Initiative: Forest Conservation

Project Leader: Paul Catanzaro

Project Overview

Sixty-two percent of Massachusetts is forested. A large majority (79%) of Massachusetts forests are privately owned. Most landowners enjoy their woodlots on a daily basis without much forethought about their land until something triggers a decision about its management or future. These decisions are often made reactively without the benefit of knowing their full range of options. When these decisions arise, landowners often turn to trusted family, friends, and neighbors for advice. The goal of the Forest Conservation project is to put into place in each community the people that can deliver accurate information at crucial decision making times. The separate initiatives associated with this project are based on:

Grant funded applied research - Research to inform the critical issues on which we focus, the project outputs we produce, and to quantify the impacts we achieve.

Social Networks - Enhancement of social networks to inform landowner decisions.

Technology - Utilize the internet and other technologies to reach landowners and to facilitate their information sharing.

Forest Resources Management - Provide research based information to protect and restore forest resources while providing forest products, including ecosystem services.

Activity Summary – 2014

- Keystone Activity Survey(1)
- Keystone Annual Training(1)
- Keystone e-newsletter and list serve

Total Educational Contacts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adult Contacts</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In Person</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indirect</td>
<td>475</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Keystone: Important People Making the Conservation Difference

Natural resource professionals cannot assume that landowners consider them the most credible source of information when making a decision about their land. In fact, research shows that when landowners need to make a decision about their land, they turn to trusted friends and neighbors for information and to hear their experiences.

In ecology, a keystone species is one whose impacts on its environment are larger and greater than would be expected from one species. The Keystone Project invests education and reference materials in important, keystone people, community opinion leaders such as large landowners and members of municipal board members, watershed associations, and land trusts. Keystone trains those people that landowners naturally turn to for information.

The goal of Keystone is to put into place in each community the people that can be a local source of information to landowners, communities, and organizations, those shaping the future of our landscapes one decision at a time. Graduates of the project, called cooperators, make a significant conservation difference at the local level by transferring information and ideas to landowners and decision-makers.

The training covers subjects such as forest ecology and management, wildlife management, land protection, and community outreach. In exchange for the training and take-home resources, graduates of the program agree to return to their communities and volunteer at least 30-hours of their time towards projects that promote forest and wildlife conservation.

Cooperators also become a part of a statewide network, available to help each other and acting as a local contact for UMass outreach programs and resources. The Keystone Project, originally called Coverts, was started in 1988. Since then, 425 community leaders have been trained. For more information about Keystone, visit: http://masskeystone.net/.

This year, we completed an evaluation of the impact of Keystone cooperators over a 12-month period. Highlights of this survey include the following efforts of our Keystone Cooperator network:

- Estimate Cooperator retention rate: 87%. Once trained, most cooperators continue to participate.
- Keystone Cooperators own or are involved with the management decisions on 143,840 total acres of land.
- Keystone Cooperators made contact with 15,033 people about forest conservation.
- Keystone Cooperators made 1,742 referrals to conservation information resources. Referrals to land trusts, government programs, private foresters, and public foresters were most common.
- Keystone Cooperators contributed 44,636 hours to conservation-related activities, 63% of which were volunteer hours.
- Keystone Cooperator activity is equivalent to >22 full-time conservation positions, of which nearly 14 positions were volunteer.
• Keystone Cooperator activities most influenced by the Keystone Project (50+% total hours influenced by Keystone Project) included planning educational events for woodland owners (92%), harvesting timber on land with which they are involved (86%), referring woodland owners to other sources of information resources (83%), providing information to media about forest conservation (76%), distributing forest conservation information (75%), doing other types of conservation work (e.g. NEFF) (62%), improving timber stands (56%), and conducting watershed-related activities (56%).

Collaborating Organizations

• Mount Grace Land Conservancy
• Franklin Land Trust
• MA Dept. of Conservation and Recreation
• U.S.D.A. Forest Service