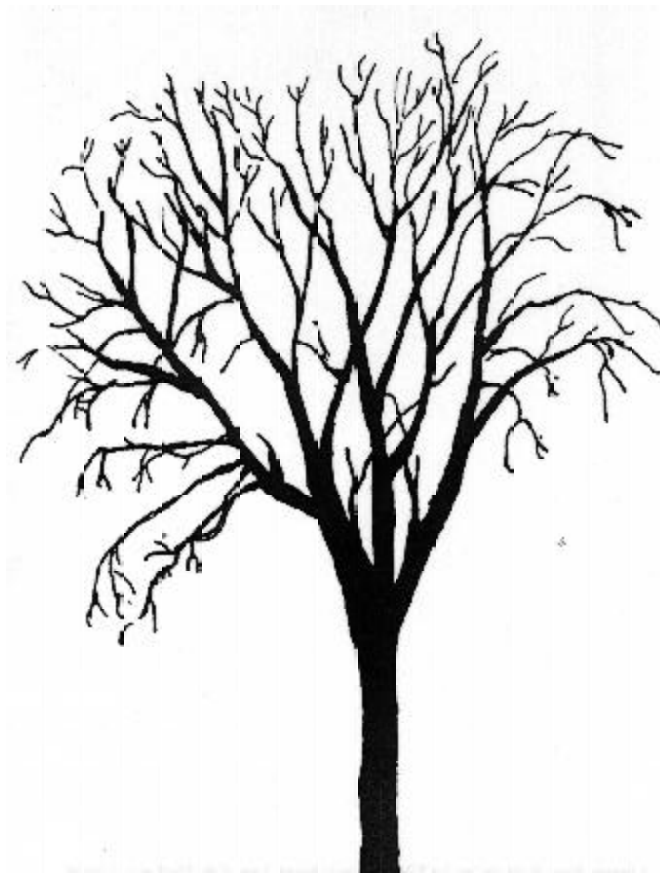


What is Community Forestry and Why Does It Matter?



National Community Forestry Center
Northern Forest Region
August, 2000

What is Community Forestry and Why Does It Matter?

In recent years rural communities have come to recognize the key role played by farm land and agricultural productivity within their landscape and economies. Substantial time and resources have been devoted to the conservation of land with agricultural potential and actions which assist farmers in reaping fair economic gain from their products. Recent concern over suburban sprawl has directed even more attention to the form and function of rural "open spaces." However, the role of forest stewardship and the contribution of forests to the rural economy is rarely mentioned within any of these conversations at the national, state, or local level. It seems that even though a growing proportion of our precious open spaces are tree-covered, we're not really seeing the forest.

But others are seeing our forests. As the woods elsewhere become depleted or off-limits to harvesting, fiber from the Northern Forest is sought and valued by increasingly distant markets. It is therefore critical for rural communities to recognize the many ways in which forest land, both public and private, is important to their local economy, social structure, cultural fabric, and environment, and to actively engage in discussion and action to maintain and capture these values at the local level.

The term "community forestry" is used in a whole range of different ways, as illustrated by the readings below. The Northern Forest branch of the National Community Forestry Center takes a very broad view of the term. We use it to describe efforts by communities - those united by a common interest or by a sense of place - to recognize and take advantage of the economic, social, and environmental opportunities afforded by their local forest resource, whether it is in public or private ownership, or somewhere in between. Our definition includes a wide range of community-based activities from starting a local reading and discussion group, to surveying local forest landowners, to developing a concentration yard to sort logs in order to gain access to niche markets for wood. Some examples:

Lynn Jungwirth of Hayfork, California, recognized the need for her community to become more active in shaping the management decisions of federally owned forestland if residents were to continue deriving their livelihood from the woods. Jungwirth was instrumental in founding the Watershed Research and Training Center to retrain loggers displaced by changes in federal forest management policy to provide support services such as surveying, restoration, and forest management. Local residents and workers have become

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adept at negotiating with the U.S. Forest Service to change contracting policies so that local work is done by local work crews. Simultaneously, the Center has reviewed the town's social and economic history to determine which factors are most important to prosperity in order to target their economic development efforts.

Marshall Pecore, forest manager of Menominee Tribal Enterprises in Wisconsin, oversees the tribe's management of more than two hundred thousand acres. The tribe's management philosophy blends profitability and community participation to create what is widely recognized as one of the best examples of sustainable forestry in the country. The Menominee combine cutting-edge forestry techniques with the democratic process prescribed by their tribal constitution to ensure that the long-term health of the forest isn't sacrificed for short-term gain.

Vermont Family Forests, an alliance of private, non-industrial forest land owners was established to develop better market access for local wood and to promote widespread adoption of sustainable forestry methods. The group recently sold 70,000 board feet of lumber certified by SmartWood and processed by local sawmills to Middlebury College, a local institution.

Community forestry is a worldwide phenomenon which began in developing countries and is gradually sweeping the U.S. from West to East. Until relatively recently, it has been practiced mostly by communities where lifestyles and livelihoods depend upon access to healthy, productive public forest land. Here in the Northern Forest, where the vast majority of forests are privately owned, landowners and communities are just beginning to recognize the mutual benefits (and the benefit to the forest) of dialogue and collaboration.

The readings in this packet have been chosen to provide some examples of the way community forestry has developed over time and in different contexts. We hope they will spark your interest and stimulate your thoughts about the forests in your community. As you read, consider the following:

- ☛ Who owns the forests in your community?
- ☛ How many people use the forests in your community?
- ☛ How are decisions made about forest management and use in your community?
- ☛ How many people in your community depend, either directly or indirectly upon the woods for their livelihood?
- ☛ What is most important to you about the forests in your community?

Community Forest Stewardship Has Deep Roots in New England

Reprinted from Yellow Wood Notes, An Occasional Publication of Yellow Wood Associates, Inc., January 1999, pps. 6-8.

Through time, the ownership and management status of New England's forest lands has undergone a series of interesting permutations, but New Englanders have a long tradition of community forest stewardship. The following historical overview is gathered from *The Landscape of Community: A History of Communal Forests in New England* by Robert McCullough, published by University Press of New England in 1995.

THE COMMONS

While New England's first settlements replicated the functionality of Mother England's nucleated villages surrounded by common open fields and woods, the unfamiliar ecology and vast wilderness of the new country forced settlers to adopt novel patterns of land use. Individual grants of timber rights on common land occurred routinely, although often with restrictions ensuring some specific public benefit beyond that of clearing. For example, voters of Marshfield, MA sold rights to remove ore and cut pine for charcoal from common lands to support the manufacture of iron, but their grant was made subject to a condition that only town inhabitants be employed to cut wood.

Early on tension emerged between the quest for individual property and the birth of collective stewardship as relentless clearing quickly dwindled wood supplies. Colonists remembered how scarce wood had been back in England, and quickly adopted measures to limit waste, distribute resources fairly, and prevent other towns from harvesting local timber. Woodland management was dictated by economic incentive: stewardship made fiscal sense. Eventually regulations extended beyond purely economic concerns and recognized the importance of trees as town amenities. In 1693, residents of Reading, MA acknowledged a need for shade trees in the village and marked those to be spared the ax. As town administration developed, control of the forest resource assumed a more public function and sale or taxation of wood products taken from common land was used to meet communal expenses.

In the early settlements, ownership and control of both land and community were vested in proprietors who received land grants from the colonial governors. As town populations increased, new immigrants demanded their share of the undivided lands and conflict ensued. By the early 1700s, this conflict, along with economic pressures, speculation, political and religious unrest, and evolving agricultural practices combined to hasten the transformation of common land from a collective resource to a commodity belonging to a select group of town members. Even so, McCullough argues that the commons clearly established collective stewardship as essential to the economic and material well being of town citizens, both on an immediate and a long-term basis.

PUBLIC LANDS

A second class of communal property, public lands, developed simultaneously with the commons. Lacking currency to pay salaries, colonists resorted to abundant land and resources to support the church and the school. Ownership of property accrued directly to the institutions or their ministers, or sometimes to towns through their selectmen.

During the nineteenth century, a new category of public lands emerged when poor farms became a widely practiced method of local welfare. In addition to crop and pasture land, poor farms often included woodlots which supplied fuelwood for resident paupers, building materials for farming operations, and lumber or other wood products for sale to the general public.

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The collective stewardship evident on common lands also applied to public lots, often in a more consistent way due to the supervision of town selectmen or individuals linked to benefiting institutions. Many public lots have withstood centuries of change and remain community property, testimony to successive generations of local stewards. With routines of woodlot management in place, many towns simply converted woodlots and abandoned pastures within the public domain into municipal forests as the town forest movement gathered momentum during the early twentieth century.

THE TOWN FOREST MOVEMENT

As the nineteenth century drew to a close, the nature of collective stewardship in New England's local woods, their character of use, and their function in community structure once again began to change. Public concern for the country's depleted forests and damaged ecosystems swelled, and conservation became a rallying cry. Forestry developed into a profession with an organized association and university programs. In 1886, forestry became a formal division within the Department of Agriculture, and in 1891, the Forest Reserve Act authorized U.S. presidents to set aside designated areas of public land. The American forestry debate switched from preservation to the management of public timberlands. European-trained foresters, Bernhard Fernow in particular, introduced community forestry, patterned after Swiss and German city forests, as a model for New England towns.

In 1882, Massachusetts became the first state to enable towns to purchase land and place it in the public domain for the purpose of generating revenue. The MA legislation explicitly recognized the potential for timber-crop management by towns and acknowledged an important relationship between forests and protection of water supplies. In addition, towns were quick to recognize the benefits of preserving woodland for park purposes.

Town forests rapidly became New England's dominant category of local woodland. The term frequently included watershed lands, and just as often, was applied broadly enough to encompass forest parks. Whether the primary focus was commercial harvest, protection of water supplies, recreation, or some combination of purposes, the town forest movement's primary objective was the cultivation of trees for common public benefit. However, the movement floundered almost as rapidly as it began when local forestry committees proved both politically and technically unequal to the task of long-term forest management. Attempts by state and federal agencies to offer assistance were frequently met with concern over outside interference. Conflicts between user groups emerged. By the mid 50s, many municipal forests were converted to alternative public use or sold back into the private domain. Many simply languished, forgotten by public officials and local residents.

CONSERVATION LANDS

The decline in the momentum of New England's town forest movement coincided with the appearance of laws enabling communities to establish conservation areas. Local commissions were enabled to acquire and use undeveloped land to conserve natural resources, control development, and protect ecosystem values.

More recently, conservation commissions have begun to recognize the value of the working landscape and search for methods to support it. This trend offers the opportunity for spirited local discussions about the role of forest land within the evolving landscape and economy of rural communities.

Community Forestry, Defined

by Thomas Brendler and Henry Carey

Reprinted from the Journal of Forestry Vol. 96, No. 3, March 1998

Community forestry has been practiced for many years in the developing world (Poffenberger 1990), but only in the past few years has it emerged in the United States. The term is therefore unfamiliar to many people concerned with the management of forests in this country.

Forestry is often defined as the manipulation of forests to achieve a desired objective, and it is the objective that distinguishes the different types of forestry. Industrial forestry involves the production of all manner of wood based products for national and international markets. Other approaches to forestry create and enhance wildlife habitat and water quality. In this context, managing forests with the express intent of benefitting neighboring communities constitutes yet another brand of forestry, which we call community forestry.

Many rural communities that depend on nearby forests as a source of cultural and economic well-being see community forestry as tool for reckoning with a daunting array of challenges, including the globalization of the economy, industrial mechanization, political disenfranchisement, and emigration. Three attributes are shared by most community forestry efforts.

Residents have access to the land and its resources. Community forestry is deeply concerned with how benefits from forest resources, including timber and nontimber products, jobs and opportunities for value-added processing, are distributed. Community forestry seeks to ensure that local people have access to a portion of the benefits flowing from nearby forests.

Residents participate in decisions concerning the forest. Recognizing that neighboring communities stand to suffer most from resource degradation, community forestry aims to provide local people with the meaningful role in forest decision making.

The community begins by protecting and restoring the forest. In the developing world, community forestry programs have focused on areas where the balance between subsistence cultures and the surrounding forests has been upset by resource depletion and resulting social decline; in such places, the first job is conservation and restoration. Similarly, in the United States, community forestry begins with protecting and restoring forest resources.

Community forestry provides an invaluable opportunity for society in general - and resource managers in particular - to engage the knowledge of those living closest to the land in developing a sustainable relationship with our forests. In partnership with these communities, we can evolve a philosophy of resource use - a system of social and cultural restraints - that is relevant to the demands imposed by today's technologies, population, and global economy.

The efforts of forest-based rural development practitioners reflect the diverse ecological and economic circumstances of small communities across the country. These practitioners are engaged in a variety of enterprises, including

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ecotourism, nontimber forest products, watershed restoration, and value-added wood manufacturing networks. They believe in the potential of forestry as a tool for strengthening their communities, and even more important, they believe that the forest protection and economic development are inseparable goals.

Most practitioners are nonprofit organizations. Some nonprofits are associated with for-profit ventures, and an increasing number operate small businesses. Many combine economic development projects with social service programs and environmental advocacy and education. Some seek to improve the broad economic base of their entire community, while others focus on specific sectors. Although most practitioners were originally concerned with either economic development or environmental protection, all have integrated the two concerns into a single mandate.

For example, the Newton County Resource Council, and Arkansas-based community development corporation, promotes ecotourism, which builds on the knowledge and talents of low-income residents and on collaborative partnerships with public land managers. The Center for Economic Options provides technical assistance to individuals and organizations in West Virginia in such areas as business development and community assessment and promotes job creation by seizing new market opportunities. In northern California the Redwood Community Action Agency brings together community volunteers, area service organizations, private businesses, and government agencies to fulfill its goal of protecting natural habitats and developing job opportunities. Projects have included water quality improvements, training for displaced workers, and community education.

It is not surprising that community forestry has emerged primarily in the West, where the predominance of public lands guarantees, through the National Environmental Policy Act and the Forest Service's rural development mandate, a seat for rural communities at the table. The prospects to community forestry are less clear in areas where corporate and nonindustrial private forest ownership are the norm. The interest some corporate landowners have shown in consulting with local communities and working with local contractors is an auspicious sign, however. Although community forestry in these regions will surely borrow models from the West, working with private landowners to achieve the goals presents a complicated and delicate puzzle. Thus community forestry in this country will be shaped through practice.

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Community-Based Forestry

by Margaret Thomas

Excerpted from Midwest Research Institute, MRI-CTRD/R1332, Chapter 7

As the counterpart to agriculture, community-based forestry presumes that designated forest areas near forest-based communities can be sustainably managed to protect the natural resource base and forest ecosystem functions and also provide enhanced income opportunities to community residents from a broad array of traditional and nontraditional products and services.

As with agriculture, there is a growing awareness of the need to “reinvent” forestry and to decentralize the fiber production system. Community-based forestry envisions local production and value-added systems that are environmentally sound for biologically diverse, productive forests and which support the social and economic life of local communities. The benefits and services of forest ecosystems to be protected include non-timber forest products, watershed protection, recreational use, tourism, carbon storage, spiritual and cultural significance, genetic resources, medicinal plants, wildlife habitat, and more. Some of these have significant market values that can even exceed revenues from timber and wood products. Other forest benefits are “nonmarket values” but nonetheless critical to environmental stability, quality of life, and ultimately, the economic strength of a region. Taken in aggregate, the sum of benefits provided by a healthy forest will be significantly greater than the benefits from timber alone.

Theoretically, community-based forestry could be practiced on public, private, or industrial forest lands. It would use partnerships and coordination between communities and forest landowners to foster both forest stewardship and community economic development. Since community-based forestry has as a premise that the stream of benefits that can be sustainably produced through forest management should be maximized at the local community level, community forests would need to be under the management of the local community or a local cooperative, either by ownership or long-term lease/stewardship arrangement. Community-based forestry would emphasize collaborative, participatory, and holistic management rooted in local stewardship, local needs, and local knowledge.

What If the Community Doesn't Want to Actually Manage a Community Forest But Wants Community-Based Forest Development?

There are many strategies for community-based forestry development that can be undertaken regardless of whether or not a community undertakes to manage its own community forest. Some of these strategies include:

- ☞ Identifying new non-wood product opportunities
- ☞ Adding local value to wood and non-wood products & services
- ☞ Developing agroforestry initiatives
- ☞ Expanding direct marketing
- ☞ Exploring green certification opportunities
- ☞ Improving techniques of harvesting
- ☞ Reducing post-harvest losses
- ☞ Exploring renewable energy opportunities
- ☞ Initiating reforestation or urban forestry projects
- ☞ Expanding the amount of local wood & non-wood products used in the region
- ☞ Providing financial and technical assistance
- ☞ Encouraging landowner cooperatives

Do you see a role for any of these in your community?

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Excerpts from *Community Forests in Canada: An Overview*
Peter N. Duinker, Patrick W. Matakala, Florence Chege, & Luc Bouthillier
published in The Forestry Chronicle, Nov/Dec 1994, Vol. 70, No. 6

A great deal of attention is being given in Canada at present to the idea of community forests. This is occurring at a time of unprecedented attention to forest management on one hand, and to community empowerment on the other. We conceive of a community forest as a tree-dominated ecosystem managed for multiple community values and benefits by the community.

The apparent growing interest in community forests in Canada has opened an exciting and challenging frontier for forest interests. We are convinced that Canada's future will be characterized by increases in people's demands for community forests and by more experiments and trials to test a variety of manifestations of the concept. Learning from both successes and failures is vital.

What is a Community Forest?

There are many definitions of community forest. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO 1978) of the United Nations defined a community forest as any situation which intimately involves local people in a forestry activity. This definition, however, fails to speak clearly to three issues: (a) how that "intimate involvement" is or can be structured - who has ultimate decision-making authority; (b) representation - who is involved locally and how are they selected; and c) equity - who pays and who benefits. The USDA Forest Service, on the other hand, defined community forests as lands owned and operated for forestry or allied purposes by the community (village, city, town, school, district, township or other political sub-division) for the benefit of that community.

Although this definition speaks to all three issues raised above, it is assumed that community forests are owned by the community. While this may be the case in the United States and other countries like Finland where the majority of forest lands are privately owned, it may not be practical in Canada where most forest land is publicly owned and controlled by senior governments. Implicit in the definition is also the assumption that those charged with the responsibility for managing community forests will be elected officials.

A definition of community forest would have to recognize three attributes: a) who decides; b) who benefits; and c) how broad-ranging are the management objectives. These are the traits of a community forest which set it apart from other types of forests in that the community makes the decisions and accrues the benefits, and the forest is managed for multiple values. Therefore, for us a community forest is "a tree-dominated ecosystem managed for multiple community values and benefits by the community." While this includes urban situations, new conceptions of community forests in Canada involve smaller, rural communities and their forest hinterlands.

Community forests have existed since humans settled into communities and demarcated, owned, and managed specific tracts of land. Various forest tenures, such as private, corporate, municipal and state, have evolved. Contemporary forest-management arrangements called community forests have different administrative infrastructures, and levels of community involvement. However,

community forests share a common and essential goal of providing forest related benefits to the local community. Our notion of a community forest involves deliberate development of a relationship between a community and its immediate forests such that all community members have a means of direct involvement in the management of the forests, with a goal of benefiting the whole community.

Community Forests in Canada

Reference to community forests in Canada dates back at least to the 1940's-50's. Most of what we report here, however, are recent and current developments.

British Columbia

Community forest thinking is pervasive in BC. It is a topic frequently addressed and advocated by interest groups, consultants, interested citizens, and the universities. For example, Marshall (1986) advocated the concept of community forest licenses in BC, publishing his paper in *Forest Planning Canada*, which billed itself as "a community forestry magazine." As another example, the New Perspectives Forestry Society sponsored "Transition to Tomorrow: Community Options Forestry Conference" in Victoria in February 1991. The conference combined concepts of forest sustainability and community sustainability into powerful messages about how forest management needs to change. As a final example, the University of Victoria's Centre for Sustainable Regional Development, as part of its Sustainable Communities Initiative, recently convened a working group to address and report on community sustainability and forest resource use in the Alberni-Clayoquot and Cowichan Valley areas of lower Vancouver Island (SCI Component Three Working Group 1993). The report argues for redesign of the relationship between communities and forests in terms of economics, attitudes, and decision-making processes.

Perhaps the best-known community forests in Canada are the municipal forests at North Cowichan (lower Vancouver Island) and Mission (lower Fraser Valley). North Cowichan has some 5,000 ha of municipal forest land, while Mission has a provincial Tree Farm License of some 9,000 ha. The town of Revelstoke just recently received its own Tree Farm License.

Manitoba

As part of its overall sustainable development initiative, the government of Manitoba recently released a forest-strategy document. The document, under Policy 2.6 (which states: "Forest resources shall be allocated in an equitable manner amongst the various users of the forests including the non-commercial needs of individuals and communities.") commits the Government of Manitoba to "investigate opportunities for cooperative management of the forest resource with First Nation and local communities."

Ontario

Ontario's Community Forestry Project is the main community-forest policy initiative of the Ontario government. That initiative, part of the overall Sustainable Forestry program of Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources (OMNR), is being guided by Ontario's recently announced Policy Framework for Sustainable Forests created on the basis of the work of Ontario's Forest Policy Panel in

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1993. The Panel recognized the strengths of the community-forest approach, and endorsed it as one of several possible mechanisms for improving public participation in forest decision-making.

The following are two examples of community forests in Ontario: The Algonquin Forestry Authority, a Crown corporation established some 20 years ago with a locally constituted Board of Directors, is responsible for timber management in Algonquin Provincial Park. It has long been viewed as a successful model of local determination and benefits of forest management. The Ganaraska Forest about 100 km east of Toronto, consists of some 4,400 hectares (ha) owned by the Ganaraska River Conservation Authority and managed in cooperation with the OMNR.

Quebec

During the Forest Protection Commission hearings in 1991, it became clear that new forestry meant that people living in forested areas would have greater responsibilities, through regional bodies, for Crown lands. The Commission acknowledged this by urging the government to amend its legislation to facilitate the holding of forest tenures by local communities. In December 1993, the National Assembly passed a bill authorizing local municipalities to sign forest management agreements with the government. To municipalities requesting it, the new law enables them to gain the right to tend tracts of public land as a means of enhancing economic development.

Recently, the Government of Quebec went one step further by working on a specific agreement with the Abitibi-Temiscamingue Development Council. The agreement would empower some 80 municipalities to control Crown land lying within their boundaries. The area in question could amount to 300,000 ha. Through such an arrangement, the Government intends to improve the state of the forests growing close to the people. The agreement also signals a large decentralization experiment in forest management which could equate to the creation of several community forests.

Notwithstanding these new developments in Quebec, community forestry is rather a well-established story there. In 1911 the Goin Government set up a unique tenure type with the objective of fostering rural community well-being and addressing settlers' needs for lumber and firewood. Although officers of the provincial forest service were supposed to keep control, these cantonal reserves covered some 800,000 ha. Unfortunately, in most cases, open-access behavior was rampant and the system was dismantled when its enabling act was repealed.

Another attempt to establish community forests was made during the 1930's. Residents of the Gaspé region, prompted by declining markets for their fish, fought to gain access to special forest reserves. These were supposed to be the land base for providing a living for residents of forest villages. Pushed out of business during the Great Depression, some people relied on the idea of community forest to survive and prosper. The economic upturn of World War II prevented this from happening. However, the endeavor provided a starting point for the emergence of a cooperative movement in forestry. In Quebec, it was instrumental in making room for local people in a tenure system tailored to fit the requirements of big industry.

The story of community forests in Quebec does not end there. Since the early 1970's, a strong movement favoring privatization of Crown land near inhabited areas has activated the process referred to above. Though most of the people supporting that option are looking for the establishment of forest farmers with full-fledged property rights, the outcome seems different. This is because, from the beginning, the thrust of the operation was to find new ways of creating wealth within a collective setting. The development must be done for and by the people inhabiting the territory.

Also part of the community-forest scene in Quebec are the many Aboriginal communities which are defining ways of managing forests according to their traditions. Algonquins, Attikameks and Montagnais all pursue projects that from many angles pertain to the community-forest concept. For example, the Algonquins of Barriere Lake are currently developing an integrated resource management plan, jointly with the Governments of Canada and Quebec, for a large tract of Crown land they claim to be their traditional lands. Descriptions of the initiative by Aboriginal leaders call it a community forest.

Newfoundland

The Portland Hill Community Forest pilot project of the 1980s designated a 550 ha block of forest near Gros Morne National Park for management and use by local residents. The objective was to provide locals with opportunities to cut fuelwood in an orderly fashion and begin to rehabilitate the degraded forest.

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