

The Forest Speaks

News from the Windham town forest

The Town of Windham has been lucky to have a dedicated group of residents be part of our Conservation Commission over the years. These volunteers have worked hard to acquire, retain and maintain open space in a town with tremendous development pressure. In 2012, the Conservation Commission hired a NH licensed forester to develop a Forest Stewardship Plan for a collection of conservation parcels in the southeast part of town off Osgood and Bayberry Roads. This 10 year plan addresses the town's interest in a multiple use concept for this property. This concept includes recreation, wildlife habitat, soil and water conservation, and sound long term sustainable timber management. Last March, the residents of Windham voted to change the designation of this collection of land (sometimes referred to as the South-Eastern Properties) to "town forest", under NH state statute RSA 31:110. Designating this property as town forest, and creating a Forestry Committee was part of the implementation of this town vote.

The Windham Forestry Committee has been hard at work preparing for a planned timber harvest in 2015. Responsible timber harvesting encourages the growth of quality trees that remain after the harvest as well as the establishment and or release of tree regeneration, in order to grow tomorrow's forest beneath the forest of today.

Forest management can also be beneficial to wildlife in that harvesting has the potential to address habitat needs for specific species, increase food from sprouting trees and sun loving berry bushes, as well as provide low cover for wildlife as the seedling trees develop into saplings. Harvesting can also aid wildlife by protecting or encouraging trees that are sources of food such as oaks, or shelter such as hemlock or standing dead trees favored by cavity nesting birds and animals. Diversity is encouraged by utilizing proper forest management practices. This property sits among neighboring properties that are conserved either by the state or others, and helps to provide a large contiguous area of wildlife habitat.

One of the many benefits that can be derived from long term sustained yield forestry is the generation of periodic revenue from timber harvests. Revenue generated from the sale of timber products will be placed into a new town Forestry Fund and allowed to accumulate year to year. This fund will provide for town forest management and property improvements as directed by future town votes. Some of the projects we hope to consider are to create informational kiosks at trail heads, improve non-motorized trail access, improve wildlife habitats, and identify historic structures on the property. These improvements will create an opportunity for the public to explore and enjoy some of the interesting historic and natural features on this property.