### Title: 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 Forest Conservation project is composed of related initiatives that rely on a combination of the following elements:

## 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 - Utilizing the internet and other technologies to reach landowners and to facilitate information sharing

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

## Activity Summary - 2012

* Conservation Awareness Index journal article (1)
* Journal Article from integrated Mac-Stennis biomass availability project (2)
* Journal article from integrated Mac-Stennis project on landowner attitudes towards carbon markets (1)
* Journal article on the effect of taxes on family forest owners (1)
* Keystone Activity Survey (2)
* Keystone Refresher Courses (1)
* Workshop Series: " Your Land, Your Legacy" (12)
* Keystone Annual Training (2)
* Keystone e-newsletter and list serve (15)
* Quarterly Stumpage Price Survey (1)
* **MassWoods** Website Updates and Maintenance (1)
* Instructor for Forest Ecology and Conservation - Fall, 2011 (1)
* Instructor for Inventory of Local Lands - Spring, 2012 (1)
* Serve on graduate (Master’s Degree) committees (2)

### *Educational contacts*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Adult Contacts | Youth Contacts |
| In Person | 97 | 0 |
| Indirect Contacts (Print, Web, etc…)  | 16,488 | 0 |

## Narrative Summary - 2012

***Your Land, Your Legacy: Deciding the Future of Your Land -*** Forests cover over 60% of Massachusetts. The vast majority of those forests - over 70% - are owned by private families and individuals. The average age of the “family forest” owners is over 60 years old. In the coming years, the future of our forested landscapes will be determined as this aging population decides what to do with their land. Their decisions will not only have a profound influence on the benefits their land provides their family, but also on the tremendous public benefits this land provides. The Forest Conservation program, in partnership with Mount Grace Land Conservancy and The Trustees of Reservation, has been involved in a 4-year initiative to help family forest owners make informed decisions about the future of their land, decisions that will meet the needs of their family and the commonwealth. The foundation of this initiative has been the development of the “Your Land, Your Legacy” publication which has served as the cornerstone for workshops, webinars, and web-based outreach.

***Landowner Research to Inform Critical Issues -*** The Forest Conservation program is a founding partner in the Family Forest Research Center (FFRC) (<http://www.familyforestresearchcenter.org/>), a partnership of UMass Amherst and USDA Forest Service. One of the goals of FFRC is to help inform policy decisions. FFRC has had a productive year, investigating critical questions facing the commonwealth and nation as a whole. Current projects include an evaluation of the USDA Forest Service Forest Stewardship Program.

***Internet Based Outreach –*** While the internet represents an enormous opportunity to efficiently inform the decisions of landowners, 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.

***Keystone: Important People Making the Conservation Difference -*** Natural resource professionals cannot assume that they are the most credible source of information for landowners who are making decisions about their land. Research shows that when landowners need to make decisions 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 directs education and reference materials towards **keystone individuals;** community opinion leaders, large landowners, and members of municipal boards, watershed associations, and land trusts. Keystone trains those people who 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 that acts 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. More information is at: <http://masskeystone.net/>. In 2011, 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:

* Volunteered hours: 21,147 (10.5 FTE)
* Work hours: 16,067 (8 FTE)
* Total hours contributed: 37,214 (**18.5 FTE**)
* Average number of years since training **>10**!
* Number of referrals to professionals and information sources: 1,536
* Top activities: Land Trust, Conservation Commission, Trails , Watershed Assoc., Conserve land of another, Wildlife enhancement

###  Collaborating Organizations

* Mount Grace Land Conservancy
* The Trustees of Reservation
* USDA Forest Service