

Community Forest Fund



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Two Rivers Community Forest

Since 2010, the Community Forest Fund supported 15 community forests, helping conserve over 30,000 acres in 20 Northern New England towns.

A Catalytic Conservation Investment

Communities across northern New England are rallying to purchase, permanently conserve and collectively manage forests to benefit directly from the land's many values. Since 2010, the Open Space Institute's (OSI) Community Forest Fund has made grants to help kindle this locally-based conservation movement, slowing forest fragmentation, linking community conservation and economic goals and attracting conservation dollars. Using strategic criteria, expert advisors and in-house transaction expertise, OSI has invested philanthropic capital in exemplary community forest projects.

The Community Forest Fund has helped New England communities gain control of the forests that historically provided their livelihoods, capturing environmental, economic, recreational, civic and cultural benefits. OSI's grants have provided the essential spark galvanizing town leaders and land trusts to work collaboratively and rouse local support for citizen-driven conservation. And the Fund's financial support has played an important role in catalyzing change in struggling rural communities.

Today, OSI's Community Forest Fund has reached a critical juncture. With a track record of successful projects and strong demand for new and expanded community forests, OSI is seeking to renew the Fund to support the next generation of projects.

Role of the Community Forest Fund

“After years of talk, this project came to life because of OSI’s commitment to feasibility planning, and later to actual funding of the purchase. Now we have a great forest, and an even greater place for building community.”

- Rebecca Brown,
Executive Director
The Ammonoosuc
Conservation Trust
2012 grantee
Easton, NH

OSI’s Community Forest Fund, capitalized with \$1.6 million from private foundations, including a lead gift from Jane’s Trust, is the outgrowth of recommendations made by the Community Forest Collaborative. In its 2007 landmark report *Community Forests: A Community Investment Strategy*, the Collaborative called for a private fund dedicated to helping towns conserve land for the direct benefit of local citizens.

Benefits that towns glean from community forests can include:

- **Financial Capital:** Revenue from timber products, Water treatment costs avoided, Recreational fees
- **Natural Capital:** Biodiversity and wildlife habitat, Air quality, Carbon storage
- **Social & Political Capital:** Collaborative management practices, Community cooperation and engagement
- **Built Capital:** Environmental education facilities, Recreational trails for hiking, biking, etc.
- **Intellectual Capital:** New knowledge, Sustainable forestland management techniques

—“Community Forests as a Wealth Creation Strategy for Rural Communities,”
M. Lyman et. al, Community Development (2014)



Figure 1: Value of Community Forests

These projects combine land protection with community action to provide direct and indirect economic benefits to rural communities.

Community Forests Concept: Victory of the Commons

In the late 1990’s, a sea change in New England forest ownership was occurring: global market forces created a restructuring of the forest products industry, sparking the sale of millions of acres of forestland. New England towns saw treasured lands that had long been open—for hunting, fishing, camping and boating—closed off, divided and sold to distant landowners. A groundswell of concern spurred local stakeholders to revisit an historic community land-use model of the 19th and 20th centuries in which the towns themselves own land for forestry, pro-

tecting water supply and recreation. Land conservation organizations, such as OSI, joined in to support this renewed movement with research, training and funding. Today, the original, time-tested conservation strategy is enjoying a revival among New England’s independent communities. Now the community forests movement is marked by homegrown land conservation projects where citizens work together to protect an important landscape. Executed with citizens at the helm, the projects place manage-

ment decisions in the hands of communities, increasing the likelihood that the forests will enjoy the multi-generational support needed to safeguard sustainable use of the land.

Another major tenet of community forests is to help sustain the local economy: harvesting maple syrup and wood products or enticing tourists to mountain bike on local trails create revenues that can be captured, directly or indirectly, by local communities.

Accomplishments of OSI's Community Forest Fund

Since its inception in 2010, the Fund has supported projects that provide all of these benefits and that increase community ownership and governance of forestlands. Overall, the Fund has helped accelerate and give life to this promising trend that couples community empowerment and land protection (Figure 2).

To better understand the significance of the Fund, in 2014 OSI hired the Carsey School of Public Policy at the University of New Hampshire to provide third-party expert evaluation. The researchers conducted in-depth interviews with 31 nonprofit and public leaders. Among the findings were that the Fund has a distinctive value in focusing not just on land but also communities and that without the Fund many projects would not likely come to fruition. Accomplishments of OSI's Community Forest Fund include:

- **Building capacity:** OSI's funding provides communities with early money and confidence to move forward.
- **Leveraging public and private dollars:** OSI's grants provide projects with credibility, helping land trusts and towns secure funds from public and private sources—leveraging \$6 for every \$1 invested by the Fund.
- **Supporting rural communities:** OSI has supported projects in struggling communities, increasing civic involvement and providing an economic boost.
- **Steering funds to deserving projects:** OSI's staff presence in Northern New England, coupled with experience in evaluating conservation projects and administering private funds, ensures direct community engagement and enduring resource protection.

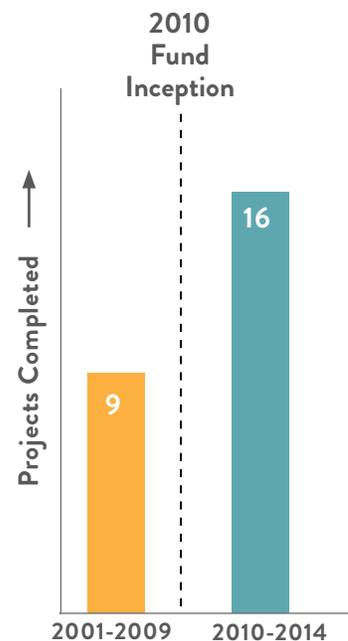


Figure 2: Completed Community Forest Projects

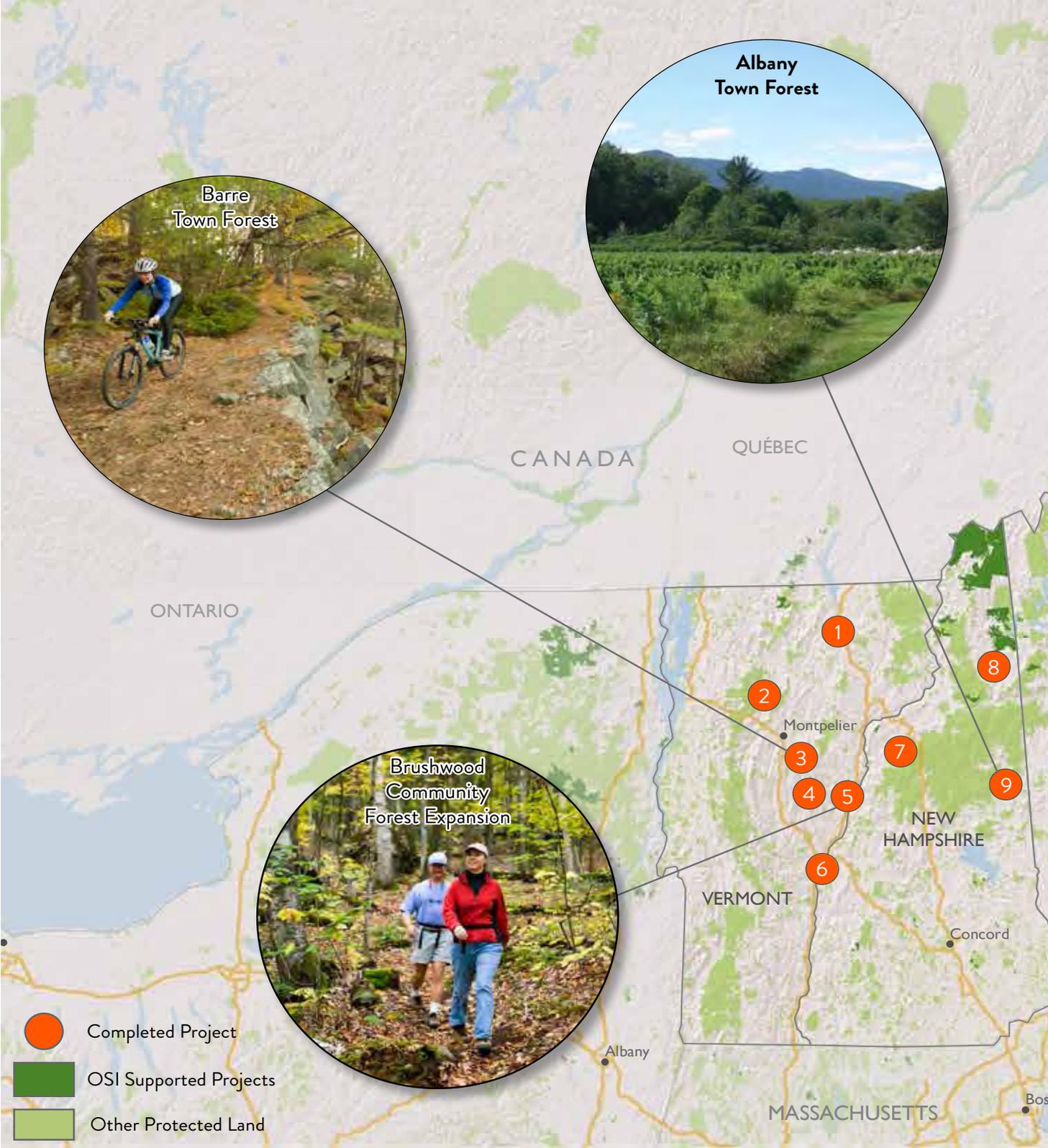
In the Fund's five years, nearly twice as many projects were completed as in the previous ten years.

Source: Julie Evans,
Northern Forest Center

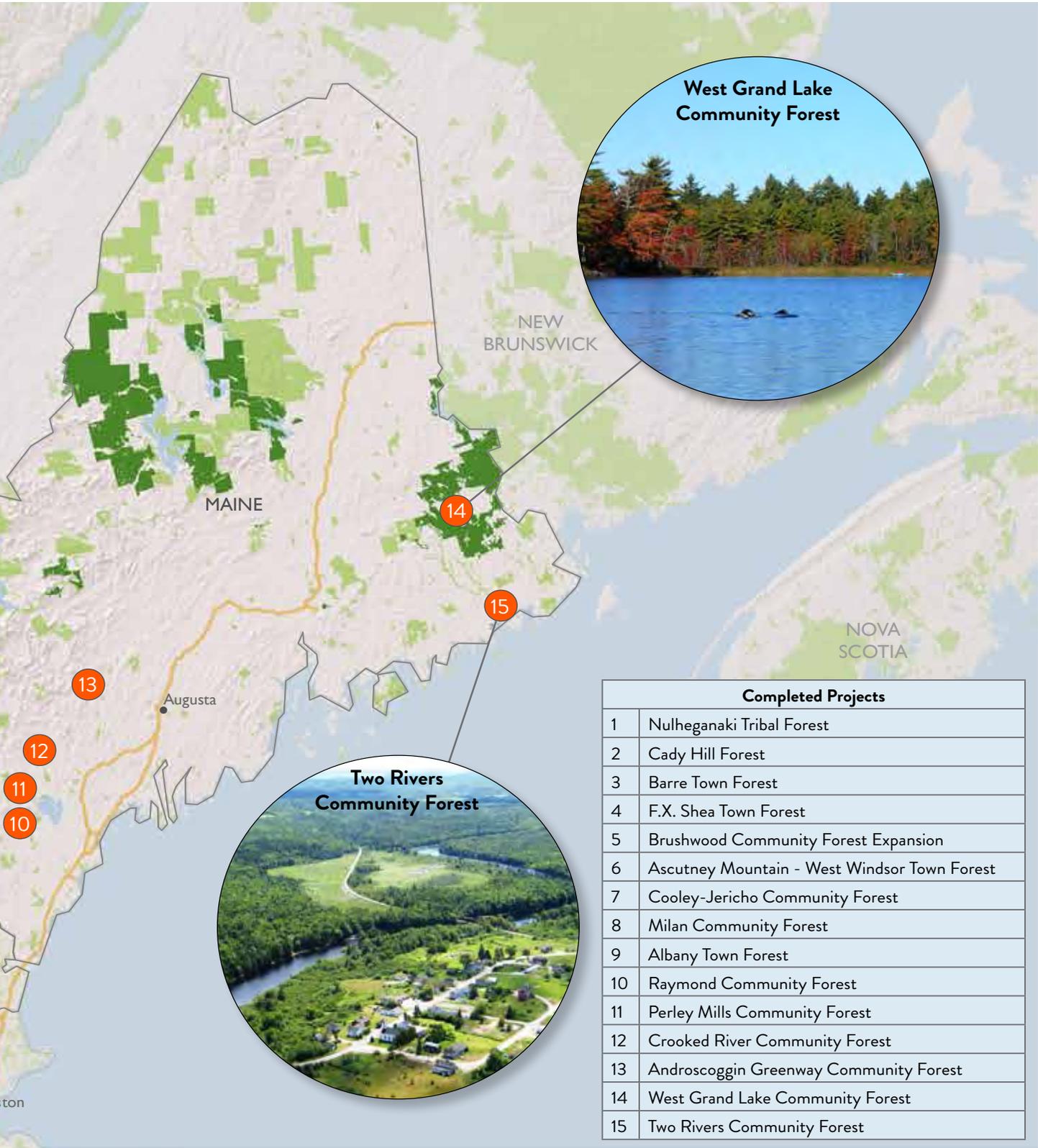


Community Forest Fund Projects

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5 Photo credits: Trust for Public Land, Barre Community Forest and Brushwood Community Forest



Moving Forward: A Need for Reinvestment

With the start-up funding committed, OSI and its collaborators have taken stock of the Community Forest Fund's successes and lessons learned. Since 2010, the Fund has enabled community forests to experience a strong revival in northern New England. The challenge now is to help other struggling communities in the region apply these lessons and create community forests that will produce economic and other benefits at a time of great challenge for rural economies.

Towns and land trusts in the region are developing more than a dozen projects that would conserve over 20,000 acres of productive forests. By directing capital to the most deserving of these efforts and creating incentives for exemplary management and community engagement, the Fund is poised to both improve the community forest model and extend its implementation, particularly in economically underserved places.

Specifically, with an additional \$1 million to be spent over three years, OSI would:

- Support the creation of two to three community forests annually, reaching new towns across the region. Efforts are underway in over a dozen places from Beaver Cove, Maine to West Windsor, Vermont.
- Disseminate information about developing and implementing sustainable community forests, including exemplary governance structures and stewardship plans and the economic contribution of community forests.
- Convene community forest leaders across the region to share best practices and creative ways to overcome obstacles in creating, expanding and managing community forests.
- Create at least 4:1 leverage of federal, state and private funding for community forests. OSI's Fund can help bring a greater share of the federal community forest program dollars to the region as well as private funding that is increasingly looking for ways to support conservation that also achieves community and economic goals.



Cooley-Jericho Community Forest

Project Spotlight: Cooley-Jericho Community Forest

In the White Mountains of New Hampshire, negotiations starting more than a dozen years ago have yielded a vibrant, thriving community forest shared and managed by four neighboring towns. The Cooley-Jericho Community Forest was successfully conserved after a 2012 grant from OSI helped bring in federal funding. Notably, the US Forest Service ranked the project its number-one priority.



Rebecca Brown
Executive Director
Ammonoosuc
Conservation Trust

Ammonoosuc Conservation Trust, who spearheaded the project with town leaders, is still heavily involved while locals begin to reap the benefits of their work. A consulting ecologist is helping the forest's Stewardship Team develop a long-term plan for managing sections of the forest for recreation, wildlife and forestry. Meanwhile, the Trust is partnering with Appalachian Mountain Club and Plymouth State University to develop a course for local school children on environmental education, harnessing the land as an outdoor classroom. Community members gather at potlucks to discuss how to use and maintain the land and

take snowshoe walks to survey the property in the winter. When proceeds from sustainable forestry begin to come in, they will be split between the four towns based on their investment levels, after first replenishing management and stewardship funds.

"After years of talk, this project came to life because of OSI's commitment to feasibility planning, and later to actual funding of the purchase. Now we have a great forest, and an even greater place for building community," said Rebecca Brown, Executive Director of the Ammonoosuc Conservation Trust.

In New England's long history of communal forestland ownership, the current era may well be a defining one. Unlike town forests of the last centuries, which were mostly focused on fiber production and managed with little community input, today's community forest is a rich hybrid with extensive citizen involvement in governance and a diverse stream of benefits, ranging from timber revenue to recreation to water supply protection.

With renewed support, the Community Forest Fund is committed to continuing and deepening this rich legacy for generations to come.



Perley Mills Community Forest

“OSI’s direct infusion of dollars into these small communities has leveraged federal and other funding, as well as countless volunteer hours, direct economic benefits, protection of resources and community revitalization. So many more communities would benefit from creating Community Forests, but they need both capital and operating support to be able to complete new projects.”

- Julie Renaud Evans
Director of Forestry
Northern Forest Center

Project Spotlight: **Perley Mills** **Community Forest**

For generations a 1600 acre property that spans three towns— now known as the Perley Mills Community Forest— was owned by private



Carrie Walia
Executive Director
Loon Echo Land Trust

timberland companies. In 2011, the time was right for a different kind of owner to step forward.

The success of the Perley Mills Community Forest resulted from a regional conservation plan developed in the northern Sebago Lake region of southwestern Maine. Seeing municipal interest and active grassroots support for a regional community forest, Loon Echo Land Trust led a campaign to secure and purchase the land.

After the property was purchased with donations from local residents and businesses and grant makers including OSI, the towns had to vote to take ownership of the land. After the call for a vote at Town Meeting in Denmark, Loon Echo Land Trust's Executive Director Carrie Walia was thrilled to turn and see sixty plus hands raised in favor of the project, with not one person in opposition.

Going forward, conservation of the land will help protect drinking and surface water, plant and animal habitat and provide recreational opportunities for residents in Denmark, Sebago and Bridgton. Over time, proceeds from sustainable harvesting and possibly tapping maple trees will go into the hands of local communities.



FX Shea Community Forest



Brushwood Community Forest



Coolley-Jericho Community Forest

About the Open Space Institute

The Open Space Institute (OSI) protects scenic, natural and historic landscapes to provide public enjoyment, conserve habitat and working lands and sustain communities. Founded in 1974 to protect significant landscapes in New York State, OSI has been a partner in the protection of over 2.2 million acres in North America.

A leader in environmental conservation, the OSI leverages our knowledge and attracts resources for strategic investments to make innovative land conservation happen. Since 2000, when OSI established the Northern Forest Protection Fund, OSI has provided \$23.3 million in loans and grants for Northern New England conservation, enabling the protection of 1.7 million acres. Visit the Open Space Institute online at www.osiny.org.



**OPEN SPACE
INSTITUTE**

1350 Broadway, Suite 201
New York, NY 10018
info@osiny.org
www.osiny.org

Maine Office:
53 Depot Street
Freeport, ME 04032
207-846-9700

Community Forest Fund Advisory Board

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