

WOODLAND NARRATIVES

“We think of it as a very special place... a very special place for all sorts of reasons. A lot of people have a certain amount of unexplained attachment to it.”

—KYLE BURDICK, DOWNEAST LAKES LAND TRUST

Nearly 15 years ago, the Downeast Lakes Forestry Partnership led to the successful conservation of 339,000 acres in Downeast Maine. The project was designed to address the social and economic needs of the Downeast region while achieving far-reaching conservation goals. As a part of the partnership, NEFF acquired sustainable forestry easements on approximately 339,000 acres of land, 27,080 acres of which were purchased by Downeast Lakes Land Trust (DLLT) as part of the Farm Cove Community Forest. Today, Farm Cove has grown to 33,708 acres and is a working example of community-led forestry. With the pending acquisition of the adjacent 22,000-acre West Grand Lake Community Forest, DLLT is preparing to apply the community forestry model to a land base of more than 55,000 acres. NEFF's Land Protection Manager, Betsy Cook, interviewed DLLT's Executive Director, David Montague, and the Community Forest Manager, Kyle Burdick, to find out more about Farm Cove and the challenges and opportunities of the community forestry model.

Q: What are the overarching goals of Downeast Lakes Land Trust?

David Montague: In broad terms, the overall goals are to manage fish and wildlife habitat, provide public access for recreation, and provide a steady

stream of timber products. A large part of the land trusts' goal is to keep things the way they have always been. That's what a lot of people wanted. They didn't want change, they didn't want anything to happen, and it was what they were accustomed to. But we would like to go beyond that, and specifically manage for wildlife. For example, we have gone through a lot of efforts to improve fish passage issues on the property.

Q: How do you balance the Trust's multiple, and at times potentially conflicting, goals?

Montague: Anytime you are managing a single land base for multiple uses and multiple objectives, there's the high likelihood that those uses will conflict, causing friction. We have recreational hiking trails and campsites that could be negatively impacted by heavy active forest management in close proximity. So whenever we are planning out a timber harvest or habitat restoration work, we think about how different uses will be impacted by the planned management activity.

Our goal is to create a diverse forest for a diverse range of uses. We have early-successional areas managed for young forest and late-succession areas managed for old forest. We have an extensive network of roads, ATV trails, and snowmobile trails, but we also have 3,500 acres of ecological

reserve in which motorized access is limited. Our multi-use approach doesn't mean that every part of the forest is managed for every activity; it means that there is a place on the community forest for each person to enjoy the forests and lakes in their own way.

Q: Have there been times when timber harvesting has caused conflict with recreation?

Montague: There has always been a lot of community involvement in the governance of the Trust, but there have been some missteps over the years where management activities did cause some upset within the community. I think that those have been learning experiences that have informed our activities, and the goal is that we don't repeat those mistakes. Often it comes down to outreach, and stepping up our outreach efforts before, during, and after the management activity. A large part of outreach is collecting community feedback and educating our community.

Q: Farm Cove Community Forest operates under a community forestry model. Can you describe how it informs your management?

Montague: Community forestry is really kind of a democratic process, beholden and responsive to the community. That really only works when that community is up to speed, informed, and educated about the type of forestry and the type of management that you are trying to achieve. We use our education and outreach program to help expand local knowledge about natural history and science-based resource management, and in turn we rely on the community for knowledge and expertise about the past and present condition of the forest, the wildlife, and the things that people value most on the landscape. It's a two-way street.

We have a forestry committee that is made up of community members and subject matter experts, including foresters, loggers, guides, and biologists.

We also have a fish and wildlife focused sub-committee, which basically grew out of the forestry committee because it is such a big topic in itself. Both of those committees try to involve as many people as possible. We also have a trails committee that handles oversight of all of our recreational facilities—trails and campsites and that kind of thing.

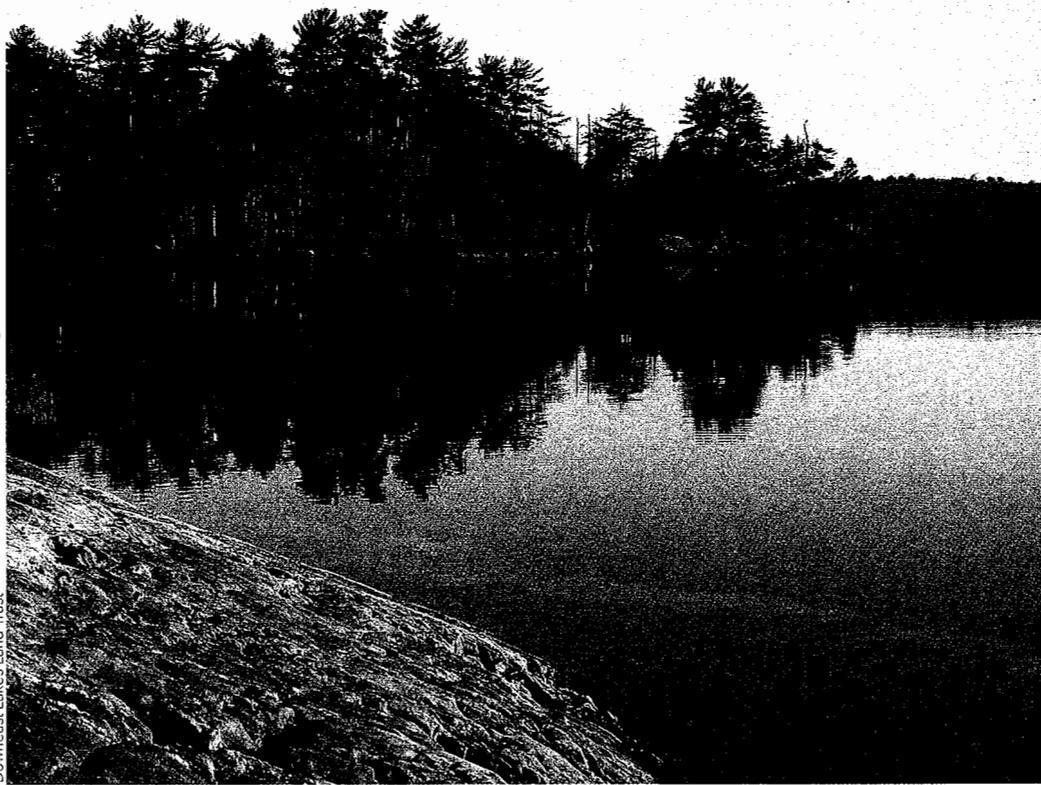
Q: Can you describe the current management of Farm Cove?

Kyle Burdick: We have a long-term time frame in mind when making management decisions, because we see this as a long-term project and a community forest that will be here in perpetuity under single management. We've taken on several grouse and woodcock early successional habitat projects, and used timber harvesting as a means to achieve those. In a recent inventory and stand analysis, it appears that our birch and aspen stands are diminishing—they are actually shrinking in acreage. We would like to keep those around.

Q: Are there any examples of external factors impacting your management, such as markets, invasive pests, or climate change?

Burdick: Hemlock is a good example of all three of those things impacting the same resource. Currently, we do not have a hemlock pulp market, and hemlock pulp used to be our “meat and potatoes” for volume of products removed in order to do good, sound silviculture and forest management. So that is going to prove difficult to manage in the future. We also have hemlock woolly adelgid making its way up the coast; and our hemlock-dominated forest may be susceptible to that.

Financially, not having a hemlock market means we have to adjust our allowable harvest to not overharvest the other species. We can't just take the same volume we have been harvesting for the past 10 plus years, and then just throw it all at hardwood, spruce and



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pine. We are going to be looking at a reduced income if we can't find a solution. Creative marketing for hemlock, whether it is biomass or some other kind of product, might become useful for us. Hemlock has been our biggest challenge facing external forces.

Q: How have you tried to mitigate the effects of those external forces?

Burdick: In addition to trying to find other markets [for hemlock], we have also expanded into a carbon market, which has provided a significant amount of income initially, and then will provide periodic income as we go forward. Should we harvest less in the future, we theoretically will get more carbon credits. This is a diversified management approach that will probably work pretty well.

Hemlock markets will prove difficult to navigate in the coming years, and we will need to figure out a strategy to cope with that. That could have many implications, although we would like to continue with business as usual, if at all possible. If the hemlock woolly adelgid does come and remove a significant portion of the hemlock, it might provide some dead woody material habitat,

which is part of what we already wanted to do as a part of the management plan. We typically try not to work against nature—we try to work with it.

Q: Outside of outreach and participation in community forestry committees, what are some of the ways that you connect with community members?

Montague: We have a firewood permit program, where people can harvest up to 4 cords of firewood per year off community forests for free. We also have craft wood permits for local artists and craftsmen. Most notably, we have canoe builders in town who make use of the permit as a way to harvest ash and cedar for canoe building. And then we have our educational programming as well, which has really grown and developed over the life of the Trust and the community forest. It is sort of treating the community forest as a laboratory and a classroom.

Q: If you could capture the essence of your management of Farm Cove in one sentence, what would you say?

Montague: We try to keep the forest forest, and keep it open and available for the enjoyment of everyone.