

Highstead

In the last decades a new concept has emerged in conservation literature, that of “working lands”. The term originally applied to timberlands, ranchland and farms, acknowledging the tangible wood and agricultural products that were derived from large acreages.

The Entire Landscape is Working

It was employed to argue for their permanent protection from development.

Somewhat less positively, however, a few advocates of the phrase used it as a backhanded slight against other conservation lands that weren’t producing a steady stream of consumable products. The wilderness areas, wetlands and unusual habitats that were promoted by one group of conservationists were often seen as “fallow,” “wastelands,” or even “lazy” lands in the eyes of some resource production groups.



this more encompassing definition of working lands. Across the highest elevations in this landscape, expansive open meadows are filled with native and introduced grasses and wildflowers. While these fields yield hay for local farmers, their greatest value lie as habitat for uncommon birds, butterflies, and plants and as a reminder of a once common landscape in New England. Across the lower slopes and rocky hills

that dominate this region is an array of woodlands. Some of these forests are actively managed and yield firewood and timber. But the broad swamp of red maple and yellow birch and the old and trail-less oak forest that occupies the core of this

forest tract are reserves that will never be cut. Both provide direct benefits to humans; clean air, filtered water, and the ongoing storage of carbon that offsets releases elsewhere to the atmosphere. Together with the managed forests, fields, and other habitats, these woodlands comprise a rich landscape mosaic where we can learn, educate others, and simply enjoy the variety of views and experiences that nature and the history of the land bring to us.

In today’s world, where economists, ecologists, community leaders and recreationists of all stripes have come to place real monetary, social and environmental value on all landscape protected from development, these old distinctions and disagreements should disappear. We should be able to agree that all of our lands, from farms to wilderness reserves to local woodlots and marshes, are working for all of us, for nature and for the globe.

Highstead, and our staff of ecologists, conservationists, and horticulturalists are working with local and regional partners and landowners to advance the appreciation and protection of all of these varied landscapes.

And it is working.

David Foster
Chairman



David Foster is Director of the Harvard Forest at Harvard University and Chair of the Highstead Board.

Highstead and the surrounding landscape protected by the town of Redding, the Redding Land Trust, The Nature Conservancy and private landowners provide a microcosm of



From the Director

Bill Toomey
Director



Dear Highstead Members and Friends,

As I settle into my first year at Highstead I would like to look back, recognize how far we have come, and chart a path toward our future. From the beginning as a sanctuary for the study and appreciation of woodland habitats, Highstead did not subscribe to the traditional concept of an arboretum. Instead, Highstead was based on ecological principles in which cultivated plants and landscapes were managed in harmony with existing habitats and the natural world. In addition, Highstead sought to be a teaching and learning facility that provided examples of good stewardship of the land.

Today, we are building on this strong foundation and focusing effort in three primary areas: science and research, regional forest conservation, and sound land management. Highstead staff are working to support the conservation actions of existing conservation organizations to help improve the pace, scale and coordination of conservation while also promoting the appreciation and value of protecting the forested landscape locally and globally.

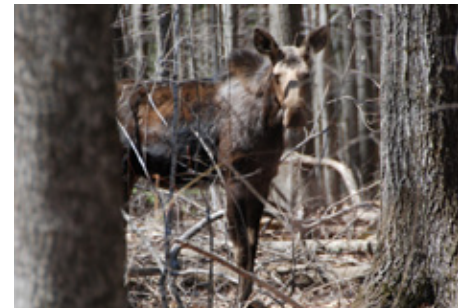


above:
Highstead is working in partnership with others to help protect the forested landscape of New England.

right:
Highstead is conducting ecological studies on the role of Moose and Deer in shaping New England's forested landscape.

Connecticut and into neighboring Rhode Island and New York, and creating a new interpretive brochure and trail to enhance visitors' experience.

In the years ahead, Highstead will explore new programs, opportunities and collaborations to advance our mission and conservation work at local, regional and national scales. I hope that you are inspired and encouraged by the direction and accomplishments of Highstead's work. I invite you to join us at one or more of our events or just to come for a visit. Thank you for your continued interest and support of Highstead.



Bill Toomey
Director

You are invited

photography credits: Alden Warner

Highstead welcomes members and non-members alike to participate in these events. If we do not already have your email address, please send it to info@highstead.net.

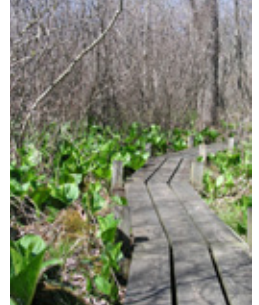
Saturday June 13th:

10:00 am to 3:00 pm

Highstead Open House and Trails Day

Members and visitors are invited to explore the new addition to our Barn headquarters and enjoy our new self-guided interpretive trail and brochure.

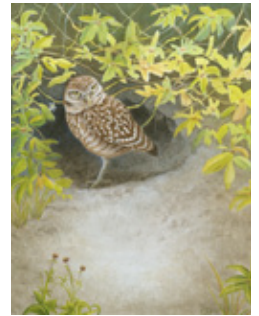
For those who prefer a guided tour, staff will lead walks at 10:30 and 1:00.



**September 12th –
October 30th:**

Art Exhibition Birds of Prey of the Eastern United States

Guild of Natural Science Illustrators - Greater of New York Chapter. Viewing is weekdays from 9:00 am – 4:00 pm.



Artist Guild artist:
Dori Petrochko

Saturday September 12th:

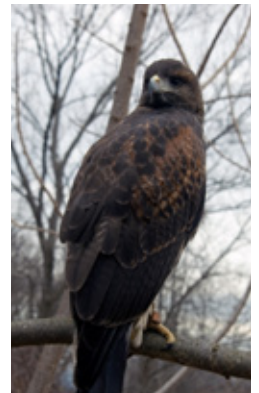
10:30 am to 12:00 pm:

Birds of Prey of the Eastern United States

Artists from the Guild of Natural Science Illustrators - Greater New York Chapter will be at Highstead to show and discuss their work on display at the Highstead Barn. Join us for a special informal presentation where the artists will enlighten us about the subject matter and share personal experiences that inspired their work

1:00 pm to 3:00 pm:

Chris Davis, Master Falconer, will present information on birds of prey and their conservation. Chris, the first Master Falconer permitted in the country to offer hands on falconry education, will bring some of his birds to view and see in action.



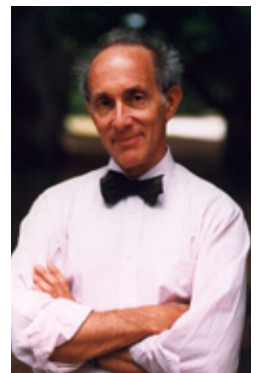
Photography Credit:
Chelynn Tetreault

Friday September 18th:

7:00 pm to 9:00 pm:

Woodland Conversation

Dr. Eric Chivian, Director of the Center for Health and the Global Environment at Harvard University Medical School, will discuss how our health depends on the state of the environment and what we must do to protect it.



Regional Conservation

Bill Labich
Regional Conservationist



Regional Conservation: Advancing a Shared Vision

Bill Labich made a compelling presentation to over 100 members of Connecticut's forestry community entitled "Wildlands and Woodlands: A Vision for Sustaining Forested Landscapes" at Yale University on March 27, 2009. This talk was well received and formed the basis for a number of informative roundtable discussions later that day, which will lay the groundwork for the possible creation of a large scale forest conservation vision for Connecticut.

What should the future of Connecticut's forest look like?

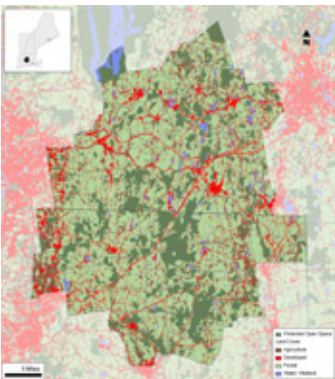
The Wildlands and Woodlands vision developed by scientists from Harvard Forest in 2005 stresses the urgent need to conserve New England's relatively young forests. Forests that had been cut or cleared for agriculture, timber and charcoal in past centuries have grown back giving this region a second chance for forest conservation. Our expansive forest cover provides a host of benefits including abundant clean air and water, habitat for wildlife, and diverse recreational opportunities. Forests also slow global climate change by absorbing and storing vast quantities of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. In fact, due to their young age and rapid growth, the forests of southern New England are better at storing carbon than most on earth. Bill highlighted how conservation organizations, landowners, and citizens are actively cooperating across political boundaries to increase both the pace of land protection and the quality of forest management.

In many ways, Bill's talk at Yale set the context for the initiatives of this year's Regional Conservation Program. Highlights include:

- *Training key stakeholders.* In early March, Bill organized the Forester to Forester Conservation Workshop where 33 state and private foresters from Massachusetts, Connecticut and Rhode Island shared their enthusiasm and advice for increasing their involvement in regional conservation efforts.
- *Advancing bold conservation visions.* Bill is helping to increase the membership and activity of the 55-member Wildlands and Woodlands Partnership. These partners collaborate to advance innovation in policy, mapping, grassroots organizing for regional conservation, land protection, and forest management.
- *Researching and sharing lessons.* Bill is working with researchers in forest ecology and regional planning to write publications on how landowners can work together to maintain the health of the regional forest resource. They will be writing on environmentally sensitive zoning tools, and showcasing lessons learned from several conservation partnerships from around New England. Bill highlighted lessons learned from implementing the Wildlands and Woodlands vision at the Massachusetts Land Trust Conference and a Conference of the Society of American Foresters in Maine.

Massachusetts Connecticut Sustainable Forest Partnership

Highstead works with Harvard Forest to increase the accuracy of protected lands mapping for emerging regional conservation partnerships like the Mass-Conn Sustainable Forest Partnership



Regional Conservation

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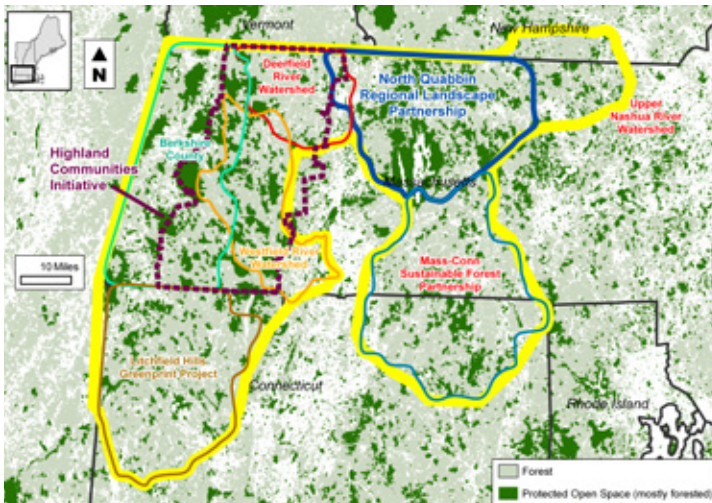
- *Assisting regional conservation partnerships.* Bill continues to work closely with twelve regional partnerships in Massachusetts, Connecticut and New Hampshire to foster new collaborations, strengthen existing groups, and share information strategies and fundraising ideas. Bill also coordinates the Western Fairfield County Regional Conservation Partnership comprising the towns of Bethel, Brookfield, Danbury, Newtown, Redding, and Ridgefield Connecticut. Quarterly meetings of the partnership share information and plan landowner trainings and events to engage local businesses.

Download a PDF of Bill's presentation *Wildlands and Woodlands: A Vision for Sustaining Forested Landscapes* at www.highstead.net.

For more information on Wildlands and Woodlands and the original report see www.wildlandsandwoodlands.org.

Regional Conservation: What Works Best?

There is growing interest among conservation organizations in collaborating across town, state, and national boundaries to protect woodlands. These groups want to protect significant portions of their remaining watershed lands and large forests and farmlands, and are trying out new ways of working together. While these groups have different sizes, funding, missions, and geographies, they all share a common motivation; to conserve much more land from development than they have ever done before.



Highstead's Regional Conservation Program has identified over 20 of these groups throughout New England that fit a general design model that Bill Labich and others are calling 'Regional Conservation Partnerships'. Partnership members can include representatives of local, state, and federal government and agencies, conservation organizations, regional planning agencies, landowners, business owners, and others.

Highstead's Regional Conservation Program will be researching regional conservation partnerships in the Northeast and then across the nation in order to better

Highstead works with woodland council groups and regional conservation partnerships to collaborate to increase the pace of land protection and the number of woodlands under management

understand what works best. The goal of this research will be to document how these partnerships are formed, how they function, and what they have achieved. This information will be compiled into a database that will be available to share successes and lessons learned.

Forest Ecology

Ed Faison
Highstead Ecologist



Ecological Studies

The Pace of Change in Highstead's Forests

Five years have elapsed since we established a network of one hundred vegetation plots across the forest landscape at Highstead. Permanent vegetation plots are one of the simplest and most powerful, yet under-utilized tools for documenting change in nature due to an ever-changing environment. The resulting data yield insights into critical processes, such as the rate of spread of invasive plants, the mortality of trees from insect pests or pathogens, and the decline of wildflowers and tree seedlings due to deer browsing. Data from a network of plots like those at Highstead are invaluable to conservationists, land managers, policy makers and the science community.

This summer, ecologist Ed Faison and two interns, Erik Yando from Connecticut College and Stephen Murphy from Denison College in Ohio, will re-sample the original permanent plots and expect to document substantial change. During the past five years many important disturbances have altered our forests:

- The ash decline, a poorly understood combination of the native ash yellows fungus and environmental stress, and removal of the dying trees have reduced overstory ash in our moist forests.
- Patches of the invasive plant, Japanese Stilt Grass (*Microstegium vimineum*), have begun spreading into the forest, and

Research Sites at Highstead



- Deer browsing on tree seedlings and wildflowers and antler scraping on saplings continues to be intensive.

The individual and collective influence of these and other disturbances will be the focus of the summer activity.

Moose: a New Agent of Change in Southern New England

This year Ed will also continue his regional studies of the role of moose, a relatively new arrival to Massachusetts and northern Connecticut, in shaping forests in this new habitat. Collaborating with University of Massachusetts wildlife experts, Ed and two undergraduate interns from the Harvard Forest will visit locations frequented by moose, using Geographic Positioning System receivers on radio-collared animals. At each site they will record the impact of moose browsing on the vegetation and compare to sites that are less heavily used by moose. Because moose forage intensively in only a few locations during the year and often return to sites year after year, they have the potential to generate dramatic changes at these sites.

Landscapes and Collections

*Kathleen Kitka
Landscape and Collections
Manager*



photography credit: Alden Warner

Highstead's Expanded and Enhanced Interpretive Trail

Visitors to Highstead will experience our expanded self-guided walking tour and trail. This trail traverses a diversity of natural and cultural habitats, plant collections, and research and demonstration areas. A kiosk planned for the trailhead adjacent to the Barn will hold brochures and information about the route, walking time, safety, and visitor orientation. Visitors are led through a series of stops, identified by numbered posts and keyed to text in a trail brochure.

Collectively, these stops interpret:

- the interactions among geology, natural disturbances, and past and current land use in shaping the Highstead and southern New England landscape.
- the role of scientific studies in generating information that can guide decisions about natural resource and land management.
- the importance of conservation lands to local communities and to regional forest protection.
- nature as inspiration for the creation of aesthetically pleasing, environmentally sensitive, and low maintenance landscapes.



Jack In The Pulpit

photography credit: Alden Warner

Upon completing the walk, visitors are encouraged to provide feedback on their experience and the accompanying brochure. The resulting information will be invaluable in guiding the future development of the interpretive trail.

We invite you to visit Highstead to experience the natural history and beauty of our southwestern Connecticut landscape.



Highstead

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