

A FOREST STEWARDSHIP SUCCESS STORY

Stewardship Network Builds Bridges with New Hampshire Landowners and Volunteer Groups

The Challenge:

New Hampshire is the second most forested State with 84 percent forest cover. Much of that forest is privately owned. According to the U.S. Forest Service, the State's Merrimack watershed ranks first in the country for loss of private forest lands due to housing pressures, fourth for threats to water quality, and seventh for loss of habitat for species-at-risk. Stewardship programs exist to help forest landowners manage their land for diverse benefits, such as forest health, wildlife and timber management, recreation, and water quality. However, too few people are available to provide direct "hands on" support. There is a growing need in the Granite State—and throughout much of New England—for potential force multipliers, such as increased stewardship volunteer capacity.

The Solution:

The University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension launched The Stewardship Network: New England initiative in 2013. Their purpose was to share successful models of working with volunteers to improve ecosystem, forest health, and environmental benefits.

This project was funded in large part by a 3-year \$248,000 U.S. Forest Service Landscape Scale Restoration grant. The organizers also raised \$328,000 in grants from the University of New Hampshire, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Science Foundation, New Hampshire Charitable Foundation, Northeast Utilities Service Company, and the National Park Service Northeast Region Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program. The New Hampshire Division of Forests and Lands leads the project.

Resulting Benefits:

Accomplishments of [The Stewardship Network: New England](#) include these:

- Built a [Web site](#) and an online hub for stewardship and citizen science volunteer opportunities and trainings. To date, 169 organizations have used the hub to promote 665 events. The events calendar is open to all organizations in New England.
- Made use of more than 50,000 hours of donated volunteer work during the initiative.
- Established a weekly bulletin used by over 2,000 subscribers to share stewardship stories and volunteer opportunities.

- Created Stewardship Training Guides on six topics, available for free download online: How to Lead a Nature Walk, How to Monitor Conservation Easements, Outdoor Skills for Conservation Volunteers, Workday 101, Trail Maintenance, and Invasive Plants.

- Expanded digital outreach related to stewardship and citizen science.

- Conducted focus groups and a survey to understand how partner organizations value the network and to determine future needs.
- Refocused their mission from "mobilizing volunteers" towards "fostering a culture of stewardship."



(Source: University of New Hampshire Extension)

Innovative Stewardship project builds volunteer support.

Sharing Results:

The network's organizers provided technical assistance for dozens of organizations that work with volunteers. The number of volunteers in the network rose from 254 to 1,145 in 3 years. They also continued expanding social media accounts including Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, with a follower base that exploded by an average of 182% in 2016. Three additional New England States have expressed interest in joining the program.

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