Ecological Reserves

In the summer 1988, after the Diamond land sale, while the state was negotiating for the Nash Stream portion of this sale, Paul Bofinger, of SPNHF and an aid to Senator Rudman, engaged with Senator Leahy to appropriate funds in the Forest Service budget to establish the Northern Forest Lands Study (1988-1990). Maine's large timberland owners obstructed most of the efforts to examine the crisis, but the Forest Service staffers on the NFLS wrote an honest report that, among other things, asserted:

- The status quo cannot be maintained.
- We should acquire some lands (using mostly federal and some state funds) to establish new reserves and parks. The Study noted that this is an idea popular with the public.
- Climate change threatens to drive the spruce-fir forest north out of New England
- Congress should establish a long-term Council to continue with this work.

The large landowners vetoed "long-term" and allowed a 4-year Northern Forest Lands Council (1990-1994) with the proviso that it only do the landowners' agenda in the Northern Forest Land Study and not the NFLS recommendations the landowners hated, including those listed above.

The Council refused to address damaging forest practices, and would have avoided biodiversity and land protection if not forced by a united conservation community (the Northern Forest Alliance) to tackle these critical issues. Recommendation 21 of the Northern Forest Lands Council stated: "By June 1996, states should develop a process to conserve and enhance biodiversity across the landscape."

Unfortunately the Council, at the demand of the large landowners, weakened this important recommendation by advising the states to work individually (not as a regional entity in collaboration with the federal government) to "conserve the present diversity and to enhance it where possible." This approach did not bode well for the recovery of wolves, cougars, old forests and the networks of mycorrhizal fungi that flourish in undisturbed forests. The Council recommended the work of the Maine Forest Biodiversity Project (MFBP) where a "preliminary scientific assessment" had concluded "a reserve system would be limited in size, encompassing only a small portion of the landscape."

The NH Ecological Reserves Steering Committee was formed in response to that recommendation, in 1995. It took a more ambitious approach than the Council had recommended. ERSC sought the scientifically-defensible goal of "ecosystem integrity" instead of "natural community representation." Representation is politically-driven, not scientifically-driven. Small, representative reserves are vulnerable to the impacts of climate change as species of that community respond in different ways; some disperse north, south, east or west at different rates, others remain or go extinct. The natural community does not migrate as a unit. Ergo, climate change disassembles the "representative community." In larger reserves, this disassembly is less harmful because more of the dispersion occurs withing the reserved area.

In 1994, Bryce's predecessor at DF&L, Jack Sargent, a member of the Council, had hired Laura Falk. She had been one of the Forest Service authors of the *Northern Forest Lands Study*. Falk insisted on broad representation on forest policy committees. The Forest Resources Plan, written by one of those committees, was the most science-informed 10 year forest plan the state has ever written.

New Hampshire's 1996 Forest Resources Plan stated:

"Maintaining blocks of contiguous forest is extremely important, both ecologically and economically. In northern New Hampshire, nine blocks of contiguous forest have been identified, each over 25,000 acres. In southern New Hampshire, blocks of forest over 25,000 acres are rare and blocks of uninterrupted forest are likely to be in multiple ownerships. With private land comprising 83 percent of the state's forested land, factors such as tax policies, land use and forest policy have a large impact on the ability to maintain large tracts. New Hampshire's Current Use Law (RSA 79-A) is the best tool currently available for conserving forest land. But current use assessment does not address the full range of pressures facing land owners. For decades sustained-yield forest management has been the accepted model of forest management. In the 1990s the concept of forest sustainability has been expanded to include larger landscapes and non-commodity values of forested ecosystems. Information to assess current forest conditions is needed to adapt forest management to an evolving notion of sustainability…

The human influence on biological diversity is very complex, but it is clear that some forest habitats are scarce because of past or present human activity. The state list of threatened and endangered species now includes 17 percent of known species of vascular plants and 14 percent of known vertebrate species. These habitat and species declines are not all related to forest management activities. Many are the result of land clearing, farm abandonment and development. Species declines that are linked to the availability of forested, and in some cases agricultural, habitat are important concerns in forest resource planning."

New Hampshire does not have the Ecological Reserves system recommended in 1998 by the Steering Committee established by DF&L and F&G.

The climate and biodiversity crises have worsened considerably since the Ecological Reserves Steering Committee was quietly terminated by DF&L and F&G.

In 1998, atmospheric carbon levels were at approximately 370 ppm and today they are near 420 ppm.

DF&L's 2020 Draft Forest Plan fails to mention Ecological Reserves.

DNCR must acknowledge the climate emergency by resuming the work of ERSC and establishing Ecological Reserves.

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