

Community Education on Watershed Conservation

Follow the Flow

The Challenge

Rapid development and population increases in New Hampshire make it the fastest growing State in the Northeast. This growth consumes 13,000 acres of critical open space each year, most of which is forested land.

Forests, together with shorelines and riparian areas, are critical protectors of wildlife habitat, water quality, and other natural resources. More and more communities recognize this and have taken active planning steps to ensure the future of the State's remaining open space and watersheds. For proper planning, however, landowners, local officials, and conservation groups must have the knowledge, data, and analysis support to make informed decisions.

The Solution

To focus its outreach resources, the State of New Hampshire identified several threatened watersheds that would benefit the most from conservation planning. With financial support from a USDA Forest Service grant, University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension and its partners have provided assistance and education to the communities of these watersheds to develop:

- An inventory of existing natural resources,
- Detailed maps of critical lands and open space, and
- A common understanding of the value of these natural resources relative to watersheds, habitat, and the local economy.

Armed with a natural resources inventory, the mapping and analytical power of Geographic Information System technology, and the aid of volunteer educators in organizations such as New Hampshire Coverts, local communities gain the assistance they need to develop comprehensive watershed conservation plans.

Integrated with the aid to communities, UNH Cooperative Extension and its partners have implemented strategies to promote sound forest stewardship to individual landowners,

In the Northeast's fastest growing State, proactive communities safeguard the future of their forests and watersheds.



Coverts cooperators learn about the interdependence of woodlands and watersheds. (Photo courtesy of UNH Cooperative Extension)

foresters, and loggers. These individuals play a pivotal role in meeting the overall conservation needs of the watershed.

Resulting Benefits

The collaborative efforts focused on threatened watersheds educate residents about the interrelationship between the built and natural environment. The approach is a holistic one, including social, environmental, and economic concerns. In this way, communities can develop their own balance between growth and the sustainability of the surrounding forested watershed.

Sharing Success

The outreach efforts in threatened watersheds draw upon the existing New Hampshire Coverts Project model for community conservation education. The Coverts Project is a volunteer education and outreach program that promotes habitat conservation and forest stewardship. Coverts cooperators receive intensive training and become important resources for planning and outreach in the communities in which they live.

Education and technical assistance in the threatened watersheds has been provided to more than 35 communities and conservation groups. The workshops and assistance provided by the USDA Forest Service and UNH Cooperative Extension help hone the Coverts Project to serve as an even more effective vehicle to outreach and transfer knowledge to other communities.



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