Title: Forest Conservation

Leader: Paul Catanzaro

Overview

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. 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. 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. The Forest Conservation project utilizes a variety of methods to inform and educate landowners of their options:

- **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.

**Project: MASSWoods.net**

Everyone is on the internet. It represents an enormous opportunity to efficiently inform the decisions of landowners. However, it is critical to learn how to be both efficient and effective. The Forest Conservation program has been working for several years on internet based outreach projects, including our main website MassWoods.net. We continue to work on ways to connect people to resources and resource professionals. This past year we developed a poster to market MassWoods and mailed it to each town, land trust and Keystone Cooperator in the state. In addition, we launched a Facebook page. All the positive impact measures of website activity are up from last year, likely due to increased marketing efforts of the poster and Facebook page.

Information and forms are available on the website for The Massachusetts Ch. 61 current use tax programs. These programs offer a property tax reduction to those landowners willing to commit to
keeping some or all of their land undeveloped for a specified period of time. The reduced property taxes are given in recognition of the essential benefits these private lands provide the public, including clean water, wildlife habitat, scenic character, wood products, food, and outdoor recreation. Undeveloped land also uses fewer town services (e.g., schools, emergency services) than other land uses (e.g., residential). The Chapter 61 programs can be very effective tools for helping to maintain the public benefits we rely on while helping landowners meet their ownership goals. However, not all landowners know about the Ch. 61 programs and those that do often need more information to make a decision that is right for them. In addition, these programs can also be the source of confusion and misinformation for both landowners and communities.

**Activity Summary**

- MassWoods e-newsletter (4)
- MassWoods Listing Survey - survey foresters and land trusts to see if they wanted to continue to be listed on the site and to verify their coverage and contact information. (1)
- Website Updates and Maintenance (20)

**Total educational contacts**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adult Contacts</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In Person</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indirect Contacts (Print, Web, etc...)</td>
<td>17599</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Narrative Summary and Impact**

The Forest Conservation program has been working for several years on internet based outreach projects, including our main website MassWoods.net. We continue to work on ways to connect people to resources and resource professionals.

This past year we developed a poster to market MassWoods and mailed it to each town, land trust and Keystone Cooperator in the state. In addition, we launched a Facebook page. All the positive impact measures of website activity are up from last year, likely due to increased marketing efforts of the poster and Facebook page.

This year we were awarded a 4-year, $500,000 grant for an integrated research/extension proposal through USDA NIFA. This is a multi-state effort. Family forest lands provide tremendous amounts of wood products and ecosystem services in the U.S, particularly in the northeast where 52% of the land is held by family forest owners (FFOs). Due to an aging landowner population, in the coming years, almost half of the FFOs in the U.S. will be deciding the future of their land (i.e., convert to another use, parcelize, conserve). These decisions will be the most important determinants of the viability of working forests, because forest cover loss and parcel size reductions eliminate or lessen forest management opportunities. Stabilizing the forest land base by stemming the tide of conversion and parcelization is critical to ensuring a future of viable and competitive working forested landscapes.

**Collaborating Organizations**

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