



TRUST FOR
PUBLIC
LAND™



Town Hall in the Woods: Community Forest Program

Town-owned forests are a centuries-old tradition in New England and predated by Indigenous cooperative land management. Town forests were managed for timber production or for firewood to heat residents' homes; and a few forests were managed to promote recreation, shelter wildlife, and safeguard drinking water. Today, due to changes in land ownership and rising interest in protecting forests for community and climate benefit, the traditional town forest is being reinvented as the community forest, a 21st-century model for protecting local woodlands across America.

What makes a community forest?

- Community-driven planning, use, and management.
- Economic benefits flow to the local community.
- Permanent protection of the land.

A Community Investment Strategy

Trust for Public Land is leading this growing movement to reconnect communities to the forests that define and sustain them. Community forests provide an intimate yet powerful conservation strategy that protects economic, natural, and recreational resources while empowering communities to own and manage the forested landscapes that surround them by pairing local institutions like town government and community-based organizations with land stewardship.

Community forests can play a key role in strengthening forest-based economies by providing a source of timber-related jobs and municipal income. Moreover, these forests offer close-to-home hiking, biking, hunting, and other outdoor recreation. By incorporating the tradition of town-owned forests and common lands, the modern community forest addresses today's concerns like forest loss from development and the need for rural communities to have a voice in deciding competing uses of the forest.

How it Works

Protect

We work with communities to acquire land important to them, by securing a property under contract, working with the town and local volunteers to raise the public and private funds necessary, and solving any legal or environmental issues. We also engage residents in a facilitated planning process to develop land management plans that are responsive to local needs. By convening a diverse committee—hikers, business owners, teachers, foresters, and elected officials—we help the community create a plan that reflects local priorities.

Advocate

Trust for Public Land spearheads a national coalition focused on growing Community Forests nationwide. We helped convince Congress to establish a dedicated source of funding, and over the past decade, the program has created over 113 community forests in 29 states, leveraging more than \$54 million in additional investment.

Our vision

In New England, we aim to empower residents to cooperatively manage close to home natural areas, for rural prosperity, civic engagement, and local environmental solutions. In doing so, we'll create an enduring connection to the outdoors, for all.

Accomplishments

Our Community Forest Program helps communities reconnect their residents to the woods and to one another, by:

- Promoting dedicated federal funding through the creation of the USDA Community Forest Program
- Establishing or expanding thirty-two community forests in Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine, totaling 37,399 acres.

These local forests are now permanently protected for the enjoyment and benefit of future generations. Our work has benefitted tens of thousands of people by providing jobs, protecting drinking water and wildlife habitat, and creating public access to the outdoors.



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