

## *Environmental Affairs* (Cont. from page 39)

served as wild land. To achieve that objective, conservation efforts would need to be twice as robust as they have been over the last 15 years.

On the practical side, the authors believe that conservation is fully compatible with logging. They say that "active management and conservation are complementary, not conflicting objectives" (emphasis in the original.)

That won't necessarily be easy. To do it, forest management must be transformed through a variety of techniques that more closely mimic the natural growth and regeneration of the forest. This is particularly important for wildlife habitat. The intensive clear-cutting and quick harvest cycles typical of the paper industry in its heyday in Maine might have been great for moose, but it impoverished the habitat of countless other creatures, many of which are game animals themselves or those they depend on for prey.

It's sobering to realize that when the Europeans arrived, an estimated 70 percent to 90 percent of New England consisted of old growth forests. Today that figure is much less than 1 percent. Old growth not only nurtures wildlife species that don't exist elsewhere, but it accumulates carbon at twice the rate of a young forest. So if we are to eventually rebuild this critical habitat, we'll have to protect some acreage permanently from active harvesting.

### Easements Emphasis

The report places appropriate emphasis on the conservation easements that now keep large sections of the Maine woods intact, including the first one, the 750,000-acre Pingree easement, which has been followed by major projects Down East, along the Penobscot's West Branch, St. John River and in the Katahdin Region. Even here, though, there can be improvements. Though the latter agreements explicitly guarantee public access for hunting, the Pingree easement does not.

One comes away from reading with a positive feeling about the future. Forest conservation, while different than in other regions, has a long history here, too. It is one reason why New England still has a surplus of clean, drinkable water – something that certainly can't be claimed for the Southwest or overdeveloped coastal areas in the Southeast. And why so many people from all over the world still come to hunt and fish in Maine.

Much has been accomplished. Five of the 10 major conservation easement projects in New England are in Maine. The wildlands component can be created by different methods, too. Efforts by philanthropists such as Roxanne Quimby, like Percival Baxter before her, can benefit game species even if they restrict hunting on some of their land.

The "Wildlands and Woodlands" report says it is "not just a forest conservation plan and it is not written for a specific political moment – it is a vision for the next half century and beyond."

We all need to do that kind of work. If Aldo Leopold was correct in asking, in the title of his great essay, for "Thinking like a mountain," then we all need to be "Thinking like a forest" today. For a copy of the report, visit: [www.wildlandsandwoodlands.org](http://www.wildlandsandwoodlands.org)



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