

# Public Access to Private Lands for Recreation and Tourism in the Northern Forest

Principal Investigator: Lisa Chase, University of Vermont Extension, [Lisa.Chase@uvm.edu](mailto:Lisa.Chase@uvm.edu), 11 University Way #4, Brattleboro, VT 05301

Co-Principal Investigators: Tommy Brown, Cornell University; John Daigle, University of Maine; Walter Kuentzel, University of Vermont; Robert Robertson, University of New Hampshire

Collaborators: See next slide

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Research findings revealed great concern by Northern Forest residents and visitors regarding the impacts of land tenure change and access to forest lands. These findings, disseminated through roundtables and a project website, have served as a starting point for Northern Forest landowners, planners, natural resource agencies, and recreational interests to better understand landowner decisions and improve communications between diverse stakeholders.

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<http://www.nsrcforest.org>

# Collaborators

- Jeff Hayes, North Country Council, 107 Glessner Road, Bethlehem, NH 03574, Phone: 603-444-6303, FAX: 603-444-7588, E-mail: [jhayes@ncia.net](mailto:jhayes@ncia.net)
- Bruce Hazard, Mountain Counties Heritage, P.O. Box 508, Farmington, ME 04938, Phone: 207-778-3885, E-mail: [bhazard@mainemountains.com](mailto:bhazard@mainemountains.com)
- Kenneth L. Kogut, New York State Department of Environmental Conservation Bureau of Wildlife, PO Box 296, Route 86, Ray Brook, New York 12977, Phone: 518-897-1290, Email: [kxkogut@gw.dec.state.ny.us](mailto:kxkogut@gw.dec.state.ny.us)
- Mary Jeanne Packer, Vermont Woodlands Association, PO Box 196, 212 Main St., Ste. 1, Poultney, Vermont 05764, Phone: 802-287-4284, E-mail: [mjpacker@gwriters.com](mailto:mjpacker@gwriters.com)
- Tom Decker, Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department, 103 South Main Street, Waterbury, VT 05671-0501, Phone: 802-241-3700, E-mail: [Tom.Decker@state.vt.us](mailto:Tom.Decker@state.vt.us)
- Mike Wilson, The Northern Forest Center, P.O. Box 671, Bethel, ME 04217, Phone: 207-824-8263, FAX: 207-824-4440, E-mail: [mwilson@northernforest.org](mailto:mwilson@northernforest.org)
- Steve Wright, National Wildlife Federation, Northeast Natural Resource Center, 58 State Street, Montpelier, VT 05602, Phone: 802-229-0650, E-mail: [wrights@nwf.org](mailto:wrights@nwf.org)

# Project Summary

**Rationale:** Land tenure changes, globalization of the timber industry, growing recreational demand, and new conservation easements have all contributed to the changing landscape of the Northern Forest region. To effectively cope, adapt, and plan, Northern Forest communities need a better understanding of how social and economic forces are affecting rural development prospects, particularly with respect to tourism and recreation on private lands.

**Methods:** Four methods for research and outreach were used in this study:

- 1. Web-based Stakeholder Involvement Tool:** This tool was used to gather public input regarding land tenure change, recreational access, landowner liability, and changes within Northern Forest communities.
- 2. Analysis of Limited Liability Recreation Statutes:** Each of the Northern Forest states has a limited liability statute that protects landowners. A re-examination, comparison, and critique of these statutes was conducted focusing on the successes and challenges in each state.
- 3. Landowner Mail Surveys:** This study surveyed two distinct groups of landowners: private landowners owning 10 acres or more and large investment landowners with greater than 1,000 acre parcels.
- 4. Roundtables:** To disseminate research findings and develop recommendations, each state hosted its own roundtable. Roundtables were organized with the help of study collaborators and included landowners, natural resources agencies, non-governmental organizations, tourism and recreation interests, town planners, elected officials, and chambers of commerce. A project web site was developed to continue the discussion and share results with a wider audience.

**Findings and Outcomes:** Results indicate that almost half of private landowners have not limited or denied recreational access to their lands in the past ten years, and less than 10% have closed off their land completely. Large investment landowners also allow the public to recreate on their lands, with 87% of landowners allowing public recreation. Despite this level of access, the perception held by the majority of private landowners and the public sentiment from the stakeholder involvement tool suggests that public access in the Northern Forest has decreased over the same ten years. Results also suggest that many private landowners are not well informed about the liability protection offered them by state statutes, while large investment landowners tend to be much more familiar with landowner liability statutes.

**Implications for the Northern Forest region:** Findings were disseminated through roundtables and a project website, serving as a starting point for Northern Forest landowners, planners, natural resource agencies, and recreational interests to better understand landowner behaviors and perceptions and improve communications between diverse stakeholders. By gaining insight into landowners' perspectives, interested parties will be better able to promote recreational access and tourism throughout the Northern Forest region, thus benefitting the local economy, traditional culture, and forested landscape.

# Background and Justification

- Northern Forest economies are changing.
- Traditional forest-based economies focusing on timber and paper production are less prominent.
- Communities are seeking to diversify their economies through nature-based tourism and recreation.
- Nature-based tourism and recreation is becoming a more important economic driver in the rural communities of the Northern Forest.



# Background and Justification

- As nature-based tourism and recreation becomes a more significant economic force, access to forest land for recreation is essential to sustain that economy.
- With more than 85% of land in the Northern Forest privately owned, maintaining public access to privately owned forest land is critical for economic and cultural sustainability.



# Background and Justification

- As forest-based economies have declined, new patterns of land ownership have emerged.
- Large industrial landowners have been disinvesting land, selling to a variety of new owners.
- Landowners, some new to the area, are making land-use decisions that may vary from traditional land-use decisions.
- Such land ownership changes may have an impact on the amount of recreational land available in the Northern Forest.



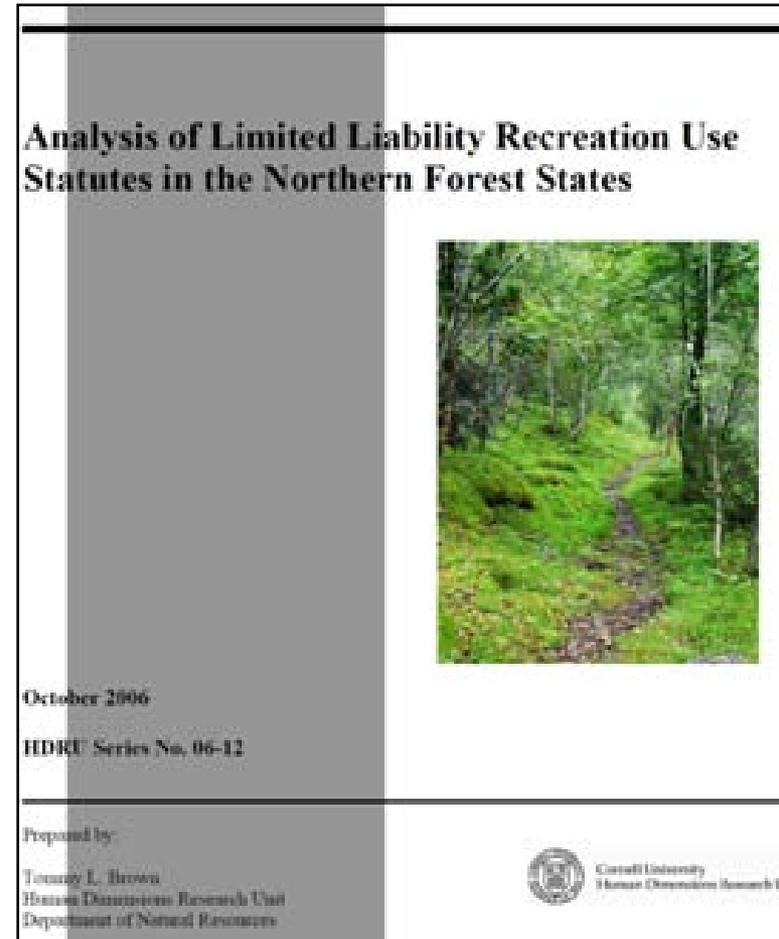
# Methods: Limited Liability Statutes and Stakeholder Input

## Limited Liability Statutes

- Court cases were examined in each state. Cases dealt with liability issues and landowners.
- Analysis focused on cases decided for the plaintiff, as these cases identified possible loopholes in statutes.

## Stakeholder Input

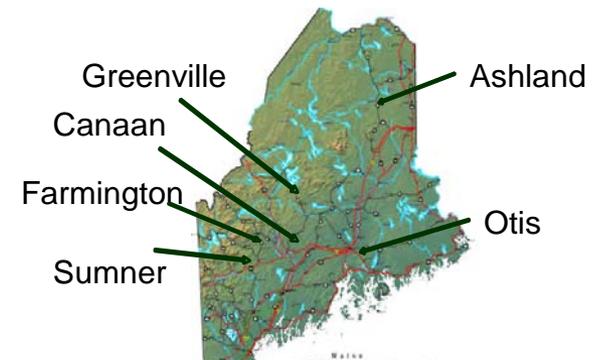
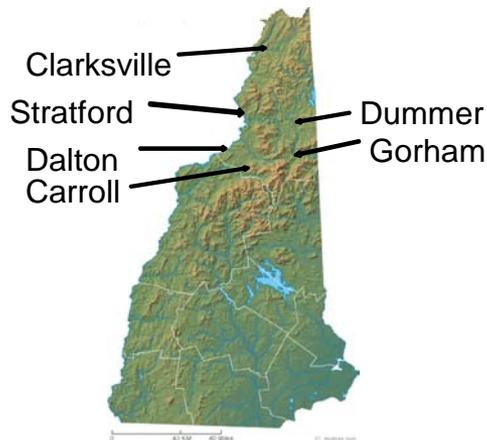
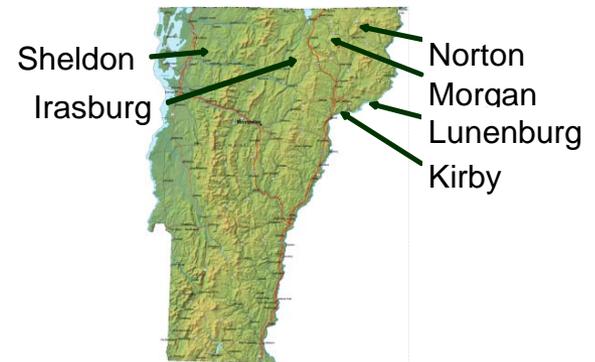
- Web survey asked participants about their perceptions of public access, land sales, and community changes.
- The perceptions of all stakeholders were sought.



Front page of Limited Liability publication

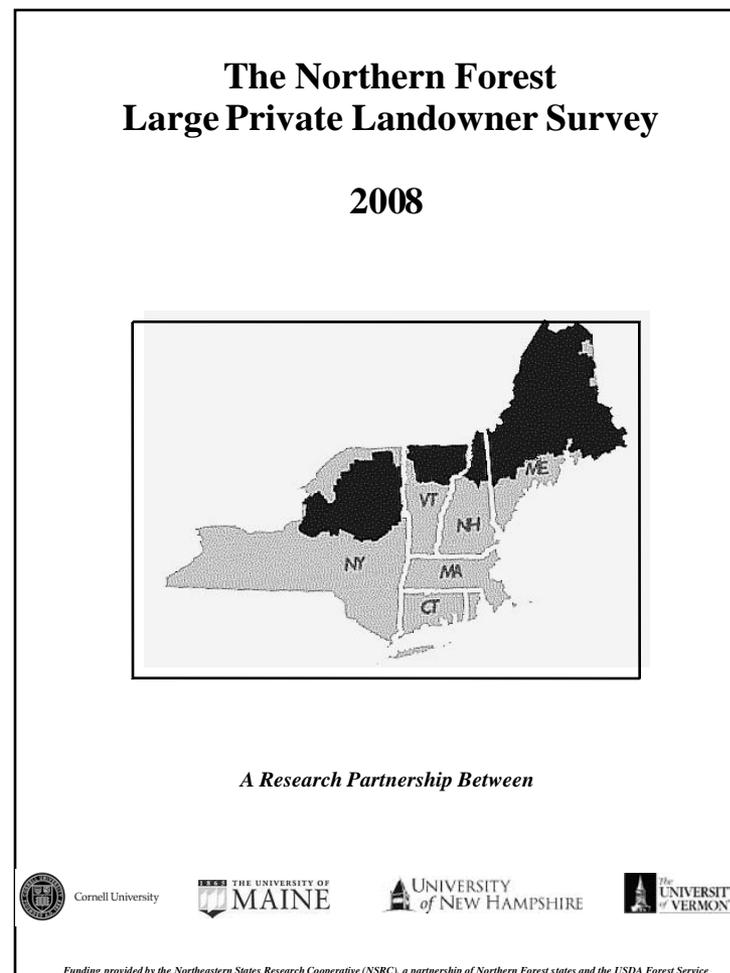
# Methods: Private Landowner Survey

- 6 towns in each state were selected.
- In each town, 100 landowners were selected.
- Landowners were sent a mail survey.



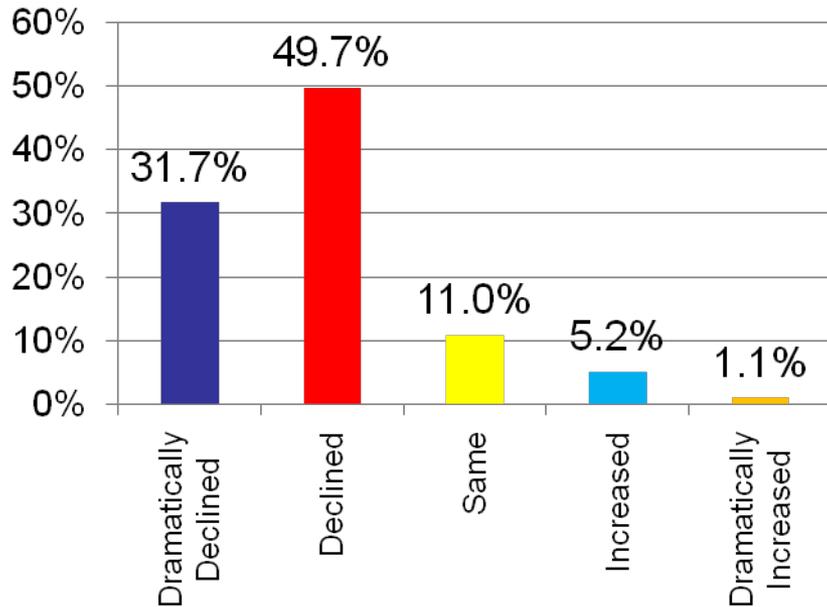
# Methods: Large Investment Landowner Survey

- A sample of 114 landowners across the Northern Forest was compiled.
- All landowners owned parcels greater than 1,000 acres.
- Landowners were sent a mail survey.

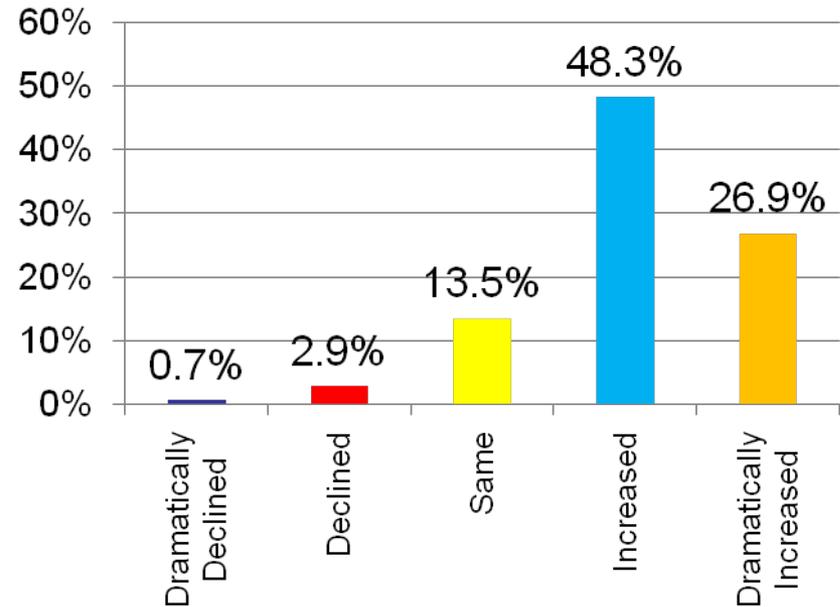


# Results: Web Forum

## Change in Public Access Past 10 Years



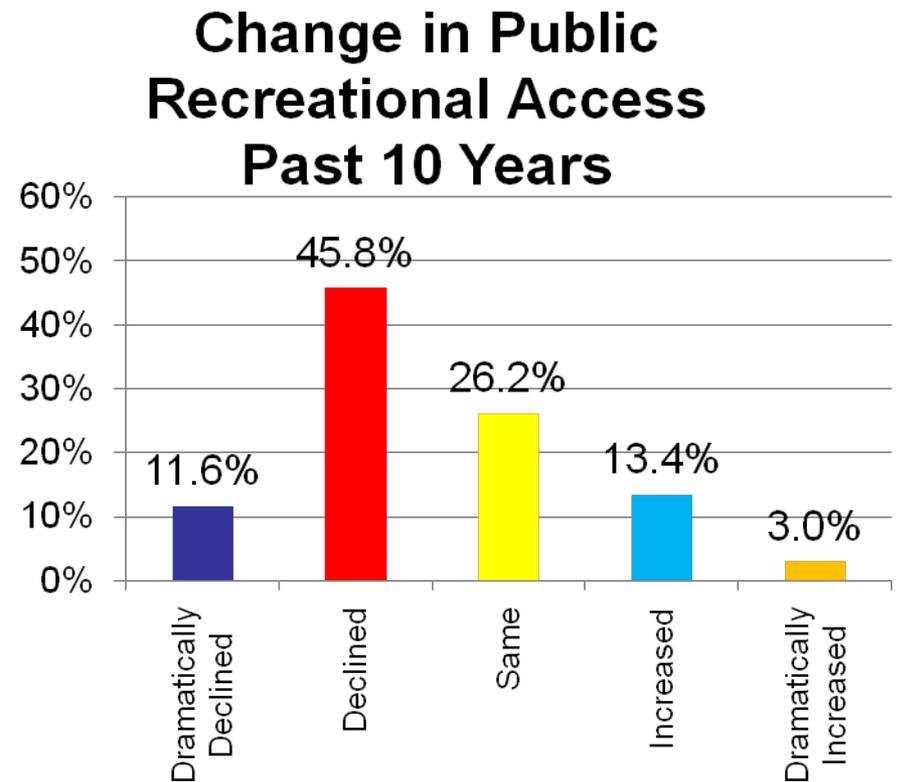
## Change in Land Sales Past 10 Years



Participants in the web forum stated that public access had decreased over the past 10 years, while land sales had increased over the same 10 years.

# Results: Private Landowners and Recreational Access

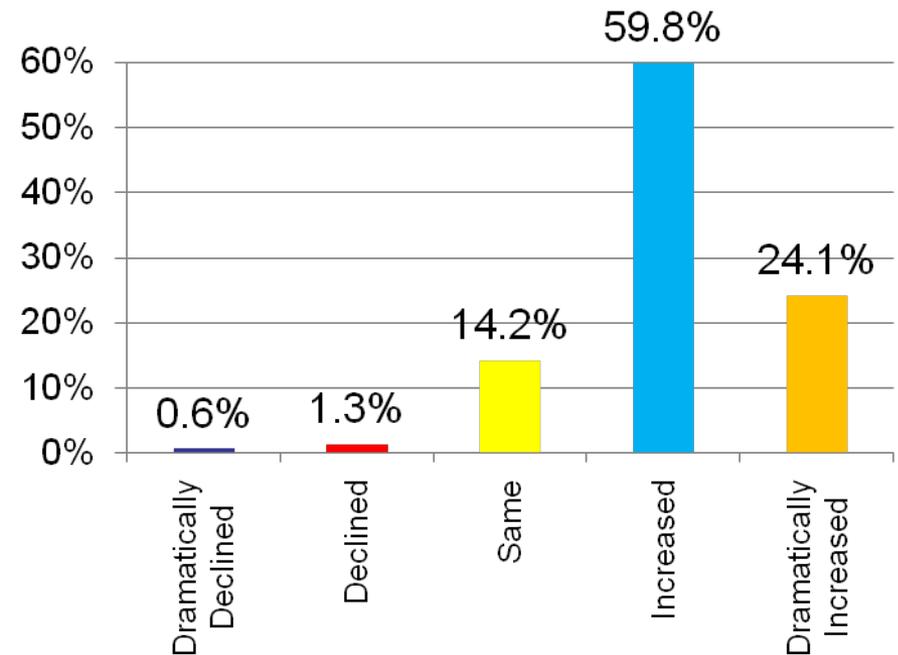
- 57% stated recreational access has declined over the past 10 years
- 41% do not limit access, 7% limit all access
- 53% were not familiar with limited liability statutes in their state
- 83% stated education and outreach about limited liability should occur



# Results: Private Landowners and Land Sales

- 82% stated land sales have increased over the past 10 years
- 30% purchased land in the past 10 years
- 49% are 1<sup>st</sup> generation owners
- 18% have sold land in the past 10 years
- 62% are permanent residents

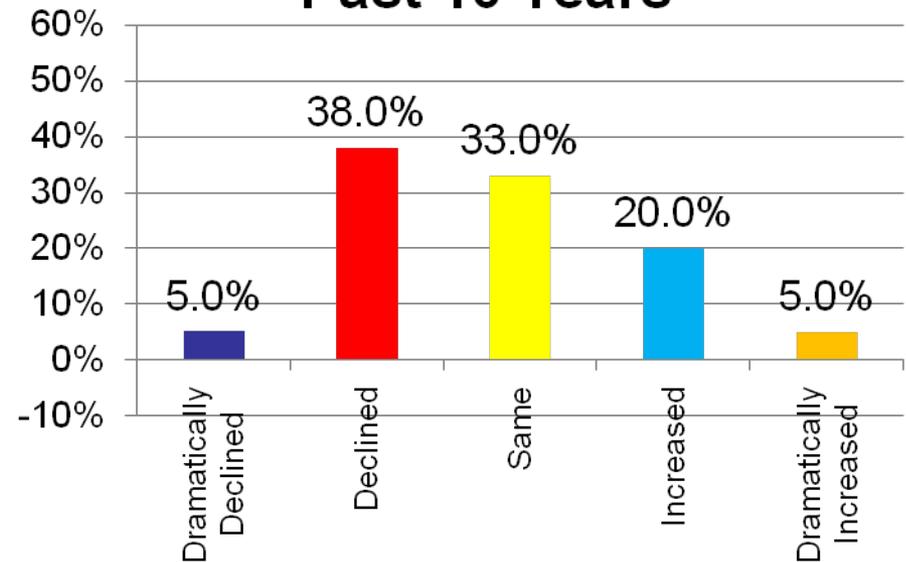
**Change in Land Sales  
Past 10 Years**



# Results: Large Investment Landowners

- 43% stated recreational access has declined over the past 10 years
- 87% allow access, 13% do not allow access to their land
- 61% are moderately/very familiar with limited liability statutes in their state
- 39% have owned their land for 10 years or less
- 18% have owned their land for 50 years or more

**Change in Public Recreational Access Past 10 Years**



# Project Outcomes: Roundtables

- Roundtables were conducted in each of the Northern Forest states, presenting results from the private landowner survey.
- Landowners, recreation and tourism interests, non-governmental organizations, natural resource agencies, and local officials were invited.
- Participants identified specific issues, recommendations to address those issues, and potential “next steps” they could use in their own community.
- 83% of participants reported an increase in knowledge about the perspectives of other participants.
- 66% of participants reported they had gained new ideas for improving recreation on private lands.



Discussing strategies and “next steps” in ME.

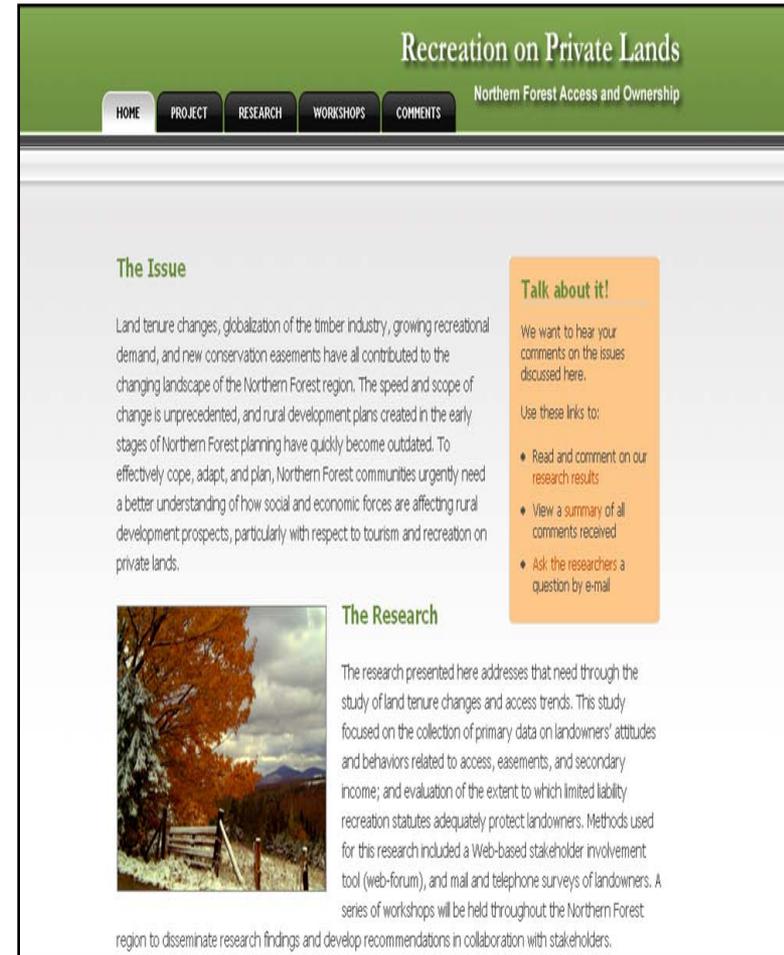
# Project Outcomes: Outreach

Project web site includes:

- Background about the project and the methods used
- Research results from all phases of the project
- Media coverage of the project
- Discussion board allowing visitors to comment on research results
- Presentations from the project roundtables and conferences
- Links to additional resources related to recreation on private lands

Visit the web site at:

[www.privatelandaccess.org](http://www.privatelandaccess.org)

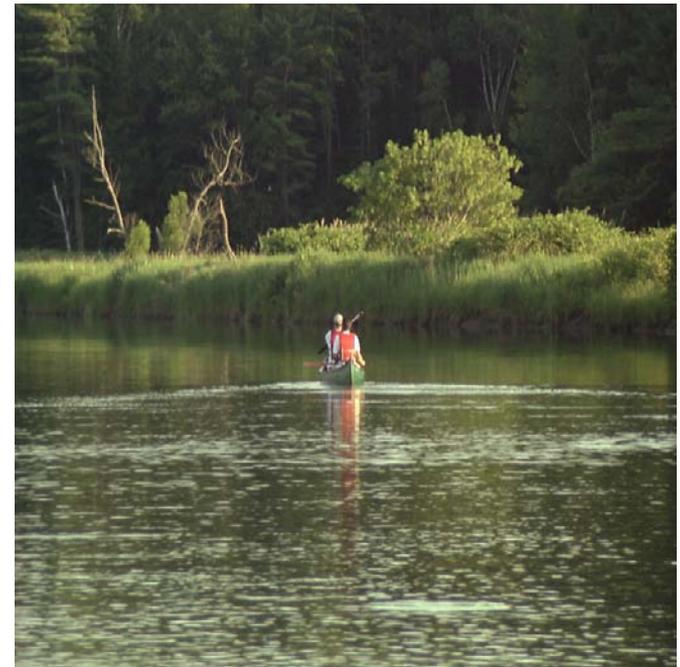


Home page of web site.

# Implications and Applications in the Northern Forest region

Results indicated that many private landowners are unaware of the liability protections offered to them. Coupled with a fear of lawsuits from those using their land, this lack of knowledge may lead to a decrease in private land available for recreational use into the future. Educational efforts should focus on providing landowners with the liability information they need to feel comfortable leaving their land open for recreation.

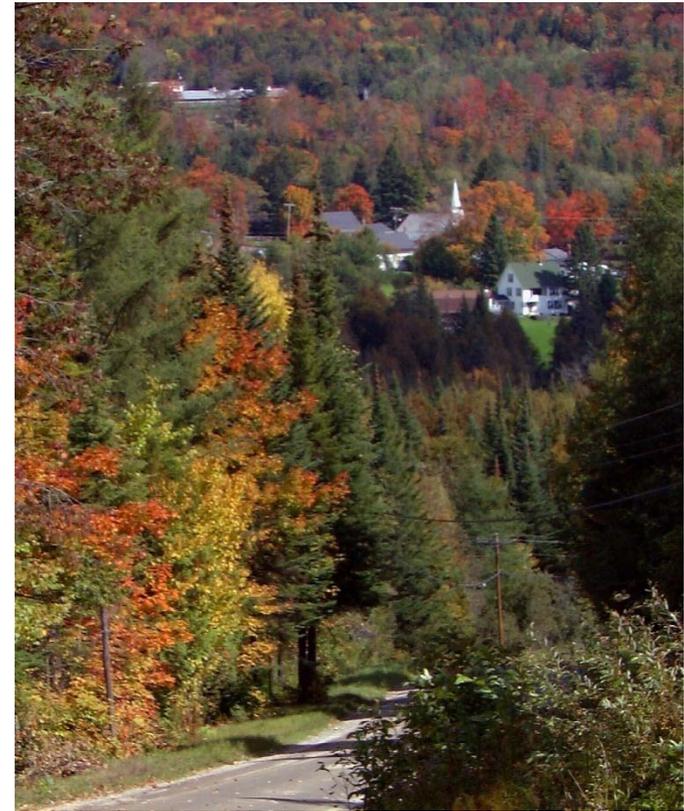
Results also suggest landowners are concerned about the rate of land sales occurring in the Northern Forest. Land sales may be changing the landscape and traditional recreation patterns. By bringing long-term landowners, new landowners, and recreation interests together, the Northern Forest region may be able to find common ground among stakeholders and ensure recreational access into the future.



# Implications and Applications in the Northern Forest region

The process of finding common ground is underway. Roundtables allowed diverse stakeholders to interact and gain valuable insight into other perspectives. As one participant commented, “It has been a good starting point to bring stakeholders together.” Informed with other participants’ perspectives and new findings on recreational access, landowner behaviors, and limited liability statutes, roundtable participants have fostered change across the Northern Forest region. Below are some examples of participant accomplishments since the roundtables:

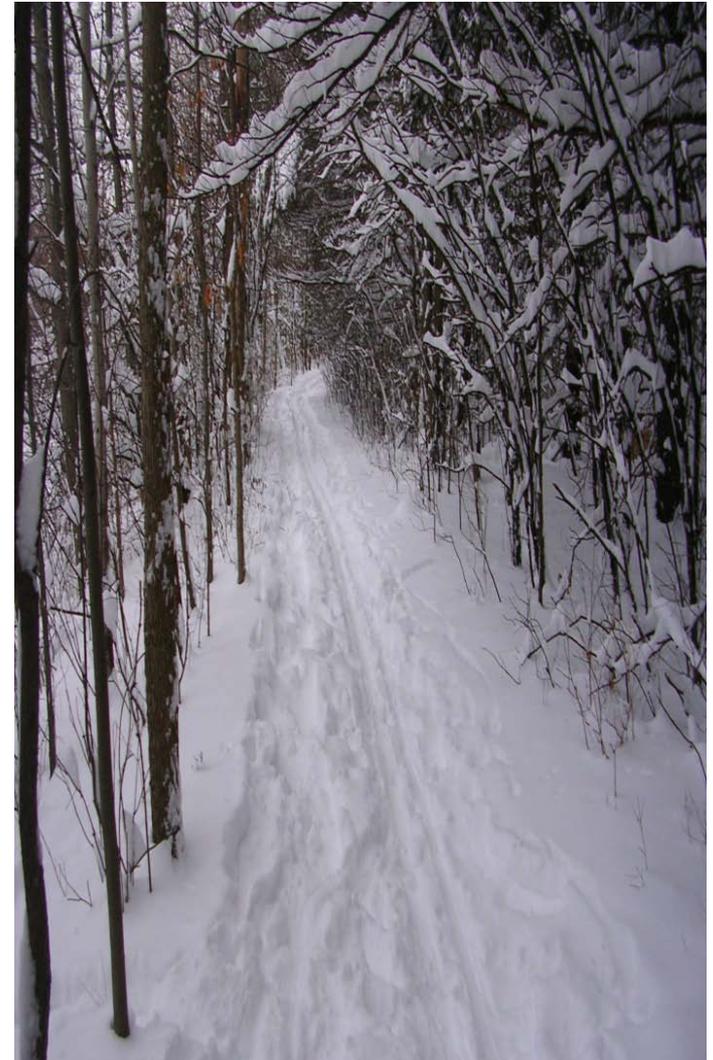
1. Disseminated information to members about responsible recreational use (print and web).
2. Worked with landowners to establish a hiking trail connecting pre-existing trails.
3. Developed a waterway campsite protocol.
4. Secured funding to conserve recreational land.



Sample town: Morgan, Vermont

# Future Directions: Research

- Conduct research on the feasibility of landowner incentives to keep land open for recreation.
- Conduct research on land sales data, to determine if the perceived increase in land sales is in fact happening throughout the Northern Forest region.
- Conduct research to determine the economic importance of nature-based tourism and recreation to the Northern Forest region.
- Conduct research to better understand differences in attitudes and behaviors of long-term residents, new residents, and second home owners.



# Future Directions: Outreach

- Conduct outreach and education related to limited liability statutes, focusing on landowners throughout the Northern Forest region.
- Conduct outreach and education to recreational groups with the goal of increasing appreciation for private land access. This outreach would focus on proper recreation techniques, traditional land uses, and communicating with landowners.
- Continue the dialogue started by the roundtables. Interaction between stakeholders will lead to continued recreational access into the future.



# List of products

## **Publications:**

Chase, L., B. Amsden, S. Geoffroy. (in preparation). Translating research into outcomes: Lessons from the Northern Forest. *Society and Natural Resources*.

Brown, T. (in press). Improving access through strengthening state recreational liability statutes. *Transactions, North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference, 2008*.

Geoffroy, S. (2008). *Land Tenure Change in the Northern Forest: Using Landowner Characteristics to Predict Landowner Behaviors and Perceptions of Community Change*. Master's Thesis, University of Vermont, Burlington, VT.

Brown, T. (2008). Trends in wildlife and privatization. Pgs 275-288 (Chapt. 20) in M. Manfredo, J. Vaske, P. Brown, D. Decker, and E. Duke. *Wildlife and Society: The Science of Human Dimensions*. Island Press, Washington DC.

Geoffroy, S. and L. Chase. (2007). *Access to Private Lands for Recreation*. Vermont Tourism Data Center Factsheet. Rubenstein School of Environment and Natural Resources, University of Vermont, Burlington, VT. 1p.

Brown, T. (2006). *Analysis of Limited Liability Recreation Use Statutes in the Northern Forest States*. HDRU Publication 06-12. Dept. of Natural Resources, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY. 29p.

# List of products

## **Presentations:**

- Chase, L. and S. Geoffroy. (2009, April). Expanding Outdoor Recreation Opportunities through Partnerships. Vermont Travel Industry Conference, Manchester, VT.
- Daigle, J. (2009, March). Land Sales, Subdivision, and Recreational Access in the Northern Forest. Northeastern Recreation Research Symposium, Bolton Landing, NY.
- Kuentzel, W. (2009, March). Land Tenure Change in the Northern Forest: Natives, Newcomers, and the Exurban Footprint. Northeastern Recreation Research Symposium, Bolton Landing, NY.
- Daigle, J. (2008, December). Private Land and Recreation in the Northern Forest. University of Maine, Forestry Department Seminar, Orono, ME.
- Brown, T. (2008, June). Improving hunting access through strengthening state recreational liability statutes. National Shooting Sports Foundation, Annual Summit, Colorado Springs, CO.
- Chase, L. (2008, June). Recreation on Private Lands in the Northern Forest: Recommendations and Stakeholder Strategies. International Symposium on Society and Resource Management, Burlington, VT.
- Daigle, J. (2008, June). Land Sales, Subdivision, and Recreational Access in the Northern Forest. International Symposium on Society and Resource Management, Burlington, VT.

# List of products

## **Presentations (cont'd):**

- Geoffroy, S. (2008, June) Land Tenure Change in the Northern Forest: Using Landowner Characteristics to Predict Landowner Behaviors and Perceptions of Community Change. Master's Thesis Defense, University of Vermont, Burlington, VT.
- Geoffroy, S. (2008, June). Land Tenure Change in the Northern Forest: Effects on Landowner Perception of Community Change. International Symposium on Society and Resource Management, Burlington, VT.
- Kuentzel, W. (2008, June). Land Tenure, Recreational Access, and Community Change in the Northern Forest. International Symposium on Society and Resource Management, Burlington, VT.
- Kuentzel, W. (2008, May). Recreation on Private Lands: Northern Forest Access and Ownership. Coos County Forester's Mud-Season Breakfast. Berlin, NH.
- Geoffroy, S. (2008, March). Northern Forest Land Ownership: Perceived Effects on Community Vitality and Recreational Access. Northeastern Recreation Research Symposium, Bolton Landing, NY.
- Geoffroy, S. (2007, October). Northern Forest Land Tenure Changes: Effects on Recreational Access and Community Vitality. Rubenstein School Graduate Student Symposium, Burlington, VT.

# List of products

## Roundtables:

- New York - April 1, 2008  
Heaven Hill Farm on the Uihlein Estate  
Lake Placid, New York
- Vermont – May 8, 2008  
Wildflower Inn  
Lyndonville, Vermont
- Maine Roundtable – May 30, 2008  
University of Maine  
Orono, Maine
- New Hampshire – November 18, 2008  
Plymouth State University  
Plymouth, New Hampshire

# List of products

## **Proposals for Funding Submitted:**

Kuentzel, W. and L. Chase. (2009). Culture Clash or Exurban Footprint? Conflict Over Land Tenure Change in Vermont's Timber-Dependent Rural Communities. Proposal submitted for McIntyre-Stennis funding through the Rubenstein School of Environment and Natural Resources, University of Vermont, Burlington, VT.

## **Popular Press and Media:**

New England Cable News Interview (2007)

Across the Fence Episode (2008) [Responding to the Changing Landscape of the Northern Forest Region](#)

Vermont Public Radio Interview (2008)

Articles in the following local newspapers: The Caledonian Record, The Chronicle, Vermont Field Journal Blog, Rutland Herald, South County Sentinel, Vermont Times, Addison Eagle, News and Citizen, Hardwick Gazette, Times Argus, Randolph Herald, Coos County Democrat, The Message, and Original Vermont Observer

## **Other Products:**

Project website: [www.privatelandaccess.org](http://www.privatelandaccess.org)

Stakeholder database with over 400 email addresses