

FY23 Forest Conservation Extension Activities and Outcomes

Status: NIFA REVIEW

Project Director

Paul Catanzaro

Organization Project Number

Accession Number

7002101

Start & End Date

10/01/2020

Organization

University of Massachusetts

To Project / Program

"Forest Conservation"

Primary Critical Issue

Environmental Stewardship

Fiscal Year

2023

In 2-3 sentences, briefly describe the issue or problem that your project addresses.

Conservation-based Estate Planning Outreach for Landowners There are over approximately 50,000 family forest owners (FFOs) who own 10 or more acres of land, living in 351 communities across Massachusetts. I am charged with increasing forest conservation by informing the decisions of these FFOs who collectively own 70% of our forests. I have a 9-month appointment with a 50% extension allocation. That translates into .4 FTE dedicated to reaching the many FFOs deciding the future of our landscapes. In order to effectively inform these decisions in my limited time, I focus on research-based outreach strategies that can amplify my efforts, productive partnerships, and strategic critical issues.

Keystone Project - www.MassKeystone.net - Respected friends and neighbors are often cited by landowners in research as the most important source of information about their forest conservation decisions. Peer-to-peer learning is therefore an effective way to amplify my outreach efforts by providing the information people need in the hands of those they naturally turn to for information. The Keystone Project invests education and reference materials in important, keystone people, such as large landowners, members of municipal board members, watershed associations, and land trusts. See attached list of those trained this year. There is a competitive application process (60-80 applications a year for 20-25 spots) that allows us to choose those people with the highest likelihood of informing decisions, such as those who are involved in multiple organizations and a history of community activism.

Forest Resiliency- We are now facing an uncertain future, in which our forests will encounter many challenges, including land conversion, invasive plants, insects, and diseases, heavy deer browse, and climate change. Though our forests are resilient, they also have characteristics that make them vulnerable to these stressors to varying degrees. While there is uncertainty as to how our forests will react to these stressors, we can be confident that our forests will change. It is possible to increase the resiliency of forests to current and future stressors by increasing the characteristics not currently a part of your forest that will make them more resilient.

www.Masswoods.org - Surveys confirm that landowners often turn to the internet for information about their land. It is an efficient tool that allows landowners to find information at their convenience, when they need to make a decision. The internet also offers the opportunity to develop tools to help landowner find people and information they need and therefore helps me, in my limited capacity, amplify my efforts. Launched in 2005, MassWoods.net is a dynamic website which strives to inform landowner decisions. In addition to serving as a resource, the site features a contact database listing land trusts, professional foresters, and estate planning professionals working in every town in the state and also includes on-line calculators that help landowners determine their property taxes under the state's current use tax program. The site also features case studies highlighting landowners conserving their land as a way to further use peer learning. The website is enhanced by a 'Constant Contact' e-newsletter and Facebook page that help market the site.

Briefly describe in non-technical terms how your major activities helped you achieve, or make significant progress toward,

the goals and objectives described in your non-technical summary.

- Facilitated a donation of \$2,000,000 in land and assets from long-time participants in our forestry extension programs to provide support for the UMass Forest Conservation Extension program and the Forestry Ecology and Conservation concentration.
- Awarded \$120,000 grant from the MA DCR for conservation-based estate planning outreach.
- Authored a new outreach publication with Indigenous partners: Managing New England Forests Threatened by Emerald Ash Borer
- Organized and delivered the 3-day Keystone Project for the first-time since Covid, training 25 community opinion leaders from across the state. In total, this year's class owned 2,345 acres and is involved in the stewardship of 56,674. Participants rated the training an average score of 9.6 out of 10.
- Conducted 8 outreach events/programs in support of our recent Restoring Old-Growth Characteristics publication, reaching more than 1,000 landowners and foresters who report making decisions on more than 31,000,000 acres. Distributed more than 5,000 copies of the publication around the country. 1,888 visits to the Restoring Old-Growth Characteristics page on www.MassWoods.org.
- Organized and delivered a 6-part webinar series which reached 177 landowners owning a combined 5,888 acres through our Conservation-based estate planning webinar series. An additional 976 landowners owning an estimated 39,000 acres have viewed the recordings.
- Reached 345 members of an Open Space Committee or volunteer land trust through our annual Open Space Network conference, a 25% increase in attendance from 2022. There have been >400 views of the recorded webinars. Distributed more than \$15,000 in small grants to support their outreach efforts.
- Grew our Women on the Land network through a book club, forest resilience webinar & field day, and a Mother's Day wildflower walk.

Briefly describe how your target audience benefited from your project's activities.

Facilitated a donation of 2,000,000 in land and assets from the Benoit family, long time participants in our forestry extension programs, to endow the benoit Forestry Management Fund which will provide support to the UMASS Forest conservation Extension program and the Forest ecology and conservation concentration

We received 120,000 contract from the MA Department of Conservation and Recreation through the Working Forests Initiative to develop and deliver conservation-based estate planning programs to MA landowners.

We organized and delivered a 6-part webinar series entitled: Moving from Planning to Action. we purchased landowner data and direct mailed postcards to 5000 of the largest landowners in Massachusetts. To help landowners move to action, we not only offered three webinars of information delivery, but we also offered three webinars in which landowners were allowed to ask questions about their specific questions to professionals and share their experiences with the other landowners. The participants voiced numerous times that they very much liked this format and the informal and supportive nature of these sessions. Below are tables with a summary of the webinar series. An additional 976 people owning an estimated 39,000 additional acres have watched the webinars posted on MassWoods.org

For the first time since the pandemic, we organized and delivered our first Keystone training in three years. The content of the training included: land use history, forest ecology, wildlife management, forest management, land protection, invasive plants, invasive insects, climate change and carbon, Ch. 61 programs, and outreach strategies. We identified landowners and community opinion leaders from around the state and trained them at Harvard Forest.

Briefly describe how the broader public benefited from your project's activities.

My work on conservation-based estate planning outreach provides fertile ground for the development of a robust research program investigating how families make decisions about their land. The work of this initiative is having national impact as other states use my work as a model for the development of their programs.

The Massachusetts Open Space Network consists of municipal Open Space Committee members, volunteers, and others involved in community-based conservation planning and projects. We have organized an annual conference for this network for more than five years. This year's conference included a total of five webinars to provide resources, project inspiration, and peer advice that volunteers can apply to conservation efforts in their communities. This year's webinars were: Open Space and Recreation Plans, from Writing to Action, Tips and Tools for Landowner Outreach. Land Conservation and Restoration Initiatives for Climate Resilience and BioMap, the Latest and Greatest

On November 16th, the Open Space Network held an Economic Benefits of Open Space to Massachusetts Communities webinar with Robb Johnson, the Executive Director of the Massachusetts Land Trust Coalition (MassLand), and Christa Collins, the former Director of Land Protection at the Sudbury Valley Trustees. Robb and Christa provided an overview of a free toolkit available from MassLand that can be tailored

to help communicate the various benefits that open space and land conservation can provide. 63 people attended the webinar. The recording of the webinar has received >60 views. We received positive feedback on this webinar, including “Great to have the webinar and tool kit to get folks thinking about this underappreciated but important topic”.

Neighborhood Outreach Small Grant Program – Landowner decisions are often informed by the advice and stories of friends and neighbors. This program solicits proposals to implement “neighborhood-based outreach” to landowners on conservation-based estate planning, including land protection options. The goal of this project is to use social networks to help inform landowner decisions about the future of their land. Ideal proposals identify a critical neighborhood in Massachusetts and reach the landowners within it through a combination of neighborhood scale outreach activities that lead to landowners taking a specific action to plan the future of their land. The location and size of the “neighborhood” are up to the applicant, but should strive to create and utilize relationships among landowners in a defined area. Applicants also need to justify the ecological value of their neighborhood.

This year, we awarded four grants totaling \$12,854 to the Princeton Open Space Committee, the Southampton Open Space Committee, the Provincetown Conservation Trust, and the Town of Franklin Conservation Department

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In exchange for the training and take-home resources, graduates of the program, called Cooperators, agree to return to their communities and volunteer at least 30-hours of their time towards projects that promote forest and wildlife conservation. Cooperators have an intimate knowledge of the local interests, issues and the people within the community and therefore are in the best position to move conservation forward. Cooperators also become a part of a statewide network, available to help each other and acting as a local contact for setting up and marketing UMass outreach programs and resources. This model has evolved over the 30 years of its existence and, based on most recent evaluation results below, has shown itself to be a very effective initiative.

Restoring Old-growth Characteristics: Old growth forests covered 90% of the land area of New England, but now occupies <.1%. Although old growth forests cannot be recreated, there are both passive and active strategies to restore old-growth characteristics to our current ecologically young second growth forests. The structural complexity of those forests with old-growth characteristics provide many wildlife and carbon storage benefits and also increases forest resiliency.

Managing Northeast Forests Threatened by Emerald Ash Borer: I wrote an outreach publication in collaboration with a regional team of forest researchers and practitioners, which includes indigenous partners, to integrate both traditional ecological knowledge and western science to promote the preservation of ash from emerald ash borer for both its cultural and ecological values. The publication was recently printed. To date more than 2,000 copies have been distributed to my partners. The publication has been marketed on MassWoods.org. I plan to direct mail the publication to foresters and land trusts in MA. I envision it as the basis for an outreach effort.

Comments (optional)

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- Grew our Women on the Land network through a book club (21 participants), forest resilience webinar (30 participants) & field day, and a Mother's Day wildflower walk. (30 participants)
- Land Conservation Networking mini-grants - Conservation in Massachusetts is often fueled by the energy, persistence, and care of local community members. In recognition that many land conservation projects require partnerships among community leaders and other conservation partners, this year we piloted a mini grant program focused on creating intentional opportunities for networking and relationship-building. Ideal proposals aim to bring together people from a shared geography to build or strengthen relationships in service of community conservation.

This year, we awarded two grants totaling \$2,600. The grants were awarded to the Town of Franklin Conservation Department and the Hilltown Land Trust

- Open Space Network (OSN): To help provide a common resource and an identity for the OSN, we developed a website: <https://www.massopenspace.org/>.

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Acres Owned: 2,345

Acres Involved: 56,674

Total Acres Impacted: 59,019

Article in the Forestry Source, national newspaper for the Society of American Foresters: https://eforester.org/Main/SAF_News/2023/New-Outreach-Publication-on-Restoring-Old-Growth-Forest-Conditions.aspx

Cornell Webinar Series – 270 attendees who report managing 31,733,526 acres, >450 views of the recording

MA Legislators breakfast presentation – Forest and Wildlife Panel Discussion

MA Association of Conservation Commissions annual conference presentation

MA Land Conservation Conference presentation

Yankee Division Field Day field tour

U.S. Sustainability Alliance podcast: This is U.S. Sustainability:

<https://thisussustainability.podbean.com/e/e7-forests-and-their-role-as-a-natural-climate-solution> CT Department of Energy and

Environmental Protection presentation and advised on state definition of old growth forest and mature forest

More than 5,000 copies of the publication have been distributed around the country

1,882 visits to the

MassWoods Restoring Old-Growth Characteristics webpage