

# A Lasting Legacy



Recommendations of the New England Governors  
Blue Ribbon Commission on Land Conservation

September 2009

# Recommendations of the New England Governors Blue Ribbon Commission on Land Conservation<sup>1</sup>

## The Background: A Heritage of Concern.

In Boston in November 1908, then-Governor Curtis Guild, Jr. of Massachusetts proclaimed the *First New England Conference Called by the Governors of the New England States*. The convening came on the heels of the landmark White House Conference of the Governors of the United States called by President Theodore Roosevelt. Natural resource management issues, especially de-



graded forests and their river headwaters, dominated both the White House meeting and the later Boston event that led to creation of the White and Green Mountain National Forests. In September 2008 the region's current Governors celebrated the

centennial of the 1908 Boston meeting and established a blue-ribbon commission to identify the most urgent land conservation issues facing New England today, and to report with recommendations to the Governors' meeting in September 2009.

## The Challenge: Saving the Stage.

New England today faces unprecedented and profound threats to its land and natural resource base. Climate change and its impacts on the region's biodiversity and agricultural and forest economies, fragmentation of the landscape from sprawling development and the generational turnover in farming and forestry operations, and the demand for coastal property threaten the viability of the plants, animals, and resource-based industries that depend on these lands. They also threaten the human

experience of our natural world. As an historic marker of change, tourism now eclipses forestry and farming as a source of employment in the region's rural places, yet tourism depends directly on these very qualities of the landscape and rural industry.

These lands may well be viewed as the green infrastructure that future generations of our citizens will require for their health, well-being, and prosperity. At the same time, the New England experience of place – human in scale, with close-by access to the land – resonates widely with virtually all Americans. As the nation urbanizes further, efforts to re-create elsewhere what New England has long enjoyed come at a time when our own qualities of the landscape are in peril. Happily, growing public awareness of climate change and its impacts, the role forests play as carbon sinks, the greatly increased demand for locally-grown foods and resurgence of small-scale, community-based farming, all raise the urgency of and public receptivity for conservation initiatives.

New England has for at least a century been a national leader in maintaining and renewing the human benefits of land conservation. A highly developed New England land trust community and creative uses of the conservation easement – both New England inventions – are powerful assets now in use across the nation. New England may once again lead the nation, this time through a collaborative partnership among the public, private, and non-governmental actors necessary to land conservation in the 21st Century.

This is, moreover, a critical time to engage the next generation of citizens of New England to care about our

<sup>1</sup>For complete details, findings, and recommendations, see Report of the Blue Ribbon Commission on Land Conservation, New England Governors Conference, Inc., September 2009, available at [www.negc.org](http://www.negc.org) and <http://efc.muskie.usm.maine.edu>.



future landscape and quality of place as an active duty of citizenship. With a public that is increasingly urban and suburban, more ethnically diverse, and in many cases with limited access to the outdoors, there is compelling need across the region to engage a new generation in land conservation. A lost generation at this juncture will prove devastating to them, to the landscape, and to the industries that depend on it. As a goal, we believe that no New Englander should be more than 15 minutes from a walk in a natural setting.

### **The Opportunity: The Time Is Now.**

A series of forums with concerned and knowledgeable citizens across New England convince the Commission that now is the time for a high priority, integrated, pan-New England land conservation effort that transcends state boundaries and the public and private sectors. The collaborative strategy we propose is enabled today by new technologies that allow much-improved, cross-boundary analysis. A new funding model is required, as well, a true and lasting federal, state, local, private, and philanthropic partnership that will serve as a national model for other regions. Central to this funding model is a fair share of federal conservation support to New England, and the development of tax and other mechanisms that will allow farms and forestlands in private ownership to prosper.

The outcomes we foresee for this effort, in terms of both quality and quantity, promise a strong, self-renewing legacy on the New England landscape. They include:

- **Farms and forests** – a new, national model for growing, producing, and using local agriculture and forest products, and significantly displacing building materials with carbon footprints vastly larger than wood’s;
- **Climate mitigation and adaptation** – preventing the loss of forest and farmlands across the region by focusing development in city and town centers and mitigating forest and farmland loss with new forest cover in cities, suburbs, and marginal farm land;
- **Energy** – exploration and development of alternative energy resources across the region where appropriate and consistent with other values;
- **Sustainable economic and community development** – maintenance of a diverse landscape that will provide jobs and economic opportunity in all and, especially, in rural places;
- **Biodiversity** – conservation of the existing natural landscape and restoration of plant and wildlife habitats that have been and will be adversely affected by development, climate change, and invasive species;

- Culture and recreation – maintenance and enhancement of the natural landscapes’ cultural, recreational, and educational experiences; and
- Public education – greater opportunity to experience and learn from nature close to home, wherever one may live or visit in New England.

**Recommendations: A Lasting Legacy.**

The Commission offers five recommendations on which to build a lasting conservation legacy for future generations. These needed innovations will be greatly enhanced by the active support of affected federal agencies and the New England Congressional Delegation.

**1. Keep Forests as Forests.** Empower the six New England State Foresters, in collaboration with the USFS, the region’s universities, private forest landowners, and other stakeholders and interested parties, to prepare a New England Forest Initiative. This will constitute a new and creative partnership among the New England states, federal government, local communities, and private forest and conservation interests that has as its goals preventing the loss of forestland and ensuring the sustainability of these lands. It will identify barriers to and opportunities for sustaining forestlands that are in private ownership, expanding regional forest product production and consumption, and identifying the tools to make these policies work.

**2. Keep Farmlands in Farming.** Empower the six New England Chief Agricultural Officers, in collaboration with the USDA, the region’s universities, private farmland owners, commodity and farm organizations, and other stakeholders, to develop a New England Farm and Food Security Initiative. This will establish the region’s capacity to increase production, utilization, and consumption of New England-grown farm and food products; identify barriers to and opportunities for expanding regional pro-



duction and consumption; and recommend appropriate means and measures to remove the barriers and achieve these goals and protect the region’s agricultural land base.

**3. Connect People to the Outdoors.** Empower the six New England State Liaison Officers to the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund, in collaboration with local partners and education leaders in each state, the National Park Service, and U.S. Forest Service, to prepare a New England Outdoor Initiative built upon the several Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plans and related open space planning documents. The initiative will identify six-state priorities for outdoor recreation and education, and means to engage younger generations in land conservation; address urban as well as rural needs; and identify priority issues and recreation land conservation projects common to two or more states.





**4. Protect Wildlife Habitat.** Empower the six New England Chief Wildlife Officers, in collaboration with partner groups, to prepare a New England Wildlife Habitat Initiative, making use of each state’s Wildlife Action Plan as the foundation for regional work on habitat connectivity that will inform land use and public infrastructure investment decisions at the local, state, and federal levels.

**5. Safeguard Coastal and Estuarine Lands.** Empower the Coastal Program Managers in the several coastal states, in collaboration with the Chief Wildlife Officers and other partners, to develop a New England Coastal Initiative. This initiative will make use of each state’s Coastal & Estuarine Land Conservation Program and Wildlife Action Plan, and the New England Governors and Eastern Canadian Premiers’ Climate Change Action Plan, to identify a regional strategy for coastal land conservation and acquisition that addresses joint goals for climate change adaptation and habitat protection.

The Commission recommends that these several initiatives form the basis of a New England Land Conservation Act to be introduced to the Congress to advance and sup-

port New England’s role in both fulfilling its own priority conservation needs and serving as a national model for regional landscape conservation.

We further urge the Governors to call upon appropriate agencies of the federal government and the New England Congressional Delegation to maintain and fully fund essential land conservation initiatives, including the Forest Legacy Program, the Farmland Protection Program, the Land and Water Conservation Fund, the State Wildlife Grants Program, the Coastal Estuarine Land Conservation Program, and the New Markets Tax Credits; and to include in federal climate change legislation funding for forest, farm, wildlife, and coastal conservation, and for outdoor recreation and education.

Finally, we recommend that the Governors establish the CLC as a standing Commission of the NEGC to continue its work, implementing its recommendations, coordinating the initiatives cited above, and identifying other opportunities for regional collaboration, to the extent funding allows.

With these timely actions, we believe the Governors will set in motion a long-lasting legacy on the New England landscape, a far-sighted and far-reaching initiative to conserve the region’s diverse landscapes and help ensure that they will remain forever healthy, productive, and accessible to the citizens of New England and the nation.



## Commission Members

*Maine:* Patrick McGowan and Richard Barringer (Chair)

*Connecticut:* Matthew Fritz and David Leff

*Massachusetts:* Dorrie Pizzella and Lynn Lyford

*New Hampshire:* Susan Francher and Jane Difley

*Rhode Island:* W. Michael Sullivan and Janet Coit

*Vermont:* Jonathan Wood and Edward O'Leary

Professional Staff: John Shea, NEGC, Inc.

Meeting Facilitator: Jack Kartez

Administrative Assistant: Barbara Ives

Report Layout and Design: Jennifer Hutchins

Commission members acknowledge with gratitude:

- the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy,
  - the New England Environmental Finance Center,
  - the New England Forestry Foundation,
  - the New Hampshire Charitable Trust, and
  - the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
- for their generous support of the Commission's work, its meetings, and publication of its report.

September 2009

Photo captions:

- cover Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park, Vermont (courtesy National Park Service)  
Farmhouse near Woodstock, Vermont  
Acadia National Park, Maine
- page 2 President Theodore Roosevelt
- page 3 Stone River, New Hampshire (courtesy New England Forest Foundation)
- page 4 Farm outside Conway, Massachusetts  
Mother and daughter on mountain hiking trip
- page 5 Black bear cub climbing birch tree  
Aerial view, Connecticut coastline (Connecticut Coastal Program)
- back Hiking on Gile Mountain, Vermont (courtesy National Park Service)

This public document may be downloaded from [www.necg.org](http://www.necg.org) and from <http://efc.muskie.usm.maine.edu>, and reproduced and quoted with citation of the source.

