

# Highstead

in order to enhance life,  
preserve nature and  
advance sound stewardship practices.

## To the Members and Friends of Highstead

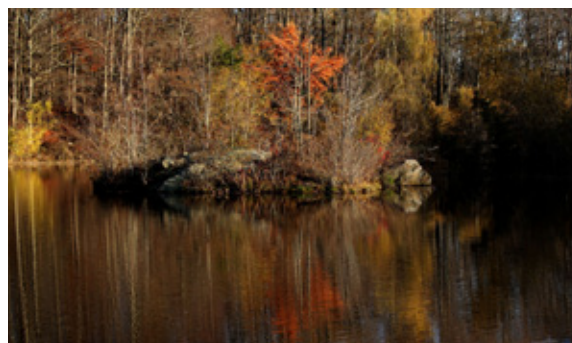
While developing this newsletter three words emerged prominently: conservation, partnerships and disturbance. As our region reels from a late October snowstorm and looks back at a summer of wind, water and unease wrought by an earthquake, tornado, and hurricane we recognize an inherent linkage among these words.

In Highstead's central mission of conservation and our work with many conservation partners lies the ability of nature and society to be resilient to the surprises that natural forces and global change will deliver in the future.

Conservation has been a driving force at Highstead since Jim and Elisabeth Dudley chose to protect their marvelous landscape of woodlands, meadows, wetlands and water and share it with others. But when our Denver colleague Elaine Shiramizu was designing this newsletter she noted that the word "conservation" appeared 52 times in this issue; consequently, we decided to highlight and explore the meaning of this important word on the newsletter's back cover. After all, it was the early ethic of conservation at Highstead that attracted us to the Wildlands and Woodlands vision of preserving the region's forests, farmlands, and communities and motivated us to advance this vision locally, regionally and nationally.

From our experience in Redding, CT and elsewhere watching landowners, organizations and local communities collaborate in conserving large landscapes we became convinced that one strategic role for our small organization lay in facilitating the formation and effective work of conservation partnerships. As described by Bill Labich, in areas from Fairfield County and New York to Maine and New Hampshire, we are assisting diverse groups with information, tools and resources that aid their efforts to conserve a wide variety of landscapes.

Kathy Lambert underscores the critical role that partnerships among groups with similar missions can play advancing state and federal policies that support these local conservation efforts. And, Jim Levitt describes emerging programs that link Highstead's work with analogous efforts in the southeastern U.S., the Rockies, southwestern U.S. and internationally.



Meanwhile, this year has been tumultuous for the New England landscape. Ed Faison reminds us that nature is regularly visited by a range of natural disturbances. As he describes Hurricane Irene he notes the great ability of our forests to resist and recover from wind, fire, pests and other impacts. Yet,

in an era when changing climate is bringing new extremes in weather it is important that we recognize that this resilience and the ability of nature to provide society with benefits like clean water, wood products and flood protection is largely dependent on our determination to keep nature intact and to choose wisely how and where we develop it for our use. Consequently, as we reflect on our work with many partners to conserve landscapes near and wide, we recognize that this work is inherently centered in strong personal passion and a desire to ensure that nature and society can cope with an uncertain future.



**David Foster** is Director of the Harvard Forest at Harvard University and President of the Board of Highstead Foundation.





## Forest Ecology

*Ed Faison*  
Highstead Ecologist



# Irene and Alfred in Context: Disturbance and Resilience in Southern New England Forests

As you walk Highstead's and other regional trails this fall and winter, you'll undoubtedly see the effects of Tropical Storm Irene and Snowstorm Alfred. Some 35-40 trees were blown down in Highstead's woodlands on August 28-29. Many more fell or sustained broken tops on October 29-30, particularly in our oak forest. Oaks were particularly susceptible to damaging snow loads because their leaves trapped the wet, heavy snow (oaks hold onto their leaves later into the fall than many other deciduous trees).

*below:*

*Two large oaks uprooted above the North Trail by strong winds*



The sight of multiple downed and damaged trees is jarring and seems unnatural, but not to worry: the damage you see is as natural as the forest itself. Windstorms and damaging ice and snowstorms are two of the principal natural disturbances in southern New England and have helped shape the composition and structure of our forests for millennia. Major hurricanes that cause extensive blowdowns occur every 85-150 years in this region—the most recent one in 1938. But smaller windstorms like Irene that cause some blow downs occur every 10-15 years.

Deciduous trees like oaks, maples and birches that comprise much of our forests have a number of effective insurance policies against periodic windstorms and icestorms. When damaged, these trees create new stems from buds near the base or along the trunk, and nearby offspring also grow rapidly from seedlings into adult trees in the newly created canopy gaps. A beech grows new stems from buds on its roots. In certain

coastal locations, beech has become extremely abundant, in part because of its resilience to damaging windstorms. Adult trees also benefit from the damage sustained by their neighbors. Limbs broken from one tree mean increased growing space for another. Through long-term studies at Highstead and across New England with other Wildlands and Woodlands collaborators, we will be able to analyze the effects that Irene, Alfred, and other storms and many other natural and human impacts have on our forests.



*right: Oak tree snapped by Tropical Storm Irene near the Oak Forest Enclosure*





## Regional Conservation

*Bill Labich*  
*Regional Conservationist*



# Gatherings and Grants: Advancing conservation through coordinated networks

The conservation of forests and farmland across New England is gathering momentum. People from a variety of backgrounds and with diverse interests in nature are finding a common purpose in the Wildlands & Woodlands vision and an ability to advance their conservation goals through networks of groups initiated or assisted by Highstead.

### **New York -**

#### ***Keeping Forests as Forests Grant for New York-New England***

Through Highstead's leadership, state foresters in collaboration with 20 conservation groups and several regional partnerships were awarded a three-year, \$450,000 grant from the US Forest Service. In four large landscapes across New England, these partners will work together to increase the number of family forest owners engaged in managing their woodlands and protecting their land from development.

### **W&W Partnership**

As a broad network for conservation visionaries and activists to share information and lessons, the Partnership provides the means for conservationists to learn about and support each other's initiatives. Efforts shaped partly by Partnership discussions include annual Regional Partnership Gatherings, the W&W Conservation Aggregation Project, and the 2012 Policy Agenda for Conserving New England's Forests.



### **Large Landscape Conservation Initiative Practitioners Network**

Highstead staff serve on the coordinating committee of this international network, which is designed to attract funding to large landscape conservation efforts like that of the W&W Initiative.

### **Connecticut Forest Partnership**

Bridging the conservation and forestry communities takes time and care. Using its growing expertise in effective collaboration, Highstead convenes a working group focused on helping conservation partnerships protect more land in the state.

### **Fairfield County Regional Conservation Partnership**

A growing collaboration of land trusts, conservation commissions, state foresters, and a watershed association are now equipped with shared goals and measurable outcomes. The Partnership recently sponsored a workshop for land trust and municipal volunteers covering land conservation tools for estate planning, legacy and tax benefits. A mapped conservation vision and efforts to collaborate on stewardship and land protection projects is underway.

*For more information*

*See page 5 and  
[www.wildlandswoodlands.org](http://www.wildlandswoodlands.org)*

*above: Town officials and local land trust volunteers in Fairfield County listen to Attorney Peter B. Cooper describe requirements of conservation easements.*





## Conservation Collaboration

*Senior Fellow  
Jim Levitt*



# Catalyzing Conservation at the National and State Levels

Partnering is a well-established role for Highstead that allows us to advance conservation by sharing knowledge of effective practices through collaborations and exchanges with other organizations. One of our new partnership efforts is multi-national in scope: the launch of a new network of large landscape conservation initiatives across the United States and adjoining areas in Mexico and Canada.

Highstead, the Harvard Forest and the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy are advancing this effort in collaboration with the University of Montana and the Sonoran Institute.

With the support of these diverse institutions, Senior Fellow Jim Levitt and Regional Conservationist Bill Labich advanced this effort through a meeting of the Practitioners' Network for Large Landscape Conservation (PNLCC). The meeting took place in October 2011 at the National Land Trust Rally in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. More than 75 conservation leaders from the private, public, non-profit and academic sectors gathered to discuss conservation policy initiatives, new research and projects and the evolution of the PNLCC. Importantly, the workshop provided newcomers the opportunity to assist in building this network.

Also with Highstead and Harvard Forest support, Jim Levitt is helping to advance forest conservation policy statewide in Massachusetts with the release of the Report of the Massachusetts Commission on Financing Forest Conservation. Levitt served as the coordinator of this effort and is working closely with state energy and environmental agency leaders to assist them in implementing some of its most important recommendations. Key priorities include the development of funding for large

conservation projects in the Connecticut River watershed that are comprised of multiple parcels owned by numerous individuals.





## Conservation Policy

Senior Fellow  
Kathy Lambert



# Groups Rally to Advance a Policy Agenda for Conserving New England's Forests

This year is the 100th anniversary of the Weeks Act, which reminds us that public policy can shape the landscape in dramatic ways. The Act allowed the federal government to purchase the “lands nobody wanted” and create public forests for watershed protection in the eastern United States. It led to the creation of the White and Green Mountain National Forests and is widely heralded as one of the most successful pieces of conservation legislation in United States history.

Today, there are few policy opportunities as sweeping as the Weeks Act; however, a coordinated policy voice for New England forests is critical to advancing the conservation ambitions of Wildlands and Woodlands: *A Vision for the New England Landscape*. Large landscape conservation can benefit substantially from access to federal funding, stewardship and tax incentives, and climate and energy policies favorable to forests. Highstead has worked with leaders from the Trust for Public Land, the Appalachian Mountain Club, the Nature Conservancy and several other organizations to define a shared policy agenda for New England's forests and then to seek endorsements and communicate the agenda to policymakers. The final document urges federal lawmakers to help meet the economic challenges facing New England by investing in the region's forests. The recent flood damage by Hurricane Irene offers a potent reminder of the critical link between forests and flowing waters -- the very connection that motivated Senator Weeks to take bold policy action a century ago.

Thanks to the work of many partners, *A Policy Agenda for Conserving New England's Forests* has been endorsed by 60 organizations spanning from Maine to Rhode Island. It outlines six federal opportunities in Fiscal Year 2012 to conserve New England's forests and the infrastructure they provide.

See [www.wildlandswoodlands.org](http://www.wildlandswoodlands.org)

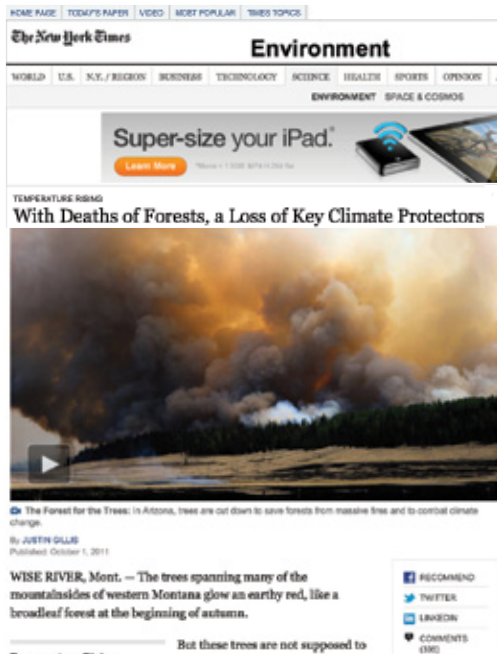
### Six Federal Policy Priorities for the Conservation of New England Forests

1. Secure funds for New England's working forests through the Forest Legacy program.
2. Prioritize the large landscapes of the North Woods and Connecticut River watershed in the President's America's Great Outdoors Initiative and associated competitive matching fund programs.
3. Support community forest and recreational trail projects through funding from the existing Community Forest and Open Space Conservation Program.
4. Protect the region's special places by adding to the existing public land base through the Land and Water Conservation Fund.
5. Enhance the financial benefits for stewardship of private forestland through federal cost-share programs and incentives.
6. Promote the development of appropriately scaled biomass energy through the Community Wood Energy Program and investment tax credits for qualifying projects.



# Highstead in the News

## Forests, Climate Change and Wildlands & Woodlands



In a news story released on October 1, 2011, New York Times writer Justin Gillis outlined the positive impacts that forests have on climate change. Forests absorb more than a quarter of the carbon dioxide that people put into the air by burning fossil fuels across the globe. Forests are, therefore, a key factor in offsetting climate change through the active storage of this greenhouse gas.

To supplement the story, the Times provided an interactive map that utilized the Wildlands and Woodlands publication, which Highstead helped to produce. The graphic relied on W&W research to illustrate changing forest cover in New England as the land was cleared for agriculture in the 18th and 19th centuries and then grew back to cover more than 80% of the region today.



A section of the article also featured Highstead's collaborators at Harvard Forest who are measuring carbon uptake, storage, and release in forests. Interestingly, these maturing forests experienced an upturn in carbon storage about a decade ago. Today these forests increase in weight by roughly two tons per acre per year. All New England forests play an important role in helping to mitigate climate. As part of Highstead's research initiatives, forest ecologist Ed Faison tracks forest growth in Highstead's woodlands every 5-10 years. More importantly, Ed engages and assists landowners across the region to do the same thing on their protected forestlands to better understand how climate change and other human influences are changing forests.

Highstead and its partners are working to protect forests across New England and hope to provide a model of land conservation that can be adopted by other regions of the United States. Highstead supports the Wildlands and Woodlands vision to conserve 70% of New England's forests. Wildlands and Woodlands present practical conservation options to landowners and citizens that are still compatible with ongoing economic growth and focused development.

With increased attention brought to the critical role of our forests globally, Highstead and Wildlands and Woodlands can help to achieve solutions to pressing environmental challenges.

article written by  
Talbot Eckweiler, Communications Intern



## Highstead Welcomes New Interns

This fall, Highstead continues its tradition of providing internship opportunities and hands-on work experience to college students and recent graduates. Talbot Eckweiler, Mairin O'Donnell, and Stephanie Weyer have recently joined Highstead and are already advancing the Wildlands and Woodlands initiative.

### Communications



**Talbot Eckweiler** is from Valparaiso, Indiana. She graduated in May with a Bachelor's in Journalism and Mass Communications from St. Bonaventure University. Talbot focuses on producing media content for Highstead and the Wildlands and Woodlands initiative and wrote the piece on Forests and Climate Change on page 6. She assists with the design, coordination and monitoring of Highstead's online communication plan. Talbot has a passion for nature photography, and her undergraduate senior thesis focused on the 2010 budget crisis facing New York State Parks.

**"I'm excited to be here, learning about conservation planning.**

**I look forward to helping people recognize the benefits of preserving wild spaces."**

### Regional conservation



**Mairin O'Donnell** is from Painesville, Ohio. She graduated in May with a Bachelor's in Environmental Studies from Brandeis University. Mairin will focus on partnership, policy and event-related activities for Highstead.

**"Much of what I studied focused on the history of New England forests and how we can sustain them and shape them to benefit the community.**

**I believe in the importance of the Wildlands and Woodlands vision and am happy to be a part of it and other Highstead projects."**

### Regional conservation



**Stephanie Weyer** is from Evansville, Indiana. She graduated in May with a Bachelor's of Landscape Architecture from Ball State University. Stephanie will focus on ArcGIS, mapping, graphics and illustration, and land use planning. Stephanie will also work on a regional conservation vision and greenway plan for the Fairfield County Regional Conservation Partnership.

**"Coming from a design and urban planning-focused background, it's a great opportunity to expand my conservation knowledge and learn from people who enjoy and care about their work.**

**And it's a lot of fun exploring the beautiful Highstead grounds and local towns."**





# Highstead Fall 2011

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## Highstead

*printed on recycled paper*



**Q:** *What is Conservation?*  
*The word appears 52 times in this Newsletter*

**kansər'veɪʃən**

**A:** The preservation, protection, or restoration of the natural environment and of wildlife; the practice of seeking to prevent the wasteful use of a resource in order to ensure its continuing availability.