

Vermont's Town Forest Centennial Summary Sheet

Vermont town forests make our communities better!



Photo credit: Jerry and Marcy Monkman

This year we mark 100 years since the 1915 legislation enabling the creation of town forests in Vermont was enacted. To recognize Vermont's long and proud tradition of towns owning and managing their own forests for public benefit, the Town Forest Centennial Planning Committee has been planning a year-long celebration of Vermont's Town Forests.

What is Vermont's 1915 Municipal Forest Act?

The Act enabled Vermont towns to purchase lands for growing wood and timber and designate them as school endowment forests. Parcels had to be at least 40 acres in size and examined by the state forester to determine whether the land was suitable. The state forester was given authorization to manage the forests and annually sell 150,000 tree seedlings to each forest through the state nursery. The task of protecting the forest was given to the town fire warden who was compensated by the town for his/her services at the same pay rate as forest fires. The Act was amended in 1917 to authorize towns to purchase lands, designating them as municipal forests, to grow wood and produce timber.

What is a town forest?

Vermont town forests comprise diverse parcels. These are known locally as watershed forests, community forests, school forests, town conservation areas, and town parks.

How many town forests are there in Vermont?

Consider that there are 349 town forests in Vermont owned by 168 municipalities that totals 67,000+ acres of Vermont forestland!

Why should every town have a town forest?

Because town forests make our communities a better place to live, work, and play! They provide a wide array of benefits to the people of Vermont:

- Clean air and water
- Open space for recreation
- Healthy habitats for hunting and fishing
- Support of local economies, generating income through timber and other forest products, recreation, and tourism
- Natural outdoor classrooms



Photo credit: Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation

Are town forests protected or conserved?

Seventy-nine percent (53,826 acres) of Vermont town forests have no additional protection for long-term conservation, which means that these lands in theory could be sold and/or converted to other uses. All Vermont communities have the potential to own a town forest, and to do so, will need partners, local officials, and residents to participate in their creation, protection, and management.

What resources are available to assist communities in creating new or managing existing town forests?

Town forests require active care on the part of community leaders, forest users, partners, and all Vermonters. *The health of Vermont's town forests relies on balancing many uses and benefits.* Instituting a management plan can help balance such uses within a town forest. Currently 48% of municipal forestlands have some form of management plan in effect. Vermont County Foresters, consulting foresters, botanists, biologists, community stewards, and municipal planners are valuable resources and partners in the forest stewardship planning process. See www.vtcommunityforestry.org for information about what programs and resources are available to guide town forest conservation and stewardship activities.

What is in store for the year-long celebration?

Over the course of the year we will be highlighting town forests around the state; encouraging Vermonters to discover their local town forest; and sharing Vermonters' stories to inspire, transfer lessons learned, and celebrate the great work going on in Vermont town forests. Celebrations start in the spring at the Vermont Legislature, with their recognition of the value town forests provide, and culminate in the fall with a statewide gathering for the Town Forest Summit on Saturday, November 7th. Throughout 2015 there will be activities for young artists and writers, exploration walks, lectures, and engaging programs via different media. For more information about these events and opportunities, visit <http://www.vtcommunityforestry.org>.

Who are the partners?

The centennial celebration is being organized through the collaborative efforts of the Association of Vermont Conservation Commissions; Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation; Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department; Northeastern States Research Cooperative; Northern Forest Center; Trust for Public Land; University of Vermont; University of Vermont Extension; Vermont Land Trust; and Vermont Woodland Association.



***Vermont town forests are valued public places!
They contribute to our health and well-being!
And they are open to the public.***