



Project Impacts

NSRC-FUNDED RESEARCH FINAL REPORT

Inventory of Town Forests in Vermont

PROJECT AWARD YEAR AND TITLE:

2007

Town Forests in Vermont: Inventory of an Overlooked but Essential Component of the Forested Landscape

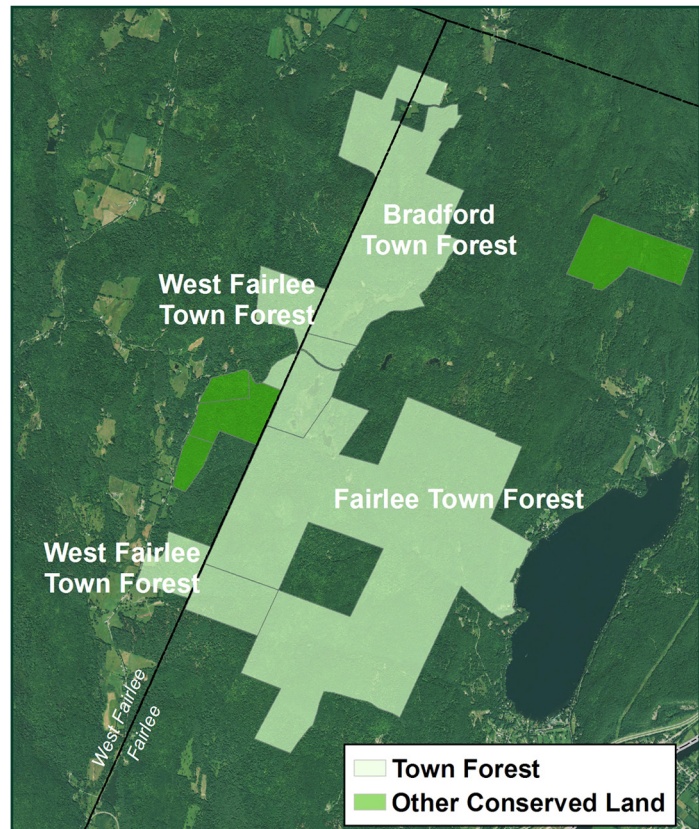
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Town forests in Vermont contribute to the regional landscape by keeping productive forestlands in timber management, protecting physical and biological diversity, and maintaining connections between larger forest patches. They also provide social benefits such as economic investment, recreation, and clean water. However, they are often little known or appreciated by local governments and residents alike, making it possible that unprotected properties could be sold and converted to other uses. This neglect extended to the Vermont Conserved Land Database (CLD), a statewide digital map of protected lands, which lacked as much as half the current municipal landholdings.

NSRC researchers acquired boundary data for new and missing municipal forestlands from county foresters, regional planning commissions, and towns, increasing by 38% the area of town forestlands in the CLD to over 65,000 acres. Researchers also collected information on forest management and protection status. Data indicated that only about half of municipal forestlands have a management plan, which suggests these properties lack formal oversight. Although almost 60% of the municipal forestland parcels were cited in town plans, which articulate a vision for a town's future growth, few provided detailed descriptions of long-term management objectives. Only 17% of municipal forestlands were identified as protected by a conservation easement.

These results underscore the lack of attention devoted to town forests and the need to keep the CLD current for land conservation analyses and other natural resources assessments. Future work should further quantify use and management of municipal forestlands with the ultimate goal of protecting and expanding the current network of town-owned properties.