

Insurmountable Opportunities

The following is taken from the Report to Members delivered at the 2008 Annual Meeting of the Forest Society by Jane Difley, president/forester.

Greetings to you all. I'm pleased to be here at Muster Field Farm, which is not only a quintessentially New Hampshire place by virtue of its beauty but a place where the Forest Society plays a role by holding a conservation easement on the 250 undeveloped acres surrounding us.

I'm also pleased we're here today because Muster Field Farm represents an important source of local produce. We are perhaps at the beginning of a food revolution in our world today, and as author Barbara Kingsolver points out in her book, Animal, Vegetable, Miracle: a Year of Food Life, *"At its heart, a genuine food culture is an affinity between people and the land that feeds them."* The Forest Society has worked to promote such an affinity between land and people for more than a century, land for not only food and drinking water, but for wood for housing, heat and increasingly, energy. I am also pleased we're here because we are at the heart of the Quabbin-to-Cardigan region, or Q2C as we like to say around the Conservation Center. The Q2C runs from Quabbin Reservoir in Massachusetts up the western spine of New Hampshire, including already-protected icons such as Monadnock and Sunapee, Kearsarge and Cardigan. As many of you know, the Forest Society has joined more than 20 other organizations in planning and prioritizing additional land conservation connecting across the region, with the goal of creating some one million contiguous acres of permanently protected land as working forest, wildlife habitat, water resources, farm and recreation land. That goal is

still a long way away, but we believe it is within reach, and I'm happy we're here today on one of the conserved parcels.

And when I say I'm pleased to be here, I also mean that I am pleased to be in New Hampshire, my home and yours. For after all the Forest Society has for its 107-plus years taken on the protection of the best of all New Hampshire, from the Connecticut River to the Atlantic, from Canada to the Massachusetts border.

I am equally pleased to be here among you all—friends, members, partners. We are a community with a common purpose and shared values. We gather to celebrate the day, the season, and the work we've accomplished together.

Lastly, I'm pleased we're all here, living and working in 2008 to achieve the Forest Society's goals. Thanks to you, the Forest Society protected 9,697 acres last fiscal year, including 592 acres (eight projects) in forest reservations and 9,105 acres (29 projects) on which we acquired conservation easements. These included land along the Lamprey River in Epping, Lovewell Pond in Nashua, a town forest along the Cockermonth River in Hebron, and more than 2,000 acres of working forest in Nottingham.

As of the close of the fiscal year the Forest Society owned some 45,000 acres among 159 forest reservations. In addition to lands we own, we monitor 579 conservation easements covering some 100,000 acres. We raised \$8.2 million overall last year, including grants and donations toward specific land protection projects. Not too shabby!

You've heard the saying—some say a proverb, others call it a curse-- “May you live in interesting times.” Well, I think maybe we do. And I'll tell you in a moment why I think we all should be pleased to live during them.

These times are interesting because we face remarkable challenges as a result of change. The economy—local, national and global—is changing in a way that even the masterminds of Wall Street don't yet understand. Our climate is changing even as we debate the causes and consequences of that change. Economy and climate are intricately linked to our uses of energy, which are also facing fundamental change. In New Hampshire, the forests are intricately linked to economy, to climate, and increasingly to energy, and those forests are changing—they increasingly have different owners who are putting them to use in different ways. For an organization like the Forest Society, these are interesting times indeed.

I have been asked more than once recently about how the current economy is effecting the Forest Society. I often think that if a good forester and a responsible logger were asked to take on national fiscal policy, we might see more sustainable growth. At the very least the logger would know how to fix something when it broke.

Failing that, however, we must deal with the current economic uncertainty. What we have seen in the past, and what we are experiencing now, is that the many people who share our conservation values continue to support our work. Our donors tell us that when hard choices must be made that the Forest Society represents stability. They tell us that such choices flush out the highest priorities. They tell us that they see land and natural resource protection as a solid investment in the quality of not only their lives, but the lives of their children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren.

I can report to you that not only are our members more determined than ever to fund the ongoing conservation of land, but that our land conservation projects are bringing in new

members. For example, of the more than 800 individual gifts to our Connecticut River Forest project in Clarksville, 569 were new members. Of those, nearly 250 came from snowmobilers with a fresh understanding of the value of land protection, while others were anglers who appreciate the six miles of newly protected frontage on the upper Connecticut River.

So, looking ahead, while we are being financially cautious in our current fiscal year, and while we must work harder than ever to raise the funds we need for our operations, we are confident that our strategic land protection work can continue. The cover of the autumn issue of *Forest Notes* is taken from the top of Silver Mountain, a spectacular spot in the heart of our 1800-acre Ashuelot River Headwaters project. We are launching a campaign for a 2,000-acre conservation project in New Durham, not far from our Moose Mountain Reservation. We are working with the Forest Legacy program to protect thousands of acres of working forest west of Plymouth known as Green Acres. These land protection efforts are strategic—we are taking advantage of the opportunities to protect the land with the highest conservation values.

So, despite the uncertainty in the air these days, we see opportunity even as we exercise fiscal caution. Here's why we see opportunity and why I think we should all embrace these "interesting times."

The challenges of our economy, our climate, and our energy use are fundamental. And while meeting those challenges may cause pain, it will also provide a once-in-a-generation opportunity to advance the goals of the Forest Society.

Crises often open minds otherwise closed to fundamental change. The silver lining of our current cloud of uncertainty may well be the willingness of the broader society to reject business as usual and embrace what seemed only a luxury before. In fact, as Stonyfield Farm CE-YO Gary Hirschberg points out in his recent book, Stirring it Up, *“...addressing climate and environmental challenges will give 21st-century businesspeople and ordinary citizens the chance to grasp what Pogo called “insurmountable opportunities,” possibilities that may exceed anything humankind has ever seen before.”* The conservation values--the “wise use” of our natural resources--that the Forest Society has espoused for more than a century, are key not just to a higher quality of life; they may be key to survival.

Our interesting times can make us witnesses to a revolution in how society stewards its natural resources. I’m pleased to join you here during these particular interesting times because the world may take us more seriously than during any time in our history.

But turning challenges into opportunities will take some effort. I’d like to ask for your help.

I’d like to ask you to consider the world, and how we live in it, from a new perspective.

As Albert Einstein has said, we can’t solve today’s problems with the same thinking that created them. And in order to take advantage of tomorrow’s opportunities, we need to start with tomorrow’s ideas. I would ask you to imagine not just the possibility of protecting your own back yards, your own town forests, your own rivers and mountains, but to extend your vision and support the protection of land across the state. We must

think and act with a broad reach. I firmly believe that it is up to us, up to you, to set the example that convinces the world to protect the forests that we all—all—depend on.

Thank you for being here tonight and for all your support of our work.