

Mohawk Trail Woodlands Partnership (MTWP) Project

The goals of the Mohawk Trail Woodlands Partnership Project (MTWP) are to bring recognition and additional financial and technical resources to 21 municipalities in northwestern Massachusetts, primarily via special designation by the State and the U.S. Forest Service to:

- Increase economic development related to forestry and natural resource based tourism
- Support the expansion of forest conservation and sustainable forestry on private lands
- Improve fiscal stability and sustainability of the municipalities

Approximately 82% of the land is forested in the 21-Town region. In addition to a Plan that was completed in December 2015 (updated October 2016), a Draft Business Plan, Potential Governance Structure and Draft State legislation have been developed. Potential projects contained in the Business Plan include:

- Design, construction and operation of a multi-purpose “Forestry Center” that would provide: public education about the ecological benefits of forests; tourism services; sustainable forestry technical assistance; research to address climate change; and a marketing program and gallery to promote local wood products.
- Creation of a program similar to the Agricultural Preservation Restriction Program to protect approximately 2,100 acres of forest land through conservation restrictions with willing landowners with land remaining in private ownership.
- Capitalization of a Revolving Loan Fund to support forestry businesses.
- Creation and Implementation of a Forest Viability Program with grants to forest-based businesses in exchange for a temporary restriction on development of forest land.
- Establishment of a municipal grant program for participating towns to support municipal services or operations related to the goals of the MTWP.
- Technical assistance to private landowners to prepare forest management plans.
- Grants to support natural resource-based recreational tourism.

Please note: No funding has been received yet by the MTWP to implement the potential projects listed above.

In addition, the MA Department of Energy Resources is sponsoring a study of energy efficient wood heat and potential air quality impacts for the MTWP region. The study is anticipated to be conducted from 2017 to 2018 and will provide information to towns about the feasibility of converting to energy efficient wood heat as an alternative to oil heat and potential air quality impacts.

Meetings with each Franklin County town’s Select Board have been completed to discuss the recommendations of the Plan and to determine town interest in proceeding with State legislation to create a Special Designation for the 21-town region. Special Designation would

allow the Partnership to be formally created, funded and governed. All eleven communities in Franklin County have provided letters of support for proceeding with State legislation for a Special Designation for the 21-Town region. Eight of the ten towns in Berkshire County have also provided letters of support. A final Draft of the proposed legislation was submitted to our State legislators in December 2016. State legislation was filed in January 2017. For more information, contact Peggy Sloan at psloan@frcog.org. The Plan is available on our website (www.frcog.org).