



The Forests of Northwest Connecticut are the lungs of our state. They store large amounts of carbon. Our forests filter our drinking water, providing clean water to fast-flowing streams and adjacent wetlands. They renew our spirits and are in great demand for outdoor recreation and the enjoyment of nature. Our larger, intact woodlands support a rich array of plant and animal species and are at the very core of the resilient habitats identified by The Nature Conservancy across our region and beyond.

Our larger forests are nearly all located in the uplands of the Berkshire and Litchfield Hills and the Taconic Range that forms the spine of New England. These areas encompass a vast network of woods and wetlands, fields and riverbanks, and villages and roadways where a bobcat can still move freely, and a northern flying squirrel can shift its range to find food and shelter in a warming world. Many small and mid-sized mammals, interior-nesting migratory songbirds, and wide-ranging species like moose and fisher, need contiguous woodland habitats and the ability to move between them in safety. These forests are vital for the survival of species responding to climate change and the pressures of human development, and we are running out of time to save them.

HVA, together with the Salisbury Association Land Trust and local and regional conservation partners, is working to protect and connect our forests in one of the most significant green corridors of wildlife habitat in the Eastern United States. We call our initiative **Follow the Forest**. We are bringing together conservation partners in Connecticut, Massachusetts, New York, and Vermont. Working together, we are starting to realize a shared vision that connects us all to the places we love and the wildlife that shares it with us.

Follow the Forest has a breathtaking goal: Together we must protect at least 50% of the interior or core forest habitat across our region and secure the linkages used by wildlife to move among them. Within the Housatonic watershed alone, we calculate it will require 50,000 more acres of targeted, long-term land protection to reach this threshold. Right now, we and our partners have land protection projects underway in Northwest Connecticut that will save more than 4,200 acres in service of this goal. We are poised to take **Follow the Forest** to the next level and inspire even greater conservation action. We have a short window of time, little more than a decade, to conserve the majority of the **Follow the Forest's** habitat cores and linkages.

You can **Follow the Forest** through our interactive map viewer <https://arcg.is/1rzemW>. To learn more about our partnership and its ambitious goal to protect at least 50% of the forest habitat and its vital linkages across western New England and eastern New York, contact Tim Abbott at the Housatonic Valley Association www.hvatoday.org.





Forests support our health. They are in great demand for recreation and the enjoyment of nature.



Diverse forests are home to a rich array of plants and animals. They support biodiversity.



Forests offer the economic benefit of timber and wood products. We need to conserve ecologically important trees and maintain a resilient forest.

FORESTS: Why Should We Care?

Forests are essential for life on a global scale. They matter at a more fundamental level than we may realize.

Forests are nature’s green lungs, giving us the oxygen that we breathe. They sequester and store more carbon than any other terrestrial habitat, a natural buffer against climate warming.

Forests, the source of clean drinking water, support health and well-being. Long a source of life-saving medicines, forests contain the potential for new treatments for disease. Local woodlands are in great demand for recreation and the enjoyment of nature. A walk in the forest offers exercise and reduces stress--a renewal of body and mind.

Large contiguous forests sustain a biodiversity of plants and animals. The uplands of the Berkshire and Litchfield Hills and the Taconic Range encompass a network of habitats where a bobcat can still move freely, migrating birds can still nest in interior forest, and wild brook trout, highly sensitive to water temperature, can still reproduce in clean, cold streams.

Forests offer an economic benefit of timber and useful wood products. When harvesting trees for this purpose, it is important to conserve interior forest and allow ecologically important species to stand. We need these trees to sustain abundant and diverse populations of birds and other wildlife.

Forests help to control floods caused by heavy rainfall, now intensified by climate warming. Trees and soils act as a big sponge absorbing large amounts of water underground, then releasing it slowly into streams and aquifers.

For these and other significant benefits, it is clearly in our interest to conserve large intact forests with mature trees.



Forests filter our drinking water and provide clean water to fast-flowing streams. Forests sequester and store large amounts of carbon, a natural



Inappropriate development fragments forests into smaller separated parcels, resulting in reduced habitat connectivity for wildlife.



Forests are threatened by the spread of non-native invasive plants



Over-browsing by deer affects the regeneration of vegetation and trees in the forest.

FORESTS: What Are the Threats?

Forests are always in flux, continually subject to change and disturbance.

A majority of a forest's insects are beneficial to the forest's ecosystem. However, significant disturbances are caused by biological stress from some diseases and insects. Among these are the gypsy moth (name changed to "spongy moth," in reference to its egg masses), the Asian long-horned beetle, and the hemlock woolly adelgid. Now we see great loss of American ash in backyards and woodlands from the emerald ash borer.

Forests are subject to abiotic stresses, too, including drought, intense fires and storms. Though climate change is not the only factor involved, it acts as an amplifier, making disturbances more extreme. In its Annual Report of 2021, National Audubon notes with concern: "Climate is the single biggest threat confronting birds and our planet. If we don't win on climate, nothing else matters."

Our regional forests are also threatened by the spread of invasive non-native plants. Invaders like multiflora rose, Oriental bittersweet, non-native honeysuckle and others are filling voids left by blown-down trees. They outcompete native plants that provide higher-quality food for birds and other wildlife.

Deer density affects forest vegetation. No longer held in check by predators like wolves and mountain lions, large populations of deer are over-browsing the forest understory. This influences the diversity and abundance of vegetation and the regeneration of trees, essential for the future of a forest.

Human population growth and development have significantly impacted forestlands. Early settlers in Northwest Connecticut clearcut forests for agricultural and industrial purposes. Suburbanization fragments woodlands into "islands" of trees with less habitat connectivity for wildlife. On a global scale, vast boreal and tropical forests are being deforested for agriculture, ranching and commercial logging. There is heightened concern about the great Amazon rainforest that sequesters and stores the most carbon and sustains the greatest biodiversity.



Forest disturbance is caused by disease and insects like the hemlock woolly adelgid and the Asian long-horned beetle. As seen above, the emerald ash borer causes significant loss of American ash trees.



Housatonic Valley Association / Greenprint works with regional conservation partners to protect the Housatonic River watershed. Its “Follow the Forest” initiative protects and connects our forests and wildlife habitats.

Forests: Where Is the Hope?

The large forests of our region are diverse and extensive, encompassing a network of woods and wetlands, fields and riverbanks, wildlife habitats and villages.

Two government programs provide funding for forest protection in our area. The Highlands Conservation Act, a federal program, has saved more than 3,800 acres in Northwest Connecticut so far. The program leverages Congress’s investment with matching contributions. In addition, a state program, Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition, OSWA, provides grants to help land trusts acquire and conserve important ecological lands.

Many local environmental groups are dedicated to forest conservation. Here are three examples.

Salisbury Association Land Trust has conserved more than 3,500 acres. Some is pasture land, but most is forest. The Land Trust is adding further protection to its forestlands by placing a “forever wild” conservation easement, held by the Northeast Wilderness Society, on 676 acres. The easement will prohibit not just development but also commercial cutting of trees. This offers the potential for restoring portions of the old-growth forest that was here before the charcoal industry cut it.

Housatonic Valley Association / Greenprint is partnering with conservation groups in Connecticut, Massachusetts, New York and Vermont to conserve and connect forests and wildlife habitat. The goal is to protect at least 50% of interior or core forest habitats across our region and to secure the linkages used by wildlife to move among them. Catch the spirit of this initiative by viewing Greenprint’s scenic film, “Follow the Forest.”

Audubon Connecticut is engaged across the state in land stewardship, science, and advocacy in support of forest health and bird and wildlife populations. Education plays an important role too. With almost 73% of Connecticut’s forests under private ownership, landowners need to be well-informed on forest stewardship to make responsible decisions about their woodlands.



Audubon Connecticut is engaged in land stewardship, science, and advocacy in support of forest health, bird and wildlife populations, and biodiversity.



The Salisbury Association Land Trust has conserved more than 3,500 acres, some with farmland, but most forested.



Plant a diversity of native trees and shrubs that support wildlife. To combat climate warming, we need trees and biologically rich soils to sequester and store carbon.



Encourage the planting and maintenance of native trees in urban settings where green space is often limited.



Reduce your consumption of paper and cardboard products. When available, choose recycled paper products.

Put It Into Action!

What can you do in your area to protect forests and the environment?

- ◆ Start by reconnecting with the trees and green spaces near you. Take a walk in the woods. Slow down. Breathe deeply. Feel the tranquility of nature.
- ◆ Exercise the power of your vote. Elect representatives who will transition the present fossil-fuel economy to non-carbon, renewable-energy. Encourage elected official at all levels of government to end deforestation and invest in conservation.
- ◆ Use your consumer power when buying products. You may decide, for example, *not* to buy furniture made from endangered tropical wood. Look for “seals” that may indicate if a product was sourced with environmentally responsible practices.
- ◆ Encourage officials to minimize forest loss from development. Limit construction of roads in forests. New roads fragment woodlands and invite invasive plants. Advocate for wildlife crossings as part of infrastructure.
- ◆ Reduce your consumption of tree-based products like cardboard and paper. Use recycled paper when available. If a product comes with excessive packaging, let the supplier know what you think.
- ◆ Replace fallen trees in your backyard with native trees. National Audubon lists trees native to your area. Scientists say it’s important to plant trees that will enhance biodiversity and make forest ecosystems more resilient.
- ◆ Help to create a healthier environment in urban centers near you where green space is limited. We all need the health benefits that nature provides.
- ◆ Stay informed on news events about forests. Ask agencies with responsibility for public lands to give advance notice of their forest and tree-cutting plans so the public can be engaged.
- ◆ Support local and regional conservation organizations protecting forests and the natural environment. They need your participation.



Advocate for creating wildlife crossings as part of infrastructure development. Help protect both wildlife and humans.