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New England's Economy linked to its vast but threatened forests

Groups urge Congress to increase federal conservation funding for New England's Forests

CONCORD, N.H.—Eighty-five organizations across the region today urged lawmakers to help meet New England's economic challenges by investing in the region's forests, outlining seven critical federal funding opportunities to conserve this vital resource and the green infrastructure it provides.

The organizations submitted to Congressional leaders *A Policy Agenda for Conserving New England's Forests* <http://www.outdoors.org/pdf/upload/A-Policy-Agenda-for-Conserving-New-England-s-Forests-FY13-PrioritiesFINAL-1.pdf> at a time when forest cover is declining in all six New England states, according to the major science-based report, [Wildlands and Woodlands: a Vision for the New England Landscape](#). According to the 85 groups, federal conservation funding is a vital strategy to retain the many economic and environmental benefits of the region's forests.

“A commitment to the conservation of New England's forests is a key to the future health of the New England economy, the integrity of our air and water, and the availability of natural landscapes that provide recreational opportunities for the region's residents and visitors,” said Susan Arnold, Vice President for Conservation for the Appalachian Mountain Club, the nation's oldest conservation and recreation organization.

“Keeping forests as forests has to be a top priority for maintaining a high quality of life here in New Hampshire as well as throughout New England,” said Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests President/Forester Jane A. Difley.

New England is the most densely forested region in the nation, and its communities depend heavily on the forested landscape to fuel the economy, including monies from tourism and outdoor recreation, and heating fuel and timber from sustainably managed forests.

New England's forests protect the headwaters for all of the Northeast's major rivers; filter drinking water for millions of people; and shelter fish, wildlife, and rich biodiversity. The region's 33 million acres of forest clean the air and store vast quantities of carbon, slowing climate change.

“The daily benefits to human life, or ‘ecosystem services,’ that our forests provide are truly priceless – invaluable at both a regional and national scale,” according to Dr. David Foster, Director of Harvard University’s Harvard Forest in Petersham, Mass. “There is no cheaper way to mitigate climate change or produce clean water than widespread forest conservation.”

The 85 organizations urged Congressional leaders to adopt seven key actions to protect New England’s forests as Congress moves forward to review and finalize the President’s budget for Fiscal Year 2013.

1. **Fund working forest conservation** by continuing to fund the Forest Legacy Program at the levels in the President’s recently released Budget. Since the program’s establishment in 1990, it has protected 996,000 acres from development in New England, sustaining the region’s forests that contribute tens of thousands of jobs and billions of dollars to states’ economies.
2. **Conserve large New England landscapes** to protect water quality, farmlands, recreational spaces and habitat corridors in a time of climate change by choosing regionally identified priority landscapes to receive any FY13 competitive funds matching state, local, and private funding as part of the implementation of America’s Great Outdoors (AGO).
3. **Connect forests and communities** by continuing programs such as the Community Forest and Open Space Conservation Program; Urban and Community Forestry; Recreational Trails Program; and Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program.
4. **Protect special places** through the Land and Water Conservation Fund and the Coastal and Estuarine Land Conservation Program, which have previously protected New England treasures including the Green and White Mountain National Forests and the Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge.
5. **Provide incentives for forest landowners and forest businesses** by funding the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service and Rural Development Programs, which provide crucial assistance towards preserving the partnership between New England private landowners, forest businesses, and the federal government.
6. **Develop sustainable community-scale thermal biomass energy** by funding the Community Wood Energy Program.
7. **Protect fisheries and wildlife and mitigate climate change** by funding wildlife protection programs including the North American Wetland Conservation Act; State and Tribal Wildlife Grants Program; the North Atlantic Conservation Cooperative; the Cooperative Endangered Species Conservation Fund; the Habitat Conservation Plan; the Recovery Land Acquisition Grants; the National Fish Habitat Action Plan; and the National Fish Habitat Action Plan.

Despite substantial differences in population, development, and geography across the six New England states, 85 representative organizations from across the region have come together to call on Congress to keep intact the nationally significant and economically vital green infrastructure of New England’s forests.

The unprecedented regional unity of these 85 organizations reflects increasing recognition of New England’s fundamental reliance on its forested landscape, and a rising crescendo of voices in support of reversing the escalating forest loss. The New England Governors Conference recently issued [a major report](#) that advocates a “Keep Forests as Forests” strategy, and has called for a new federal-state partnership in New England to better address conservation of the region’s invaluable forests and forest-based economy.

The organizations urging action are listed in *A Policy Agenda for Conserving New England’s Forests*, downloadable at <http://www.outdoors.org/pdf/upload/A-Policy-Agenda-for-Conserving-New-England-s->

[Forests-FY13-PrioritiesFINAL-1.pdf](#). Additional voices from around the region in support of this Agenda are appended to this release.

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Regional Voices in Support of the FY13 Forest Conservation Policy Agenda:

1. "Farmers own nearly 2 million acres of New England woodland," according to Cris Coffin, New England Director for **American Farmland Trust**. "Federal farm conservation programs not only help farmers protect and manage their farmland, but their woodlands, too, helping them diversify their farm operations and generate additional income."
2. "A commitment to the conservation of New England's forests is a key to the future health of the New England economy, the integrity of our air and water, and the availability of natural landscapes that provide recreational opportunities for the region's residents and visitors." - Susan Arnold, Vice President for Conservation for the **Appalachian Mountain Club**, the nation's oldest conservation and recreation organization.
3. "Keeping forests as forests has to be a top priority for maintaining a high quality of life here in New Hampshire as well as throughout New England." -Jane A. Difley, President/Forester, **Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests**.
4. "The U.S. Forest Service estimates that by 2050, 60-70% of Rhode Island and Connecticut could be urbanized. We are working hard in Connecticut to stem the relentless development pressure on our imperiled natural resources, but we cannot do it alone; federal collaboration is central to our success." - Amy Paterson, Executive Director of the **Connecticut Land Conservation Council**.
5. "New England's forestlands are mostly privately owned and up for grabs due to escalating development pressure. Federal monies must play a key role in conserving our invaluable forested landscape while we still have this spectacular chance." - Emily Bateson, Conservation Director of **Highstead**; Coordinator of the New England **Wildlands and Woodlands Initiative**.
6. "Forests define the nature of Massachusetts and the region, maintaining clean air and water, wildlife habitat, recreation, and a strong economy. We must halt forest loss and fragmentation to protect the quality of life that makes our communities so attractive and vibrant." - Laura A. Johnson, President of **Mass Audubon**.
7. "Organizations representing New Englanders in recreation, forestry, agriculture, conservation and wildlife have endorsed these policies because of the profound value the forests have for our economy, our health and well-being and our future, as well as the futures of the other species that rely on the forests," said Andrew Finton, director of science and conservation for **The Nature Conservancy in Massachusetts**. "The value of forests in Massachusetts is immense and so is the significance of Congressional support for them."
8. "New England's forests are the backbone of our culture, economy, and well being. Federal matching funds through programs like Forest Legacy and the Community Forest Program will match strong efforts from New England's states and communities to conserve these nationally significant public assets." - Rodger Krussman, Vermont and New Hampshire State Director for The **Trust for Public Land**.

9. “Forest fragmentation is afoot in Vermont because of our proximity to three major metropolitan areas, and the transfer of land associated with an aging population of forestland owners. We have an urgent need for new forest conservation funding, especially to support landscape-scale and community-connected forest protection.” - Gil Livingston, President of **Vermont Land Trust**.