

# Mohawk Trail Woodlands Partnership - August 2017 Update

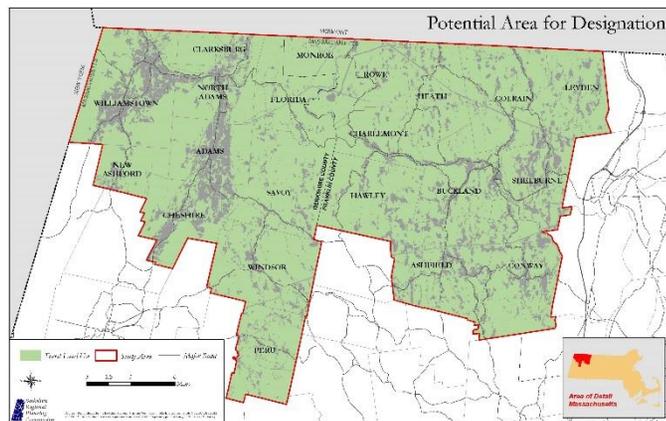
## A Forest-Based Economic Development and Conservation Project



**Purpose:** To bring recognition and additional financial and technical resources to 21 municipalities in northwestern Massachusetts, primarily via special designation by the U.S. Forest Service and the Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs to:

- Increase economic development related to forestry and natural resource based tourism
- Support forest conservation on private lands and use of sustainable forestry practices
- Improve fiscal stability and sustainability of the municipalities

**MTWP Study Area:** The 21-town MTWP area in the northwestern corner of Massachusetts is roughly 82% forested, and encompasses Adams, Cheshire, Clarksburg, Florida, New Ashford, North Adams, Peru (added October 2015), Savoy, Williamstown and Windsor in Berkshire County, and Ashfield, Buckland, Charlemont, Colrain, Conway, Hawley, Heath, Leyden, Monroe, Rowe, and Shelburne in Franklin County.



The woodlands of this area provide a variety of opportunities and benefits. People are drawn to the area for its natural resource-based tourism activities such as hiking, skiing, camping, fishing and snowmobiling. A significant number of people make their living off the

woodlands, whether running recreation-based businesses, cutting and selling firewood off their woodlots, harvesting timber for furniture or flooring, working as foresters or tapping sugar maples and selling maple syrup. Forests provide critical ecological services including water supply recharge and protection, wildlife habitat and diversity, water and air purification, and carbon sequestration.

### MTWP FUNDING PRIORITIES

The MTWP Advisory Committee recommended five (5) programmatic priorities that would be given the greatest level of effort if State funding is secured:

- Forest Based Economic Development
- Forest Land Conservation
- Municipal Financial Sustainability
- Sustainable Forestry Practices
- Natural Resource Based Tourism

### RETURN ON INVESTMENT

In Vermont, the Working Lands Enterprise Initiative (WLEI) has found that for every \$10,000 invested in grants to farm and forest businesses, gross income increased by \$148,237 and 1.23 new jobs are created in the state. Over four years, the initiative has invested \$811,510 in 29 forest businesses, and \$779,281 in forestry related service provider grants. (See <http://workinglands.vermont.gov/> for more information)

According to the Trust for Public Land, every \$1 invested in land protection in MA returns \$4 in economic value to the State's economy through services such as water quality protection, air pollution removal, & stormwater management. An investment of \$3,150,000 over four years to protect approximately 2,100 acres of forest in the MTWP region could translate to a return on investment of roughly \$10,500,000 in natural goods and services over the same time period. (See <http://cloud.tpl.org/pubs/benefits-ma-roi-report.pdf> for more information)

## FROM FORESTS TO BUILDINGS: DEVELOPING CROSS-LAMINATED TIMBER IN NEW ENGLAND

Nicole St. Clair Knobloch from the New England Forestry Foundation (NEFF) presented at the July 11, 2017 MTWP Advisory Committee meeting on the potential for developing cross-laminated timber (CLT) in New England. CLT is an engineered wood product that can replace concrete and steel in larger projects such as schools, apartments, offices, and college buildings.

Only five mills in North America produce CLT, the closest located in Quebec. NEFF's study found that New England could participate in the CLT market, sustainably supporting one or two mills. UMass Amherst is currently testing different wood types such as Hemlock and other local softwood species.

Replacing energy-intensive steel and concrete with sustainably harvested wood avoids GHG emissions and stores carbon sequestered by the trees while growing. The new UMass Amherst Design Building (below) is estimated to store 2,000 tons of CO<sub>2</sub>. (see <https://bct.eco.umass.edu/about-us/the-design-building-at-umass-amherst/> for more information)



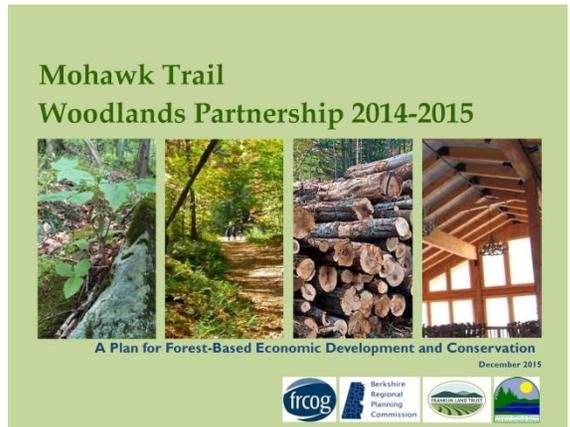
Photo credit: Alex Schreyer / UMass

**Project Background:** Public and stakeholder input about the potential State and Federal designation has been and still is a key component of the Project. **Over 50 community meetings** open to the public have occurred since the start of the project to discuss and shape the project and get feedback. The project team - Franklin Regional Council of Governments (FRCOG), the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission (BRPC) and the Franklin Land Trust (FLT), in partnership with the Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA) – initiated the project in 2013 with regional and town-by-town public outreach sessions. Input from these sessions helped shape the project plan and goals.

A key recommendation from the community meetings was the formation of an Advisory Committee to help oversee the creation of a plan and the specifics of any designation. The **MTWP Advisory Committee** has met regularly since 2014 to craft a project plan, the State legislation, and a draft business plan and governance structure. The Committee is comprised of a representative from 20 of the 21 towns, appointed by the Select Board, and regional appointments representing land conservation, economic development, forestry, and the environment. In 2014, the project team expanded to include a liaison with the U.S. Forest Service.

The final draft of the Mohawk Trail Woodlands Partnership **“Plan for Forest-Based Economic Development and Conservation”** (completed in December 2015, updated in October 2016), was presented at regional meetings and to each of the 21 towns' Select Boards in fall 2015. The plan includes the partnership goals, possible benefits and impacts, a framework for special designation, and potential projects and recommendations.

**View the plan at:** <http://frcog.org/program-services/land-use-planning-zoning/> or <http://berkshireplanning.org/projects/working-forest-conservation-program>



**State and Federal Legislation:** In 2016, project team members met with 20 of the 21 towns to gauge interest in proceeding with a special designation for the region, to be created through State and Federal legislation. To date, 19 towns have provided **letters of support** for proceeding with the State legislation. The Advisory Committee and project team prepared a draft of State legislation that would create the Partnership according to the goals and framework outlined in the plan. The legislation was filed with the Massachusetts legislature in January 2017 by legislators representing the region. If State legislation is passed, each town would have the opportunity to “opt-in” to formally join the Partnership via a vote of the Select Board or Town Meeting. If enough of the 21-towns opt-in, Federal legislation would be pursued that would be based on the State legislation.

**Funding and Business Model:** By creating a special designation, the MTWP could then receive State and Federal funding to support the goals of the partnership. The proposed initial funding request of \$30 million assumes a total Federal contribution over 4 years of \$24 million and a State contribution over the same timeframe of \$6 million. The intent of the proposed business model for the MTWP is to create a financial structure that can be **self-sustaining** over the long term. The bulk of the initial funding received would be used to establish and capitalize an “Investment Trust Fund” which would generate sufficient income by Year 5 to sustain key elements of the program over the long term. After the initial appropriations, funding via grants, donations and other income generating activities would be more heavily relied on to supplement programmatic activities.

Other proposed expenditures if funding is received are:

1. Design, construction and operation of the Mohawk Trail Forestry Center, a multi-purpose facility that would provide: a.) tourism services; b.) technical assistance to private forest landowners and businesses to implement sustainable forestry practices; c.) opportunities for research and development to address climate change, invasive species or to develop new wood based products; d.) a marketing program and gallery to promote the sale of local wood products; and e.) public education about the ecological benefits of forest management.

## MTWP STATE LEGISLATION STATUS

With letters of support from 19 of the 21 towns, State legislation was filed by our legislative delegation in January 2017 to create a Special Designation of the 21-Town region. The legislation was assigned to the Environment, Natural Resources, and Agricultural Committee, which is currently being re-organized following the recent passing of Rep. Cariddi (D. North Adams), who co-chaired the committee. A public hearing on the legislation is expected to take place this fall.

## FOREST CARBON MARKET OPPORTUNITES FOR THE MTWP REGION

At the July 11, 2017 MTWP Advisory Committee meeting, members heard from Bill Van Doren, Senior Scientist & Lead Biometrician at Spatial Informatics Group (SIG) about forest carbon markets for MA landowners. Van Doren explained the two types of carbon markets – compliance and voluntary – and how carbon credits are determined for a parcel of land. Selling carbon credits provides annual income to a forest landowner.

A minimum of 1,000 acres of forest under single ownership, or 5,000 acres under multiple ownerships, is recommended. In the MTWP region, aggregation of multiple landowners is likely necessary to take advantage of carbon markets. SIG is currently working with the cities of Holyoke, West Springfield, and Springfield on a carbon market project, with funding from the Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs.

## SIGNIFICANT ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The MTWP has leveraged these grants:

**Regional Conservation Partnership Program** (US Department of Agriculture): In January 2015, Massachusetts DCR in partnership with the Franklin Land Trust was awarded \$637,860 to support communities in the region and local landowners by helping to integrate sustainable forestry, enhanced wildlife habitat and renewable energy.

**Voluntary Public Access/Habitat Improvement Program** (US Department of Agriculture): In September 2015, Massachusetts DCR in partnership with the Franklin Land Trust was awarded \$836,000 to offer incentives to private landowners in the MTWP region who are implementing wildlife habitat projects, to open their land to the public for fishing, hunting and wildlife viewing.

**Massachusetts Department of Energy Resources** (DOER): DOER has engaged the UMASS Clean Energy Extension (CEE) to conduct a study of the economic feasibility and potential air quality impacts of energy efficient wood heat. This study will provide important information to any town considering converting from oil to energy efficient wood heat.

## UPCOMING ACTIVITIES

Next MTWP Advisory Committee meeting: October (date TBD) in Charlemont at the Berkshire East Ski Lodge

2. Protection of approximately 2,100 acres of forest land via conservation restrictions with willing landowners with land remaining in private ownership and on the tax rolls.
3. Capitalization of a Revolving Loan Fund to support forestry and natural resource based businesses.
4. Creation of a Forest Viability Program with grants provided to forest-based businesses in exchange for a temporary restriction on forest land.
5. Establishment of “Municipal Cooperative Agreements” that provide annual grants to participating towns to support municipal services or operations related to the goals of the Partnership such as road maintenance or emergency response related to tourism.
6. Grants or technical assistance to private landowners to prepare forest management plans and implement recommendations.
7. Grants for natural resource-based recreational development or promotion.

**Decision Making:** Currently this effort is under the direction of the MTWP Advisory Committee. If the program moves forward, a long-term “governance” structure would be responsible for making key decisions and implementing the plan. The proposed governance structure contains two key elements: a decision making body responsible for higher level policy and programmatic decisions; and a non-profit organization responsible for the day-to-day administrative, financial and implementation activities. Annual budget and funding decisions for the programmatic priorities would be determined by the “decision making body” which would have town representation to **ensure a strong local voice.**

The non-profit would be staffed by an Executive Director and an Administrative Assistant. As proposed, the staff would also be supported by at least one (1) high level staff person from the U.S. Forest Service that ideally would be located at the Mohawk Trail Forestry Center. This staff person’s salary could be funded by the U.S. Forest Service and they would coordinate services and technical assistance with the Executive Director. The U.S. Forest Service could also partner with the State, a Town or a private landowner to establish a “Demonstration Forest” for sustainable forest management practices that would be open to the public.