

# An Oral History Place Attachment Project: Understanding the Changing Forest Landscape through the Eyes of Maine's Oldest Citizens

**Principal Investigator: Marilynne J. Mann**

Husson University - [mannmj@husson.edu](mailto:mannmj@husson.edu)

**Co-Principal Investigator: Jessica E. Leahy**

University of Maine - [jessica.leahy@umit.maine.edu](mailto:jessica.leahy@umit.maine.edu)

**Collaborator: Debra Kantor**

University of Maine Cooperative Ext.- [dkantor@umext.maine.edu](mailto:dkantor@umext.maine.edu)

April 3, 2013

For long-lived resident of the Northern Forest area in Maine:

- Place attachment consistently high through the life course,
  - Evolved with decreasing place dependence as place identity increased.



Funding support provided by the Northeastern States Research Cooperative (NSRC), a partnership of Northern Forest states (New Hampshire, Vermont, Maine, and New York) in coordination with the USDA Forest Service.

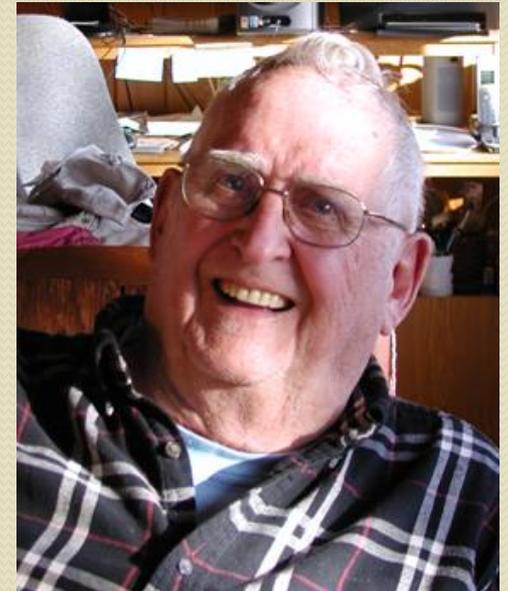
<http://www.nsrcforest.org>

# Project Summary

- Forest landscape change over time has impacted the dynamic relationship between people and the forest.
- Long-lived residents have witnessed change first-hand over their lifespan and have not been engaged in the discussion taking place.
- The objective of this research was to capture the oral history of Maine's long-lived residents who have witnessed changes in the forest landscape.



Jeannette Holden, 91  
Moose River, Maine



Wesley Baker, 85  
Bingham, Maine

# Project Summary

- Semi-structured personal interviews documented the subjective nature of lived experience over the life course.
- Place attachment remained consistently high across the life course.
- Place dependence decreased as place identify increased with age, regardless of birth location.



Rodrick Perry, 96



John Caldwell, 79



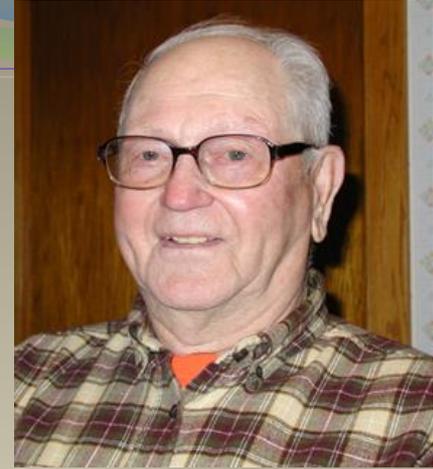
Etta Hubbard, 94



Nona Young, 94

# Objectives

- ❖ Understand the perspective of some of Maine's oldest residents about change that has taken place in the forest over their lifetime.
- ❖ Use their wisdom to inform sustainable development in the future.



Chummy Broomhall, 91  
Rumford, Maine



Marion Wing, 105  
Phillips, Maine

# Background and Justification

- The Boston Cane program began in 1909 when gold-headed ebony canes were sent to small towns throughout New England to recognize the oldest resident.
- Residents with recognized longevity and high visibility serve as desirable study participants.
- This study's focus was Cane recipients in the Kennebec Watershed area of Maine.



Leona Cross, 101  
Farmington, Maine

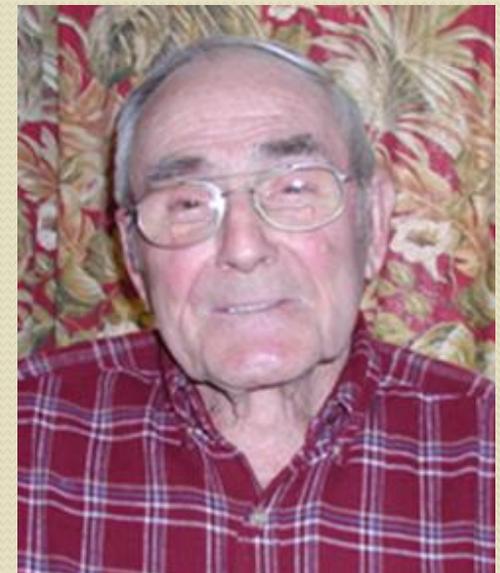


Zelda Harnden, 99  
Strong, Maine

- Understanding “life-as-lived” can inform policy about sustainability for resource-based industries that impact the Maine way of life.
- Natural environments hold cultural and historic significance.
- Understanding the unique perspective of Maine’s oldest residents informs important aspects of quality of life issues in Maine.



Louise Chase, 82  
Carrabassett Valley



Ivan Hoyt, 88  
Anson, Maine

# Background and Justification

- Past place attachment research has not looked at residents or older adults with long connections to land immersed in landscape change.
- This study provides a unique perspective on change over time in the Northern Forest area.
- Place identity helps to explain mental and emotional investments in a location and can inform policy and management decisions.



Ronald Ingersoll, 92  
Moscow, Maine

# Site : The Kennebec Watershed

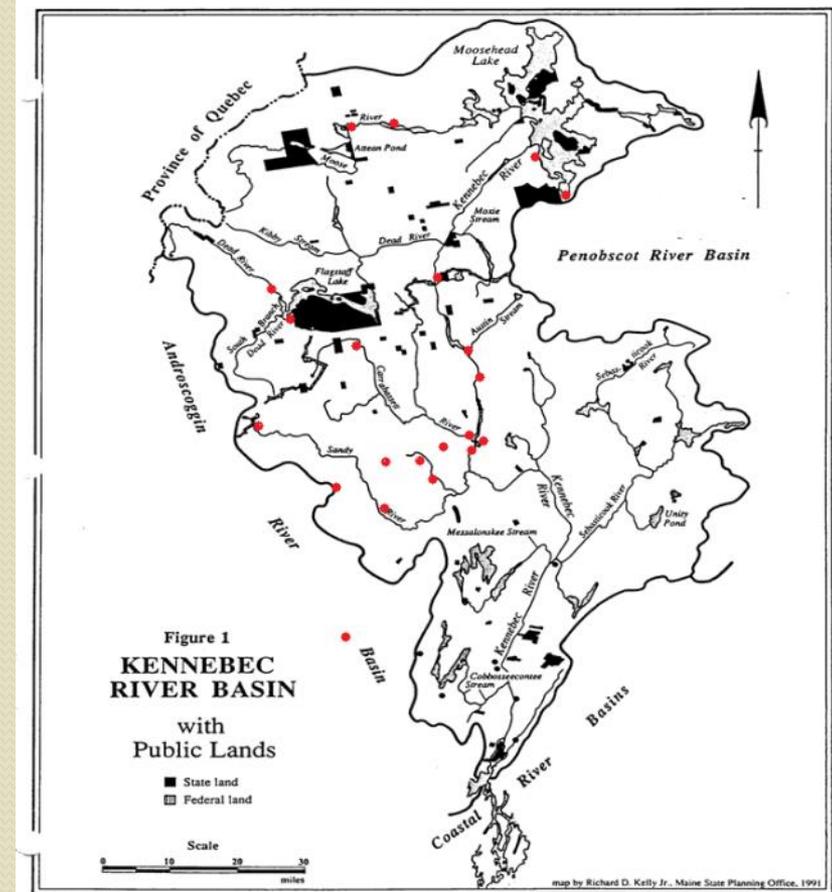
The perfect location to study trends, patterns, challenges and solutions to changing landscape of the working forest through the eyes of long-lived residents.

- The Old Canada Road National Scenic Byway & Kennebec-Chaudière International Scenic Byway recognize historic, cultural and scenic value of this riverine landscape
- Lumbering / working forest history tied to well-being of communities
- Last river drive in Maine 1976
- Nearly 90% forested area
- Drastic changes in past 50 years



# Methods

- Non-probability purposive sampling of Boston Post Cane or oldest citizens
- 22 semi-structured in-depth interviews using an oral history technique, 45 to 180 minutes in length
- 21 towns in the Kennebec Watershed
- Interview guide assured focus
- Conversations coded and analyzed for emergent phenomenon



# Methods

- Phenomenology studies experiences and how people shape their existence
- Collected first-person descriptions of participants' experiences looking for patterns and relationships of meaning
- Looked for the meaning of the forested landscape to long-lived residents



Forest Parson, 85  
June Parson, 75  
Eustis, Maine

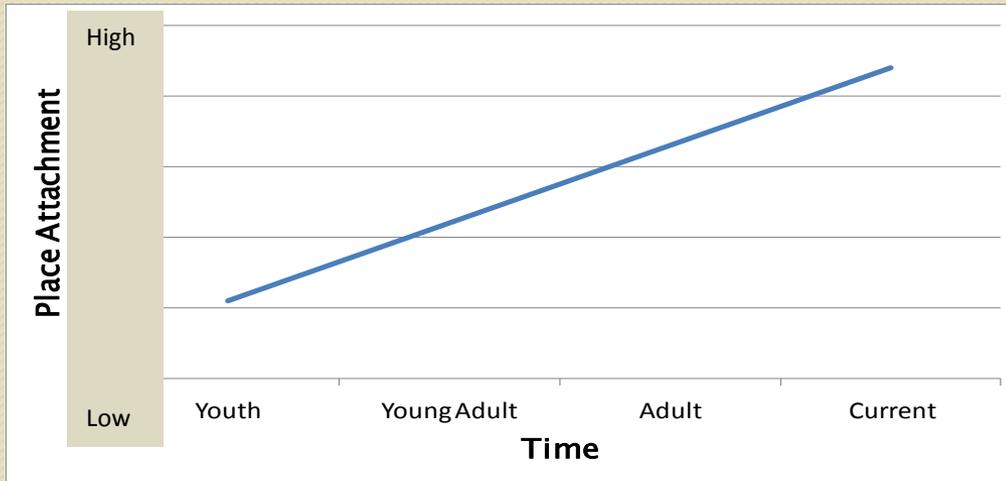
# Project Outcomes

- 11 male and 11 female participants
- Average age 89: range 75 to 105, with 3 centenarian
- 8 were oldest members of their communities, remainder one of the oldest
- 17 born and raised Mainers
- 3 vacationers moved to Maine for retirement
- 2 “From Awaysers” dragged to Maine by a mate



Thomas Giroux, 80  
Jackman, Maine

# H<sub>0</sub> – PA would grow over life cycle

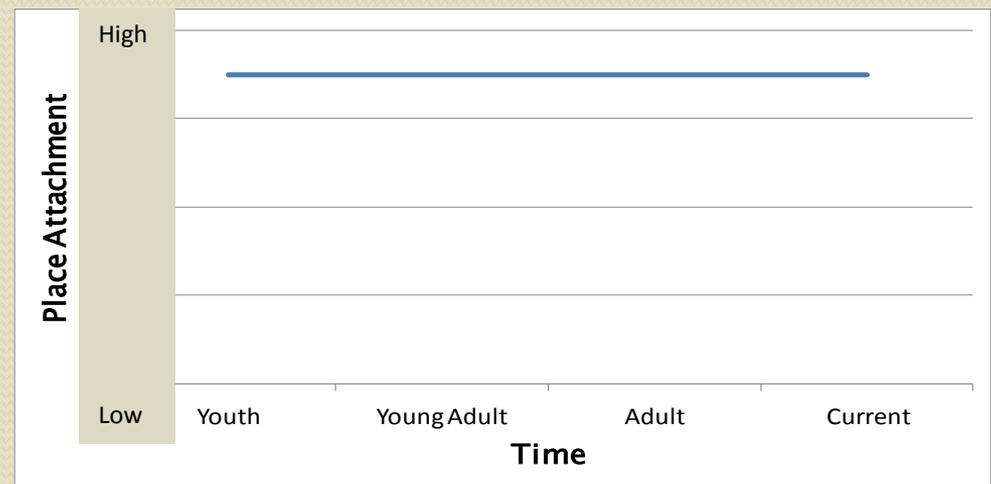


Louise Doak, 91  
Rangeley, Maine

## Findings - PA was high during entire life course



John York, 87  
Caratunk, Maine



# Place Attachment

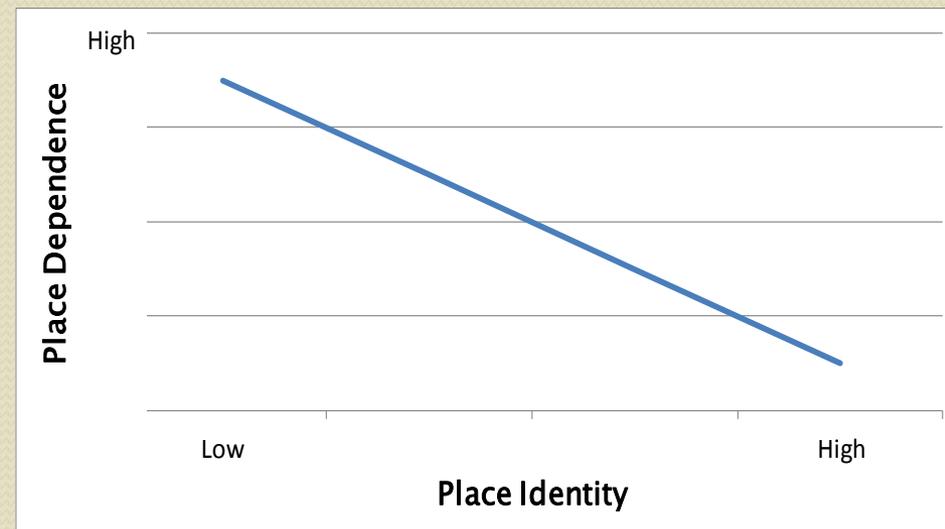
## PAST – Place dependence

- Raising family
- Livelihood
- Many activities
- Being in the woods
- Change related to newcomers
- Living in place

Place dependence decreased as place identify increased with age, regardless of birth location.

## CURRENT – Place identity

- Some family dispersed
- About hanging on
- Reduced activity
- Living near the wood
- Change related to newcomers
- Recollecting about place



# Project Outreach

- Due to the influence of this research, the Solon Historical Society is undertaking the collection of its history through the life-stories of oldest residents using interviews and video recording.
- Bingham Historical Society will maintain study data for nearby towns and seek to expand the collection of it's own oral heritage.



Albert Starbird, 87  
Solon, Maine

# Project Outreach

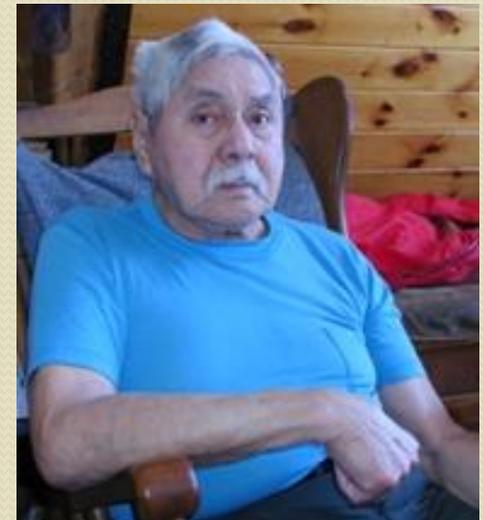
Transcripts with photos sent to town offices to preserve oral heritage.

Study results presented:

- \* Center for Research on Sustainable Forests
- \* Forest Society of Maine
- \* Kennebec Co. Soil & Water Conservation District
- \* Kennebec Land Trust
- \* Maine CDC Drinking Water Program
- \* Maine DOA, Food and Rural Resources
- \* Maine Forest Service
- \* Maine Forest Products Council
- \* Maine Project Learning Tree/ME TREE Foundation
- \* Maine SFI Implementation Committee
- \* Sebasticook Regional Land Trust
- \* Small Woodland Owners Association of Maine
- \* Solon & Bingham Historical Societies
- \* Trust to Conserve Northeast Forestlands



Eleanor Ketchum, 80  
Embden, Maine



Francis Tomer, 80  
Rockwood, Maine

# Implications and applications: Northern Forest Region

- People are concerned about the forest.
- Forest health is measured based on the view from their home or vehicle.
- New technology is embraced, but not at the expense of less jobs and less woods.
- Mainers want to protect the environment, but they want access to the forests.



Phemie Russell, 100  
South Paris, Maine

# Implications Based on Life Course Theory

## Context Matters over time within the...

Individual	Community		Forest
	<u>Past Disruption</u>	<u>Present</u>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Childhood</li> <li>•Livelihood</li> <li>•Family life</li> <li>•Other interactions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Flagstaff &amp; flooding</li> <li>•People from away</li> <li>•Lost jobs</li> <li>•War</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Lost Jobs</li> <li>•Lost industry</li> <li>•Land use issues</li> <li>•Conflicts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Land ownership</li> <li>•Mechanization</li> <li>•Timber practices</li> <li>•Windmills</li> </ul>

All factors potentially influencing place attachment.

# Findings

- Sustainability of the forest landscape was a concern for nearly all participants.
- Sustainability issues connected to the forested landscape for participants included:
  - Changes in timber practices
  - Declines in wildlife populations
  - Changes in forest landownership
  - Loss of manufacturing jobs
  - Positive perceptions of windmills

# Changes in timber practices

- *(In the past) a tree that they were cutting were a foot or more on the stump. And now you see um and they're cuttin' um off six inches (pause) log after log on a truck, you get behind it and follow it . . . most of them sticks are six inches and less. . . . Yuh, and the authorities say there's more wood than ever, but it ain't no good.*
- *No they are taking everything now. It's clear cutting. Hard wood, soft wood, anything that's big enough to go.*
- *They don't leave anything. There's a lot of trees, like a tree this big around, you open it up and it will start growing fast if you leave them, but it's pretty hard to work around them . . . you have to a be fussy about it because, if you fall a tree it may take another one, you have to care. Well, they don't care.*

# Declines in wildlife populations

- *The deer population is way, way down. Lack of cover.*
- *They put a they put a road off of the black top. . . to cut the wood in there . . . . Wasn't long before they fished the river out.*
- *And another big thing on the deer population around here has been coyotes killing them. Killing the fawns in the spring and...whenever I see one I shoot it.*
- *There was a lot of deer. Until they. . . introduced the Coy Dogs – Coyotes . . . there's no partridges anymore. Rabbits they cleaned um out.*
- *[The wildlife] is very scarce now. We used to see a lot down there and they'd walk right out in my driveway, but, we don't see hardly any now.*

# Changing Forest Land Ownership

- *The places that they had good woodlots before, now they got house here, house there. It's all chopped up.*
- *I'm not going to point my finger at Plum Creek, they own the land, . . . and you know they have cut it hard.*
- *And all these people from out-of-state thought they're going to come up here and buy [land]. Some move here and some don't. And as soon as they get here they start fussing about the tax.*
- *The ownership of so much of the land, is shifting now from really, from paper companies . . . And you go on these back roads and there are signs on Plum Creek land, "52 Acres For Sale." "113 Acres For Sale" . . . That's new this year*

# Loss of Manufacturing Jobs

- *This paper mill right here . . . . they did one smart thing . . . that helped save it. The politicians . . . went to Washington and got a tariff put on pulp shipped in here. It saved the paper industry in Maine and saved this woodland, and there's some future.*
- *Young people don't, move up here. It's a state of very old people.[Young people] move away for better jobs . . . apart from the mills . . . the only jobs are in the woods, and that is pretty hazardous.*
- *Every little town in Maine . . . was in some kind of wood business . . . they made a living, they didn't get rich, but they made enough to . . . send their kids to school and had a quality of life . . . there's no jobs for youth here anymore. And all these little towns are suffering.*

# Perception about Windmills

- *You could call it a gift. For every megawatt that they generate they'll give us a thousand dollars.*
- *Up to Kibby where they got the wind power . . . one of my favorite spots . . . They want to put 11 more which is okay by me . . .It's gonna be 70 years before there's any trees up there that's big enough to cut so you might as well put these things up and generate some electricity and get some money out of the land.*
- *Well, there's a lot of people right now talking about the windmills, but it's nothing, it's gotta be something more than that.*

# Management Implications

Perception represent a reality and need to be addressed.

- Encourage stronger onsite regulatory / advisory presence for the Maine Forest Service and agencies such as the Kennebec Woodland Partnership to create opportunities for engagement with Maine residents and support state-wide, regional and local sustainability efforts.
- Work with the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife to address residents' concerns about wildlife populations.
- Collaborate with USDA Rural Development, Maine Rural Development Authority (MRDA), and state and regional Economic Development Corporations to strengthen agricultural and manufacturing innovation in Maine's forest-based rural communities.

# Future directions

- Perceptions, experiences and observations have not been collected for other segments of Northern Forest populations that could inform policy and management decisions and provide comparison to the population of this study. Populations of interest include:
  - Younger populations
  - “From Away” and part-time residents
  - Sportsmen, recreationists, backpackers, and other populations who are off the beaten path
- Survey and quantitative research methods would complement this study and add a body knowledge to quality of life issues for residents of the Northern Forest.

The value of this research lies with the stories collected before it was too late.



Phemie Jane Russell  
July 21, 1909 –  
Jan. 2, 2012



Roderick J. Perry  
Nov. 28, 1914 –  
June 8, 2012



Thomas Giroux, Jr.  
Oct. 11, 1930 –  
Feb. 22, 2011

# List of products

- Mann, M. J. (2012, November). Place attachment and the forested landscape of the Kennebec watershed. Lecture conducted at ECANUSA, Durham, NH.
- Mann, M. J. & Leahy, J. E. (2012. November). Place attachment and the forested landscape of the Kennebec watershed. Lecture at the Solon & Bingham Historical Societies Board Meeting, Solon, Maine.
- Leahy, L. E. & Mann, M. J. (December, 2012). Place attachment and the forested landscape of the Kennebec watershed. Lecture at Kennebec Woodland Partnership Board Meeting, Winthrop, Maine.