

Highstead's Conservation Interns' activities in 2008

Eva Weyers and Emily Silver, recent graduates from Allegheny College and Brandeis University, respectively, are working in collaboration with our partners to support regional partnerships and other conservation efforts throughout southern New England. Here are three highlights:

- Mapping Intact Forest Blocks for the Western Fairfield County (WFC) Regional Conservation Partnership
- Updating Protected Lands Maps for the Mass-Conn Sustainable Forest Partnership
- Discovering ways to engage young adults in land conservation activities in support of the Wildlands and Woodlands Partnership

Mapping Intact Forest Blocks for the Fairfield County Regional Conservation Partnership

Highstead is a member of a conservation partnership in Fairfield County (Redding, Ridgefield, Bethel, Newtown, Brookfield, and Danbury). In collaboration with other members, Highstead conducted a study of woodland and associated recreational resources in the region. The goals of this study were to provide support materials to the Fairfield County Regional Conservation Partnership and to gather information about the woodland resources surrounding Highstead. The Partnership wants to understand what forestland resources we have and assess their value. In order to display this information, Highstead's interns, Emily and Eva, collected data on forest cover and used ArcGIS to render a map showing intact forest blocks. In addition, they looked at hiking trail connectivity, specific forest types, and other indices of woodland value.

Updating Protected Lands Maps for the Mass-Conn Sustainable Forest Partnership

Working with local conservation groups and town governments, as well as other staff from Highstead and Harvard Forest, Eva Weyers and Emily Silver updated protected open space information for towns along the Massachusetts-Connecticut border. The towns were identified by members of the Mass-Conn Sustainable Forest Partnership as being most in need of attention. Using digital photographs of town assessor's maps and GIS (Geographic Information Systems) software, they were able to add newly protected parcels of land to the existing protected open space data layer. This provided a more complete view of protected land in the region, allowing local conservation groups and land trusts to make informed decisions for future conservation efforts. They completed mapping for the towns of Stafford, Ellington, and Somers, Connecticut, and Holland, Wales, and Brookfield, Massachusetts.

Discovering ways to engage young adults in land conservation activities in support of the Wildlands and Woodlands Partnership

Conservationists have long recognized a lack of participation in natural resource management and land conservation initiatives by young adults (e.g. 20-34 year olds). This project researched the involvement of this cohort in environmental initiatives. In particular, it identified best practices for reaching and engaging young adults. Common hurdles to participation were also addressed. Emily Silver and Eva Weyers invited recent college graduates to participate in an on-line survey on this topic. The overall objective of the study was to develop a strategy for engaging this demographic in land conservation initiatives like Wildlands and Woodlands (W&W) and to provide a framework for other organizations to take similar action. The final product was a report covering past literature on the topic, areas of future study, and strategies for youth engagement in land conservation issues.