

An Opportunity to Increase Natural Resource Based Economic Development, Sustainable Forestry & Forest Conservation



MOHAWK TRAIL WOODLANDS PARTNERSHIP PROJECT NOVEMBER 12, 2015



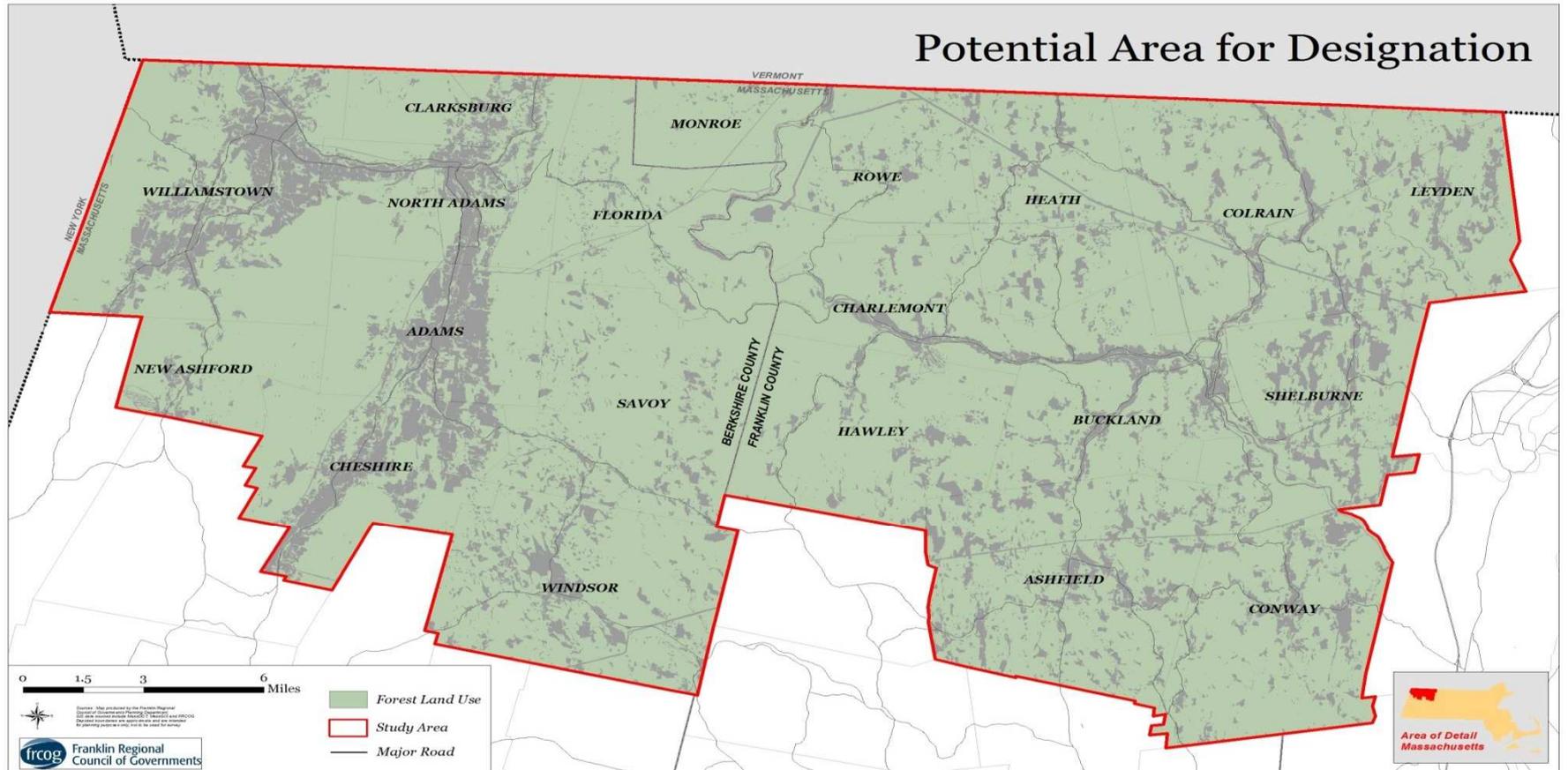
Project Goals



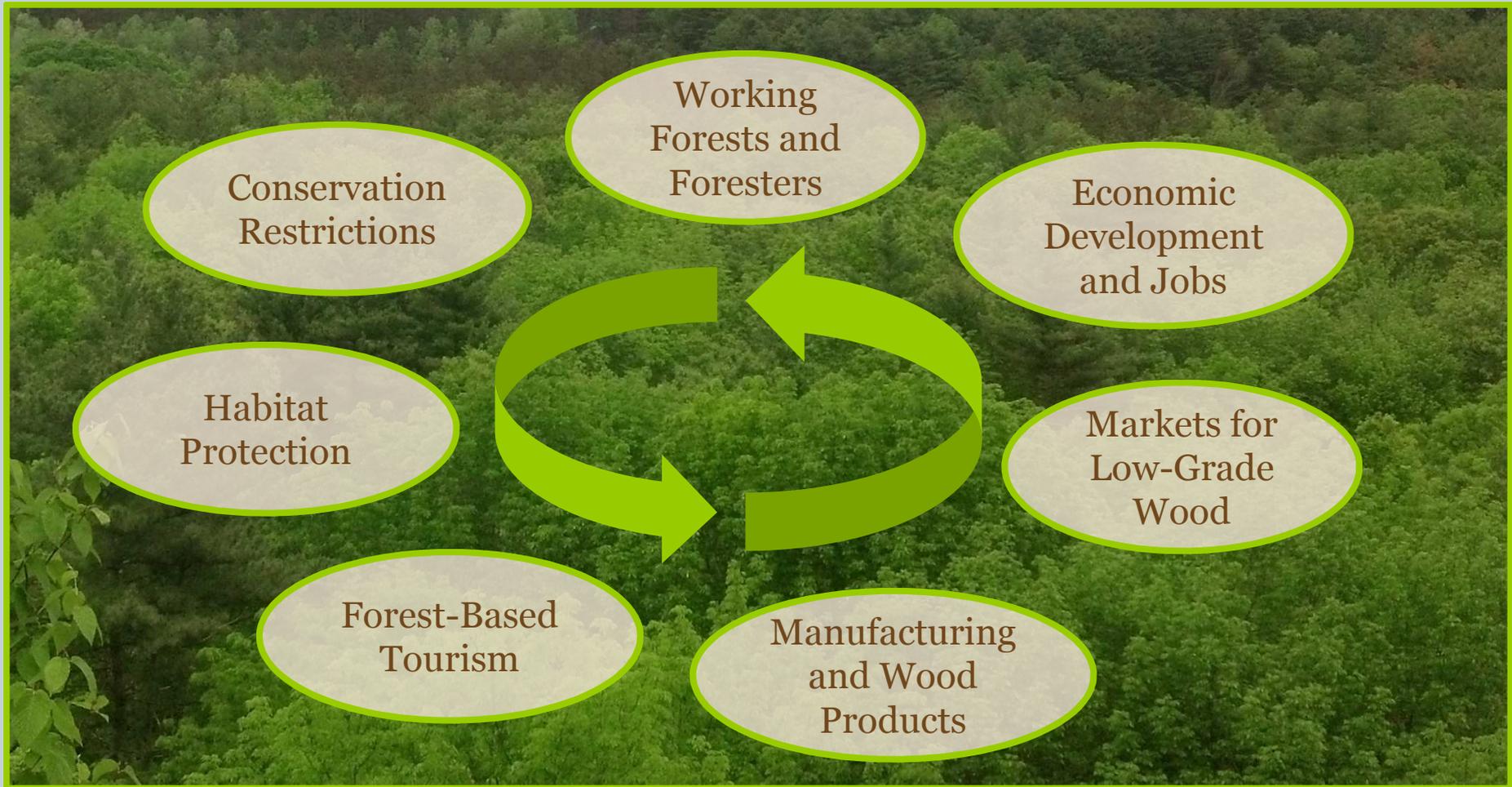
To explore an opportunity for a new partnership between the towns in Western Franklin and Northern Berkshire Counties, Regional Agencies, Landowners, Local businesses, the State and the U. S. Forest Service to:

- **Increase economic development** related to the extensive forest resources in the 21-town area (over 280,000 acres of forest – MA most rural, forested and low income region)
- **Support the expansion of sustainable forestry practices and forest conservation** on private lands in the 21-town region

Potential Area for Designation



Forest Conservation and Economic Development... the need to “connect the dots”



Potential Partners in a Special Designation



What Regional, State and Federal Agencies might participate in this Special Designation in partnership with local towns?

- 21 small communities
- Franklin Regional Council of Governments, Berkshire Regional Planning Commission and the Franklin Land Trust
- Commonwealth of Massachusetts (Department of Conservation and Recreation, MassWildlife, Executive Office of Energy & Environmental Affairs & Department of Agricultural Resources)
- U.S. Forest Service (State and Private Forestry, Forest Research and Wood Products Laboratory & National Forest Systems)



Potential Benefits of a New Federal Designation



- Creation of a new transferable model based on private land ownership to increase sustainable forestry and natural resource based economic development
- Creation of a Demonstration Forest using a public-private partnership model focused on increasing forest resiliency and addressing climate change
- Increase in research and technical assistance to landowners and forestry based businesses to conserve forests and increase marketing of local wood products
- Creation of an Education/Technical Resource/Visitor Center staffed and maintained by a partnership of the U.S. Forest Service and/or the State to provide public education and to conduct research on the ecological and economic benefits of sustainable forestry

Community Involvement



From November 2013 to April 2014, the FRCOG and BRPC conducted 2 regional meetings and 20 community meetings with the assistance of the Franklin Land Trust to ask landowners, residents and town officials for **input on:**

- A vision and locations for conservation of forests for habitat protection, recreation and forestry products
- Ideas and potential locations for a visitor center, technical resource center and/or expanded secondary processing of forest products
- Project ideas and locations for expanding recreational tourism
- The level of interest in a federal designation and key provisions towns and community members want to include if any legislation is filed

Input from Public Outreach



Top 5 Key Concerns:

- Loss of local tax revenues for land in Federal or State ownership and insufficient PILOT payments
- Potential impact on municipal services such as road maintenance or provision of emergency response services for visitors
- Need for the process to be locally driven and supported
- Need for Conservation Restrictions that allow for forest products (lumber, firewood, etc.), habitat protection, and/or recreational opportunities
- Need for towns to be able to review and comment on any legislation proposed for a Special Federal Designation and to participate in the governance structure if a Designation is pursued

Input from Public Outreach



Top 5 Key Interests:

- Opportunity to increase the conservation and resiliency of forests
- Opportunity to increase sustainable recreational tourism
- Opportunity to increase sustainable forestry management and improve marketing of local wood products
- Opportunity to improve the financial stability of rural towns
- Opportunity for research to increase sustainable forestry and to identify new manufacturing technologies related to forestry

Mohawk Trail Woodlands Partnership Advisory Committee



- The Advisory Committee was created in response to local input with representation from 20 towns and regional representatives from forestry, regional planning, economic development and land conservation organizations.
- The committee has met 6 times and reviewed and approved the plan, framework, business plan and governance structure.



Key Framework Elements for a New Model



- All 20 towns would be eligible for participation but would need to “opt in” in order to receive incentives and to allow private landowners to access funding for Conservation Restrictions (CR)
- Forest land remains in private tax-paying ownership to generate revenues for the municipality
- State and Federal incentives or payments for forest Conservation Restrictions with willing sellers only – no eminent domain and no Federal right of first refusal

Key Framework Elements for a New Model



- Use of a Model Conservation Restriction that allows for forest management, habitat protection, passive recreation, agricultural activities, or a combination of those activities that are held by the State, town and/or local land trust
- Promotion of forestry, forestry-related manufacturing (e.g. wood pellet facility) and/or research for new technologies related to forest-based products by providing State and Federal incentives (e.g. tax credits, grants, etc.)

Key Framework Elements for a New Model



- Provision of tax incentives or technical assistance programs for sustainable forestry practices to private landowners and towns including preparation of forest management plans
- Land for a Demonstration Forest would be leased from the State, a town, or private landowners
- Provision of minimum annual payments to participating towns to support municipal services including road maintenance and emergency response or to supplement PILOT payments by creating a Trust fund that is initially capitalized by the U.S. Forest Service and/or the State

Success to Date and Next Steps



- Project has secured \$1.85 million in federal grants and a commitment for \$5 million to study/install a regional wood pellet plant and wood heat for schools
- Federal HUD grant for additional wood economic development projects submitted this month with \$1 million commitment from US Forest Service;
- FRCOG and BRPC will conduct 2 regional meetings and meet with Select Boards in the 20 towns to present the Draft Plan and receive feedback
- Town Select Boards will have the opportunity to support the potential designation - support by a number of communities will be needed in order to proceed with the Special Designation

Lessons Learned/Replication



- Holding many listening sessions in each community is well worth it for the great ideas and buy in received;
- The project started with a single focus and ended up addressing many additional important issues;
- Strong community support helps leverage grants;
- Economic development and conservation can go hand in hand.

