

External Advisory Committee Northeastern States Research Cooperative 2024 Summary Report

Virtual Convening on October 28, 2024 Convening and report organized by NSRC Team members: Meg Fergusson, Anthea Lavallee (facilitator), Mary Beth Malmsheimer, and Brenda McCartney

Overview of the Committee Charge and Process

The charge of the External Advisory Committee (EAC) for the Northeastern States Research Cooperative (NSRC) is to inform the NSRC Executive Committee about priority issues facing forest policymakers and practitioners in the Northern Forest region and to provide guidance to the NSRC Executive Committee with the goal of aligning the 2024 request for proposals (RFP) with on-the-ground needs. This report is a summary of responses from the EAC following a two-hour facilitated virtual meeting held on October 28.

2024 External Advisory Committee Members

- Jennifer Ballinger, Tribal Relations Specialist, USDA Forest Service
- John Bartow, Executive Director, Empire State Forest Products Association
- Amanda Cross, Supervisor/Project Leader, Maine Field Office, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- Jamey Fidel, General Counsel, Forest & Wildlife Program Director, Vermont Natural Resources Council
- Derek Ibarguen, Forest Supervisor, White Mountain National Forest
- Matt Leahy, Public Policy Director, Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests
- William "Andy" Martin, Assistant Director/ Supervisory General Engineer, USDA Forest Service
- Oliver Pierson, Director of Forests, State of Vermont
- Sean Ross, Managing Director, Lyme Timber
- Joe Short, Vice President, Northern Forest Center
- Jasen Stock, Executive Director, New Hampshire Timberland Owners Association
- Fiona Watt, State Forester NYS DEC, State of New York
- Shawn White, Lake Champlain Sea Grant Watershed Forestry Partnership Coordinator, UVM
- Carolyn Ziegra, Research Forester, Appalachian Mountain Club
- Kenneth Zwick, Acting Deputy Director, Forest Products Laboratory, USDA Forest Service

Anthea and Meg shared a brief history of the NSRC and the goal of the EAC to identify real-world needs for forest research. By regularly engaging with a rotating group of forest professionals across sectors, the NSRC will develop a research agenda that responds to stakeholder needs.

NSRC Executive Committee members Mark Ducey and Anne Jefferson welcomed the EAC and reiterated the NSRC's goal to synchronize forest research with on-the-ground needs. Meg outlined the logistics of the 2024 general competition: \$2.2 million in funding will be awarded in addition to the Indigenous Forest Knowledge Fund (\$1.2M will be awarded in the spring). In 2023, 18 awards were made out of 49 submitted proposals.

Anthea listed the following USFS priorities for the 2024 RFP

- Climate resilience and adaptation ¹
- Wood utilization and economics ²
- Improving market opportunities through enhancing utilization of woody biomass ³
- Technology transfer of research ⁴
- Sabbaticals with Forest Service scientists or research ⁵
- Partnerships with our experimental forests ⁶

An EAC participant asked how the NSRC squares with reduced funding and staffing at Northeastern experimental forests. Anthea agreed that declining funding at the experimental forests has been a concern, and the NSRC executive committee has worked closely with the Northern Research Station to ensure that NSRC projects are synergistic, not competitive. Mark Ducey noted that the NSRC is recommended by U.S. Congress, year-to-year, *in addition to* baseline NRS funding. NSRC intends to add value and extend the reach and impact of Forest Service research. Also, NSRC projects often take place in areas that are not served by an experimental forest.

The group reviewed the 2023 RFP with a critical eye on priority and focus areas. The following questions framed the discussion:

- 1) What topics should be added or emphasized in the 2024 RFP?
- 2) What topics should be removed or de-emphasized in the 2024 RFP?
- 3) What other recommendations do you have for the 2024 RFP?
- 4) Is there anything else you would like the NSRC organizers to consider?

In a Nutshell

On a scale from one to five, 73% of the EAC indicated that the 2023 RFP reflected the most important priorities for research to benefit the ecosystems and people of the Northern Forest (i.e., they gave this question a score of 4 or 5). Three EAC members gave this question a score of 2 or 3. The conversation and written responses centered on forest management and resilience, emphasizing climate adaptation, sustainable wood utilization, biodiversity conservation, and community engagement. Key discussions included the balance between active and passive forest management, addressing invasive species, and the importance of equitable access to forest resources. Committee members also highlighted the role of renewable energy in forest economies and the integration of Indigenous knowledge into sustainable practices. Recommendations focused on accelerating research with practical applications, fostering partnerships with on-the-ground practitioners, and supporting rural economies through innovative uses for wood products, all aimed at enhancing forest and community resilience.



Word cloud derived from meeting notes



Top 10 Key Terms

Histogram derived from meeting notes

Summary of Discussion Themes

1. Climate Resilience and Adaptation

Emphasis on forest management practices that enhance human community resilience to climate change, including flood resilience, while also balancing carbon storage and other ecosystem services. Focus on maintaining forest health with benefits to human community long-term resilience.

- **Objective**: Enhance forest and human community resilience against climate change impacts such as extreme weather.
- Topics of Interest:
 - Flood resilience in forest management and forest restoration / conservation for the protection of human communities
 - Carbon sequestration as a balanced forest use
 - Addressing invasive pests (e.g., EAB, spruce budworm) and climate-related pathogens
- **Goals**: Support rural human community resilience with tools for adapting to climate disruptions.

"Rural community resilience- e.g. predictive tools, decision-support tools, etc that support NF communities in understanding and preparing for the multiple impacts of climate change (extreme weather, seasonal economic disruptions, population growth, increased tourism/rec use)."

2. Wood Utilization, Market Opportunities, and Economics

Strategies that enhance economic opportunities for rural communities and improve market access for wood products, including efficient utilization of biomass for renewable energy. Explore new uses for forest materials, like affordable housing through wood-based construction materials, especially low-grade and/or locally/regionally sourced wood.

- **Objective**: Drive economic benefits through sustainable wood product markets.
- Topics of Interest:
 - Development of low-grade wood and woody biomass products
 - Consumer research on wood products and sustainable alternatives
 - Innovations in affordable housing using forest products
- Goals: Strengthen local economies by promoting sustainable wood-based industries.

"Markets/research to propel forward infrastructure/products to utilize low-grade products in the region." <u>In addition to</u> "Support for markets of locally produced higher quality wood products."

"Elevate sustainable balanced forest management to Priority Issue."

"Biomass for affordable housing meets three goals: increasing affordable housing, giving markets for biomass from forest management, and developing rural economies."

3. Forest Management and Biodiversity

Balance active management practices with conservation approaches to enhance forest resilience, particularly against climate change and invasive species. Focus on ensuring that carbon storage goals align with long-term biodiversity preservation, connectivity, and the maintenance of intact habitat across ecosystems.

- **Objective**: Balance biodiversity and forest health with management practices.
- Topics of Interest:
 - Trade-offs in passive vs. active forest management
 - Forest connectivity, maintenance of intact habitat, and impact of land use on both aquatic and terrestrial biodiversity
 - Education on sustainable forest management in local communities
- **Goals**: Protect forest diversity while optimizing forest health and resilience.

"Active management vs passive management and impacts of each on forest resiliency and biodiversity."

"Impacts of renewable energy development/forest conversion on biodiversity conservation and carbon storage/sequestration; deconflicting biodiversity and forestry management practices (e.g., certain practices benefit one listed/at-risk species but are detrimental to another; can we find practices that benefit both or certain life stages?)."

4. Land Use and Community Access/Inclusion

Balance forest conservation with crucial development needs, particularly for workforce housing in rural areas. Address tension between active and passive forest management.

- **Objective**: Address land use pressures and ensure equitable access to forests.
- Topics of Interest:
 - Equitable forest access and ownership
 - Impact of renewable energy installations (e.g., solar) and conversion of forested land
 - Sustainable tourism and infrastructure for overused forest areas
 - Forest fragmentation due to development
- **Goals**: Balance forest conservation with development needs and community equity.

"For environmental justice, equity, and inclusion issues, emphasis is heavy on Tribes and Indigenous people so would like to see more about other underserved communities in the region."

"Establishing consistent messaging for forest management activities through the lens of science and current/relevant natural resource issues."

Additional Comments

- **Partnerships**: Projects should involve active collaboration with "boots on the ground" partners in the forestry industry, watershed groups, conservation districts, municipalities working to address environmental issues (e.g., flood resilience), or related sectors.
- **Practical Application**: Proposals must show how research results will integrate quickly into realworld applications, benefiting stakeholders in the Northern Forest region. Prioritize proposals that demonstrate clear, practical outcomes for immediate use by stakeholders.
- **Timeline**: Emphasize projects with timely, actionable outcomes to align with rapidly evolving forest challenges.
- **Focus Consolidation**: Reduce topic breadth by grouping similar priorities under main themes.

- **Equity Considerations**: Extend beyond Indigenous knowledge to include other underserved communities in forest resource access and research efforts.
- **Technology Transfer and Pace:** Prioritize applied research that translates quickly into actionable strategies for forest management and aligns with USFS priorities. Suggestions include faster research outcomes and ensuring practical applications with community partnerships.

"The 2023 funded project list does not strike me as terribly different from what NSRC 1.0 funded. "Applied" to me means not just an issue that the proposer can say is practically relevant. There must be on-the-ground partners- non-profits, businesses, agencies, etc-who are asking for the information, can describe specifically how they will use it, and are ready to do so."

"Less emphasis on basic research and more applied."

The following refinements align with the need for consolidation and practical outcomes, while supporting a more manageable, targeted research agenda for the Northern Forest region.

Superscript numbers correspond to U.S. Forest Service priorities, identified on page 2.

Consolidated and Refined Focus Areas

1. Forest Health and Resilience ¹

- Focus on understanding our changing forests with an emphasis on forest health and resilience. This includes predictive research on forest response to threats like climate change, invasive species, and extreme weather events.
- 2. Decision Support and Management Tools 1
 - Develop practical tools and strategies for stakeholders to manage forests sustainably. This could include decision support systems, technologies for monitoring forest health, communication tools for stakeholder engagement, and methods to balance forest health with other needs like carbon sequestration and biodiversity.
- 3. Social Science for Effective Public Engagement ^{2, 4}
 - Develop communication strategies for effectively engaging landowners and the general public around best practices for forest management, including locally and topically relevant social science to support consulting / licensed foresters, county foresters, non-profits, etc.
- 4. Community and Economic Resilience 1, 2, 3
 - Research should support rural forest-dependent communities, focusing on resilience to economic, social, and environmental changes. Topics may include sustainable forest product markets, job creation through wood utilization, and economic development aligned with climate resilience.

Consolidated and Refined Priority Issues

- 1. Wood Products Innovation and Market Development ^{2, 3, 4}
 - Encourage innovations in forest products, including sustainable wood markets, efficient utilization of biomass, and biorefineries. Emphasize market strategies that create

sustainable economic value from low-grade wood and support the utilization of local or regionally sourced wood products (e.g., in construction/housing)

2. Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation ¹

 Focus on climate resilience, including flood resilience for human communities, carbon accounting, and the role of forests in renewable energy. Emphasis on balancing carbon sequestration with other ecosystem services (e.g., biodiversity, wood products, flood resilience) and addressing the impacts of forest conversion for renewable energy development (e.g., solar farms).

3. Land Use and Sustainable Forestry ^{2, 4}

 Address issues of forest fragmentation, regeneration, and sustainable forestry practices. Research should explore conservation incentives, communication with private landowners, and balancing diverse forest management needs (e.g., the tension and balance between forest conservation and the need for housing).

4. Biodiversity and Connectivity 1, 4

• Focus on preserving biodiversity through the maintenance of intact habitat and connectivity of terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems. Emphasize balancing carbon storage goals with biodiversity conservation and strategies for species adaptation.

5. Invasive Species and Forest Pests 1

 Study impacts of invasive pests on forest diversity, health, and resilience, with emphasis on early detection and response, culturally significant species, and impacts on carbon sequestration.

6. Recreation, Tourism, and Land Use Impacts ^{2,4}

Study the effects of recreation on forests, including economic impacts and carrying capacity.
Focus on equitable access, management strategies for balancing recreation with conservation, and impacts on local communities.

7. Environmental Justice, Equity, and Inclusion ⁴

• Research inclusive practices in forest management, especially access for Indigenous and other underserved communities. Prioritize studies integrating traditional practices, equitable access to forest resources, and inclusive conservation approaches.

Additional Recommendations

- **Focus on Applied Science with Stakeholder Partnerships**: Projects should demonstrate clear application potential and established partnerships with stakeholders to ensure that research outcomes are implemented.
- **Balance Between Active and Passive Management**: Encourage research that evaluates active and passive forest management and how to balance opportunities for diverse approaches, particularly for resilience to climate change and pest invasions.
- **Understanding the Past to Plan for the Future**: Consider how 19th and 20th century land use policies have created forest ecosystem characteristics that reduce resilience in response to current and future stressors
- **Emphasize Timely and Impactful Results**: Prioritize research that will deliver rapid, relevant findings that address pressing forest management and community resilience needs.