

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) about the Woodlands Partnership

What is the Woodlands Partnership?

The Woodlands Partnership was started in 2013 as a community-driven project for 21 towns in Western Franklin and Northern Berkshire Counties to support forest conservation in the region. Forest conservation was a key recommendation of the Regional Plans for Sustainable Development completed in 2013 by the Regional Planning Agencies for communities in Franklin and Berkshire Counties (Franklin Regional Council of Governments and Berkshire Regional Planning Commission). The 21-town area is roughly 82% forested. Community input expanded the goals of the project to include natural resource-based economic development and financial sustainability of participating towns. State legislation was filed to formally establish the Partnership as a public body, which enables the 21-town region to jointly and individually pursue State and Federal funds to implement the priorities and goals of the project. The legislation was enacted in August 2018 as part of the Environmental Bond Bill.

What towns and organizations are in the Partnership?

The 21 towns in the Partnership region are Adams; Cheshire; Clarksburg; Florida; New Ashford; North Adams; Peru; Savoy; Williamstown; Windsor in Berkshire County and Ashfield; Buckland; Charlemont; Colrain; Conway; Hawley; Heath; Leyden; Monroe; Rowe; Shelburne in Franklin County. Organizations represented on the Board include Berkshire Natural Resources Council; Deerfield River Watershed Association; Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs; Franklin County Community Development Corporation; Franklin Land Trust; Franklin Regional Council of Governments; Hoosic River Watershed Association; Lever, Inc.; Massachusetts Forest Alliance; Ohketeau Cultural Center; University of Massachusetts Amherst Forest Ecosystems, Carbon Cycling in Terrestrial Systems & Climate Change Faculty; University of Massachusetts Amherst, Public Health & Health Sciences Faculty; Yankee Division of Society of American Foresters, Massachusetts Chapter; US Forest Service Liaison, Northern Research Station at UMass Amherst; US Forest Service Liaison. As of March, 2024, 19 of the eligible 21 towns have voted to join the Partnership.

What are the Woodlands Partnership Implementation Grants?

The Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy & Environmental Affairs (EEA) offers yearly grant funding of up to \$25,000 to each community, and \$75,000 to each regional partnership, that has voted to participate in the Partnership. Eligible activities must advance the Partnership goals of supporting natural resource-based economic development or increasing forest conservation.

What are the goals of the Woodlands Partnership?

The Partnership seeks both to conserve our forests and enhance our region's rural, land-based economy. The following are our goals as they appear in the Partnership's Ten-Year Plan (2022-2032):

GOAL 1: Conserve forestland while keeping it in private ownership to protect the region's rural character and enhance the role forests play in providing clean water and air, flood control, carbon sequestration and storage, and habitat protection in New England

GOAL 2: Increase economic development and expand employment by nurturing sustainable forest products, outdoor recreation, and natural resource and tourism-based businesses

GOAL 3: Improve the fiscal stability of municipalities

GOAL 4: Engage in public education and outreach

Will this create a National Forest or increase regulations in the 21-town region?

No. Ownership of land by the U.S. Forest Service is not allowed under the enabling legislation. All land that is conserved with any funding received by the Woodlands Partnership will remain in private ownership. Participation of municipalities and landowners in the Partnership will be strictly voluntary. No additional regulations or takings are included in the legislation.

Quick Facts

- There is no cost for towns to join
- There is no requirement to conserve land through CR's or any other mechanism, unless willing individual private landowners seek to do so
- The Partnership has no relationship to proposals to ban cutting on state lands
- The 2018 state law creating the Woodlands Partnership as a public body declares it will NOT expend any funds: 1) to construct or operate a wood pellet or biomass manufacturing facility 2) for the USFS to hold a fee interest in real property
- A Select Board or Town Meeting vote to join is the only action needed to join, followed by appointment of a resident to represent the municipality on the Partnership Board