

The Land

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The connections residents feel to the land and to the physical environment of their communities is an important defining characteristic of regional identity in the Northern Forest. For most people, the beauty of the landscape, as well as the variety of recreational opportunities it affords, serves as an anchor for sense of place. The proximity to forest and water resources and the nature of the land were often described as essential to people's quality of life. People also identified more specific aspects of natural and cultural heritage that have left imprints on the landscape and defined their sense of place, such as the built environment of the town, the land use histories of the area, and the climate and weather of the region. The history of the working forest is an important ingredient in many people's sense of the Northern Forest. While the management and stewardship of the forests, the rivers, and the overall environment is important to residents, it is a subject of strongly-held, often divergent, opinions. Many people expressed personal values of sustainable and productive forestry, protection of water and wildlife resources, wild areas, and access to recreational opportunities - but there were many different ideas about how to incorporate these values and management goals in the Northern Forest.



Landowner and logger walk the land, Long Lake, New York



TALKING ABOUT landscape & sense of place

Across the Northern Forest, people talked of how they cherish the ideal of a mature, healthy forest. In some areas, where the forest is woven together with small farms, people spoke of how the combination of dense forest and open space creates a visually satisfying pattern that defines the Northern Forest's sense of place. Others, who live in areas where rugged topography and mountains dominate the landscape, told me that the mountains conveyed a sense of home to them.

*Wentworth
Location, New
Hampshire*

∞ Landscape & Sense of Place ∞

*I*n terms of identifying with a place, it is this mountain and lake community. It's the familiarity of the trees as I drive up the Northway.

—private school administrator, New York

*M*y family has been in this town since the early 1860s, doing subsistence farming, trapping, hunting. I suspect they were escaping religious persecution—the English were marching Catholics out of Canada at the time. Some of my family is still here, there aren't jobs to support everybody—I could make a lot more money away but the quality of life isn't nearly as good. And this is because this is such a wonderful area. The forest is incredible. I was in the service for five years. I've done enough traveling to know what the rest of the world is like, and this is still the best there is.

—recreation outfitter, New York

*W*e were talking about this tug on the heart when you get near the woods. It's real special. I raised my kids in the woods, I lived in the woods without electricity or running water for eight years. And you get real close to the trees that way! And the water, and where it comes from, is it polluted, and all those issues, and raising my kids that way taught them to have this deep abiding with the earth and with the trees – not only do these woods and the forest in this region have a draw for me, but now I have something to give back. And I think the people are here to support the forest and the forest is here to support the people and the people are here to support each other. And if you can make that equation work, going in both directions, then it's sustainable.

—deli owner, Vermont

*T*he White Mountains are extremely important to my identity here. Community doesn't have to be a town for me—anywhere in this area could be home, I would feel like I fit in. Every time I've tried to relocate I've literally gotten sick. I have to come back here. The mountains and water always make me want to come back here.

—assistant inn manager, New Hampshire

I like to walk around in my woods, look at the wildlife. I like the intimate, three dimensional knowledge of my land and what happens on it. I like the stream on it. I hunt and fish on my own land in season. There's always something fascinating to see, and there's so much I don't understand.

*—town clerk's assistant,
Vermont*

*W*hen I was in the Marine Corps, some officers talked about the Allagash—how they had made a trip through it as Boy Scouts, and how much they loved it. They asked me all about it. I was 24, and I had never seen it. I said 'So what?'—I didn't see their point. But I resolved to come back and see it for myself. When I left the Marines, I came back and paddled the Allagash with my wife. We enjoyed it tremendously. I didn't realize until then how much the northern Maine woods were important to me.

—paper mill human resources manager, Maine