



Western Massachusetts residents deeply appreciate and understand the value of our forests, whether for timber, tourism, the support of wildlife, or combatting climate change. As conservation organizations, we are increasingly concerned about the growing trend of forest loss not just in Massachusetts, but across New England and are looking for solutions that are supported by and benefit local communities.

The Mohawk Trail Woodlands Partnership (MTWP) is a homegrown, grassroots effort to preserve our region's forests while addressing many of our region's economic challenges. By linking land conservation, recreational tourism, and sustainable forestry around a common goal of forest protection, we will be able to protect existing wild reserves, which cannot be logged, *and* working forests, which can provide the economic, social and ecological benefits associated with sustainably managed woodlands.

Public funding for conservation has decreased in recent years, while at the same time local communities are expressing concern over the fiscal challenges that emerge when land is conserved and no longer generating tax revenue. Private landowners, who own around 70 percent of the undeveloped, unprotected land in Massachusetts, may be forced to sell their land if they cannot use it to generate income. And hundreds of local businesses, who rely on the forests and the tourists they attract, lack a coordinated marketing effort to capitalize on the region's potential as a major recreational destination.

The MTWP heard from communities at over 60 public meetings with input from local leaders, landowners, environmentalists, foresters and farmers. Unpaid volunteers from 20 towns in Franklin and Berkshire counties carefully and patiently shaped this process, and developed strategies to help achieve community goals. As a result, this partnership would provide much needed funding and assistance to local private forest landowners and to our municipalities. This approach would *protect* our forests while keeping the local forest economy in the hands of local families and businesses. It would also strengthen regional partnerships to help conserve and enhance the benefits that our region's forests provide while adding economic value to our region through focused research, financial assistance, and business support.

In order for the MTWP to proceed, authorizing legislation must be passed in our state legislature, which would establish the MTWP governing body, its purposes, and trust fund. The MTWP communities have been working diligently with Representative Steve Kulik, the chief sponsor of the MTWP legislation, and Representative Smitty Pignatelli and Senator Anne Gobi, the co-Chairs of the Joint Committee on Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture, which is currently considering the bill.

The Mohawk Trail Woodlands Partnership represents an innovative and collaborative approach that fits the needs of the communities we serve. Our conservation community will continue to work together to help meet the economic, social, and ecological challenges and goals of our region in the coming century.

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