

Highstead

To the Members and Friends of Highstead

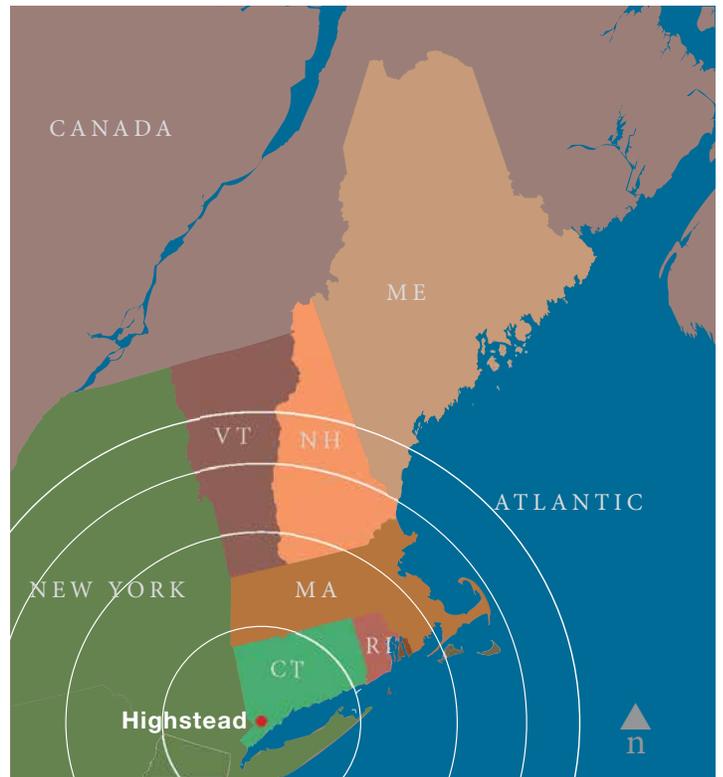


Ten years ago the Highstead Board decided to expand the organization’s mission thematically, geographically, and through the appointment of new staff and two senior fellows. This fall the board met with the entire staff to take stock of how far we have come and to begin discussing possibilities for the next decade.

There will be more on the future of Highstead in subsequent newsletters. In this issue we provide insights into where we are today and what kind of institution we have become.

From my perspective, the question that we posed at the outset of our board discussion — *what is Highstead today?* — has answers that are clear and quite gratifying.

Highstead has become an innovative leader in conservation, rooted firmly in our home landscape of Redding, while also working across Fairfield County, the state of Connecticut, and all of New England.



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



We work at each scale to advance land protection through the demonstration of good stewardship, strong field-based science, and collaboration with partners. As the following text demonstrates, we are also beginning to edge past New England into New York, Washington, D.C., and beyond to engage in regionally and nationally relevant policy issues and conservation activities.

More is on the horizon, but it is clear that the decision made by our board ten years ago is validated by the success and great accomplishments of our staff and senior fellows. I hope that you continue to follow, engage with, and support these activities into the future.

Highstead at Work



Backyard Stewardship:

Inspiring curiosity and building knowledge at Highstead



Protecting the Native Landscape

Geordie Elkins, Operations Director, and Darel Peck, Grounds and Facilities Manager, are working to protect our native plants from invasive stilt grass by weed whacking the plant in early September, which prevents it from seeding. This technique was used in September 2013 and, as shown in the map below, the reduction in stilt grass cover was impressive. This method will also be used along paths and roads to prevent people and vehicles from spreading the seeds further into the property.



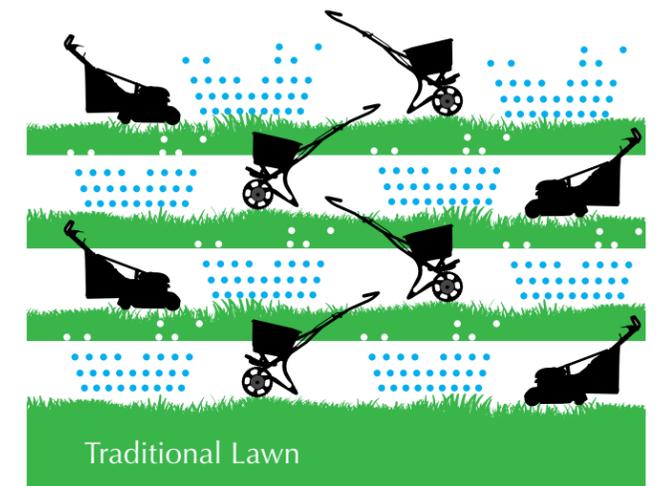
The above graphic shows the change in stilt grass presence from 2013 to 2014 following the weed whacking treatment.

Summer of Sampling for Ecology Interns



Highstead's summer ecology interns, Jill Hautaniemi, a Dickinson College graduate, and Aaron Lefland, a Brandeis University graduate, worked over the summer sampling disturbed forest plots on land owned by Aquarion Water Company, permanent plots in the town of Redding, and *Phragmites* removal plots at Highstead.

Highstead strives to inspire and inform people about the natural world and to foster sound stewardship and appreciation for wooded landscapes. By promoting science-based, hands-on knowledge of ecological systems we hope to engage people in their surroundings and help them better manage and conserve their property.



Finding a Green(er) Lawn Alternative

Kathleen Kitka, Collections Manager, is conducting an experiment in which two lawn seed mixes, one a traditional mix and one an "ecologically-friendly" mix, are planted side by side and studied to determine which requires less water, fertilizer, and maintenance. This demonstration will help us and others make more ecologically sound choices for seeding and maintaining a lawn.



Backyards to Backwoods



Conservation Without Borders:

Highstead works across town and state lines to share our knowledge and encourage collaborative conservation. By helping landowners understand their land and its importance, we can help them become better stewards and increase the amount of protected habitat across the state and region.

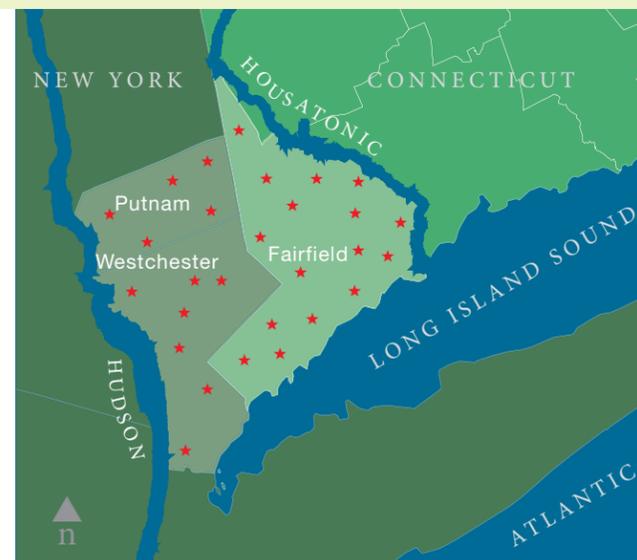
Expanding our work beyond Highstead

New Models for Landowner Outreach

Four Regional Conservation Partnerships in central and northern New England participated in a project to learn how to effectively work with family forest landowners to drive stewardship and land protection. The findings from that project will help inform the Hudson to Housatonic Initiative and other conservation projects throughout the region. Led by Bill Labich, Regional Conservationist, this project was part of a larger North East State Foresters Association (NEFA) program. A summary of the results will be available at wildlandsandwoodlands.org.

Partnering on Forest Regeneration Research

Through a new partnership with Aquarion Water Company, Highstead is conducting research throughout Fairfield County to learn about forest regeneration after disturbances. Ed Faison, Ecologist, set up research plots in Aquarion-owned forests that were disturbed by Superstorm Sandy and will gather results that could help landowners make more informed choices about their land.



H2H

Hudson to Housatonic Initiative

- 2 states
- 3 counties
- 4 lead partner groups
- 28 + total partner groups
- 1300 + sq. miles covered in the program

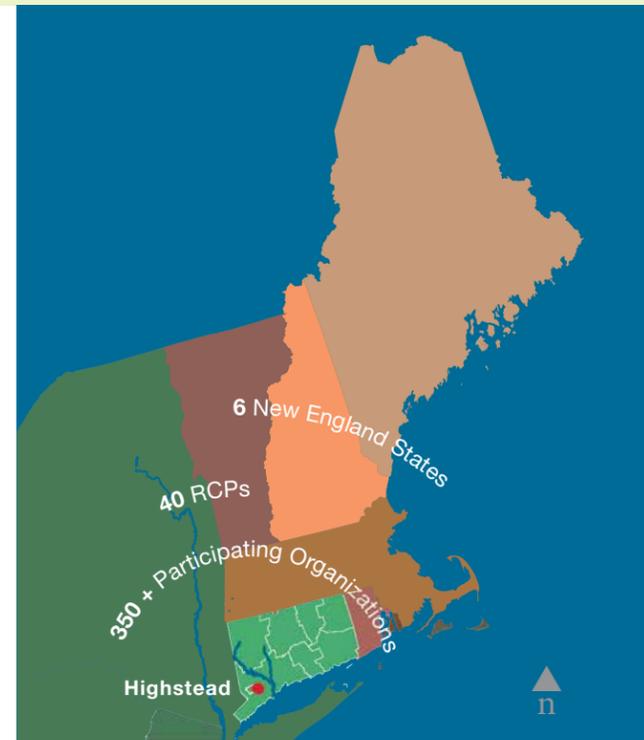
Save the Land, Save the Water

Highstead, along with several partners in Connecticut and New York, launched the Hudson to Housatonic (H2H) Initiative this fall to help conservation organizations connect with landowners to protect drinking water and natural ecosystems. This groundbreaking program was made possible through a highly competitive grant awarded by the U.S. Forest Service, Northeastern Area State and Private Forestry. H2H is part of the Landscape Scale Restoration Program of the U.S. Forest Service, Department of Agriculture.

 Learn more at: fcrp.net.



Conserving New England:



Protecting our region for future generations.

Highstead's science-based commitment to conservation helps drive Wildlands and Woodlands (W&W), which aims to conserve 70 percent of our region as forest. Highstead helps individuals, groups, and communities work collectively to protect the New England way of life for generations to come.

Advancing Collaborative Conservation

Highstead helps further collaborative conservation through the Regional Conservation Partnership (RCP) Network and RCP Network Gathering. In November, the Jessie B. Cox Trust announced a new \$1 million RCP grant program that will help fund the growth and expansion of these partnerships.

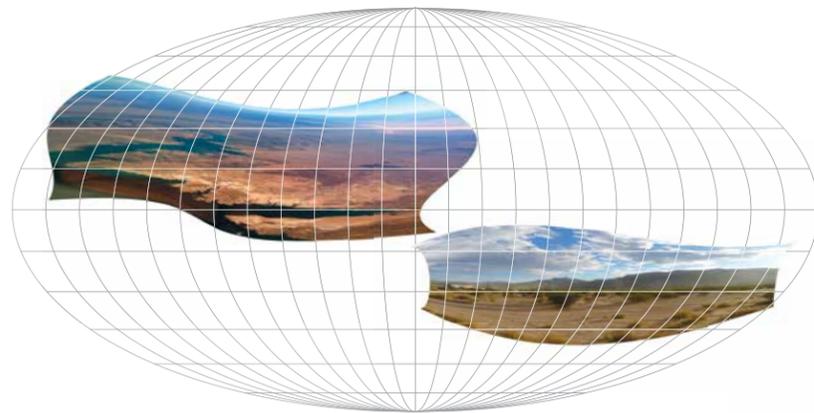
i Learn more at: wildlandsandwoodlands.org/rcpnetwork.

Conserving at the Large Landscape Scale

Highstead helped launch the Practitioners Network for Large Landscape Conservation in order to advance large landscape conservation both regionally and nationally. This fall the Network held a seminal conference on national conservation that featured a W&W session and keynote speech by Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell. Jim Levitt, Highstead Senior Fellow and Director of the Program on Conservation Innovation at Harvard Forest, served as Co-Chair of the conference.

Science for Everyone

Highstead, along with academic partners across New England, released the W&W Stewardship Science Manual for Long-Term Forest Monitoring to help citizen scientists monitor their land and contribute to our overall regional knowledge of forests. This new manual offers landowners an accessible, step-by-step approach to monitoring forests and is designed to be used by people of all ages and educational backgrounds.



i Learn more at: wildlandsandwoodlands.org/science-initiatives/stewardship-science.

Building knowledge about plants and wooded landscapes

Who can be a citizen scientist?

landowners,
students,
volunteers,
teachers,
nature enthusiasts

Highstead

Backyards to Backwoods

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Celebrating Nature's Influence on Art

Highstead's annual Fall Art Exhibit began with a well-attended opening on September 7 that featured several works of art from the Greater New York Chapter of the Guild of Natural Science Illustrators.

The exhibit, titled "Echoes: An Homage to Plants and Animals in Art," displayed the strong influence of natural flora and fauna on art throughout human history. The exhibit was on display in the Highstead Barn through October.

"By combining art and nature we gain the ability to reach a broader audience," said Geordie Elkins, Highstead Operations Director. "We hope the art will draw people in and inspire them to care more deeply about the landscapes around us and to take action to protect the incredible natural beauty in the region."

