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Reporting Examples of Our Progress in Caring For the Land and Serving People



Discovering a Working Forest in the Northeast Stewardship Contract Positions Forest for Work on Interpretive Trail

To the residents of New Hampshire and Maine, working forests are sources of jobs, wood, and serve as an anchor for the region's culture and heritage. But to millions of others from East Coast urban areas, the sights and sounds of logging operations are contrary to their generation's idea of the "northern forest."

How to close this gap of knowledge, and create a better understanding? An interpretive trail through the White Mountain National Forest along the well-traveled Kancamangus Highway seemed like a good place to start. The trail would identify the multiple uses of national forest lands and the multiple values those lands can deliver. The Forest Service completed planning for the "Discovery Trail" in 1995.

For the next six years, the Forest Service worked with the National Forest Foundation and local forestry organizations to raise funds to augment congressional appropriations. Two years later, the trail was opened to the public. The final components of the site were put in place during the summer of 2003.

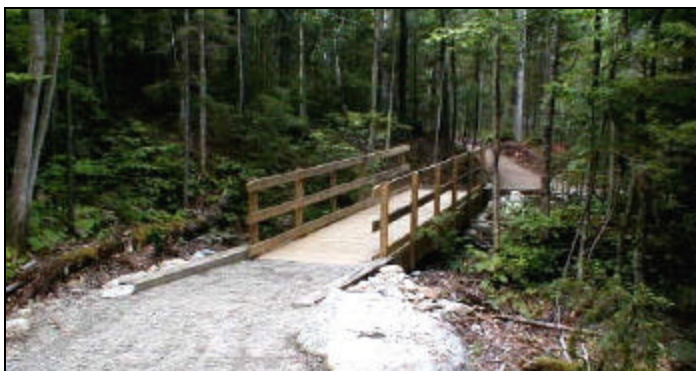
Stewardship contracting – goods for services – was tested in the construction of the Discovery Trail. With authority from Congress for trials across the country, the Forest Service selected several projects including the Discovery Trail. A local construction company performed small logging operations and removed trees it could sell in exchange for creating trails, a trailhead, and a parking area that would become part of the interpretive trail system.

Stewardship didn't stop with the completion of construction. The Forest Service established a local team of citizens and organizations to provide for the long-term stewardship of the "educational experience" at the Discovery Trail, including assisting with the development of a set of educational activities including things to do on the "kids trail," interpretive signs, and other lasting improvements.

The Discovery Trail is proof that stewardship contracting can benefit local contractors, the Forest Service, and stakeholders of the national forests. It also demonstrates that through "hands-on discovery" at national forest sites, urban visitors to the Northwoods can better understand the role of working forests.



Autumn's brilliant colors attract scores of visitors bound to benefit from descriptive instruction on the interpretive trail.



The experiment with stewardship contracting may lead to more positive changes in the way the Forest Service accomplishes critical work.