American Foresters (MA Chap.)

**Municipal:** 20 of 21 eligible towns  
have opted in

**Academic:** UMass Amherst

## **Planning agencies:**

- Berkshire Regional Planning Commission
- Franklin Regional Council of Governments

## **State and federal agencies:**

- Executive Office of Energy & Environmental Affairs,
- U.S. Forest Service

# SECTION ONE Executive Summary

## LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

*It is with gratitude and humility that we acknowledge that we are learning, speaking, working, and gathering on the ancestral homelands of the Mobican, Pocumtuc, Nipmuc, and Abenaki people, who are the indigenous peoples of this land. We pay honor and respect to our ancestors past and present as we commit to building a more inclusive and equitable space for all.*

**T**HE WOODLANDS PARTNERSHIP of Northwest Massachusetts (previously known as the Mohawk Trail Woodlands Partnership, see Sidebar: *The Partnership's New Name* on page 11) is a unique local effort to both conserve our forests and support our region's rural, land-based economy across the Northern Berkshire Mountain towns, and riverside villages of northwestern Massachusetts.

In 2013, a group of citizens who live and work in the northwestern corner of the region came together as leaders and representatives from about 30 entities—towns, organizations, and business and academic organizations—to work cooperatively with regional planning agencies in Franklin and Berkshire Counties, the State, and the Forest Service to create the Woodlands Partnership and further its goals.

Hoosic River valley forests from Pine Cobble, Vermont

# WOODLANDS PARTNERSHIP of NORTHWEST MASSACHUSETTS

## *A Plan for Forest-Based Economic Development & Conservation*



JANUARY 2023

Board Adopts 10-year Plan:  
<https://woodlandspartnership.org/partnership-plan/>



# Partnership Name Change Vote Oct. 2022

- ❖ In reaching out to local Indigenous People to invite input on 10-year plan, Board & Agent heard that the "Mohawk Trail" name contributed to local Tribes such as the Nipmuc, and Stockbridge Munsee Band of Mohicans, feeling more invisible in their own communities - where they had never left.
- ❖ Route 2 highway corridor does not run through all the communities.

Board Motion unanimously adopted:

"The Mohawk Trail Woodlands Partnership", a public body established by Massachusetts House Bill No. 4835 filed on 26 July 2018 and signed into law on 31 October 2018, will conduct its work known as "**Woodlands Partnership of Northwest Massachusetts**," and change its bylaws to reflect said change in name. ... "

# Seeking to Amplify Indigenous Voices – Board Added Indigenous Organization Seat

- Board created Working Group on Building Relationships with Indigenous Peoples;
- Grant paid Indigenous partners to lead educational forest walks and forums, such as focusing on lasting impacts of colonization;
- Indigenous-led book club discussions open to public this fall;
- Indigenous partners reviewed content for new web site:

[TheForestCenter.org](https://TheForestCenter.org)



Ashfield-based Ohketeau Cultural Center, represented by Founder & Co-Director Rhonda Anderson, joined Board and Ex. Com. in 2023



# Riparian Tree Planting - USFS grant

2022 site: Conway's South River Meadow

2023 sites: Williamstown bike path & Housing Authority;  
Buckland-Shelburne Elementary School field, culvert area



2024 site: Hawlemont Elem. School in Charlemont on Deerfield River – student ag program



## Managing multiple state and federal grants:

- Funding for foresters to prepare Forest Stewardship Climate Plans for town-owned land – assessing vulnerability to forest health threats from climate change
- USFS grant to support model, or demonstration forests where people can learn about climate impacts & forest adaptation practices





# Action on Forest Climate Resilience



\$540,000 via 3-year USFS grant for implementing climate forestry practices on private family woodlands & town forests



\$75,000 1-year EOEEA state grant to NEFF/Mass Audubon to administer, implement, verify practices funding





# What's Next for the Woodlands Partnership?

- Focus on hosting educational programming & events
- Developing content for new web sites
- Efforts continue to secure funding and support for operations
  - Goal to hire Ex. Dir. for more Board-driven program development
- Recent Catalyst Fund grant for \$25,000 to hire fundraising strategy consultant – copies available for this role!
- Investigating National Heritage Area program of National Park Service - \$50,000 to start feasibility study in 2025
  - Video & story telling about the region's identity & profiles of its people
  - Data from RPAs, & Indigenous-focused report



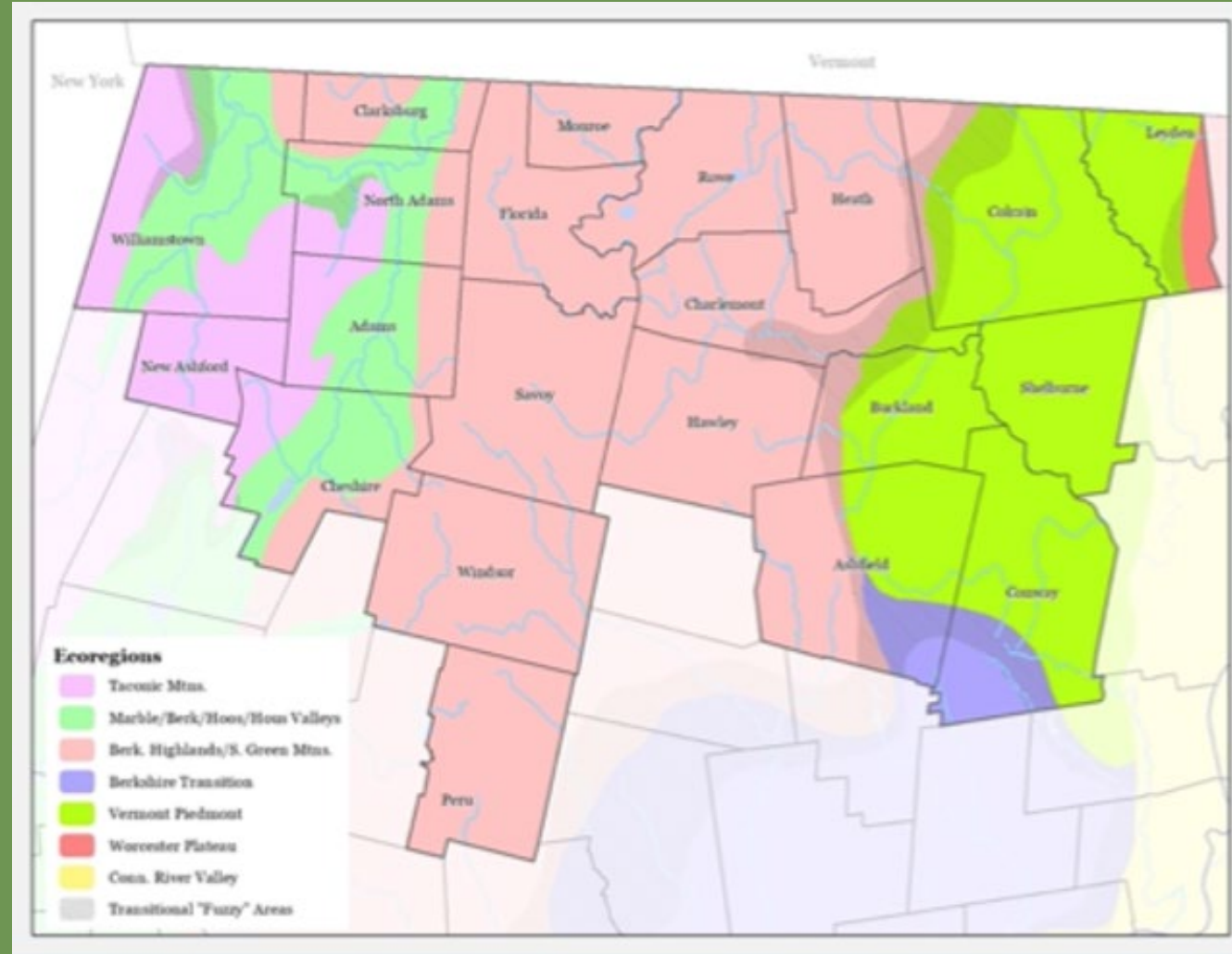
BOB O'CONNOR

---

WOODLANDS PARTNERSHIP ORIGINS

# Why the Region is so Important for Conservation & Tourism

Multiple ecoregions – and 4 different forest types – converge in the Northwest corner of the Commonwealth





# Most Rural & Forested Region in Massachusetts

Resource Category	Acres or \$ or residents	Percent of Total Area
<b>Total Area of Proposed Designation</b>	361,941	100%
<b>Forest</b>	295,866	82% (some of the highest ranking land in Forest Action Plan)
<b>Prime Forest Soils</b>	299,034	83%
<b>State Wildlife Action Plan Priority Areas</b>	227,060	63%
<b>2010 Total Population</b>	50,936	90 people/square mile
<b>Percent Population Change 2000 - 2010</b>	-2,575	-4.8% (for comparison, 4.8% of total MA population = 314,286)
<b>Per Capita Income</b>	\$27,728	22% lower than state average
<b>Protected Open Space</b>	100,100	28%

# A Novel Structure & Approach

- Massachusetts is one of the few states without a “National Forest” - without the chance to access associated Federal resources.
- The State explored a National Forest Designation in early 2000s – but it was not supported by public.
- The WP process is different - it invited the public, particularly town officials and landowners in the 21-town study area to define the elements of a designation that best work for them.
- The U.S. Forest Service has been interested in exploring a new model for a “Federal Designation” based primarily on Conservation Restrictions and new way of providing information and services from the ground-up, cooperating with State and local governments.





# Roots of the Woodlands Partnership

9 November 2019

## US Forest Service & MA -EEA Shared Stewardship Agreement Signed at Berkshire East

FILED ON: 7/26/2018  
**HOUSE . . . . . No. 4835**

**The Commonwealth of Massachusetts**

In the One Hundred and Ninetieth General Court  
(2017-2018)

An Act promoting climate change adaptation, environmental and natural resource protection, and investment in recreational assets and opportunity.



Signatures

KATHLEEN A. THEOHARIDES  
Secretary  
Executive Office of Energy and  
Environmental Affairs  
Commonwealth of Massachusetts

VICTORIA CHRISTIANSEN  
Chief  
Forest Service  
U.S. Department of Agriculture

TOM MATUSZKO

---

REGIONAL BENEFITS,  
GROWING PAINS

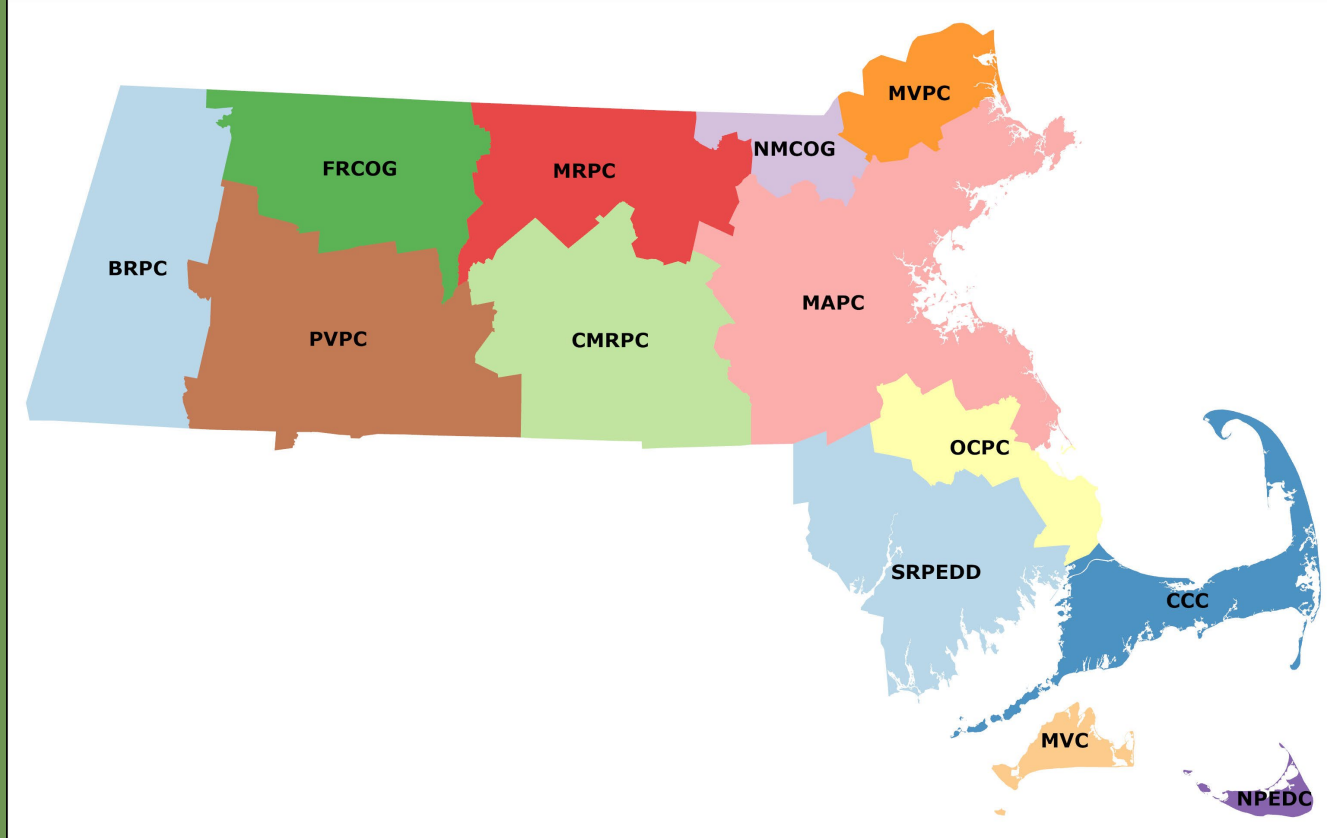
# RPA's = Regional Planning Agencies

*(13 across the state)*

**Public bodies** - *deal with issues/ needs that cross city, town, county, and state boundaries through planning, policymaking, communication coordination, advocacy, education, analysis, and technical assistance.*

## Work areas -

- *environmental stewardship;*
- *climate change and natural hazards mitigation; community and economic development;*
- *land use planning, zoning,*
- *housing production and retention; infrastructure development and maintenance;*
- *municipal services, i.e. health care, inspections, animal control;*
- *public safety, including fire, police, emergency medical services;*
- *transportation and transit.*



## Benefits

- *Know our Communities*
- *Multi – disciplinary*
- *Trusted Partners*



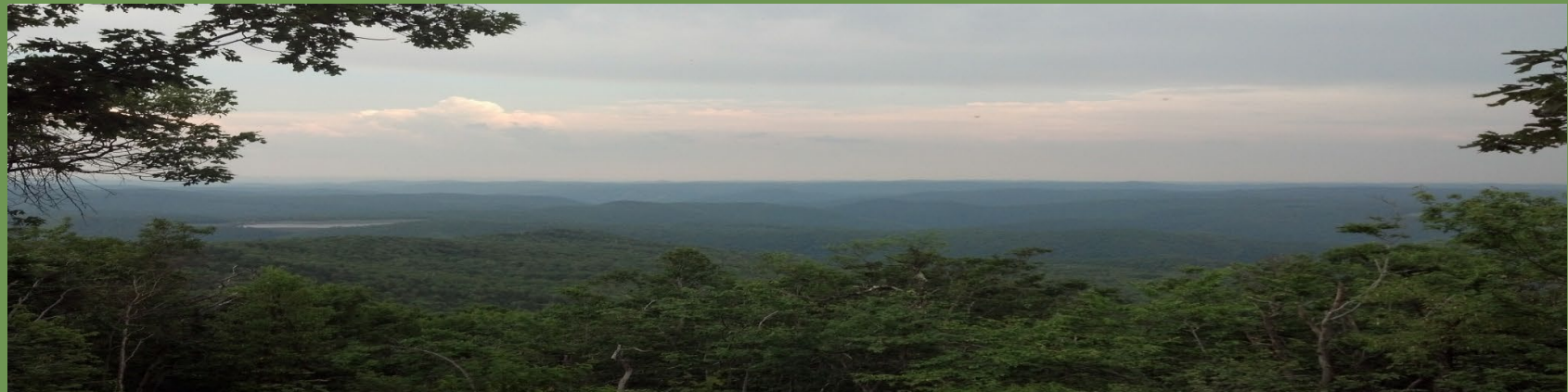
# Previous Public Outreach – Concerns and Opportunities – pre 2013

## Concerns

- Loss of Local Control
- Loss of Local Tax Revenues for Land in Federal or State Ownership
- Concerns about the Potential Impacts of a Federal Designation on Working Forests and Local Economies
- Impact on Municipal Services such as Road Maintenance or Provision of Emergency Response Services for Visitors
- Need for Reliable Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILOT) for Land in Public Ownership

## Opportunities

- Increased State and Federal Dollars to Support Forest Conservation and Natural Resource Based Business
- Opportunity to Conserve Forests and thereby the Rural Character of the Region
- Opportunity to Increase Forestry Activity and Wood Product Processing
- Opportunity for Research to Help Improve Forestry and New Manufacturing Technologies Related to Forestry



# Getting to Partnership

## Community Engagement and Listening

### Meeting, meetings, meetings

From November 2013 to April 2014 - 2 regional meetings and 20 community meetings seeking input on:

- A Vision and Locations for Conservation of Forest for Habitat Protection, Recreation and Forestry Products
- Ideas and Potential Locations for a Visitor Center, Technical Resource Center and /or Expanded Secondary Processing of Forest Products
- Project Ideas and Locations for Expanding Recreational Tourism
- The Level of Interest in a Federal Designation and Key Provisions Towns and Community Member wanted included in possible legislation

## Outcomes

Shift from Primarily Land Conservation to the Interconnections between **Forest** Conservation and Economic Development Connecting:

- Working Forests and Foresters
- Habitat Protection
- Forest – Based Tourism
- Manufacturing and Wood Products
- Markets for Low-Grade Wood
- Economic Development and Jobs







## Advisory Committee Oversight

### Charge of the Advisory Committee

- Create a Framework and proposed Governance Structure to guide any Special Federal Designation
- Create a Plan which includes recommended projects and strategies to support forest conservation and economic development
- Create a model Conservation Restriction
- Draft State legislation based on the “Framework” if enough towns would like to proceed with a Special Federal Designation

### Committee Members

- Municipal Members from all eligible municipalities appointed by their Chief Elected Officials
- Foresters
- Land Conservationist
- Economic Development
- Environmentalists

# Partnership Framework

- **Municipal Opt In Provision**
- **No Eminent Domain – Restrictions with Willing Seller Only**
- **Tax Incentives/Technical Assistance for Sustainably Forestry Practices**
- **Incentives/Funding for Outdoor Recreational Infrastructure**
- **Creation of a Demonstration Forest – on Private Land**
- **Visitor/Education/Technical Resource Center-Education, Tech. Asst., R&D, Products, Tourism**
- **Annual Grants to Participating Towns Supporting Municipal Services and Operations**
- **Private Tax Paying Ownership of Forest Land**
- **Flexible Conservation Restrictions that Allow a Combination of Uses**
- **Promotion of Forestry, Forestry Manufacturing and New Technologies**
- **Financial Support to Convert Oil-based Heat in Municipal Buildings to Wood Chips/ Pellets**
- **Notification and Approval Process for Conservation Restriction**
- **Partnership w/ U.S. Forest Service to Staff the Center**
- **Creation of a State and Federal Investment Trust Fund Large Enough for Sustained Partnership Operation**



# Outcomes of Initial Effort

- 
- 11 Communities Opt In Initially - now 20 of 21
  - Legislation Approved by Massachusetts Legislature in 2018
  - Partnership Agreement with the U.S. Forest Service
  - Small Grants Program for Municipalities



Greylock Glen Outdoor Center - Adams, MA

- 
- Intense Controversy about the Proposed Pellet Plant
  - Investment Trust Fund Never Capitalized

# DICKEN CRANE / ART SCHWENGER

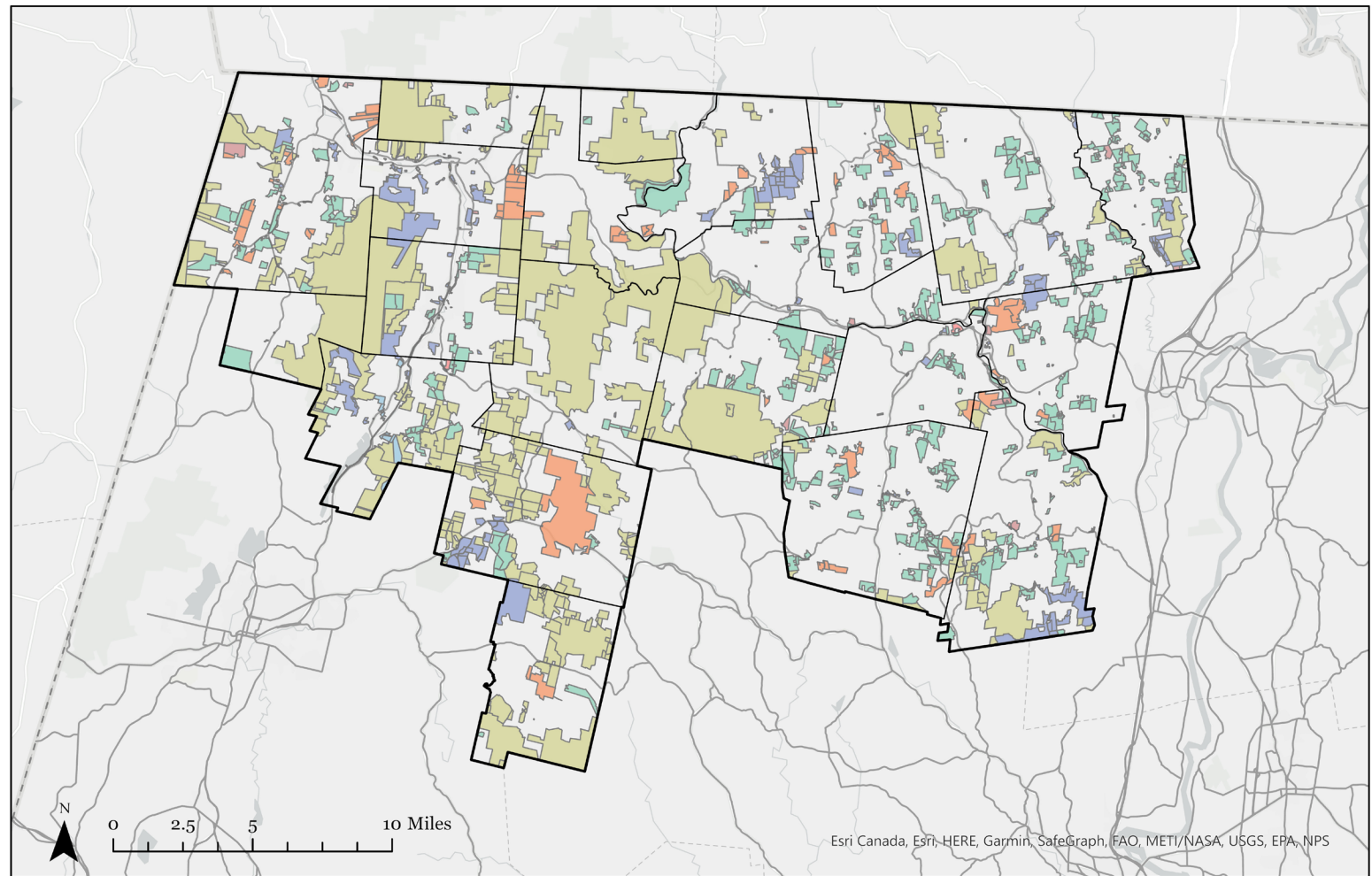
---

MUNICIPAL CHALLENGES &  
PERSPECTIVES












# PAYMENT IN LIEU OF TAXES (PILOT)

- In FY2021, Partnership towns were reimbursed a total of \$990,867, a rate of \$12.35 per acre on eligible state-owned land.
- These payments fell \$498,433 short of what the region would have received if the state had fully funded PILOT payments to communities (without addressing the formula's equity issues).
- PILOT payments per acre vary considerably by town, ranging from \$2.99 per acre in Monroe to \$39.89 per acre in North Adams — and this contrast is often even greater outside the WP Region.



**LEGEND** Scale: 1:300,000

 FEDERAL	 PRIVATE FOR PROFIT	 MTWP REGION
 STATE	 PRIVATE NONPROFIT	 TOWN BORDER
 MUNICIPAL	 LAND TRUST	 MAJOR ROAD

## Protected Open Space: Ownership Type

*Protected open space data collected from MassGIS  
Protected and Recreational Open Space data layer.*



## Woodlands Partnership to Study Effects of Tourism and PILOT Shortfall on Municipal Safety Services

Healthy town budgets, with adequate health and public safety services, are critical if the Commonwealth hopes to increase land conservation in the Partnership Region to fulfill climate goals.

As it stands, rural municipalities are strained and often view land conservation efforts as out-of-touch.



- Partnership embarking on public safety services study of 21-town region with Edward J. Collins, Jr. Center for Public Management at the UMass Boston.
- Focus on municipal services related to increasing tourism, use and accessibility of public forests, and ability of first responders to provide rescue services on conserved state land.
- Funded by MA EOEEA to provide towns with direction in receiving additional funds and to identify strategies, as well as inform state policy and procedure.



> \$1.7 million in ~54 small state grants to member towns, regional projects, & small business start-ups via business incubator

Towns that vote to join are eligible to apply for annual state grants of up to \$25,000 to fund municipal needs.

SOME EXAMPLES...



✓ An open space and recreation plan & ballfield renovation by Shelburne;

✓ purchase of an ATV for back country rescues by Hawley;

✓ construction of boat access by Ashfield;

✓ funds to Rowe & Heath to plan a regional trail from downtown Shelburne Falls to Mohawk Trail State Forest;

✓ completion of educational kiosks at Greylock Glen by Adams;

✓ Support for road maintenance or visitor services in areas of heavy recreation use.

# Some of the **2021-2022** MTWP Grants

Ashfield	Construction of a recycling center building using local wood & creation of educational materials on the benefits of local wood.	\$16,500
Charlemont	Design and installation of educational and regulatory signage related to rafting at various locations.	\$20,000
Hawley	Acquisition of an ATV with tracks for 4-season rescue on State and other open spaces in town.	\$17,000
Heath	Completion of Phase III of regional trail network including design and construction of trails connecting the Town Forest with the Catamount State Forest trails.	\$20,000
New Ashford	Design and construction of a trail around Beaver Pond on the slopes of Mt Greylock.	\$20,000
North Adams	Completion of design work and property research on a section of North Adam's Adventure Trail.	\$20,000
Peru	Completion of gravel road improvements to allow access to MassWildlife property in town.	\$20,000
Rowe	Climate forest plan implementation on the Town Forest including hemlock woolly adelgid plots monitored by adjacent school, mapping old-growth site and inoculation of ash trees.	\$20,000





# QUESTIONS & DISCUSSION

---

# Some Points to Consider:

- Status as a "public body" – subject to Public Records Act – publicly posted meetings
- Built-in involvement of all levels of government – overcoming local fears of loss of control
- Broader mission than just conservation (some want to do more of it) – including natural resource-based economic development & municipal financial stability
- Governance challenges of reaching consensus amongst a large cross-sectoral Board of volunteers
- Are there any parallels to other RCP experiences in effort to gain sustainable funding to hire permanent staff?

[WoodlandsPartnership.org](http://WoodlandsPartnership.org)

[TheForestCenter.org](http://TheForestCenter.org)



# Collaboration and Community-Building for Municipal Climate Action

**Dec. 18, 12:00 - 1:15 pm**

Join us for a dynamic virtual networking event on fostering collaboration and community for local climate resilience! Now, more than ever, it's important for municipal conservation and sustainability professionals and partners to come together to advance climate resilience in our cities and towns. This event will provide an opportunity to connect, learn from each other, and explore overlapping work. **RSVP** [here](#).

*This event is hosted in partnership with the MA Society for Municipal Conservation Professionals ([MSMCP](#)) and [MVP](#) (Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness) Program.*

# Please fill out Session Evaluation!

## To Connect to UMass Wifi:

In the WiFi settings on your phone/computer/tablet select the UMASS network:

- Open up a web browser (IT suggests using Safari or Firefox)
- Manually type in the address bar:  
<http://login.wireless.umass.edu> (or scan the QR code)
- Either a page telling you that this site is unsecure will present itself OR the UMass wireless login page will appear
- If it is a page telling you the website is unsecure, click “More Details” or “Advanced” at the bottom and click on the link to visit the page anyway
- You should then be on the UMass wireless network login page
- Enter the credentials below
  - Username: 78456876
  - Password: 58861667



Scan QR code to fill out evaluation