

Protecting Our Forests

Forest conversion and fragmentation continue at a rapid pace. Loss of forested areas poses a growing threat to the integrity of the nation's natural resources. Experts predict that at current rates, New England will lose 1.2 million acres of forest by 2060, along with 19% of its climate change fighting carbon storage capacity. In New Hampshire, over 100,000 residents and 36,000 children live further than a 10-minute drive to a conserved natural area – underscoring the tenuous foundation of our state's outdoor way of life. We need a generational investment in natural climate solutions and outdoor access for all, chief among them forest conservation, to provide a sustainable future—both ecologically and economically—for New Hampshire.

We recently joined Sen. Jeanne Shaheen to celebrate the newly protected Mink Brook Community Forest in Hanover and to highlight the critical forest conservation investments she is fighting for now in Washington, DC.

Congress is currently considering a substantial investment in forest conservation that would support our state's forest-based economy, create jobs, and address climate change. We were glad to see the pending Build Back Better reconciliation bill include a \$1.25 billion investment in the Forest Legacy Program, which helps states and private forest owners maintain working forests, as well as \$100 million for the Community Forest Program, which was the key to protecting Mink Brook.

Both the Forest Legacy Program and the Community Forest Program have been vital tools to help keep New Hampshire's forests as forests. The Forest Legacy Program has conserved nearly 274,000 acres across the state, leveraging \$50.4M in federal funds for a total investment of \$75.6M to protect places like Thirteen Mile Woods, Beebe River Uplands, Moose Mountain, Cardigan Highlands, and the Mahoosuc Gateway. Likewise, the Community Forest Program has helped to establish town forests like the Gorham Town Forest, the Page Pond Community Forest in Meredith, and the Milan Community Forest.

What is also important about these programs is that they bolster efforts at the local level to conserve these special places. In Hanover, for example, that means protecting an arc of green space around downtown that will serve as a wildlife corridor, clean safe drinking water source, carbon sink, and much-needed recreational resource for a growing population—all while allowing the building of additional workforce housing within just a few miles of some of the state's largest employers. This project represents the best of what conservation can do, bringing people together to develop innovative solutions with public, private and nonprofit support and financing.

We know from first-hand experience New Hampshire is feeling the far-reaching impacts of climate change and the global nature crisis. Winter temperatures are rising and snowfall totals are dropping, while many species of wildlife are shifting their ranges further to the north and higher in elevation if they can, or are threatened with extinction if they cannot. A [USDA Forest Service report](#) predicts that within the next several decades the Northeastern United States will

have a greater upward change in the yearly minimum temperatures than the rest of the country. This same report predicts the increase in summer heat will be most profound in the Northeast and Midwestern United States and that 50% of northeastern lands will see significant increases in drought.

Given the rapid pace of these changes and the scale of forest conversion, now is the time to invest in forest protection before it is too late. New Hampshire's Congressional delegation have been consistent champions of forest conservation, and Sen. Shaheen has stepped up as a bold leader to push for natural climate solutions to be included in the reconciliation bill. We hope that Congressional Leadership will follow her lead, and rally around these pragmatic, locally driven solutions to a growing global crisis in the final reconciliation package.

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