

Community Land Ownership and Governance in Northern
New England: An Analysis of Two Local Approaches to the
Community Forest Model

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Abstract

Powerful changes to northern New England's land tenure and economic base have resulted in a shared struggle among local communities to exercise control over their natural resource assets. This study explores the Community Forest Model as one viable response to this struggle, investigating two different ownership approaches in order to develop a deeper understanding of the power, potential, and limitations of community control. Through interviews with local practitioners and residents, the cases tell the story of community forest ownership and governance. Emergent themes reveal that ownership entities are exercising control through legal property rights, accessible decision-making structures, and mobilized communities. Key findings also demonstrate the potential for community forest projects to alter power dynamics in how land is managed and valued, helping to build local capacity and agency, while also addressing threats to land security in natural resource-based communities.

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Chapter 1: Overview

1.1 Introduction

Rural communities across the northern New England region of Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine share in a common struggle to hold onto the wealth of their land and local natural resource assets. This struggle stems in large part from powerful transformations in the region's land tenure patterns and economic base. Over the past thirty years, forces of deindustrialization and globalization have resulted in a massive restructuring of the forest products industry, which for many years had provided a stabilizing influence, both in terms of land ownership and economic activity. By 2004, the industrial ownership that had dominated private land tenure for many years had been reduced by 60% (Levesque et al., 2008), and was primarily replaced with that of privately held timberland investment groups (Weinberg and Larson, 2008). Investment-driven landowner groups purchase and manage land for short-term profit maximization, potentially threatening its ability to serve as a resource for a productive forest-based economy (Lyman et al. 2014). Under this investment tenure, huge tracts of land are changing hands at a pace that is creating an environment and feeling of uncertainty. Local communities are wrestling with the reality that the natural resources around which they have built their economy and way of life may not represent local assets unless these resources are under community control (Kelly and Ratner, 2009).

Community forests provide an alternative tenure arrangement that removes land from the speculative market and places it under community-based

ownership and governance. While there are many different expressions of a ‘community forest,’ the Community Forest Collaborative¹ has described a Community Forest Model that builds off the tradition of town forests and communal lands in New England, and prioritizes ownership and management of the land as a community asset. This study is grounded in this particular model, which identifies four distinct features of a community forest:

- Community forests are owned and managed by a municipal entity, tribal council or other nonprofit organization (e.g. land trust) on behalf of a community.
- The proposed acquisition and management structure ensures community participation in and responsibility for management decisions.
- The community has secure access to the value and benefits of the forest, both monetary and nonmonetary, which can support and reinforce community priorities and economic development objectives.
- The conservation values of the forestland are permanently protected (Community Forest Collaborative, 2007).

While there are an estimated 150-200 municipal-owned forests in each northern New England state—acquired through tax delinquencies, resident gifts or town purchases—many of these lands are unknown to residents and/or are not currently managed or valued as an asset to the community (Interview, Community Forest Collaborative). Over the past decade, the Community Forest Collaborative has facilitated the creation of approximately ten new community forest projects in northern New England, through supporting towns in pursuing a more thoughtful and strategic approach to community land ownership, one that is fueled by social and economic equity objectives in addition to forestland protection. Every

¹ The Community Forest Collaborative is a partnership of The Trust for Public Land, the Northern Forest Center, and the Quebec-Labrador Foundation that promotes the development and implementation of Community Forests in Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont.

community has its story, and the impetus for acquiring land as a community forest can range dramatically depending on the unique historical, economic, social and environmental contexts of the land and community in question.

Since these projects are relatively nascent, rigorous analysis to assess their various areas of impact, challenges and/or benefits has been limited. However, the Community Forest Collaborative has been a leading source of research and reports, working with additional scholars and practitioners to investigate initial economic impacts (Reaves and Ceroni, 2013), community investment benefits (Community Forest Collaborative, 2007) and community wealth creation/preservation (Lyman et al. 2014) of community forests, as well as draw comparisons between the Community Forest Model and other community and equity-driven land conservation programs (Lyman et al. 2013). One salient recommendation that has emerged from this research is bridging between community forests and the community and economic development sectors as one means of broadening the infrastructure of support available to these projects.

This study contributes to the conversation surrounding the aforementioned recommendation by exploring the Community Forest Model through the lens of *community control* that is exercised through community forest projects. For the purposes of this research, *community control* is defined as ownership of the land as well as ownership over the process by which decisions about the land are made. The purpose of this study is to develop a more nuanced understanding of the power, potential, complexity and limitations of community control over land and natural resource assets within the context of two different approaches to the

Community Forest Model: the Randolph Community Forest in Randolph, New Hampshire, which illustrates municipal ownership, and the Downeast Lakes Land Trust's Farm Cove/West Grand Lake Community Forests in and around Grand Lake Stream and the Downeast region of Maine, which illustrate community-based nonprofit land trust ownership.

1.2 Methods

Through initial assistance from Marcy Lyman, formerly with the Community Forest Collaborative, the two community forest cases for this study were selected based on their differing ownership models as well as the different geographic, historical and cultural contexts that they illustrate within northern New England. Data was collected primarily through semi-structured interviews with ten (five per case) leaders, participants and/or residents associated with the two cases, as well as two practitioners associated with the Community Forest Collaborative. Initial interviewees were identified through early conversation with Marcy Lyman, as well as through online research of the two cases. Following initial contact with point people, a snowball sampling technique was employed to learn of other interview candidates. All interviews took place over the phone during the months of March and April of 2015. Findings were triangulated and supplemented with extant data found in Community Forest Collaborative reports, other online news articles, press releases and publications that highlight the respective cases, as well as the Randolph Community Forest and DLLT websites. The interviews were transcribed, and data was then summarized along emergent themes surrounding the following research questions:

How are rural communities in northern New England exercising community control over their local land and natural resource assets through the Community Forest Model?

- What are relevant contexts and motivations that support the rationale for community control over land in this region?
- How are communities establishing land tenure and governance?
 - What other factors are critical to gaining and maintaining community control?
- What are opportunities and limitations surrounding community ownership and governance?

The cases in this study illustrate two different ownership approaches to the Community Forest Model, and as such, are not intended to represent comprehensive case studies. While some information is included regarding background, community context and acquisition process, it was beyond the scope of this study to delve into the complexities surrounding the complete picture and process of each case, including complex funding mechanisms and collaboration work that were critical to accomplishing the community forest projects.

1.3 Research Limitations

The case study approach helps to reveal how the practice of community forest projects lives up to the theory of the Model. While significant insight was learned through the deep dive into two cases, within the paradigm of choice for research methods, it is possible that review of a larger and more diverse sample of community forest projects could capture additional and/or different trends germane to the Model.

Due to time and resource constraints, interviews were limited to key players in each case. The reality among different land user groups, residents and

people who are not involved with the community forest in any formal capacity could be very different from the insight and perspective filtered from project leaders and/or people who are directly involved in land ownership and/or governance roles. Therefore, there are some threats to internal validity as this research only captures part of the story (Gaber and Gaber, 2007). It is also important to note that the two cases explored through this study are incredibly unique, particularly in terms of scale, as the tracts of land are very large in comparison to what other similarly situated communities may be working with. (Interview, Trust for Public Land). Therefore, generalizability is limited, and the extent to which findings can be transferred to and potentially useful for other communities can only be determined on a case-by-case basis (Gaber and Gaber, 2007).

Finally, there are limitations surrounding ‘community control’ as a unit of analysis. A ‘community’ can encompass ‘communities of place,’ ‘communities of interest,’ and ‘communities of identity,’ which are not always easily distinguishable (McCarthy, 2006). Furthermore, assessing ‘the community’ runs the risk of assuming that communities are homogenous and egalitarian units, when in reality they are spaces and places of innate conflict and difference. “Such an assumption of homogeneity often manifests itself in the oppression or exclusion of all those who are perceived as different...” (DeFilippis et al. 2010 p. 24). In the absence of data from a broader set of stakeholders, conclusive statements regarding collective interests in land, participation and consensus in

decision-making, and the extent to which people perceive and benefit from the land as a community asset are limited.

This study does not presume that greater local control over natural resource assets will inherently lead to more just and sustainable outcomes; that representativeness and accountability are immanent to community ownership; or that community-owned forests are the best use² of land or approach to community land ownership, as other options such as community land trusts (discussed in Chapter 4) could be more effective or appropriate, depending on relative needs of the community and objectives of the land in question.

² Yuen (2012) defines ‘best use’ for a given tract of land as the balance between use and exchange values, as distinct from traditional ‘highest and best use’ formulated by market exchange.

Chapter 2: The Northern New England Context

This study focuses on the movement of community-owned and controlled forests in the northern New England region. As such, it is important to provide a brief historical and contextual analysis of the region's land tenure patterns³, as well as introduce some of the emerging land tensions, all of which are relevant to the local capacity and motivation for community land ownership. The following section is by no means an exhaustive review of factors that are contributing to the growing interest and practice surrounding community forests in this region, but it does offer an illustrative foundation for how property interests and relations have evolved, and how communities in northern New England are positioned to respond to land security conflicts through envisioning and pursuing alternative models of ownership and control.

2.1 A Tradition of Common and Public Lands

Communal practices and local, democratic control are deeply embedded in the history and culture of northern New England. Many towns in this region still adopt their budgets, elect officers and change bylaws through an exercise in direct democracy that is known as Town Meeting (Salvino et al. 2012), an annual event at which registered voters act as the local legislature and engage in the governance process through discussion, deliberation and debate (Townsend, 2009). The Community Forest Model's emphasis on community control and

³ It is important to note that while absolutely critical to the full history of land tenure in northern New England, it was out of scope for this brief analysis to include information on Native American tenure practices.

participation takes advantage of the civic engagement that is embedded in and empowered by Town Meeting and other democratic public processes.

New England towns have equally deep roots in owning and managing land for the common good. In its earlier tenure model, common land was shared for communal benefit, offering grazing and fuelwood rights to all who worked the land. As populations grew and towns began to take the shape of distinct political bodies that were capable of representing broad community interests, public land was set aside to support growing community institutions such as church and school (McCullough, 1995). While common land was a resource for communities as a whole, public land sustained essential elements of community structure (McCullough, 1995).

Evolving from this public land model, the New England ‘town forest’ arose through a diverse array of intentions, including “a chance to alter the course of deforestation, reclaim idle lands, increase property values and related tax rates, reduce timber shortages, eliminate reliance on imported lumber, encourage local wood-using industries, provide employment, protect water supplies, and...simultaneously generate town revenue” (McCullough, 1995 p. 132). In this region, enabling state legislation was passed in the early 1900’s that permitted towns to acquire and manage forestland. This policy was a critical step in encouraging communities to pursue local ownership of land for public use. Town forests offer great potential to contribute benefits to the communities in which they are located, but historically have tended to fall short in both engaging the

public in decision-making and distributing community benefits (Lyman et al., 2013).

2.2 Private Land Tenure Changes

While the history of communal land and town forests reflects the concept and practice of ownership for the common good as a cultural norm, land tenure in this region has historically been dominated by private industry. Northern New England became an industrial powerhouse in the 1800s, supplying lumber to build the nation's growing cities. Jobs in sawmills, turning mills, paper mills and other industrial operations attracted workers who settled in communities that became the region's commercial and cultural centers (The Northern Forest Center, n.d.). By the early 1900s, land ownership in northern New England centered around integrated forest products companies, most of which maintained a long-term presence, permitted public access to the land, and had strong ties to surrounding communities (The Community Forest Collaborative, 2007). Industrial land ownership was believed to have a "stabilizing influence" for communities in this region (Lyman and Bisson, 2003 p. 3).

Beginning in the 1980s, the powerful economic transformations that were experienced throughout much of the rest of the country contributed to the deindustrialization of northern New England, resulting in an erosion of manufacturing jobs and a massive transfer of ownership in land (Belsky, 2008; Brighton, 2003). Over the course of the next 30 years, millions of acres changed hands, some of it three or even four times (Hagan et al. 2005). In the face of increased economic pressures, most of the region's industrial timberland owners

were bought out or absorbed by larger multinational corporations and private investors, including pension plans, foundations, private equity funds, large capital investors, and endowments (Weinberg and Larson, 2008). Communities have struggled to adapt to this economic restructuring. There are fewer jobs and less local revenue to invest in infrastructure and local institutions (Schildt, 2015).

Moreover, many new investors rely on timber investment management organizations (TIMOs) and publicly traded timberland real estate investment trusts (T-REITs) to purchase and manage their land holdings (Stein, 2010); hence the owners are not visible to local communities (Weinberg and Larson, 2008; The Community Forest Collaborative, 2007). Absentee ownership is all too often found to be detached from the life of a community and its current or future needs (Kelly and Ratner, 2009). Increasingly distant and investor-based ownership also brings a new emphasis on efficiency and short-run profitability, as land that is owned primarily for investment purposes demands a maximum return on that investment (Lyman et al, 2014; Brighton, 2003). Investor owners derive investment returns through asset appreciation or timber harvesting, though they are indifferent to which, so long as a favorable return is generated by the end of the relatively short – seven to 15 years – ownership frame (Weinberg and Larson, 2008; Stein, 2010). When forests are aggressively and unsustainably harvested, or subdivided and sold for real estate development, there may be temporary income streams enjoyed, but natural assets are left damaged and fragmented, and rural communities are rarely empowered to control or direct the impacts of these kinds

of economic activities, nor benefit from what economic value is generated (Kelly and Ratner, 2009).

On the other hand, some TIMOs have sold working forest conservation easements (WFCE)⁴ to land trusts or state and federal natural resource agencies as a means of earning a competitive return on investments while also preventing forest fragmentation (Stein, 2010). Lyme Timber, a TIMO based out of New Hampshire, is notable for its role in conservation transactions and community forest projects. In a 2014 presentation to the Northwest Community Forest Forum, Managing Director of Lyme Timber, Peter Stein, notes that it can be strategic for land trusts to partner with private capital because “investment managers can serve as a ‘land bank’ to assure that significant conservation properties are held still over time,” (Stein, 2014 p. 2) while land trusts and other groups assemble funding for fee or conservation easement purchases. Moreover, investment groups hold significant purchasing power to facilitate landscape scale projects, and as private investors, have access to New Market Tax Credit (NMTC)⁵ financing and other debt mechanisms (Stein, 2014). Stein (2014) also proposes that, “the end for Lyme may actually be the beginning for the community forest ownership entity. Lyme has used the opportunity of a community forest to take the risk out of its ‘exit strategy’” (p. 3).

⁴ WFCEs apply to forestlands that are actively managed for the goods and services associated with the land. While the landowner maintains title, she eases the right to develop the land and generally must adopt some extent of sustainability restrictions and certifications (Stein, 2010).

⁵ The NMTC is a federal tax credit program that seeks to encourage and provide a vehicle for investment in low-income communities throughout the country, and can be used for a broad range of eligible projects, including working forestland projects. The NMTC enables financial institutions and other corporate investors to make an equity investment in a qualifying Community Development Entity (CDE) in exchange for receiving tax credits against the investor’s federal income tax liability over a seven-year period (The Northern Forest Center, <http://www.northernforest.org/>)

Dynamic tensions exist between ideas surrounding the economic future of northern New England, particularly how the area's abundant natural resources will play a role. These tensions tend to emerge between views that follow traditional economic activity and resource use, and those that look towards resource protection and stewardship (Colocousis, 2008). There has been a strong movement of state and national conservation initiatives working to acquire development rights to the land through easement transactions with private landowners. While conservation has increased sharply from these efforts, much of the ownership in this region still remains in the hands of larger absentee landowners, without significant ownership rights being redistributed into local, community control (Brighton, 2003; Community Forest Collaborative, 2007).

2.3 Market Forces

Development pressures have also been increasing due to the region's proximity to growing metropolitan areas in southern New England, which is encouraging the growth of regional tourism, nonresident investments and second home development (The Northern Forest Center, n.d.; Brighton, 2003). Of paramount concern to many local communities is the trend of market forces to ensure the 'highest and best use' of the land by valuing its potential for real estate development over working forests (Belsky, 2008). This trend is manifesting through forestland in the region being marketed at prices well above its standing timber value (LeVert et al., 2007).

Per traditional neoliberal ideology, the market exchange value of property continually overrides the use value, and there is a fundamental contradiction here

that, as Yuen (2012) describes, causes property markets to have “inherent tensions at their core,” and “creates an objective basis from which land use conflict can potentially arise” (p. 9). Yuen also notes that while not a guaranteed result, these conflicting interests can provide impetus for collective action.

There is undoubtedly an inherent shift of power and authority that occurs when the ownership of large parcels changes hands, yet these transfers also present an opportunity for local communities to plan for the next round of sales. This glimpse into the historical evolution of land tenure arrangements in northern New England offers a reminder that “property relations are social, not natural, and that profoundly alternative social relations and values are entirely thinkable” (McCarthy, 2005 p. 16). The forces that have shaped northern New England’s land tenure patterns and economic struggles are still in motion today, and it is to these forces that the Community Forest Model can respond.

Chapter 3: The Community Forest Model

3.1 Defining the Community Forest Model

Community forests provide a unique model of shared forest ownership in that they are owned and managed by a municipal body, tribal council, or community-based nonprofit organization on behalf of a community. The Community Forest Model exists under the umbrella field of community-based forestry, which is a very diverse concept worldwide, but in the United States tends to employ partnerships between communities, their allies, and private or public landowners to accomplish collaborative forest management and stewardship (Danks, 2008). Arguably the primary distinction between community-based forestry and community forests is that the latter accomplishes and prioritizes local ownership and control. As Belsky (2008 p. 234) asserts:

While involvement in collaborative forest management on public lands has produced recommendations...there is no guarantee that the fruits of these collaborative efforts will persist into the future. Community-owned forests hold out the promise that local ownership will provide greater opportunities for local residents and community-based organizations to have authority and decision-making power over local forests and will allow them to control the fruits of their collaborative decision-making, recommendations, and labor.

The Community Forest Model is designed for flexibility to accommodate a range of ownership and governance structures that best suit the unique needs, capacities and contexts of each community, while also prioritizing elements of local control, access and benefits (Lyman et al., 2013). The suite of tenure options for ownership may include a local government board (selectmen, conservation commission, water commission, forestry committee), or a nonprofit community-

based organization or land trust. In a report describing the adaptability of the model, the Community Forest Collaborative (2007) explains how “in most cases, there will be a direct affiliation with one or more governing bodies within the community, but in all cases, the entity that owns the land will be governed by people who live in the community and represent the interests of the community” (p. 11).

This report also describes mechanisms and structures to ensure community participation and authority in decision-making, which might include involvement by community members on town boards, or if the forest is owned by an association or land trust, representation by community members on nonprofit boards and/or committees. Additionally, responsibility for management decisions may range from public participation in the development and approval of a management plan, to oversight of management operations, and/or integration of management planning and oversight with other established town processes such as master planning, public hearings and town meeting. The Community Forest Model ensures community access to the values and benefits of the land through various approaches, ranging from an explicit statement of purpose to a more formalized structure, such as creation of a community forest fund that holds revenue from land operations and may require a town meeting vote for expenditures (The Community Forest Collaborative, 2007).

3.2 Benefits of Community Forests

Studies on the economic impacts of various community forest projects in northern New England have concluded that community ownership and

management of forestland can generate significant monetary benefits in timber or non-timber forest products revenue and recreation, while simultaneously not affecting local property taxes. These economic benefits were found in the 13-Mile Woods of Errol, New Hampshire, which saw more than \$1.7 million in net timber revenue in the first seven years of ownership (Reaves and Ceroni, 2013).

Economic impacts connected to recreation include fishing, hunting, ATV tourism and the outdoor guide jobs that it supports. Additionally these forests provide a complex suite of public ecosystem services, including water quality protection and provision of wildlife habitat, as found in an analysis of community-owned forests in the Mount Washington Valley region of Maine and New Hampshire (Lyman and Bisson, 2003). They can also generate monetary proceeds through carbon credits, as demonstrated through the Downeast Lakes Land Trust's sale of 200,000 carbon credits through California's Climate Action Reserve (CAR) on the Farm Cove Community Forest in Grand Lake Stream, Maine, which generated an estimated gross value of \$10/credit (Lyman et al. 2014).

A study conducted by the Community Forest Collaborative (2011) suggests that community forests also advance community development objectives through: engaging broad participation in a way that builds social capital and civic capacity; offering a forum for deliberation on contentious issues that, while challenging, can also result in developing a shared understanding; bridging connections within and between towns, and bringing outside resources into historically isolated areas; leveraging partnerships and collaboration with existing organizations, or in some instances, leading to the creation of new groups to fill

gaps in organizational capacity; and finally improving local governance through working in collaboration with existing town processes, such as town meeting and master plans, as well as inspiring new individuals with important skills to serve on local boards.

Community forests range in size from less than 100 acres to over 30,000 acres. The value the land represents to the community is not always proportional with its scale: the 68-acre Nulheganaki Forest in Barton, Vermont owned by the Nulhegan Abenaki Tribe is used to host the tribe's governing council meetings and tribal celebrations, as well as to practice traditional maple sugaring and cultivate food for tribal members (Lyman et al. 2014).

As conservation efforts, community forest projects buffer and link conserved lands, contribute to landscape scale conservation initiatives, and expand funding for conservation through attracting broad sources such as municipal finance (bonds, taxes, operating budgets), as well as new sources of financing, such as the New Markets Tax Credits and commercial bank loans (Community Forest Collaborative, 2011). These forests also provide natural infrastructure for outdoor classrooms and public education programs.

3.3 Challenges Facing Community Forests

Assuming ownership and management responsibilities over tracts of land, regardless of acreage, requires substantial community readiness and interest, as well as capacity for technical assistance from supporting community organizations. Communities must be prepared to make financial commitments, as

well as provide significant time and energy for the planning and long-term stewardship of a community asset.

In early organizing stages, community forest projects face the potential barrier of the public's perceived costs to the community, such as how acquiring land could raise taxes (Community Forest Collaborative, 2007). This hesitation can be the product of a lack of awareness of potential funding to cover acquisition and easement purchase, which is made available through programs such as the federal Forest Legacy Program, New Hampshire's Land and Community Heritage Investment Program, and Land for Maine's Future Program. Building off of these early-on challenges, community forest projects have often been initiated in response to a forthcoming tenure change, and organizing community support and necessary financial resources can be a time-consuming process in the face of time-sensitive circumstances. Beyond initial acquisition costs, communities confront significant stewardship and management costs in the early phases of owning the land. This barrier is reflected in the need for local economic development and business planning as well as drafting and implementation of a forest management plan to ensure easement terms are being followed (Community Forest Collaborative, 2011). These costs can accrue before revenues are realized, creating the need for access to up-front capital or low-interest loans.

Skepticism in local government's capacity to own and manage land in the long-term, for both the benefit of the community and future generations, can also be a challenge for those community forest projects under municipal ownership. Municipal leaders are accountable to the short-term budgetary needs of towns;

hence, the land as an asset could become susceptible to meeting those needs (Lyman et al., 2013).

Depending on the various stages of the process – acquisition, ownership, management – there are different areas of expertise needed, which may not exist within the community itself. Ultimately, given the limited resources of small, working class communities in northern New England, a concerted effort is needed to develop an accessible, reliable and sustained infrastructure of support for communities that wish to embark on a community forest project (Community Forest Collaborative, 2011).

Supporting organizations can provide invaluable technical assistance in organizing, community building, project design, mapping, property assessment, title work, and fundraising; however, these organizations also require increased institutional capacity, primarily staff time, and along with communities themselves, require access to capital that is “flexible (flexible interest rates, no prepayment penalties), patient (provides time without pressure), and long term” (Community Forest Collaborative, 2007 p. 23).

Recent analysis suggests that community forest projects are almost entirely accomplished through technical support and assistance from the conservation and forestry sectors (Community Forest Collaborative, 2011). However, as preliminary research into the community benefits of these projects illuminates, community ownership of forestland offers the potential to achieve conservation goals while also advancing economic and social objectives in low-income rural communities (Lyman et al. 2013; Community Forest Collaborative,

2007; Bisson and Lyman, 2003). Deeper engagement by community and economic development institutions and organizations would both strengthen and expand the infrastructure of support for these projects (Community Forest Collaborative, 2011) and facilitate the realization of the full potential of the Community Forest Model. In addition to limiting fiscal and technical support, a lack of recognition within a community of the multiple values of forestland can act as a barrier to the land being viewed as a community asset, and potentially hinder collective interest in pursuing community ownership.

Chapter 4: Community Land Ownership: Theory and Praxis

The following chapter situates the Community Forest Model within some of the broader theory and concepts surrounding community land ownership. It then goes on to briefly discuss the community land trust (CLT) model to better understand how a similar and more established approach to community land ownership can enable and empower communities in pursuing land security and democratic, local control. While the model of the CLT is flexible and has evolved significantly over the years, its tenure arrangement, governance structure, and on-the-ground applications in the service of the diverse needs of an identified community are more broadly and clearly analyzed and defined in the literature than those of the Community Forest Model, and thus help to develop a foundational understanding of community land ownership and governance in practice.

4.1 Why Community Land Ownership?

As reflected in this report's previous discussion on market forces, the dominant notion of property ownership today is that the expansion of unfettered, individualized private ownership will result in greater wealth creation overall. However, the dearth of prosperity found today in many communities in northern New England exposes a stark contrast to this theory, and presents the need for alternative conceptions of land ownership as a potential remedy to market failures. Ownership determines how decisions about the land are made, as well as what and whose interests the land is serving. But how can community interest in

land be protected? One strategy is to shift more power to communities via the transfer of land into community ownership.

Community ownership recognizes land as a shared resource that, rather than being treated as other private property, should instead be held in trusteeship for future generations (Swann et al., 1972). As Hoffman (2013) defends, the mechanism of community ownership “empowers communities in a way that markets alone do not, enabling them to guide the development of resources and to reinvest the wealth that is created in ways that meet the community’s needs” (p. 296).

Another common rationale for community ownership is to achieve greater control over the land as a local asset. Many rural communities in the United States find themselves not only struggling to build local assets, but also to create and hold onto the wealth that they generate (Ratner and Markley, 2014). Control is empowered through the set of rules and institutions that govern access to this wealth, including decisions about how and how much to invest or reinvest in any given asset and how to distribute benefits of that investment (Hoffer and Levy, 2010; Boyce and Shelley, 2003).

There has been a recent surge of work around community wealth building as an alternative paradigm of economic development, one that prioritizes developing local assets, anchoring jobs locally, expanding the provision of public services, and creating systems of support for projects and initiatives that are locally – and ideally broadly – owned and rooted in community (McKinley and Kelly, 2014; The Democracy Collaborative, n.d.; Kelly and Ratner, 2009). When

a local community has vested ownership and control, its members are less subject to the whims of others and forces of change, and can steer the direction of future investment in ways that meet their objectives. This presents an important point that local ownership does not inherently benefit the broader local community (Kelly and Ratner, 2009). Local ownership by elites, or even local private individuals, for example, might not mirror the objectives and practices of local ownership that is more widely distributed, such as in the case of shared ownership. In the context of the Community Forest Model, shared ownership can be reflected when a nonprofit or municipality holds fee-simple title to the land on behalf of an identified community and eases development rights to another conservation organization or public agency (Land Trust Alliance, 2013).

There is no singular, ideal institutional arrangement for owning and governing land as a natural resource asset (Ostrom and Cox, 2010); however, as Boyce and Shelley (2003) defend, the quality of the outcomes of various organizational structures or tenure arrangements will “depend above all on the degree to which these arrangements are grounded in democratic distribution of wealth and power” (p. 3-4).

4.3 The Community Land Trust Model

The community land trust (CLT) tenure model was first conceived of over 40 years ago, and has become a firmly established and widespread social mechanism in response to inherent property market tensions. The CLT itself is a nonprofit community-based organization that enables and ensures long-term local stewardship of land. Preservation of land in perpetuity for a specific purpose is

not a new practice in the United States – take national parks and wilderness areas as common examples of this type of land protection (Housing Assistance Council, 1993). Less common, however, is land protection in perpetuity for the purpose of achieving community-scale goals, with ownership and authority being vested in a community-based organization.

As Swann et al. (1972) explain, “The CLT is *not* primarily concerned with *common ownership*. Rather, its concern is for *ownership for the common good*, which may or may not be combined with common ownership” (p. 1). This is an important distinction, as it highlights how the CLTs purpose is accomplished through its tenure and governance arrangements.

CLT Tenure Arrangement

The CLT model has a dual tenure structure that separates the ownership of property and improvements from the ownership of the land on which that property is built (Mironova, 2014). The landowner is a nonprofit, community corporation with a place-based membership, democratically elected board, and a charitable commitment to the use and stewardship of land within an identified service area (Rosenberg and Yuen, 2012; Davis, 2014). In effect, organized citizens—who are critical to the formation and ongoing operation of a CLT— remove land from the private, speculative market where its value is difficult to control (Mironova, 2014).

The nonprofit holds fee-simple title to the land in perpetuity. Fee-simple is the form of property ownership in which the landowner generally holds the greatest number of ‘sticks’ in the bundle of property rights. Essentially, fee-

simple title vests the landowner with all necessary rights to treat the land as a fully marketable commodity (Wright, 1993). The nonprofit landowner enters into long-term lease agreements with other entities that own the improvements upon the land, such as residential homes, commercial buildings, agriculture activities or other collectively determined community needs and uses.

CLT Governance Structure

Within the land trust concept, community control can be gained and maintained. Under a CLT, control is the function of its membership (made up of both CLT residents and broader community members) and trusteeship is the function of a separate board or organizational body that is somewhat removed from the day-to-day considerations of the land (Swann, 1972; Jacobus and Brown, 2007). The majority of the board of directors is elected by the CLT membership, and typically one-third of the seats are allocated to residents living on the CLT's land, another third to those representing broader CLT membership (often people living in the community but not on the CLT's land), and then the remaining third is reserved for those representing the broader public interest (such as public officials or other nonprofit groups) (Davis, 2014). The governance structure allows for balanced accountability and ensures long-term protection of the organization's core values (Jacobus and Brown, 2007).

The CLT governing board intends to create a pluralistic structure that allows for broad participation in decision-making. However, the extent of democratic participation can vary among CLTs, and while minimal community engagement does not imply that the view of the wider community is not being

represented, Moore and McKee (2012) warn that “a lack of wider representation in some CLT structures is a pertinent issue given the weight placed on local democracy and community consensus in identifying local needs upon which CLTs are often premised” (p. 286).

Applications of CLTs

The common theme of community control over land is reflected in the many different applications of CLTs around the country. In the rural San Juan Islands of Washington's Puget Sound, increases in tourism and an upsurge in demand for retirement housing in the mid-1980's were causing island land prices to skyrocket. A general feeling that the Islands were becoming a 'playground for the rich,' coupled with stagnant low wages for local residents, provided impetus for islanders to come together and form a CLT with the collective goal of local control of permanent housing (Housing Assistance Council, 1993).

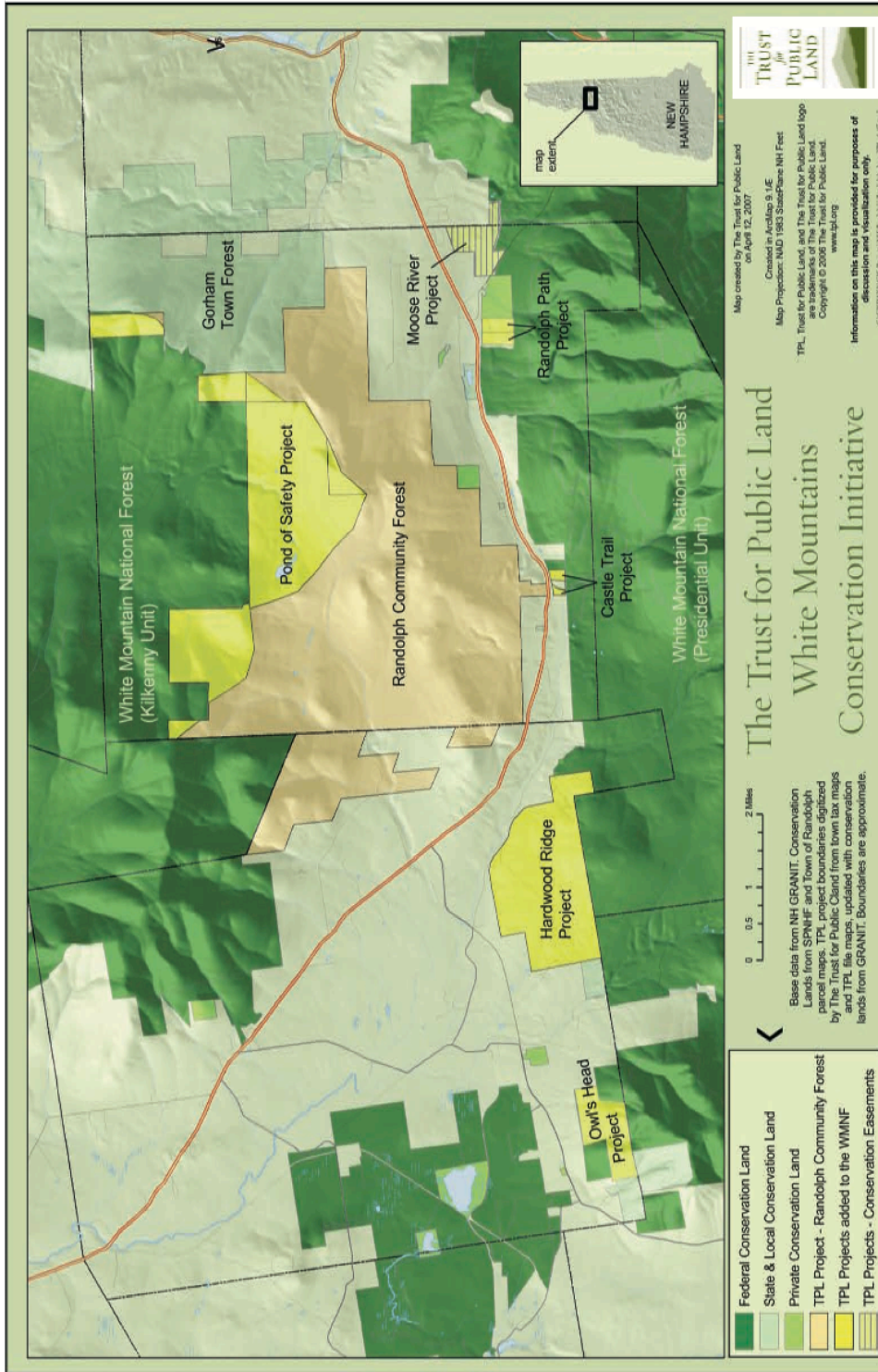
In urban environments, CLTs are being used to convert vacant land from a burden into an asset. Vacant land is connected to myriad problems, including rising crime rates and public health concerns, but it can also ignite feelings of uncertainty and represent deeply entrenched power imbalances. Hachmyer (2013), in referencing an interview with the Women's Community Revitalization Project and the Campaign to Take Back Vacant Land in Philadelphia, explains that “...in a sense, vacant land is a symbol of powerlessness...and part of the reason people think negatively of vacant land is that it undermines a community's sense of self-determination” (p.114).

Alternatively, CLTs are also being employed to combat gentrification in urban neighborhoods that are vulnerable to encroaching hot real estate markets and land speculators (Loh, 2015). The Dudley Street Neighborhood (DSNI) is a nonprofit organization that has operated Dudley Neighbors, Inc (DNI), a CLT in the Roxbury neighborhood of Boston for over twenty-five years. DNI's initial purpose was acquiring, holding and developing land for neighborhood revitalization in the face of rampant disinvestment and neglect by the City and absentee landowners. As the dynamic social and economic forces affecting neighborhood change and instability have evolved, today DNI also provides security against home foreclosures and displacement of low-income households. As a community-based organization, DSNI is rooted in grassroots organizing and democratic, community control. As Davis (2014) defends, "when DSNI exhorted the residents of Roxbury to 'Take a Stand, Own the Land,' it was not only so its CLT could secure buildable sites for affordable housing. It was so a local community, through DNI's long-term control over land and improvements, could control its destiny" (p. 26). Loh (2015) affirms this claim, quoting DNI director Harry Smith explaining how "the land trust doesn't exist just to acquire and manage land. It's really about engaging community to decide together what they want on their land" (p. 39).

The call for increasing communities' power and decision-making authority over land is a response to structural social and economic forces that are playing out at a local scale. Whether the local manifestation of these forces is in the form of skyrocketing land values, vacant lots, forestland fragmentation, or investor-

based ownership transfers, this call is being echoed across the rural urban-divide, from New England's inner cities, to its northern forests.

Chapter 5: Municipal Case: The Randolph Community Forest



Map Source: The Trust for Public Land

Figure 1: Map of The Randolph Community Forest

5.1 Community Context

The Randolph Community Forest (RCF) is a 10,000-acre tract of land that is owned and managed by the Town of Randolph, New Hampshire. Randolph is situated in northern New Hampshire's Coös County—the largest, least populated, and most rural county, which also has the state's lowest median household income and the highest percentage of individuals living below the poverty level (Lutz and Walsh, 2011). Towns in Coös County built their economy on forest products manufacturing, and more recently on outdoor recreation and tourism industries. Closings of mills and other manufacturing businesses have eroded the traditional economic base, resulting in job losses and population decline—it is estimated that just 2.5% of New Hampshire's total population resides in this part of the state, which has also seen the greatest rates of youth out-migration (Lutz and Walsh, 2011).

Randolph has fewer than 300 registered voters, but seasonal residents swell the population to over 800 in the summer months (Willcox, 2005). Many residents earned their livelihood from timber harvesting, either as owners of woodland tracts or as contract employees for nearby mills, and as such have been deeply affected by the structural and sweeping changes to the region's economic base. One Randolph resident reflects how “a lot of people who could get up and go went...because all of them at one point were able to support themselves with maybe a little bit left over, but closing of the mills has been devastating” (Interview). Dynamic tensions exist between ideas surrounding how Coös County and northern New Hampshire will reinvent itself economically and what role the

area's abundant natural resources will play (Colocousis, 2008). While divisions can be felt among year-round and seasonal residents, there is not always a bright line distinguishing how different groups value the area's natural resources.

5.2 Motivation for Community Ownership

The land that is now the RCF was commercially owned for over 100 years by a series of timber companies that managed the forest for the harvesting of wood and manufacturing of paper products (Willcox, 2005). As was common practice in northern New England, the timber companies permitted public use of the land. This embedded tradition created strong community ties to the land as well as a sense of ownership among local people, which was reflected through the construction and maintenance of access trails by residents of Randolph and surrounding communities (Interview, Forest Commission). David Willcox, Town Moderator and one of the initial organizers of the community forest project, recounts that, over time people came to “believe that the land would always be there for them,” and “in the early days, when the company owning the land was headquartered in the nearby city of Berlin, that belief seemed justified” (Interview). The mill owners knew many of the residents personally and understood what the land meant to local people. Moreover, if a resident had a concern regarding the land, she knew exactly where and how to reach the landowner. However, as one interviewee explains, it is important not to romanticize the actions of timber companies in the service of local people, because when more wood was needed to keep the mills running, that was their first responsibility.

As economic forces merged timber companies into larger corporate entities, the ownership of the 10,000-acre tract of land in Randolph moved farther and farther away, “both administratively and geographically” (Interview, David Willcox). Especially when the face of new ownership was that of an investment group managing the land for its short-term profits, town residents began to feel very uncertain as to how easily “some far away accountant, with no knowledge of the land or its local value” could make the decision to sell the property, “perhaps as a minor part of some larger corporate transaction” (Interview, David Willcox).

The presence and management of the White Mountain National Forest (WMNF) contributes to some of the tension surrounding land uses, and brings an added nuance to the rationale for community control. The Randolph Forest Commission and WMNF have an excellent and important working relationship (Interview, Forest Commission). Generally speaking, however, under federal government ownership, decisions about land in the WMNF are made in a national context, and as Randolph resident and former Forest Commission member Edith Tucker explains, “a citizen anywhere in the country has as much value as a local person.” She goes on to describe that “ultimately we are in district nine, the headquarters of which are in Milwaukee...and it can be difficult for people to get things done” (Interview).

Another critical consideration is that of community planning, as town officials recognized that the ownership on behalf of institutional investors and pressures of market forces posed a threat to the land being sold for real estate

development. The parcel in question consisted of about one-third of the town of Randolph's total land area, and the Planning Board warned that any tract of this size would hold potential for subdivision developments that would overwhelm the Town and render it incapable of providing the public services that it would be expected to provide under law (Interview, Town of Randolph). The Town's limited capacity was exacerbated by the geography of the land, as it was bisected by a 3,000-foot mountain range, and some of the most desirable residential sites would likely be located on the far side of this range, with access limited to points in neighboring towns (Willcox, 2005). Moreover, development in this isolated area would in effect create a separate town, at a higher elevation, which, as one interviewee defended, "would have had no relationship to the little town of Randolph, but would have still been within its political boundary."

In 1997, a local reporter informed the Planning Board that the current owner, Hancock Timber Resources Group (Hancock),⁶ had filed an application to the federally funded Forest Legacy Program to sell a conservation easement on the land. Local leaders of the RCF suspect that financial rationale was the driving force behind Hancock seeking Forest Legacy funds, as it provided an alternative option in that the company could sell its right to develop the land, thus making a profit, while still retaining title and the right to engage in timber harvesting activities, albeit with some restrictions surrounding sustainable management practices as well as guaranteed public access, the latter of which was already informally established. The Planning Board recognized that the Forest Legacy

⁶ Hancock Timber Resource Group is the world's largest timberland investment manager for institutional investors, serving both domestic and non-US clients (<http://www.htrg.com/about.htm>).

grant would go a long way in addressing the community's land fragmentation concerns while also supporting cultural traditions and staying true to public priorities identified in previous Master Plans and community surveys (Wilcox, 2005).

After weighing the various implications of Hancock's application, the Planning Board, backed by the Board of Selectmen, started a campaign to support the application. Learning about Hancock's plan had an interesting effect, as "when people understood that there was this application to do something different... it made people in the town start to think about [the land] as an asset" (Interview, Edith Tucker). Organizing efforts forged a number of partnership connections with groups such as the Trust for Public Land, and worked towards informing and gaining support from a broad range of interests within and surrounding the Randolph community, including local businesses, environmentalists, and political leaders as well as a number of different land user groups, such as hunters, fishermen, hikers, outdoor guides, and snowmobile enthusiasts (Willcox, 2005).

This was a time-consuming process, with a great deal of hoops to jump through, but ultimately, due to a heavy ice storm striking the region in the winter of 1998 and ensuing damage to the forest base, Hancock decided to sell the land outright instead of pursuing an easement (Interview, Town of Randolph). Initially it seemed that this change would not greatly impact the project: The Trust for Public Land would purchase the land from Hancock, place an easement upon it, and then sell to another timber company. However, community organizing efforts

had engendered new perspectives surrounding the land as a community asset, and when a buyer did not immediately emerge, the universe of ownership options began to expand. By removing development values, the cost of the land would be reduced to the extent that even a small town might be able to purchase the underlying fee (Willcox, 2005). With this, community leaders began to envision the possibility of acquiring the land as a community-owned and managed forest.

5.3 Land Acquisition Process

RCF leaders cannot overemphasize how critical it was to gain widespread community support and maintain transparent and deliberate public communication throughout every step of the project, as acquiring the land as a community forest represented a potentially major commitment of local resources, and any decisions would need to be ratified at town meeting. One primary concern was whether or not the land would “become a cause of friction within the community as factions sought to have it managed in accordance with their particular vision” (Willcox, 2005 p. 66). There were also several avenues of skepticism, including concerns over certain traditional land uses being banned, doubts surrounding a small community taking on such a big project, and also general resistance stemming from fundamental opposition to public ownership of land (Interview, Forest Commission). The Randolph Planning Board held a series of public meetings to provide space for discussion and deliberation.⁷ In discussing the merits of private versus community ownership, some comments at public

⁷ The neighboring town of Jefferson was also involved in the initial acquisition planning and discussion, as a portion of the RCF is located in that town; however, local government leaders ultimately determined that they did not want to participate in ownership of the land (Interview, Forest Commission).

meetings centered around how community ownership could allow for greater opportunities for community interests to be served, and that the town would be able to develop a collective vision for how the forest would be used (Willcox, 2005).

Another concern was whether or not acquiring and managing the land would come at a great cost to the Town. An impressive fundraising campaign succeeded in meeting the \$1.8 million goal that was needed in order to purchase the underlying, restricted fee, while also not adding to the town's tax burden (Willcox, 2005). Furthermore, initial data estimates presented at community meetings showed that the property would eventually become not only self-supporting, but also an economic asset to the town. Framing the project to appeal to various local interests was also critical to gaining community support. This land was to be a working forest, and "a lot of people in town have been involved in the timber paper and productive end of the forest industry...and some of the small amounts of money came from some of those business interests in Berlin, with discussion of protecting local jobs" (Interview, Edith Tucker). The strength of the support from the environmental community was also clear by a significant and generous donation from a national environmental foundation (Willcox, 2005). Contributors also included regional charitable organizations and the state's Land and Community Heritage Program, as well as local contributions from area residents and businesses, which were organized by the local Randolph Foundation (Interview, Town of Randolph). In 2001, the Town of Randolph, acquired title to the largest municipally owned forest in the state.

For further detail on the complex suite of factors leading up to the idea for a community forest, as well as the incredible journey that this small town underwent in order to finally acquire title to the land, see “The story of the Randolph Community Forest: Building on local stewardship,”⁸ which can be found on the Randolph Community Forest’s website.

5.4 Land Tenure Arrangement

Tenure arrangement refers to the dual question of who owns the land and how. The Town of Randolph holds fee-simple title⁹ to the RCF, subject to a conservation easement that was purchased with Forest Legacy funds, and is held and monitored by the Department of Resources and Economic Development (DRED) of the State of New Hampshire (Interview, Town of Randolph).

As fee-simple owner, the Town strives to act on its vested property rights in a way that balances the interests and values of Randolph residents and surrounding communities, while also generating enough revenue to cover management expenses in a way that does not add to the Town’s tax burden. The former timber company owners were paying property taxes at current use taxation, meaning the land was taxed at its use-value as productive timberland, which is far below its potential value as developed property (Interview, Town of Randolph). The RCF receives a timber tax anytime harvesting is done on the land, so it pays a sum in lieu of taxes to the Towns of Randolph and Jefferson (since a little over 1,000 of the acres of the forest lie in that town’s political boundary),

⁸ Willcox, David. 2005. “The story of the Randolph Community Forest: Building on local stewardship.” In Lyman and Child. 2005. *Natural resources as community assets: Lessons from two continents*. Sand County Foundation and The Aspen Institute.

⁹ Fee-simple is the form of property ownership in which the landowner generally holds the greatest number of ‘sticks’ in the bundle of property rights.

and this amount is comparable to the property tax revenue the Towns were receiving under timber company ownership (Interview, Town of Randolph).

Ultimately though, the Town does not seek greater profits through owning the land, which allows it to comfortably operate within restrictions of the easement (Interview, Town of Randolph). This flexibility also provides opportunity for creative thinking and innovation. There is currently discussion around a long-term lease arrangement to support commercial maple sugaring, with one producer interested in an operation at the scale of 40-50,000 taps. This operation could help to diversify the forest's income stream, as the successful bidder would pay a lease payment, per tap, per year, and the production and processing activities could create between seven and nine local jobs (Interview, Forest Commission).

The Town as fee-simple owner has eased some of its property rights—primarily those relating to subdivision and development—to the easement holder, which is the State of New Hampshire DRED. The easement over the RCF property is described by project leaders and interviewees as a working forest conservation easement, which when applied to productive forestland, the harvesting of timber and other forest products is sustained in perpetuity along with related conservation values and public access. The burden of the easement runs with the property and is enforceable against all future owners and tenants in perpetuity (Interview, Forest Commission). The purpose of the Forest Legacy funding is to buy public access, so the easement vests community members with the right to occupy and use the land for permitted recreational activities, such as

hiking, cross-country skiing, hunting, fishing, and snowmobiling (Interview, Forest Commission).

Since the design of a working forest easement is more complex than stripping certain development rights from the property, it relies heavily on an accompanying forest management or stewardship plan. It is the responsibility of fee-owner to develop the Stewardship Plan and submit it to the easement holder for approval. The State of New Hampshire as the easement holder does not have arbitrary authority over decisions about the land— as long as proposals meet the terms of the easement, the Town has quite a bit of autonomy and flexibility (Interview, Town of Randolph).

Both the easement terms and the Forest Legacy funding require the landowner to create a Stewardship Plan that is to be updated every 10 years. Around the time that the Town of Randolph acquired title to the land, project leaders organized an all-day charrette facilitated by the University of New Hampshire's Cooperative Extension, with the aim of identifying community priorities for the forest. As Forest Commission member and Chairman of the Planning Board, John Scarinza notes, "it was our first Stewardship Plan, so we really wanted to nail down what the vision was" (Interview). Former Forest Commission member Edith Tucker reflects on this process and how the community visioning session was attended and facilitated in a way that "really produced results" (Interview). Input for the plan also included an inventory of current conditions from the forestry team. The objective natural resource and

timber management data was forged together with subjective community priorities to create the final vision and management document.

5.5 Land Governance Arrangement

Since the Town of Randolph owns the land, in the eyes of state law the RCF is classified as a ‘town forest.’ The State of New Hampshire’s enabling legislation provides for town forests to be managed either by the town conservation commission or by a committee appointed by the Board of Selectmen, and a special fund is to be established, and then approved each year at town meeting (Willcox, 2005). Leaders of the RCF believed that the authority and complexity of managing such a substantial natural resource asset would best be incorporated into long-term planning efforts for the town, rather than the Board of Selectmen’s day-to-day administration of town affairs (Willcox, 2005). So, project leaders designed a different system, which required the passing of a special act by the state legislature, followed by the town holding its first-ever special town meeting to adopt the Randolph Town Forest Ordinance that would implement this governance structure (Interview, Town of Randolph).

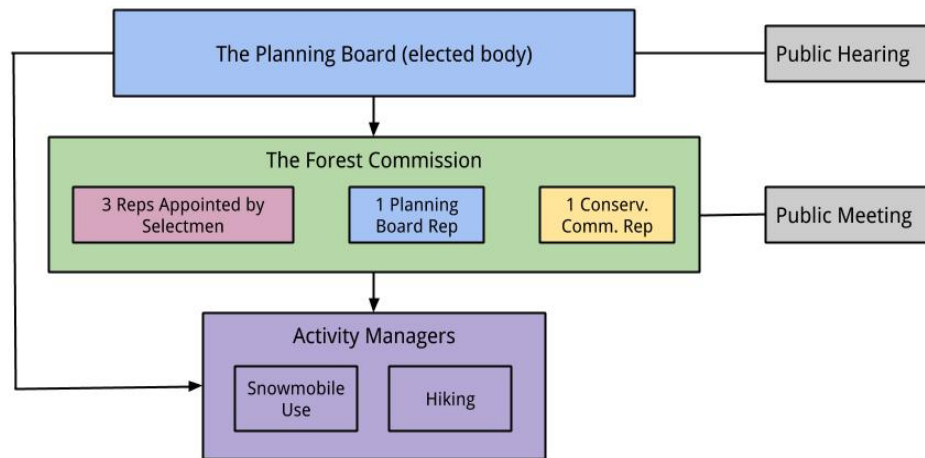


Figure 2: The Randolph Community Forest Governance Structure¹⁰

Ultimate oversight responsibility for the RCF rests with the Planning Board, an elected body, which includes one ex officio representative from the Board of Selectmen (Interview, Town of Randolph). Vesting authority for the community forest in the Planning Board “means that you have all of the public hearing requirements built into the process,” and the whole structure then “fits into democratic, small town New England life” (Interview, Edith Tucker). The Planning Board, “by the nature of its jurisdiction also must take a long-term view of land use issues affecting the future of the town, a view appropriate for dealing with issues arising in connection with the community forest” (Willcox, 2005 p.77-78). There is consensus among the local government that this organizational structure is effective and worthy of replication in other municipal land ownership models (Interview, Board of Selectmen).

¹⁰ This diagram was generated from interviews with RCF leaders. It is a simplified representation, intended to illustrate the key players involved in the community forest’s governance structure.

The ordinance places responsibility for day-to-day land affairs with an appointed five-member Forest Commission, which hires and oversees the activities of the professional forestry team. Following the State model, the Selectmen appoint three members of the Commission, but there are also two ex officio members representing the Conservation Commission and the Planning Board (Interview, Town of Randolph). Serving on the Commission is a voluntary role, and in such a small town it has been comprised of people “who are all pretty enthusiastic about the forest; they aren’t necessarily selected for any particular expertise” (Interview, David Willcox).

In an effort to streamline communication and invest other land user groups in the governance and management of the community forest, the Forest Commission releases Request for Proposals (RFPs) for interested groups or organizations to become Activity Managers. During the early ownership stages, it became clear that there were certain land use activities that represented the most interest and participation from residents and surrounding communities, including hiking, cross-country skiing and snowmobiling, to name a few. Groups that are selected as Activity Managers become responsible for any communication, fund raising, educational event planning and maintenance surrounding that activity. Activity Managers might subcontract out some aspects of maintenance to another group or club, “but the Forest Commission only has to coordinate with that primary point organization” (Interview, David Willcox).

The ordinance also establishes a non-lapsing Forest Revolving Fund, which is protected from the passions and budgetary obligations of Town Meeting,

and enables the Forest Commission to enter into long-term management contracts (Interview, Forest Commission). Each year the Commission draws up an annual budget for this fund, which is approved by the Planning Board at a public hearing, and is reported to Town Meeting, though no action from the town is required. “All moneys in the fund are to be reinvested in the management of the community forest, unless there is a surplus and the Planning Board approves a transfer of funds to the town general account” (Willcox, 2005 p. 78). The administrative design and management system of the RCF intends to achieve long-term security of the land.

Overview of Decision Making Process

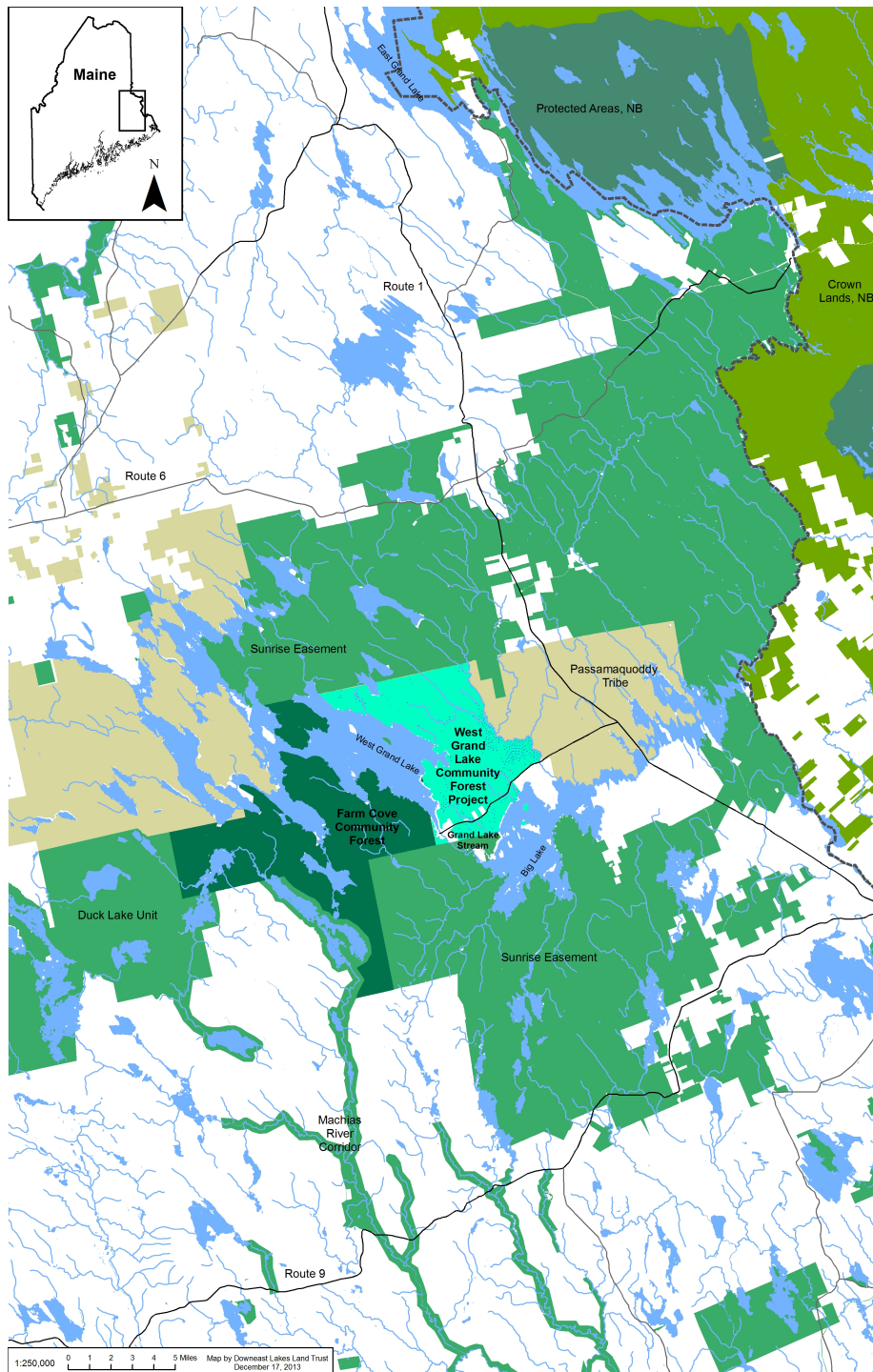
The established organizational structure does create somewhat of a formal process in terms of how decisions about the land are made. Generally, the initiation of any proposal for starting or altering any use of the land will have to take place with the Forest Commission (Interview, Town of Randolph). That being said, any person can offer an idea or concern. Forest Commission meetings are consistently held each month and open to the public, which offers one communication format. People also might express a thought to one of the Town Selectmen, as residents are accustomed to coming to them for community issues. With Selectmen representation on the Commission, comments can get passed along through monthly meetings or other modes of informal communication between Commission members (Interview, Board of Selectmen). As one interviewee explains of the process, “people know that if they have ideas or concerns...it is not like facing a large, sometimes faceless, bureaucracy.”

Admittedly, many ideas and plans for the forest do originate with the Forest Commission (Interview, Town of Randolph). In an effort to encourage more direct community involvement, the RCF is instigating a small grant program, which could provide up to \$5,000 for any group or individual who has an idea for a project on the forest, under the stipulation that it advances the goals that are identified in the Stewardship Plan (Interview, Forest Commission). Funding for this program is made possible through the Forest Revolving Fund, which might not be available if forest revenues were allocated for other town budgeting purposes.

In terms of approving or denying a proposal in general—whether its motivation originated from a Commission member, an Activity Manager, a summer resident or anyone else—the Commission assesses the decision within the framework of the conservation easement and Stewardship Plan, and if budget funds are there, in most cases, that proposal can be carried out (Interview, Forest Commission). Edith Tucker notes that she made a recent request to the Commission that the RCF have a public sledding hill, and this project idea was included in the most recently updated Stewardship Plan (Interview). Exceptions include whether or not a long-term contract would be involved or if the proposal would require an amendment to the Stewardship Plan, in which case Planning Board approval would be needed, as well as a public hearing that is open to residents, neighboring communities, and anyone else who is interested in attending (Interview, Town of Randolph).

Most of the larger resource decisions originate with the professional forester and wetland and wildlife experts that are hired by the Commission to develop and execute different parts of the Stewardship Plan (Interview, Forest Commission). If this team were to present plans for a new bridge due to flooding, they would provide their rationale, and ultimately the Commission members would vote on that decision. For the smaller, day-to-day decisions, such as clearing a trail, the Randolph Mountain Club as Activity Manager would be responsible for making that call and delegating tasks (Interview, Forest Commission). If an Activity Manager wants to propose a larger project, such as when the neighboring town of Jefferson's snowmobile club wanted to build a warming hut, they received permission from and worked with both the Forest Commission and forester, and as Edith Tucker explains, "we spent some time negotiating between them and the local government, but we didn't have to go to Milwaukee" (Interview).

Chapter 6: Nonprofit Case: Downeast Lakes Land Trust



Map Source: Downeast Lakes Land Trust

Figure 3: Map of the Farm Cove and West Grand Lake Community Forests

6.1 Community Context

Washington County lies in the easternmost part of Maine, and has the highest rates of unemployment and poverty in the state (Acheson, 2010). Over the past century, the county has lost a quarter of its population (Woodward, 2013). The area's drastic out-migration and economic struggles are in part due to the restructuring of the forest products and marine processing industries, and the resulting loss of livelihoods that they once supported. The Downeast Lakes region makes up the inland portion of Washington County, and the area's abundant natural resources support high rates of self-employment for local craftsmen, outdoor guides, sporting camp owners, and forest industry workers (DLLT, n.d.).

Grand Lake Stream lies in the heart of the Downeast Lakes region, with a population of just under 100 year-round residents. It is world-renowned for its land-locked salmon fisheries, and has the largest population of Maine Guides in the state, with close to 40 local guides living here and earning their living from the area's natural resources (Interview, DLLT board). Grand Lake Stream's population grows by around 200 in the summer months, and thousands of visitors come to the region every year (Interview, DLLT staff). Lindsay Wheaton serves on the board of Downeast Lakes Land Trust (DLLT) and owns a local lodge with her husband, a fifth generation resident. She explains how "at one point there was the largest tannery in the world here, and then there used to be the logging; now, natural resources are pretty much all we have left" (Interview). It is in this small community and its deep connection to the land where the story of the Downeast Lakes Land Trust begins.

6.2 Motivation for Community Ownership

Mark Berry, former Executive Director of DLLT, reflects how “the land trust was created in response to the shift in land ownership surrounding the community, from vertically integrated timber and mill ownership to investor ownership, and that spurred the community to try to get involved in protecting the resource that they had an interest in” (Interview). The strength of these interests lie in the extent to which the community’s economic way of life is largely dependent on recreation, which hinges equally on access to the property as well as protection of wildlife habitat. The history of property relations is also important to recognize, as local people were accustomed to wide open public access under mill ownership, and this relates to the fact that at the outset of this tenure, people using the land were largely employees of the mill, so from a community and workforce relations perspective, this level of access always made sense (Interview, DLLT former staff).

Georgia Pacific owned a pulp mill in the small nearby town of Baileyville, as well as half a million acres of land surrounding the village of Grand Lake Stream (Community Forest Collaborative, 2007). Lee Whitely, DLLT Board Vice President and year-round resident of Grand Lake Stream, explains how companies like Georgia Pacific “had the long-term perspective of ‘we need to keep this wood to keep the mill going, so we’re going to manage it in a way that allows that to happen’” (Interview). Over time though, forest products companies in the region made the financial decision to divest their landholdings to TIMOs and REITs, as “their balance sheets would look better if they didn’t own the land.” In the face of

that concern, “the idea was that a community-based organization would be better able to manage this land for the interest of the local community and local people, not for maximizing short-term profits” (Interview, Lee Whitely).

6.3 Farm Cove Land Acquisition Process

In the late 90’s, residents and local guides in Grand Lake Stream began meeting as a grassroots group to discuss possible actions in the face of fear and uncertainty over what was to become of the land. The visioning part of a project such as this takes time, and as in Randolph, this grassroots group did not embark on the journey with ambitions for the local community to become owner of the land. Options included the State, some larger organization, and there was even talk of Grand Lake Stream Plantation assuming this role, but the plantation form of government¹¹ offered limited authority and capacity at the local level (Community Forest Collaborative, 2007). There were also dynamic tensions in the community surrounding: skepticism of new ideas; conflicting opinions of conservation and what its implications would be; resistance from the property rights movement; and strain between year-round and seasonal residents as well as between newcomers and those whose family had lived in the area for generations. It was clear to initial organizers that community consensus and willingness to participate would take significant time to cultivate (Interview, DLLT former staff).

When the group sought assistance from the Northern Forest Alliance and New England Forestry Foundation (NEFF)— an organization that had the

¹¹ Plantations are a quasi-incorporated form of local government in Maine that have chosen not to administer land use controls at the local level. They are subject to the planning and zoning requirements of the Maine Land Use Planning Commission.

capacity to assist in large landscape-scale projects— they began negotiations with Wagner Forest Management, the investment group that had purchased much of the landholdings of Georgia Pacific in 1998 (Interview, DLLT former staff). Pressured by time and uncertainty, in 2001 the group decided to form the Downeast Lakes Land Trust, a nonprofit, community-based organization that would own and manage the sought-after land, and would also facilitate a larger working forest conservation easement transaction on a much larger tract of surrounding land, which would be held by NEFF. This larger project and collaboration became the Downeast Lakes Forestry Partnership, with acquisition of the Farm Cove Community Forest at its core.¹²

The initial Farm Cove Community Forest parcel consisted of 27,000 acres located in two unorganized townships to the west of Grand Lake Stream. While this parcel was dwarfed in size compared to the 312,000-acre easement purchase, it remained the centerpiece of the Partnership because it was to be purchased in fee and owned on behalf of the people of Grand Lake Stream and surrounding communities (Community Forest Collaborative, 2007). The grassroots organizing efforts of DLLT remained crucial, as early public meetings and surveys helped to articulate the values and priorities for the project, which included implications for the local economy and cultural traditions. An initial inventory of the natural resources and ecological features on the land also helped to inform fundraising and community conversations (Interview, DLLT former staff).

¹² For further information on the story of the Downeast Lakes Forestry Partnership, please see the Community Forest Collaborative’s 2007 report titled “Community Forests: A Community Investment Strategy,” which can be found on the Northern Forest Center’s website.

From the early organizing phase, DLLT's conceptualization of 'the community' extended beyond the residents of Grand Lake Stream. As an organization, the land trust serves and is comprised of a local constituency that is centered around this small community, but they are also working on behalf of the larger Downeast Lakes region. The land in consideration encompassed communities that are considerably far removed from Grand Lake Stream, but not necessarily from access to and relationship with the land in question (Interview, DLLT former staff). Moreover, as DLLT Executive Director David Montague explains, "we also happen to be situated straddling headwaters of two separate watersheds, so the activities that we have on the land have downstream impacts...there is a cascading effect of impact that literally moves down the rivers into the Gulf of Maine" (Interview). Finally, there are the thousands of people who visit this region every year who contribute greatly to local residents' ability to make a living and realize their right to remain in Grand Lake Stream.

In efforts to gain community support and participation, framing considerations were very important, as there can be conflicting views over mechanisms and values surrounding land protection. Board member Lindsay Wheaton reiterates the importance of this framing in discussing the intention behind community ownership: "we're talking about managing it, we're not trying to cut it off or gate it off" (Interview). DLLT co-founder Steve Keith adds the importance of explaining that the easement "was assuring that things would remain the same," in terms of a working forest, public access for traditional activities and undeveloped shorelines (Interview). While a time consuming and

oftentimes difficult process, community organizing was critical, as the project could not have been accomplished without “a constituency to stand up and say to private interests, ‘we don’t want this, can we buy this from you and work out a way to do this differently’” (Interview, Steve Keith).

Staff and board members of DLLT and NEFF put considerable time, energy and resources into presenting to local groups, before legislative hearings, and at briefings to funders. In four years, the Partnership raised almost \$19 million from public funds, private philanthropy, and individuals (Community Forest Collaborative, 2007). NEFF’s capacity and expanded network of connections were also critical, as the organization ultimately mortgaged one of its properties to raise the necessary and final funds for the land acquisition. While ultimately successful, the Partnership was “subject to many challenging forces that pressed on and at times fractured its cohesion, slowed its momentum, and diverted attention and resources from the effort” (Community Forest Collaborative, 2007 p. 45). These challenges include the scale of the project and its associated fiscal and staff capacity demands on the partner organizations, as well as the pressure of time constraints surrounding large-scale land transactions (The Community Forest Collaborative, 2007).

In 2005, DLLT acquired fee title to the initial 27,000-acre Farm Cove Community Forest parcel, which grew to 34,000 acres through a separate project and fundraising effort to include the 6,600-acre Wabassus Lake Tract that is situated immediately south of the original Farm Cove purchase (DLLT website; Interview, DLLT former staff).

6.4 West Grand Lake Land Acquisition Process

The land trust is currently in the final stages of a six-year capital campaign to acquire an additional 22,000-acre tract of land that is adjacent to the Farm Cove forest. The West Grand Lake property was put on the market by its long-term family owners, and was purchased in 2008 by Lyme Timber— a TIMO with a conservation emphasis, who at the time, was the first timber investment group to fill this niche (Interview, DLLT former staff), and has been involved as an investor in three community forest projects in Maine and New Hampshire, including West Grand Lake (Stein, 2014). Lyme Timber is very experienced in conservation transactions, but they also have a mandate to make a return on their investment (Interview, DLLT former staff).

The West Grand Lake acquisition process reveals how the role of timber investment groups in the Community Forest Model can also be advantageous. Lyme Timber can “act as a positive reinforcing partner,” through its ready access to private capital and “hold the land until the community does its work of organizing, building capacity, and raising the money” (Interview, Marcy Lyman).

As the successful bidder to this property, Lyme had two contingencies: firstly, they had secured federal New Market Tax Credit¹³ (NMTC) financing for the project; secondly, after some negotiation, they had arrived at an option agreement with DLLT, “which provided for some upfront investment from the land trust, and the opportunity to purchase a conservation easement on the 22,000-

¹³ The NMTC program was designed to increase the flow of capital to businesses and low-income communities by providing a modest tax incentive to private investors. It can be used as a subsidized financing tool for projects involving the forest based economy, such as working forestland, renewable energy, tourism, and forest products manufacturing (<http://www.northernforest.org/>).

acre parcel, followed by the opportunity to purchase fee ownership at a seven year period, the timeframe of which is determined by the NMTC investment”

(Interview, Mark Berry). The NMTC financing requires community benefit provisions, which in addition to the option agreement with DLLT, also included land acquisition for Grand Lake Stream Plantation, mostly as a gift from Lyme Timber but also in part at a purchase well below market price, of four parcels totaling 172 acres surrounding the village area to provide for future growth in mixed-use development, including affordable workforce housing, a transfer station and light industry (Stein, 2014; Interview, DLLT former staff).

This project is still underway, but the easement is already in place, and at the end of 2015 DLLT will assume ownership and jointly manage the collective 56,000 acres of the Farm Cove and West Grand Lake Community Forests under the same community forest management program.

6.5 Land Tenure Arrangement

DLLT owns fee simple title to the entire 34,000-acre Farm Cove Community Forest. Every part of the property is under a conservation easement of some sort, and there are different easement holders depending on the historical, ecological, recreational or economic value of the parcel (Interview, DLLT staff). The conservation easement results in a legal division of ownership, severing the property’s subdivision and development rights in perpetuity and decreasing the cost of the underlying fee (Wright, 1993). As part of the initial 27,000-acre land transaction, DLLT donated two conservation easements: a working forest easement on more than 23,500 acres that is held and monitored by NEFF (who

also holds the easement on the larger 312,000-acre tract that was part of the Downeast Lakes Forestry Partnership); and the Sweet Water Trust acquired a Forever Wild easement over a 3,500-acre ecological reserve at Fourth Machias Lake, which places permanent, stricter protections for the ecological values of this property, including the Machias River watershed that is home to endangered Atlantic salmon. Finally, a separate conservation easement over the 6,600-acre Wabassus Lake parcel was purchased with federal Forest Legacy funding and is held by the Maine Department of Conservation, Bureau of Parks and Lands (Interview, DLLT staff; DLLT website).

The goal is for DLLT to own the West Grand Lake property in fee title by the end of 2015. In 2012, the Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry purchased a conservation easement on the full 22,000-acre parcel from Lyme Timber Company, primarily through federal Forest Legacy funding (DLLT website).

While DLLT is not required to pay property taxes due to its 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status, since its founding the organization has voluntarily paid all applicable property taxes to the State of Maine, as the plantation and township forms of government in which the community forest lands are located do not administer property taxes at the local level (Interview, DLLT staff). DLLT is enrolled in the Tree Growth program,¹⁴ which results in a reduced tax rate on working forestlands. The former industrial owners were also enrolled in this

¹⁴ The Maine Tree Growth Tax Law provides for the valuation of land that has been classified as forestland on the basis of productivity value, rather than on market value, with the intention of helping Maine landowners maintain their property as productive woodlands, and to broadly support Maine's wood products industry (www.maine.gov)

program, so similarly to the Randolph case, from a tax perspective the transition of the land to community-based ownership has made little difference (Interview, DLLT staff).

It is beyond the scope of this study to delve deeply into the many different easements' specific purposes, use limitations and access rights. Generally speaking, the initial organizing, community outreach, surveying and land inventorying efforts helped to inform the easement terms as well as the management plan for the Farm Cove Community Forest. David Montague summarizes the easement structure as “working forest conservation easement on all of the land except for the ecological reserve, which keeps those lands in passive management” (Interview). The working forest easement terms allow sustainable timber harvesting, traditional public and recreational uses such as hunting, fishing, and even some of the more controversial activities, such as bear baiting, which supports the local guiding business (Interview, DLLT board). ATVs are also permitted on the property, and as board member Lindsay Wheaton explains, “we hear that from here south people aren't allowing ATV's on the property...and our philosophy has been, well let's allow it unless we have a problem...and we're not having a problem, people are using it responsibly” (Interview).

While the surrounding Grand Lake Stream community has access rights to the 312,000 acres protected by easement, holding fee-simple title to the Farm Cove property allows DLLT the fundamental right to “direct control over the day-to-day management of the property” under a collectively broad and diverse

mission (Interview, David Montague). Easements oftentimes do not assert specific, value-driven requirements for how the land is managed. Montague adds, “for example, we manage for wildlife habitat and that’s not the landowners’ primary goal on the properties we’ve helped place under easement; they are mostly owned under timber investment so their primary goal is to extract timber from those properties” (Interview). A single-minded mission is less likely to allow for freedom to explore new and alternative ideas of maintaining the land and making it work while also conserving its natural resources. Community ownership “allows you to get out of the industrial model” (Interview, Steve Keith). There is also room for changes within the management structure, as long-term management does not have to be synonymous with static management: “the system that works today may not be the best system down the road; it’s important in any land management system to be prepared to be flexible” (Interview, David Montague).

While incredibly empowering, the experience of owning land on behalf of a large, regional community under a collective vision or ideal can be very challenging and taxing, especially when confronted by the inevitable realities of financial constraints, differences in opinion, and inability to reach consensus (Interview, DLLT former staff).

6.6 Land Governance Arrangement

The organizational structure of DLLT intends to allow for, and even prioritize, multiple avenues for community participation in decision making, while also balancing the necessary expertise and oversight for effective and

responsible ownership and management of, what will soon be, 56,000 acres of community forestland. The land trust has a small but dedicated staff of four, each with their own areas of expertise (Interview, DLLT staff). Staffing and operating costs of the land trust are financed in part by active timber harvesting. Interests of the diverse community that DLLT serves are reflected through the composition of the Board of Directors—which primarily consists of local residents—as well as that of the broader committee system and the overall process by which decisions about the land are made.

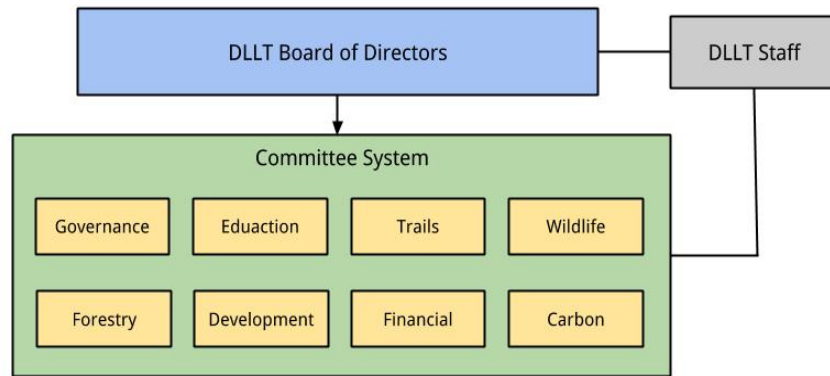


Figure 4: DLLT’s Community Forests Governance Structure¹⁵

Board of Directors

The Board of Directors for the land trust has ultimate stewardship and decision-making authority as owner of property (Interview, DLLT staff). Board members are nominated and elected by the board, “so there is not a membership or community-based election process, but the intent is to maintain both a mix of appropriate skills and resources for leadership of the organization as well as

¹⁵ This diagram was generated from interviews with DLLT staff and board members. It is a simplified representation, intended to illustrate the key players involved in the community forests’ governance structure. Some of the committees that comprise the Committee System are also subject to change.

ability to represent the community” (Interview, Mark Berry). In practice, the board has always been composed of people with a strong tie to the community, generally as a year-round or seasonal resident, business owner or community group representative. Board members also hold a significant diversity of skill-sets, such as finance, property management, law and education (Interview, DLLT board). The notion of expertise is also intentionally inclusive, as a multi-generational resident board member is seen as a significant asset to the board’s authority and perspective. Currently there are nine volunteer board members, and they add a great deal of capacity to the actual management of the land trust. However, people power can be a challenge in such a small community, as there are a limited number of people who have the time, interest, and willingness to put forth the effort to be an active and engaged part of the land trust (Interview, DLLT staff).

Committee System

Each committee most often consists of a board chair and additional board members, and is then augmented by various residents and constituency group representatives from Grand Lake Stream and surrounding communities. “Our committee system creates a structure that brings folks from the community into our organization. These individuals help provide ideas and direction for the Trust’s programs, both in the community and the forest” (Interview, Lee Whitely). Current committees include governance, finance, trails, forestry, wildlife, development, and education. The Education Committee, for example, is comprised of 10-12 people including teachers from various surrounding towns,

retired teachers, and outdoor enthusiast educators, among others (Interview, DLLT board). “When there are people who have particular experience or expertise, we would ask them to join the appropriate committee” (Interview, Lee Whitely). The committee process and structure also serves the purpose of recruiting future board members, as DLLT is always open to and looking for future candidates, and the committee service, as a less intensive commitment, provides an opportunity for both the organization and the individual to build a relationship (Interview, DLLT staff).

Committees tend to focus on long-term planning and management issues, however ad-hoc committees also form and extinguish after a certain goal is achieved. For example, there is currently an ad-hoc fundraising committee for the acquisition of the West Grand Lake parcel, which will likely disband by the end of the year upon successful completion of the project (Interview, DLLT board). There is also a carbon committee focusing on acquiring credits for the carbon that is stored on the land, as DLLT recently sold 200,000 carbon credits—the first for a community forest project—at an estimated value of \$10/credit, the sale of which requires that DLLT’s land management practices maintain or increase forest carbon stocks above the expected levels under typical industrial forest management (Downeast Lakes Land Trust, n.d.). Carbon credit proceeds were reinvested into operations of the land trust, management costs, and West Grand Lake acquisition (Lyman et al. 2014).

Overview of Decision Making Process

While ultimate authority rests with the board, there is considerable power delegated to committees in terms of providing informed recommendations on certain issue-areas, and essentially representing the first level of information gathering, deliberation, and decision making. Once the committee has reached an agreement, which is not always a smooth or comfortable process, they make recommendations to the board, which tends to be very responsive to the committee's proposal (Interview, DLLT board). Land trust staff members also work to inform and advise committees as they debate the merits of different projects or decisions. While committees go through a deliberative, analytical and thoughtful process, when decisions are brought back to the board "you have different perspectives from the community again, and they ask questions and lots of times things are sent back to the committee for more review: we really try to hash out every angle" (Interview, Lindsay Wheaton).

Just as flexibility is important to DLLT's management program, it is equally important to their decision-making. As Lindsay Wheaton explains, "if we did make a decision that didn't work for the community, we would change it" (Interview). People are not afraid to voice a concern or disagreement over a decision about the land, and community meetings that are regularly held by DLLT in Grand Lake Stream and surrounding communities throughout Washington County offer one platform for this communication. However, informal networks can also be just as effective in such a small community, as Lee Whitely explains, "a lot of us [board members] live here in the community and have our finger on the pulse of what is going on" (Interview). Board and committee members are

also involved in many other community groups and organizations, so those connections provide another conduit for information sharing. In such a small community people invariably ‘wear multiple hats,’ which can potentially create a conflict of interest when one person is representing different organizations that are not always in agreement (Interview, DLLT former staff). However, overlap can also be advantageous, such as when representatives from local government serve on the board and provide continuity between decisions facing the community.

Ensuring strong community input and participation in decision-making is important on many levels. The self-preservation of DLLT as an organization and the longevity of its management and governance structure depends on local people power and buy-in. Additionally, Grand Lake Stream practices town meeting form of local government, as in Randolph, and while the plantation had less of an involved role in the Farm Cove Community Forest acquisition, due to aforementioned community tensions and limited capacity, this distance has dissolved somewhat over the years, as residents have gradually begun to realize the potential of community ownership and trust DLLT’s role in managing the land as a local asset. This growing unity was made evident when, in the early organizing stages of the West Grand Lake project, DLLT went to town meeting with a request for an endorsement and a \$10,000 municipal contribution. Ensuing discussion centered around whether this amount was sufficient, and shortly thereafter a counter-offer of \$40,000 was proposed and passed by a unanimous town meeting vote (Interview, DLLT staff; Interview, DLLT board).

The power of local knowledge is invaluable to DLLT's decision-making process. If the board and/or committees lack perspective on a certain issue, there is intentional effort to bridge that knowledge gap through bringing in residents and local constituency or land user group representatives. However, prioritizing local knowledge and ensuring broad public input reveals one of the primary challenges faced by the DLLT board in making decisions: the process can take time (Interview, DLLT board member). While it can be frustrating for everyone involved, the slower pace allows for a more inclusive decision that more people are likely to stand behind in the end. As board member Lindsay Wheaton says, "if we do it right it has to take a lot of time (Interview)."

Another example of DLLT's commitment to considering different interests in decision-making is when the West Grand Lake property came on the market. As the last big unprotected parcel surrounding the village, there was the question of whether it was in the broader community's best interest to "close all future potential for development" (Interview, Mark Berry). DLLT deferred this decision to the local selectman, who arranged their own committee, which did have overlap with DLLT members, and came to the decision that the lakeshores should be protected, but they did want land adjacent to the village to be left available for affordable housing and other growth-related uses, which were made possible through the NMTC financing discussed above.

While DLLT identifies as a conservation land trust, within its land protection work it also clearly balances a diverse set of economic development goals and strives for broad community participation in decision-making. This case

reveals that the bright line distinguishing community and conservation land trusts can become blurred as organizations take-on complex and diverse missions, an approach that is arguably necessary in order to address complex community needs.

Chapter 7: Means for Exercising Community Control Through Community Forests

The following discussion is organized around some of the different means by which the communities of greater Grand Lake Stream, Maine and Randolph, New Hampshire are exercising control over their local forestland as a natural resource and community-building asset.

7.1 Legal Property Rights

The objective right to use and occupy physical property, as well as the right to control others' ability to do the same, is embedded in land's legal structure and property relations. Property rights to community forests can be secured and directed through a number of tenure arrangements, including fee-simple title, conservation easements, lease agreements, and permits.

Fee Simple Ownership

Similarly to the role of the nonprofit landowner in the CLT model, through fee-simple ownership DLLT and the Town of Randolph hold all of the rights that a private landowner would under this same form of tenure, and any of these rights—the right to occupy, lease, sell, develop, construct buildings, farm, harvest timber or restrict access, among others, may be separated and legally conveyed. As one interviewee in Randolph holds, “private mills had the right to close land where they were doing active timber harvesting, and we do the same; we have that right too.”

Interviewees in both cases expressed how the power provided by fee-simple ownership lies in both the day-to-day control over activities on the land, as well as the ability to collectively shape the long-term vision and management plan

for the land in conjunction with the broader community. For example, in interviews for the Randolph Community Forest, the Stewardship Plan was the most referenced and discussed document, more so even than the conservation easement. The Stewardship Plan is an opportunity for Randolph and the surrounding community to develop and directly implement their collective vision for the land. The vested responsibility of creating and carrying out the Stewardship Plan might be one of primary distinctions between what the Randolph community's relationship and connection with the land looks like today under community ownership, and what it may have looked like if Hancock had sold a conservation easement as originally planned, and retained fee title and all other customary rights and privileges of ownership.

Easements

An easement results in a permanent legal division in ownership through a landowner voluntarily donating or selling a less-than-fee simple interest in land to a unit of government, land trust, or other IRS-recognized nonprofit organization for the purpose of protecting significant land resources (Lind, 1991). Both the Randolph and Farm Cove/West Grand Lake Community Forests are subject to conservation easements that are held and monitored by a separate entity. The easement holder is responsible for making sure its restrictions are abided by, and must monitor and legally defend the easement in the event that its terms are ever violated (The Nature Conservancy, n.d.). This responsibility requires staff time and resources to visit the easement property and approve stewardship and management plans. Easements also make the underlying fee more affordable for

community-based organizations and municipalities, because the potential for realizing the ‘highest and best use’ of the property has been extinguished.

The notion of perpetuity that is immanent in easements can evoke concerns when thinking about the future, as natural landscapes and the human societies they support are fundamentally dynamic. As such, there can be inherent tensions surrounding a static legal document permanently restricting uses of the land.¹⁶ Generally, there was consensus in both community forest cases that people did not want to see the land subdivided and sold for private real estate development, which would very likely be in the form of luxury second homes. However, restricting development holds implications for local people as well. For example, in community meetings and conversations about how the working forest easement on DLLT’s Farm Cove property would prevent any future development along the lakeshores, some residents voiced concern over the implications of this limitation. When the land was under mill ownership, people were accustomed to being able to buy or lease a site on the lake and build a camp for an affordable price. One DLLT interviewee explains that, upon hearing the proposed easement terms, some people asked, “Well, what about my grandchildren?”

These are the types of decisions a community must wrestle with when weighing what is gained against what is lost through the permanency of conservation easements. Over time, change in leadership or circumstance for the fee-simple owner of a community forest could make the land vulnerable to speculative market forces, such as a turnover in the select board of a municipality,

¹⁶ While it is possible to alter or amend an easement, it can be a very arduous process, and depending on funding sources any changes may require state or federal approval (Interview, Town of Randolph).

or even looking down the road for nonprofit boards. Lee Whitely with DLLT's board explains the value of the easement in a community forest's tenure arrangement:

The way our organization is set up, we own the land, but somebody else holds the conservation easements...which restrict what can and cannot go on particularly in terms of development, and guarantee public access and recreational opportunities, so that even if we were to change our minds, or somehow magically in 50 years if we were to get a Board of Directors that wanted to do something completely different, they couldn't do that; we have written it into our bylaws and into the easements so that our current philosophy continues into the future (Interview).

If the primary use-values of the land, such as recreation and wildlife habitat, are predicated on it not being subdivided or developed, then the community might feel they have gained more than they lost through the permanent restrictions set forth by the easement. Here arises the challenge of 'the community' as a unit of analysis, as there is never a single, uniform truth in a community made up of individuals with different subjective values for the land.

When assessing community forests' different working parts, Marcy Lyman explains:

I think the easement is important, but in some ways the community participation and the values that the community receives and perceives...and the extent to which the community both knows and feels that the values of the forest are important is what is going to, over the long run ensure long-term stewardship, not just the protection afforded by the easement (Interview).

As emphasized in both cases, easements protect certain land values and prohibit specific activities, but do not go further in specifically shaping how the land is managed. In both the Randolph and DLLT cases, the management or stewardship plans created in conjunction with the easement provide substantial

value-added by creating space for collectively determining priorities for the land. Marcy Lyman, formerly with the Community Forest Collaborative, posits that, “the value of the easement if nothing else is another educational vehicle for the community to think about what the conservation values are and why they are being protected” (Interview). Furthermore, Rodger Krussman with the Trust for Public Land, a partner in the Community Forest Collaborative, holds that “permanent conservation is important, but it’s the tool that gets to the three important outcomes [of community forests] involving economics, ecology and social capital” (Interview).

Lease and Permit Arrangements

Just as the nonprofit landowner in the CLT model leases out the buildings and improvements on the land over which it holds fee-simple title, the Town of Randolph and DLLT hold the right to enter into lease agreements and distribute permits to allow individuals to engage in certain activities on the land, so long as they are in accordance with easement terms. Local authority to determine the types and recipients of these arrangements can have broader community and economic development implications. For example, the Randolph Forest Commission is very interested in piloting a long-term lease agreement with a commercial maple sugar operation, for both the direct economic revenue and local job creation benefits, as well as for the value of exploring potentially-viable alternatives to the waning timber industry, and possibly serving as a model for other natural resource-based communities in northern New England. Forest Commission member John Scarinza also hopes that a successful tapping operation

could inspire federal ownership in the WMNF, as the maple industry in the United States is growing significantly and represents an opportunity to use the timber resource in a way that keeps the land in public access, while also exploring other sustainable, viable uses of area natural resources (Interview, Forest Commission).

The DLLT issues wood harvesting permits free of charge to local craftspeople for to the purposes of building canoes, furniture and baskets (DLLT, Wood for Local Craftsmen Policy) as well for local residents and camp owners to cut firewood, with certain restrictions on tree species, diameters, and ecologically sensitive areas (Interview, DLLT board). One DLLT interviewee explains that, “many people in this area heat with wood...nowadays we are one of the rare exceptions that allows people to go out and cut [firewood] with a chainsaw.” DLLT also administers ‘tipping’ permits for a nominal fee, as wreath making is a popular business in Washington County, and many people supplement their incomes through collecting low-hanging balsam fir and white pine tree branches and selling them to various wreath makers (Interview, DLLT). With the land removed from the speculative market and access rights in place, local people can depend on these activities year after year. These arrangements reveal a level of trust and local understanding as well as a willingness to take risks and explore innovative strategies for sustainably harnessing the land as a natural resource asset. DLLT also always prioritizes local job and revenue generation when determining long-term contract agreements on the property (Interview, DLLT board member).

Ultimately this study found that community control must extend beyond the objective, legal property right realm and into that of decision-making structures and processes, as well as community mobilization and empowerment. As discussed in the earlier chapter on community land ownership theory, control is exercised through the institutional arrangements and set of structures and processes that govern access to and use of the land as a natural resource asset (Boyce and Shelley, 2003).

7.2 Formal and Informal Access to Decision Making

Both community forest cases have established structures to facilitate direct and indirect involvement by community members, while also creating a transparent process for making decisions about the land. With the RCF, the more formalized structure is comprised of the Planning Board, Forest Commission, Activity Managers, and public hearings, and for DLLT, this structure consists of the Board of Directors, the committee system, and land trust staff. One benefit of establishing a more formal governance structure is that a diversity of representation, authority and expertise can be built into its design.

However, it is also important that informal avenues are in place to invite and empower the local constituency in informing and affecting decisions. Many community members might not have the time, ability, or interest to participate directly in the established decision making structures, but people are far more likely to support what they have played a part in creating. Indirect avenues for citizen involvement include community meetings, conversations with representatives serving on boards, committees, commissions or local government,

as well as participation in educational events and celebrations that are held on or in association with the land.

The institutional arrangements for governing the land provide local individuals with an opportunity to put their own power and ideas into practice. These arrangements can face the potential challenge of a self-selecting composition, in that those who feel they have a certain skill-set and/or compatible schedule to pursue these voluntary positions will be more likely to find a place at the decision-making table. Randolph is attempting to create more avenues for direct citizen involvement through its small grant program, which is open to anyone with a project idea that will advance the goals of the forest (Interview, Forest Commission).

Northern New England communities are drawing from a small and oftentimes shrinking population, and engaging interested and willing people can be challenging. Organizing and community engagement can also sometimes be seen as a time-consuming abstraction, but in reality is essential in order to surface more democratic and inclusive forms of knowledge as a basis for decision making. The direct democracy tradition of town meeting does open up necessary larger decisions to the voters as the legislative body, but as one interviewee explains, “people can be quite cautious in a small town, unless it’s something really important to them they don’t step out of line.” Alternatively, town meeting can also be a volatile body that is ripe with passion and disagreement.

7.3 Formation of a Mobilized Community

The pursuit and ownership of land as a community forest can serve as the flash point for an organizing movement that, while less easily codified than property rights and governance structures, can engender a mobilized resident and land user group constituency to perceive and value the land as a community asset. As Edith Tucker in Randolph reflected on the ripple effect of the early organizing efforts for the Hancock application, residents had always used the land, but when the idea surfaced to do something different, “it made people in town start to think about [the land] as an asset” (Interview). A community that is mobilized around a collective interest in land holds potential to ensure investment and support necessary for long-term protection of the community forest over time.

Community perception and valuation of the land as a community asset is critical to maintaining the resources necessary for managing the community forest. Through demonstrating their competence in managing and stewarding the land on behalf of the broader community, DLLT gained trust and support from Grand Lake Stream residents, which generated the town meeting decision to contribute \$40,000 to acquisition of the West Grand Lake property (Interview, DLLT staff). Randolph Community Forest leaders reference stories of other New Hampshire town-owned forests that followed the state law’s standard management and governance arrangement, and have since encountered challenges with protecting the monies earmarked for the land’s maintenance and stewardship from their town meeting or Board of Selectmen or both (Interview, Town of Randolph; Interview, Forest Commission). As Marcy Lyman warns, in the

absence of a mobilized and invested community, over time a community forest could “just become a piece of land that is permanently protected” (Interview).

Collective Action and Empowerment

The tensions and uncertainty surrounding investment-based ownership in both communities explored through this study have provided impetus for collective action. One interviewee in Randolph explains how “the model of these 10-12-year real estate development groups buying and selling land has been very disturbing...” Marcy Lyman adds that, “the role of timber management investment groups has actually been kind of a negative incentive,” as the trends surrounding absentee, profit-driven ownership have created a “dynamic that has provided a window for local communities to say ‘we don’t want to see this happening to our landscape, what can we do about it’” (Interview). The desire to assert local control in the face of uncertainty is reflective of a pre-existing notion of ‘ownership in use’ in these communities. Yuen (2012, p. 7) citing (Mayhew et al., 2007 p. 477) explains ‘ownership in use’ as the “feelings of possession in the absence of any formal or legal claim of ownership.” Both the greater Randolph and Grand Lake Stream communities identify with a collective claim to assert control over the local natural resource assets around which they have shaped their cultural traditions, economy and way of life.

In a sense, when organizing to confront the investor-based tenure transfers and concomitant land insecurity, these communities—Grand Lake Stream in particular—were wrestling with their right to remain in this region and maintain access to the land base on which their livelihoods and future depend. As Lindsay

Wheaton with DLLT holds, “natural resources are pretty much all we have left” (Interview). The possibility and pursuit of community ownership also engendered a subjective meaning in the land as a community asset (Interview, Randolph resident), rather than a resource that people have built hopes and expectations around in the absence of any autonomy over the rules and institutions that govern access to its wealth.

When held up against the model of investor-based ownership, Mark Berry defends that community ownership “has been very different than the perspective of feeling that you are subject to the whims or decrees of an external large landowner (Interview).” He also explains how DLLT owning the land “has been empowering to the community to recognize that they had the ability to take on projects of this scale and have success, because there were people both inside and outside of the effort that thought that it was unrealistically ambitious or unlikely to succeed” (Interview). This empowerment can affect the boundaries and conceptualization of what is possible, and the process of knowledge co-production with others can also broaden these boundaries enormously (Gaventa and Cornwall, 2001). “The empowering effect has also played out in a willingness to take on more and more daunting projects, and at each stage the prior success has helped the board and community believe in the possibility of more success” (Interview, Mark Berry).

Chapter 8: The Higher Ends of Community Forests

These cases illustrate how community forests are not ends in themselves; rather they can act as means to higher ends for the communities that own, manage, and benefit from these lands. The following chapter discusses emergent themes surrounding some of the higher ends that are beginning to be realized through the Randolph and Farm Cove/West Grand Lake Community Forests. While the findings interpreted and discussed here are by no means exhaustive, they contribute to the current body of work—and possibly add new perspectives—surrounding the power and potential of community forest projects.

8.1 Altering power dynamics in land use decisions

Community forest projects hold potential to alter some of the structural power dynamics surrounding ownership and control over natural resources in this region. Marcy Lyman asserts that, “for so long these small, rural communities did not have any control over much of anything” (Interview). While the dominant land tenure of the forest products industry initially was relatively “benign and supportive,” it was still “a model where they provided everything but the community, both individuals and the larger entity, didn’t have much say in it” (Interview, Marcy Lyman). In addition to the shift in power surrounding property rights and relations, the process by which these projects envision and inform easement terms and stewardship plans can act as a participatory knowledge strategy, which has its roots in theory surrounding participatory or community-based action research.

Action research can affect popular awareness and consciousness of the issues that impact people's lives. Empowerment through knowledge means challenging conceptions of expertise and expanding who participates in the knowledge production process (Gaventa and Cornwall, 2001). In Randolph, Edith Tucker explains how:

Early on we decided we didn't know just what people were most interested in, so we held an all day session... and we assumed people would just be interested in talking about clear-cutting or not clear-cutting... but we discovered there were a lot more people interested in botany and birds than we thought, so we began to see the job of running the forest as much broader...(Interview).

Not only did the Stewardship Plan reflect these values, but when it came time to hire the land management team, its ultimate composition of forestry, wildlife and wetland expertise was in response to ideas generated and shared on the ground rather than priorities asserted from above. Furthermore, when one of DLLT's committees was looking at designing the easement for the West Grand Lake property, Lindsay Wheaton explains how, "we wanted some information about trapping in a certain area, so we went and reached out to all the trappers and trapping groups, just to make sure that we're informed and making the right decisions" (Interview). By bringing into view people's realities as a basis for action and decision-making, action research attempts to put forth a different type of knowledge, arguing that those who are directly affected by a decision at hand must participate in the information gathering and sharing process (Gaventa and Cornwall, 2001)

8.2 Owning and Managing Land by its Use-Value

The land security tensions that provided impetus for both community forest projects are expressions of inherent conflicts between different property interests. The private market allocates property through maximizing exchange-values that ensure the ‘highest and best use’ of the land (Yuen, 2012). TIMO’s, by the nature of their design, “buy land to make money...because people invest with them and expect a return” (Interview, Rodger Krussman, Trust for Public Land); therefore, investor-based ownership models are driven more by exchange-values and conceive of land as a profit-maximizing commodity. “If you look at the means of [maximizing return on investment], it is likely to require maximizing the return on your timber harvest and return on your sales of real estate...” (Interview, Mark Berry). Alternatively, the property interests of natural resource-based communities like Randolph and Grand Lake Stream lie in ‘use-value’—how the land is currently being used—or ‘best-value,’ which Yuen (2012) defines as the balance between use and exchange values. Both of these valuations conceive of the land as a natural resource asset with a worth that is “much less monetary than return on investment profit” (Interview, Rodger Krussman, Trust for Public Land). While local economic opportunities are critical, removing land from the speculative market as a community forest begins to address the many different needs of human and natural communities.

In the Randolph and Farm Cove Community Forests, these different land values are the focus of the easement terms as well as the management plans. The Randolph Planning Board viewed the community forest as a strategic community

planning effort. By preventing subdivision and development of the 10,000-acre tract, the Randolph Community Forest helped to preserve the capacity of local government and protect residents' right to use the land, while also maintaining a large enough contiguous parcel size necessary to accommodate a forest management plan, as well as other potential, larger-scale natural resource-based economic activities. While it was always understood that local people used the land, only through the customary rights and privileges of ownership did people gather together to build a collective vision for managing the land based on a diverse array of values. Edith Tucker in Randolph recounts how at the community visioning session "there was discussion about the amount of land involved and necessary decisions, and then, people began to talk about what they valued and what they were interested in" (Interview), which was directly translated into the land management goals.

As another example, for DLLT the community forests' priorities are wildlife habitat, public recreation and a sustainable economy, and while it was determined that all three of these use-values were equal, in practice, when tensions appear on the board, habitat tends to be emphasized as it was collectively conceived of as the priority that is the most sensitive (Interview, DLLT former staff). Protecting public access and wildlife habitat around Grand Lake Stream "wasn't just for people's free time: it was recreation by local residents and clients of lodges and guides, which relies very much not just on access but also habitat" (Interview, Mark Berry). Rodger Krussman with the Trust for Public Land cites another community forest in Freedom, NH that is 2,500 acres in size, with

essentially zero timber value, but the parcel sits on top of the largest stratified drift aquifer in the state of New Hampshire, and 80% of people in Freedom get their drinking water through individual wells that reach down into the aquifer (Interview).

Community ownership “allows you to get out of the industrial model,” explains DLLT co-founder Steve Keith. He adds that the 34,000-acre Farm Cove Community Forest owned and managed by DLLT still reflects an industrial-scale parcel, and in order to escape the industrial mentality that has dominated this region for so long, “you need breathing room” (Interview). Flexibility is provided by having raised an endowment to buffer initial management costs and through not being “under the gun to harvest or having to maintain and pay for logging equipment” (Interview, Steve Keith).

The use-values driving ownership of the land necessitate flexible land management. As David Montague defends:

Because we have a very broad and diverse mission, as opposed to say a commercial timber landowner who has a well-defined single-minded mission, we have more freedom to explore new and alternative ideas of maintaining the land and making it work while also conserving natural resources on the land (Interview).

The diverse representation in how land values are determined and how management decisions are made creates space for different objectives to coexist.

The Community Forest Model thus demonstrates that it is misleading to assume a zero-sum contestation between environmental and economic uses of the land.

Through allowing for creative thinking, both community forest cases investigated in this study generate economic revenue from trees that are harvested—primarily through logging—and through trees that are left standing, through DLLT’s sale of

carbon credits and Randolph's pending commercial maple syrup operation. Moreover, in DLLT's negotiation for the West Grand Lake property, the importance of reserving some land for affordable housing and future growth was addressed. Of course, these management and planning activities are still in the experiential or even idea phase, but the promise of creative and innovative consideration in balancing different accommodative uses that serve a diverse ownership constituency becomes apparent through these examples of community ownership.

8.3 Addressing Land Insecurity

Another prominent theme in both cases is that uncertainty regarding the region's future is a primary motivation for the pursuit of community land ownership. Through her work supporting community forest projects across northern New England, Marcy Lyman echoes this claim, explaining that:

One of the real problems in this region is how the churning of the ownership and the fragmentation of the forest land-base creates such uncertainty and instability in the resource base for any kind of forest-based economic activity, that until the land-base is stabilized, the future of a forest-based economy is really uncertain (Interview).

While this concern is much larger and more complex than to propose that community ownership is the silver bullet, the various means for exercising community control as well as the longevity implicit in the Community Forest Model can provide stabilizing influences. When reflecting on the impact of community ownership, former DLLT director Mark Berry holds that:

At an immediate and practical level it has provided assurance and confidence to people in the community, whether they are guides or lodge owners or business owners, that those resources are going to be available and are likely to continue to improve over time, and that's a very different

outlook than, 'well that's there now but I have no idea what is going to happen next year' (Interview).

Given the high rates of self-employment and potential for entrepreneurial activity in the Downeast Lakes region and greater Washington County, the value of land and resource stabilization can be significant. With a more durable hold over land tenure and accessible governance avenues, local people as well as prospective residents and businesses might be more inclined to invest time and resources and view the land as an active fabric of the community.

There is also potential for land security to allow for some extent of control over how the region will redefine itself economically, including uses that capture the value created by the land in a way that benefits the local community. The Randolph Forest Commission sees a niche in the maple industry, and believes a successful project on local, public land holds potential to serve as a model in the northern New England region. In discussing how the US consumes more maple syrup than it produces, John Scarinza explains how:

There's tremendous opportunity and we're losing some of our big timber employers up here because, it's just fading away. So here is an opportunity to use the timber resource that keeps the land in public access, and you're able to utilize the natural resource for another use...which could provide economic opportunity for your northern remote areas that are struggling (Interview).

Marcy Lyman frames the potential surrounding this self-determination as community capacity, which she describes as:

What communities feel they can do and what their role is and what they are empowered to do— they have not ever really felt that they have any say in what happens to the regional economy or the jobs... however, simply by the process of acquiring and owning even a small piece of forestland, there is some intangible transformation in my view, that gives them a sense that, 'huh, we can be players in what the new economy looks like' (Interview).

The economic ripple effects of community land ownership can be very difficult to measure, in part because “you’re comparing it to an unknown,” as Mark Berry explains, and “some aspects of what has been accomplished is simply protecting something that they already had” (Interview). The ‘what if’s,’ he defends, “you can’t really know, but what you did know was that an investment owner had a mandate to maximize return on their investment...and although its difficult to know the ‘what if,’ the what has actually happened is something that most people find quite remarkable” (Interview).

Chapter 9: Limitations of Community Ownership

A study surrounding the notion and practice of community ownership and control would be incomplete without problematizing “community” as a “potentially slippery unit of analysis” (McCarthy, 2006 p. 86). The discourse around community forests—this study included—often expresses community as an agent that acts, but this framing can be at risk of assuming that communities are uniform entities. In a study of community forestry in British Columbia and the U.S., McCarthy (2006) discusses some of the different contentions surrounding the notion of community, explaining that “analysts have attempted to distinguish “communities of place,” “communities of interest,” and “communities of identity” while noting that in practice these different senses are often conflated and potential members excluded from each” (p. 86). While interviewees for both community ownership entities explored in this study were able to discuss the various ‘communities’ associated with their respective community forests, crystallizing the definition of ‘community’ was admittedly impractical and not necessarily a priority. As Mark Berry, former DLLT director explains, “I don’t think they’ve [the DLLT board] ever brought complete clarity as to who is considered to be within the community and I think that is somewhat deliberate—that any bright line, no matter where you paint it, probably has a greater effect on those that are excluded than those that are included” (Interview).

There are also challenges surrounding knowledge that is perceived to be more ‘participatory’ because it came from ‘the community’ or ‘the people,’ but may in fact serve to disguise or minimize other axes of difference (Gaventa and

Cornwall, 2001), including those who may disagree with the project for various reasons, or those who are disinclined or unable to participate in governance activities. As discussed in the Section 1.3 Research Limitations, communities are rarely homogenous and egalitarian units; they are instead constructed, unstable and can be rife with their own internal inequities, which greater local control over resources holds potential to exacerbate as well as relieve (McCarthy, 2006).

Finally it is important not to romanticize the power and potential of local communities, as community forest projects are accomplished through extensive collaboration efforts and require significant technical assistance and funding support, especially during the acquisition phase. Moreover, local community action should not be construed as the silver bullet to enduring social, economic, and ecological problems. Local problems are manifestations of problems whose sources are wrapped up in complex, structural forces.

Steve Keith, co-founder of DLLT, questions the impact of community ownership on larger socioeconomic forces and tensions facing northern New England saying, “The question is, how to be sustainable while supporting a region that is in economic decline” (Interview). With the forest products industry waning, the potential for ecotourism and recreation is strong, but Keith goes on to defend that this “would require substantial capital investment, and new facilities to attract people to do those activities, but this hasn’t happened yet. This is a challenge of isolated communities: population is declining in this region, mostly due to lack of jobs” (Interview). He adds that, “the land trust level doesn’t capture the big-picture like some economic development and statewide conservation

groups studying this” (Interview). Decisions and actions surrounding community control over land are extremely relevant to the broader conversation around how northern New England will reinvent itself economically, and how local communities will exercise their right to remain in this region as well as protect and improve their quality of life.

Chapter 10: Conclusion and Recommendations

For natural resource-based communities across northern New England that are facing similar threats to land security, or are interested in planning ahead for the next round of land sales that are imminent under investor-based ownership, this study offers important considerations for the Community Forest Model as a potentially viable land tenure alternative. The findings can also be relevant to municipalities that currently own a town forest, but do not yet own, manage and/or perceive the land as a community asset. It is also important to note that, despite the large parcels of forestland explored through the cases in this study, many of the most salient takeaways surrounding both the means for exercising control as well as the higher ends of community forests as a model of community land ownership are not dependent on scale. While any considerations must be taken within the specific contextual frames of the Randolph and Farm Cove/West Grand Lake Community Forests, the recommendations interpreted and discussed here hold potential to be broadly applicable to rural, natural resource-based communities, both within northern New England and across the United States, which are interested in exploring alternative land ownership models as a means for land security and/or broader community and economic development efforts.

Formation of a mobilized, empowered community is critical—it takes an organized constituency to first stand up to private interests, to see the project through, and to maintain investment in and support for the land over time. A key piece of mobilization is the extent to which the project is initially framed to include a diverse array of interests. There does not have to be a zero-sum

contestation between environmental, social and economic uses of the land, though striving to balance these values implies the need for maintaining deliberation at the core of community forest projects. Community mobilization can also generate a positive feedback loop for increasing community capacity, as the more a small community realizes its own power and potential, the more the boundaries around what is possible expand.

Partnership is essential throughout every phase of a community forest project. In the planning and acquisition it is especially important to connect with established and well-connected groups such as New England New England Forestry Foundation or the Trust for Public Land that have experience in land transactions and financing. It was also very helpful for Randolph to request support from the Cooperative Extension to facilitate their community visioning session for their first Stewardship Plan. Finally, in ongoing management tasks, partnering with local land user group constituencies to inform management decisions, and distribute decision-making power on different levels helps to streamline communication and invest and empower direct community group involvement.

The collective process of designing an easement and stewardship plan can effectuate mobilization around the land as a community asset. Experts in forestry, wildlife and wetland ecology are absolutely critical in determining the land's conservation values and in carrying out and updating the stewardship plan, but bringing into view people's realities as a basis for action and decision-making—as DLLT did when designing the easement for the West Grand Lake Property—

creates a powerful knowledge base that incorporates those who are most directly affected by decisions and taps into the wealth of local expertise. Expanding who participates in the knowledge production process can also act as a recruitment technique for people to serve on boards or committees, and can help to ensure long-term stewardship and investment in the land as a natural resource asset.

Organizational and governance structures can establish representation avenues for encouraging direct and indirect community involvement. The ultimate authority of a community forest might be somewhat removed from the day-to-day considerations of the land, control over which could rest instead with a local land user group, such as in Randolph's Activity Managers model. Informal spaces for sharing information and asking questions offer another generative platform for community participation, and can pique interest in a way that encourages people to seek out further involvement in the community forest's governance structure. Participation and commitment on behalf of residents can confront a suite of challenges, and while a lack of community engagement does not imply that the view of the wider community is not being represented in some way, it is still important for governance structures to innovate and experiment. Randolph's small grant program is one new effort to spark interest and even a sense of ownership in land management and decision-making.

There is *inherent tension between the use-values of existing or prospective community forestlands and the market-exchange and/or profit maximization values of those lands*—removing the land from the speculative market and into the hands of community ownership is one step towards protecting less or non-

monetary values of the land. Achieving land security through stabilizing the ownership and resource base can have a ripple effect on building a community's capacity to take control of its own future and to some extent, control over how natural resources will play a role as the region reinvents itself economically, though this potential is only just beginning to be realized.

Finally, while this study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the power and potential of community control over natural resource assets, *it is important not to romanticize the potential local efforts as a solution to enduring and entrenched social problems*. Local community members interviewed for this study express a critical understanding of the deeper roots of land insecurity in their respective communities and across the region. The community can simply be too limited a scale to respond in-full to forces like the erosion of northern New England's economic base and the deeply embedded market ideology that favors unfettered private ownership. However, private landownership is taken as an inexorable reality not only due to its longstanding place in American ideology, but also to the paucity of viable alternatives (Swann, 1972). The Community Forest Model demonstrates that that another conception and practice of land ownership is not only possible and viable, but can also realize opportunities to control the value of land in a way that meets diverse community needs.

Further research to help build the case for community forests as critical community and economic development projects could contribute to building an agenda for the Community Forest Model that transcends local community efforts as well as those of the forestry and conservation fields, and finds ways to connect

and build alliances with other sectors on a regional scale. Looking forward, another interesting research opportunity that is in line with cross-sector partnership is the extent to which existing and prospective community forest projects are able to share adaptive experiences and management efforts in ways that achieve collective impact.

While this analysis only scrapes the surface of the potential of community forests, it reveals how these projects can act as a means for natural resource-based communities to exercise greater local control over how land is managed and valued, effectively building local capacity and agency, while also providing an opportunity to bring people together around a collective vision for the land and their community.

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