

# NORTHERN NEW ENGLAND AND NEW YORK FORESTS: MANAGEMENT OPTIONS

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*ABSTRACT. The forest lands of northern New York, Vermont, New Hampshire and Maine represent the last remaining large tract of open space in the eastern United States. Recreation oriented development pressure and strong demand for wood products has generated intense stress on the resource base that supports large segments of the northern New York and New England economies. Although the region has generated two comprehensive land regulation agencies (New York's Adirondack Park Agency and Maine's Land Use Regulation Commission), concern for additional protective measures resulted in a major 1990 federal study of the northern forest lands in the four states. In addition, state level evaluation of current programs has resulted in possible shifts in public policy relative to private lands. This paper examines the various public policy options for the region including the implications of forestry regulations, recreation development, and "greenlining."*

Land management policy is a product of private enterprise objectives and government controls. The relationship between landowner powers and various public mandated regulations is in a constant state of flux as environmental, economic and social conditions change. Thinly populated forest land on the fringe of high density urban areas is a current focus of this process. The forest lands of northern New England and New York provide wood fiber that feeds a significant forest products industry, recreational space for both urban and rural people and opportunities for residential and commercial development. Growing pressure associated with increased demand from all of these sectors has resulted in a comprehensive federal review of the region's forest resource base and its management (United States Forest Service 1990). Congressional authorization of an investigation of land use trends and state level regulation policy indicates the Federal Government may increase its influence concerning land use policy.

## Public Policy Formulation

Public policy formulation involves a cycle of issue identification, policy development and public/private management. As natural, economic and social conditions change, issues evolve and old ones are displaced by new concerns. This cycle is powered by the large scale national (macro) environment; however, public perception is the product of regional/local environments. Work by the author suggests the stages of such a cycle (see Figure 1).

*The macro environment,  $I_A$ , is the national condition, whereas  $I_B$  involves the local environment. Public perception (II) is largely shaped by the character of the environment and how it may be changing. Selected aspects of change or perceived threat may lead to the formulation of an issue (III) that produces legislative action. The action, if positive, results in policy and the allocation of resources to implement it (V). The task of applying the policy to the real world is assigned to an already existing public agency or a new one is formed (VI) and detailed rules are developed to carry out the mandate (VII). After significant time has passed from Stages  $I_A$  and  $I_B$ , impact (VIII) is felt, with most of it concentrated at the regional and local scale. There may be minor influence on the macro environment. If many local and regional governments adopted the same policy, there could be a major impact at the national or world level (Frederic, 1990).*

This cycle suggests that public policy is reactive rather than proactive. Legislative action is most likely to take place when crisis conditions have generated enough political pressure to force issues to a vote. A major objective of the planning and policy process

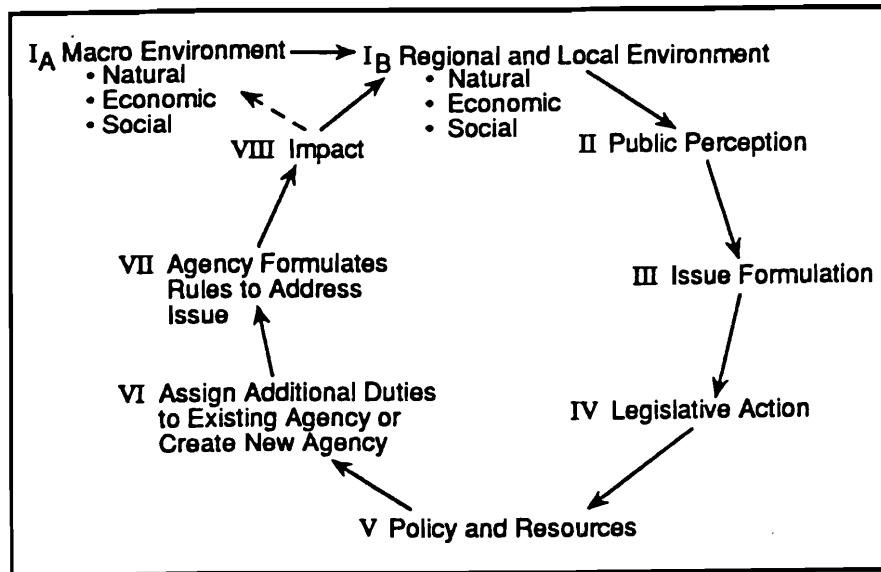


Figure 1

Public Policy Cycle

Source: Author

should be to make it more proactive. Decision-making is most effective if policies are in place to manage problems before they become critical.

The Region

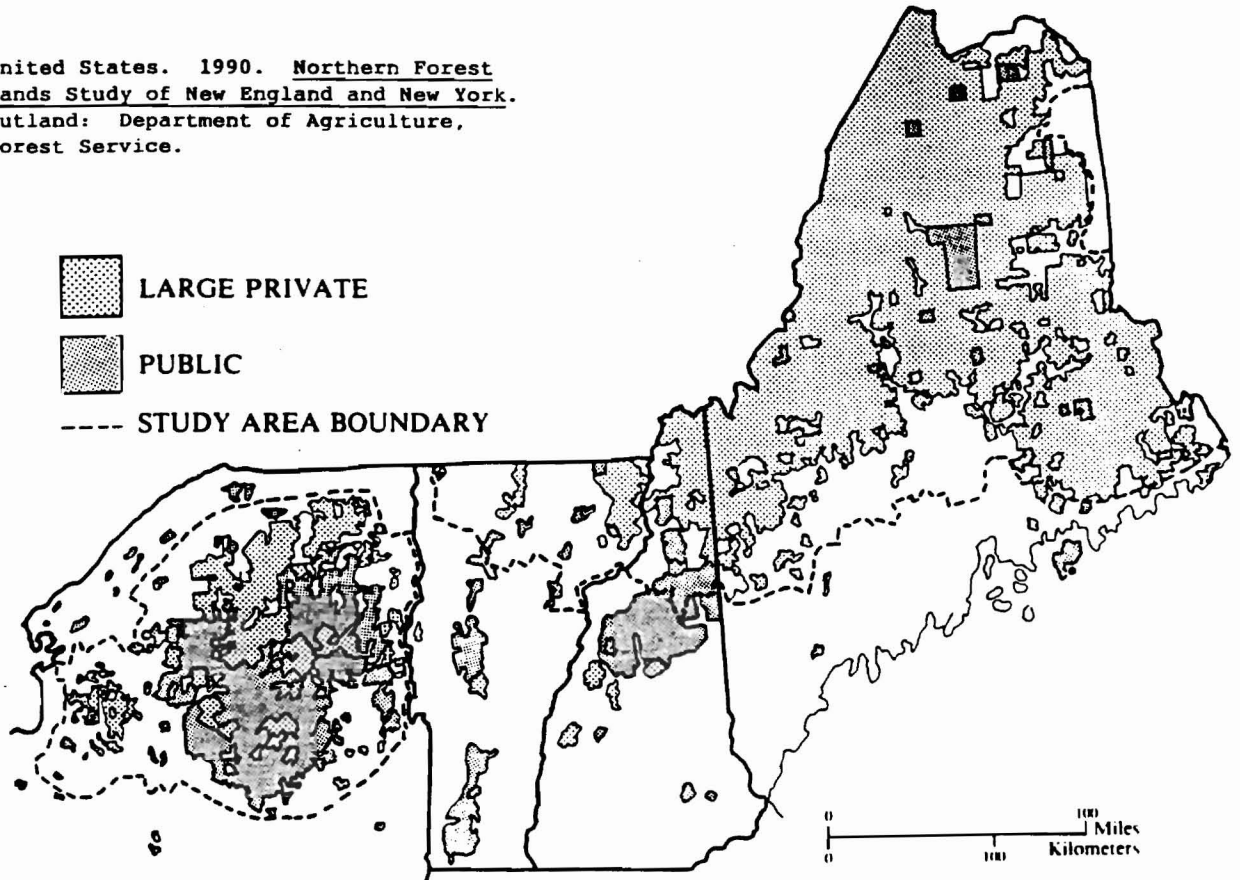
Northern New York and the three northernmost New England states of Vermont, New Hampshire and Maine represent the only remaining large tract of forest land in Northeastern United States. Most of this forest is concentrated in the Adirondacks of New York, northern New Hampshire and northern Maine (Figure 2). This region is within a day's drive of over 70 million people and is a primary open space recreation environment. Both passive, low density (fishing, hiking, boating) and intense, concentrated (skiing) activities are increasing. An analysis of subdivision activity during the 1980s in 5 counties in the region indicated that the recreational market was the primary target (United States Forest Service, 1990) and since 1983 skier visits to Maine resorts have more than doubled (Ski Maine Association, 1983-89). These trends are a source of concern to both forest resource managers and communities that are experiencing change as local economies shift from wood products, including paper, to more recreation and development oriented systems.

The region encompasses 26 million acres and contains less than 1 million people. Per capita income in all but 1 of the region's 28 counties is below the national average and

Figure 2

Northern Forests

Source: United States. 1990. Northern Forest Lands Study of New England and New York.  
Rutland: Department of Agriculture, Forest Service.



unemployment is high relative to the rest of the Northeast (United States Forest Service 1990). Industries that support many of the area's towns depended on wood fiber from the forest to meet growing demands for paper and lumber to accommodate the strong markets of the 1980s.

Most of the land is in private ownership (Table 1). The only large block of public land is the New York State owned Adirondack holdings. The largest parcels of private land in Maine are generally open to the public for a small user fee or for free. Maine's forests have undergone major changes in access since the mid-1970s when log drives were prohibited in response to environmental concerns and pressure from groups that wished to use the rivers for recreation. Also, during the 1970s and '80s, extensive spruce-budworm damage to trees occurred. This combination of events resulted in a massive land management road construction program to build highways to replace water transport and salvage damaged wood. Construction of over 10,000 miles of high quality roads that are open to the public because of political pressure to provide public access has resulted in the opening of thousands of acres of former remote wilderness to the family car and all it can carry. With access has come pressure for recreation related development, especially near lakes and ponds. As the forest products industry tried to produce more wood fiber it expanded the use of intensive management practices, such as clearcutting and herbicide application. Large scale forestry operations are often a shock to recreationalists seeking a wilderness experience. The combination of development and harvesting pressure is of concern to members of the environmental community and public agencies.

Table 1. LAND OWNERSHIP IN THE STUDY AREA (THOUSANDS OF ACRES)

|                      | Maine         | New Hampshire | New York     | Vermont      | Total         |
|----------------------|---------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|
| <b>PRIVATE LAND</b>  |               |               |              |              |               |
| Industrial           | 7,700         | 500           | 1,200        | 300          | 9,700         |
| Large Non-Industrial | 3,100         | 50            | 500          | 50           | 3,600         |
| Other Private        | 3,400         | 350           | 3,100        | 1,550        | 8,400         |
| Total Private Land   | 14,200        | 900           | 4,800        | 1,900        | 21,800        |
| <b>PUBLIC LAND</b>   |               |               |              |              |               |
| State                | 700           | 50            | 2,800        | 90           | 3,700         |
| Federal              | 80            | 200           | 0            | 6            | 300           |
| Total Public Land    | 800           | 300           | 2,800        | 100          | 4,000         |
| <b>TOTAL AREA</b>    | <b>15,000</b> | <b>1,200</b>  | <b>7,600</b> | <b>2,000</b> | <b>25,800</b> |

Source: United States Forest Service, 1990.

### Management Options

Historically, the forest environment has been the focus of several different programs. Private landowner rights have been limited over time. The creation of the Adirondack Park brought public ownership and management to much of the cutover area of upstate New York. The Adirondack Park Agency was later expanded to provide land use controls over private land in the area. Pressure from environmental and passive recreationalists is encouraging the expansion of wilderness protection zones and the development of a buffer around the mountain region (New York Commission on the Adirondacks 1990).

The region's second major regulatory agency to be created to address remote lands was the Maine Land Use Regulation Commission. This 1971 event brought 10.3 million acres of unorganized land under a single state agency. After a decade of land inventory and comprehensive plan development the organization turned its focus from logging practices to development related issues (Maine Land Use Regulation Commission 1988). A greater than 100% increase in development related permit applications and enforcement actions from 1979 to 1988 while forestry actions declined in numbers resulted in a need to reorganize the agency and provide it with additional resources (Frederic 1989). The commission also developed a comprehensive management plan for the 1,500 lakes and ponds of greater than 10 acres in its jurisdiction (Parkin and Todd 1988).

In addition to these two state agencies that regulate about 16,000,000 acres, the National Forest Service owns over 2,000,000 in Vermont, New Hampshire and Maine and these three states have a combined total of 8,400,000 acres of state owned land. Since both the Adirondack Park Agency and the Maine Land Use Regulation Commission have jurisdiction over private and selected public land, some of the above acreage is

double counted. However, it is evident that most of the Northeast forest resource base is under the control of at least one oversight agency.

Despite these existing options, new public efforts are underway to provide more management guidance. Maine's recently enacted Forest Practices Act (Maine Forest Service, 1989) and the Northern Forest Lands Study indicate continued interest in expanding the public management of private land. A series of old growth tree spikings on private land in Maine during the fall of 1990 to prevent harvest brings out the possibility of restricting public access to some areas to prevent property damage. The federal study provides little direction of a broad management plan; however, it does recommend: 1) land use controls and planning for conservation, 2) easements and land purchase for conservation, 3) maintaining large tracts of private forest land through incentives, 4) combining community improvements with land conservation, and 5) combining regional strategies in a coordinated program (United States Forest Service 1990). These items could lead to extensive greenline areas that would restrict private management options on behalf of public interest in maintaining an open space recreational environment. However, current economic conditions indicate few public resources will be allocated to these suggestions. For example, in the Fall of 1990 Maine voters rejected a bond provision to raise money for the purchase of additional public lands.

### Conclusion

Northern forest land management has been a public policy issue since the 19th century; however, the strong demand for wood fiber and recreational space during the past decade has resulted in increased stress on the region's woodland base. Various management options have been developed and put in place and others are currently being considered. The economic boom of the 1980s fueled the current interest for new regulations; however, the recent downturn in the Northeast's economy suggests weaker demand for recreation development and wood products. It is likely that public pressure for additional environmental controls will give way to requests for job protection and economic stability. The author suggests that further study of the relationships between land use public policy cycles and economic cycles is a useful way to better understand how proactive approaches to planning might be perfected.

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