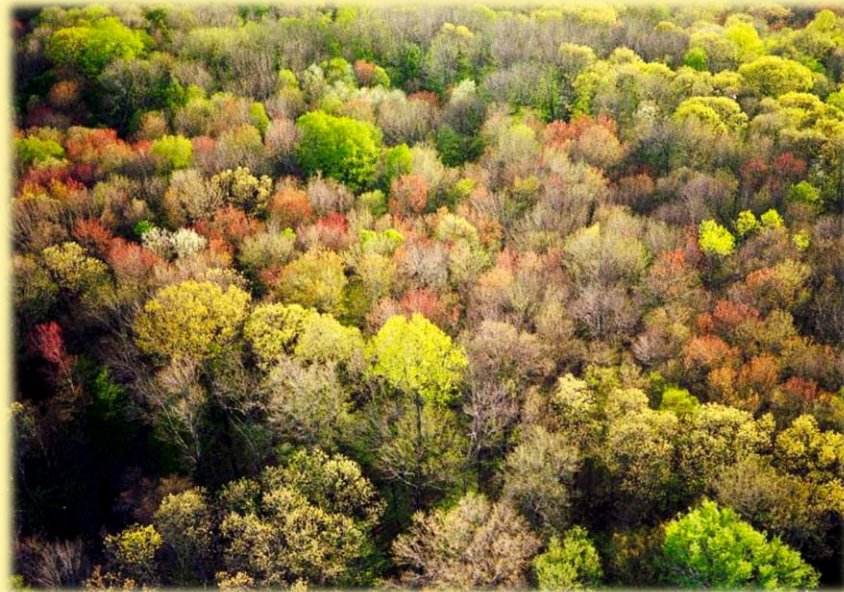
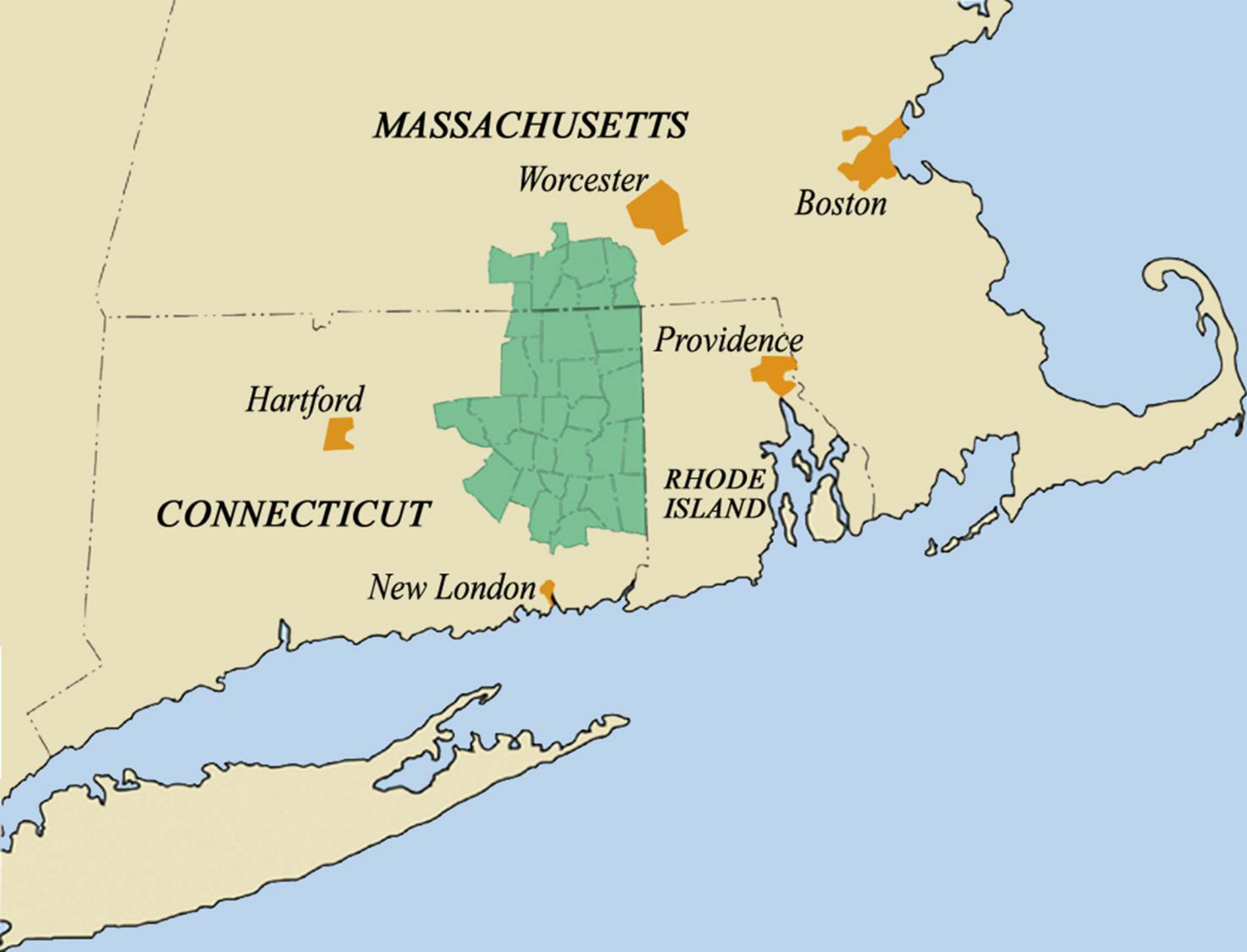




Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)

Accelerating the Pace of Woodland Conservation in the Southern New England Heritage Forest (SNEHF)





MASSACHUSETTS

Worcester

Boston

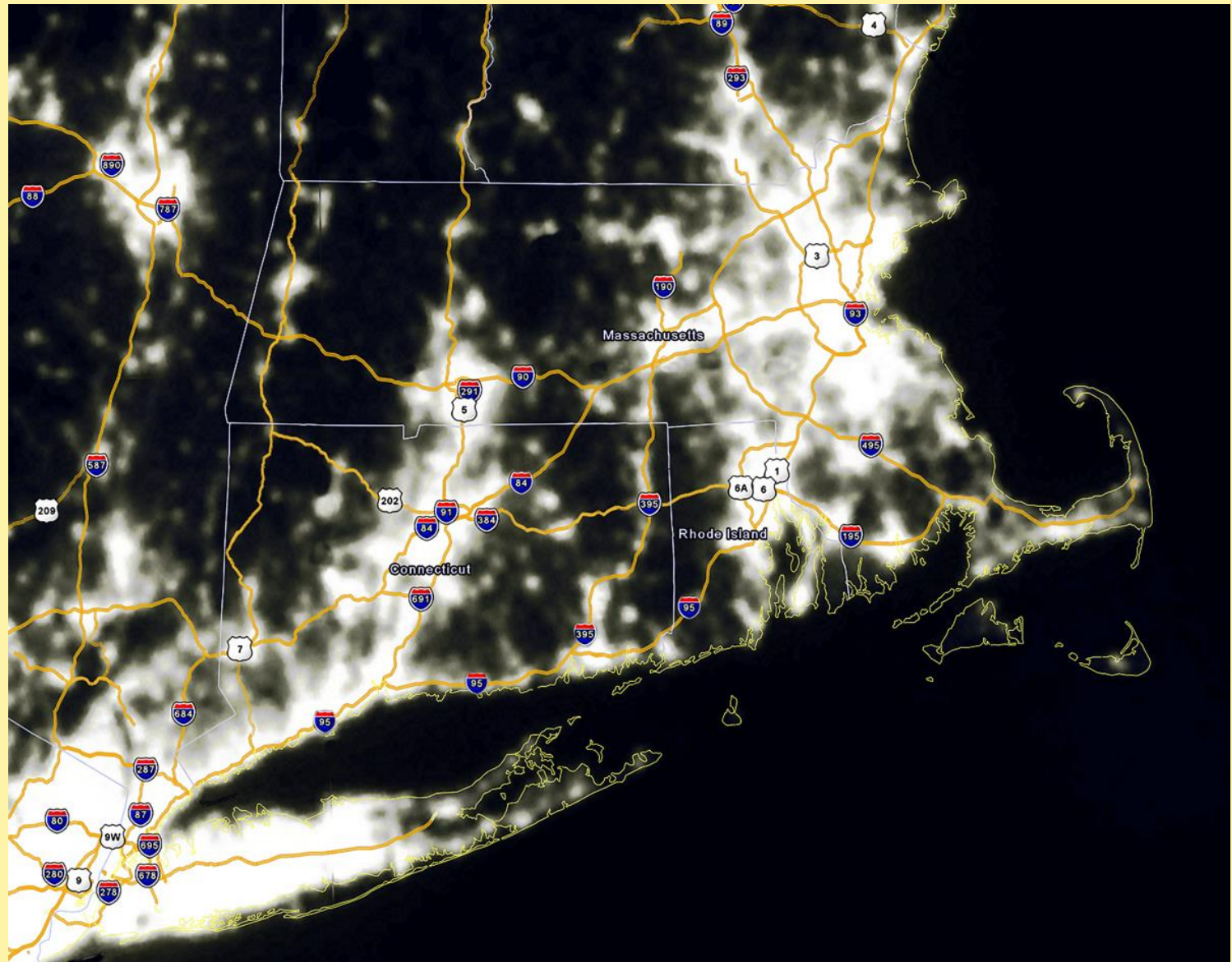
Providence

Hartford

CONNECTICUT

**RHODE
ISLAND**

New London



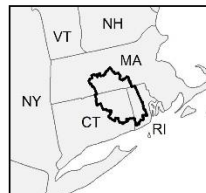
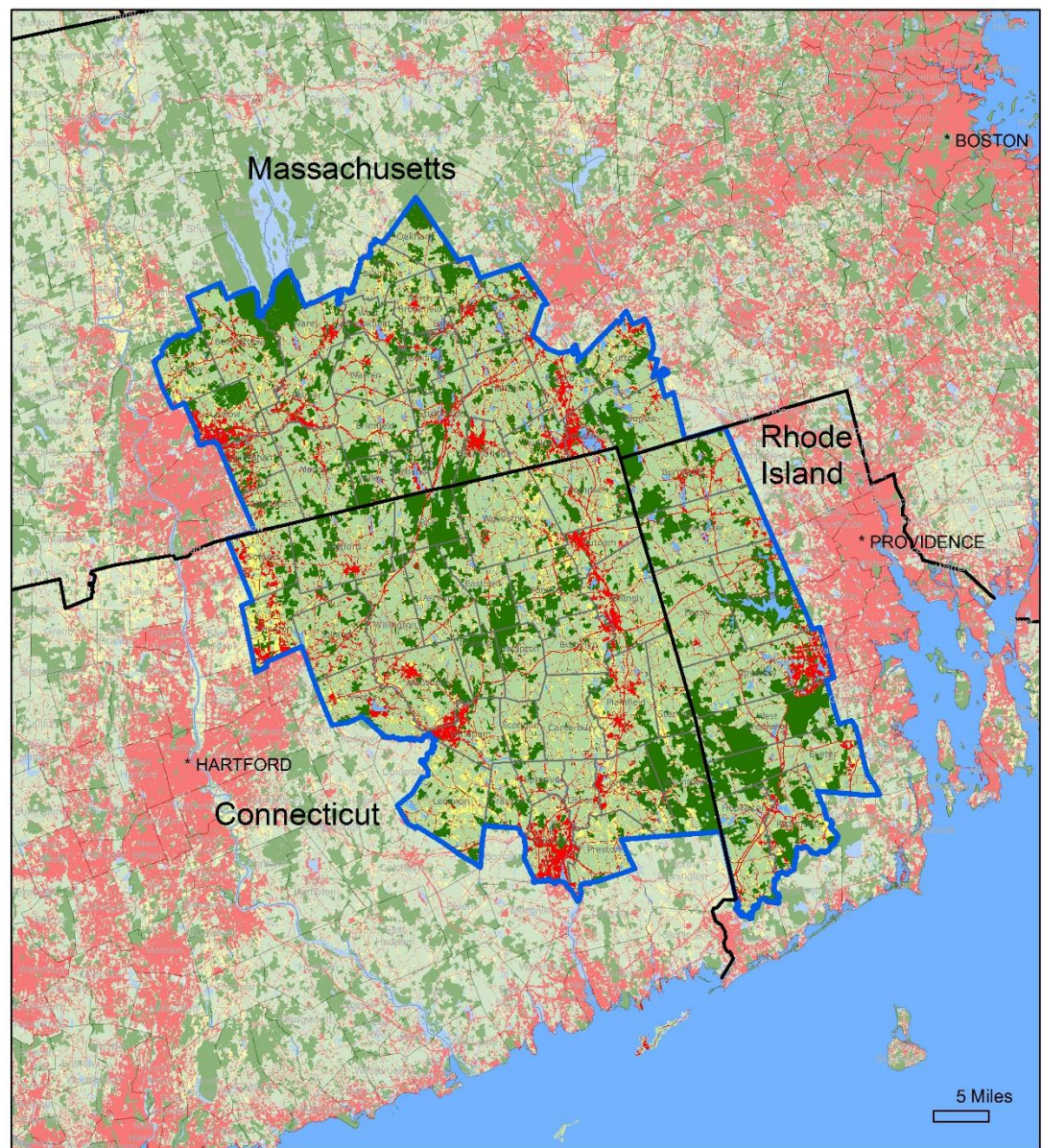
Southern New England Heritage Forest

Tri-state region

68 towns

1.49 million
acres

Still 76% forest



Protected Open Space

Land Cover (NLCD2011)

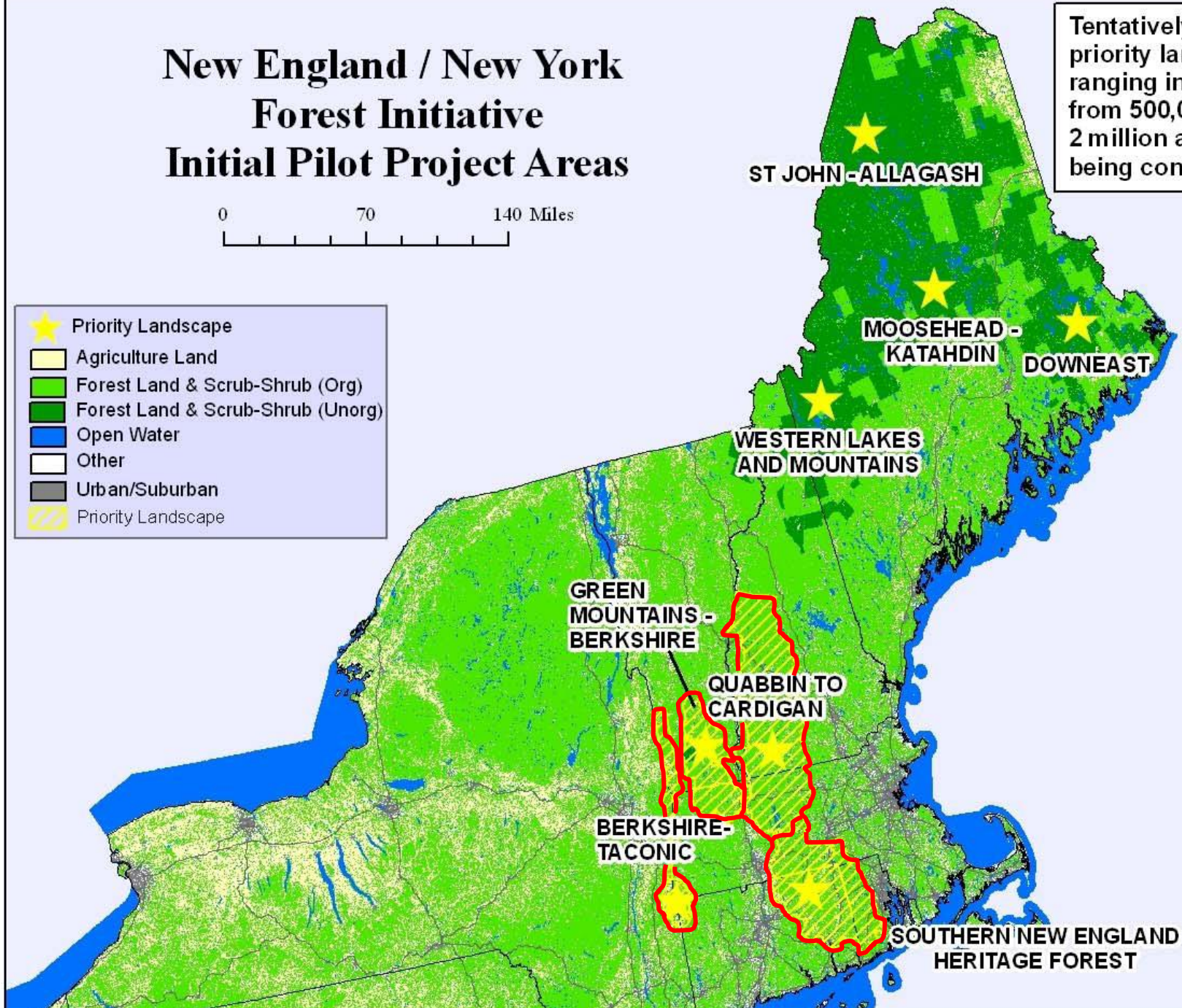
- Water or Wetland
- Grassland/Herbaceous
- Forest or Shrub/Scrub
- Developed
- Agriculture

New England / New York Forest Initiative Initial Pilot Project Areas

0 70 140 Miles



Tentatively - 4
priority landscapes
ranging in size
from 500,000 to
2 million acres are
being considered.



Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)

**New Federal Program in the 2014 Farm Bill
Agriculture/Forestry/Working Lands**

Tri-State Project = Competitive National Pool

**\$6,144,000 in new federal funding over 5 years
from the
U.S. Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service (USDA/NRCS)**



Partners & Roles

\$6,144,000 in “Significant Contributions”

Lead Partners

The Last Green Valley, Inc.

MassConn Sustainable Forest Partnership/Opacum Land Trust

Northern RI Conservation District

Supporting Partners

MA Executive Office of Energy & Environmental Affairs

Providence Water

Yale School of Forestry & Environmental Studies

CT Department of Energy & Environmental Protection

Hull Forest Products

Thames River Basin Partnership

New England Forestry Foundation

Eastern CT Conservation District

Norcross Wildlife Foundation

RI Division of Forest Management

RI Woodland Partnership

Harvard Forest

Yale Sustaining Family Forests Institute

**Audubon Connecticut, Mass Audubon,
and Audubon Society of RI**



Lead Partners:

Lois Bruinooge and Bill Reid

The Last Green Valley

lois@tlgv.org, bill@tlgv.org

860-774-3300

Ed Hood

**MassConn Sustainable Forest
Partnership**

ehood@opacumlt.org

508-347-9144

Gina DeMarco and Kate Sayles

Northern RI Conservation District

Gdemarco.nricd@gmail.com

Ksayles.nricd@gmail.com

401-934-0840



Project Goals:

- **Improve forest habitat for fish, wildlife, & invertebrate species of concern;**
- **Support the recovery of endangered or threatened species and improve biodiversity;**
- **Protect water quality and quantity;**
- **Foster resiliency and stand diversity; and**
- **Enhance air quality and carbon sequestration.**



Method of Delivery – Traditional NRCS Programs:

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

New funding for landowners:

- **Forest Management Plans with Bird Habitat Assessments**
- **Forestry Conservation Practices**

Healthy Forests Reserve Program (HFRP)

New funding for landowners:

- **75% easement value to permanently protect forest lands**
- **Due Diligence and Transaction Costs**



Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) - \$1,542,750

**Spread over 5 years in 3 states
Split 40% CT /40% MA /20% RI**



- **200 Forest Management/Stewardship Plans with Bird Habitat Assessments
(About 6,000 acres)**
- **Forestry Conservation Practices on 1,480 acres**
- **Technical assistance provided by lead partners in each state**
- **Technical assistance and program administration by NRCS staff**

EQIP Forest Management Plans with Bird Habitat Assessments

- **Landowners receive forest management plans that meet federal, state, and local standards**
- **Completed by approved and trained foresters (TSPs and/or state-licensed)**
- **75% of the cost of the basic forest management plan is reimbursed**
- **Landowner is responsible for remaining 25%**
- **Landowners also receive a bird habitat assessment completed by Audubon CT, Audubon RI, or, in MA, a forester trained in Foresters for the Birds**





Applications Available Soon

- **Apply to state lead partner – MassConn, TLGV, NRICD**
- **Landowner chooses forester from approved list and contracts with forester and TLGV**
- **Landowner coordinates with forester and Audubon CT/RI for site visit**
- **Foresters submit completed, integrated plans to NRCS for review and approval**
- **TLGV pays forester and Audubons**



EQIP Forest Conservation Practices

1480 acres @ \$400/acre

- **Landowners must have forest management plans w/bird habitat assessments to be eligible**
- **Landowner submits application to NRCS in applicable state**
- **Lead partners can help**
- **Projects are ranked by NRCS**
- **If approved, NRCS enters into contract with landowner and reimburses 75% after work has been completed**

Healthy Forest Reserve Program (HFRP) - \$4,601,250

**Spread over 5 years in 3 states
Split 40% CT /40% MA /20% RI**



- **1,140 acres permanently protected via conservation easements
Approximately 38 projects at 30 acres per project**
- **Transaction costs for 38 projects (\$30,000 per project)**
- **Easement restoration costs for 1,140 acres**
- **Technical assistance provided by lead partners in each state**
- **Technical assistance and program administration by NRCS staff**

HFRP Permanent Easements

- Landowner retains fee simple title to land; NRCS holds and enforces conservation easement
- Sample HFRP Conservation Easement deed:
https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/nrcs143_006835.pdf
- NRCS pays 75% of easement value to landowner; landowner asked to donate 25% of easement value as match



HFRP Permanent Easements

- **Landowners must be eligible and register with FSA**
 - **Private nonindustrial forest land, includes nonprofits but not municipal lands**
- **Land must have habitat able to “restore, enhance, or measurably increase the likelihood of recovery” of federal or state endangered or threatened species or candidate species, or federal or state species of special concern or conservation need**
- **Landowner must commit to “forever” bird species restoration plan**

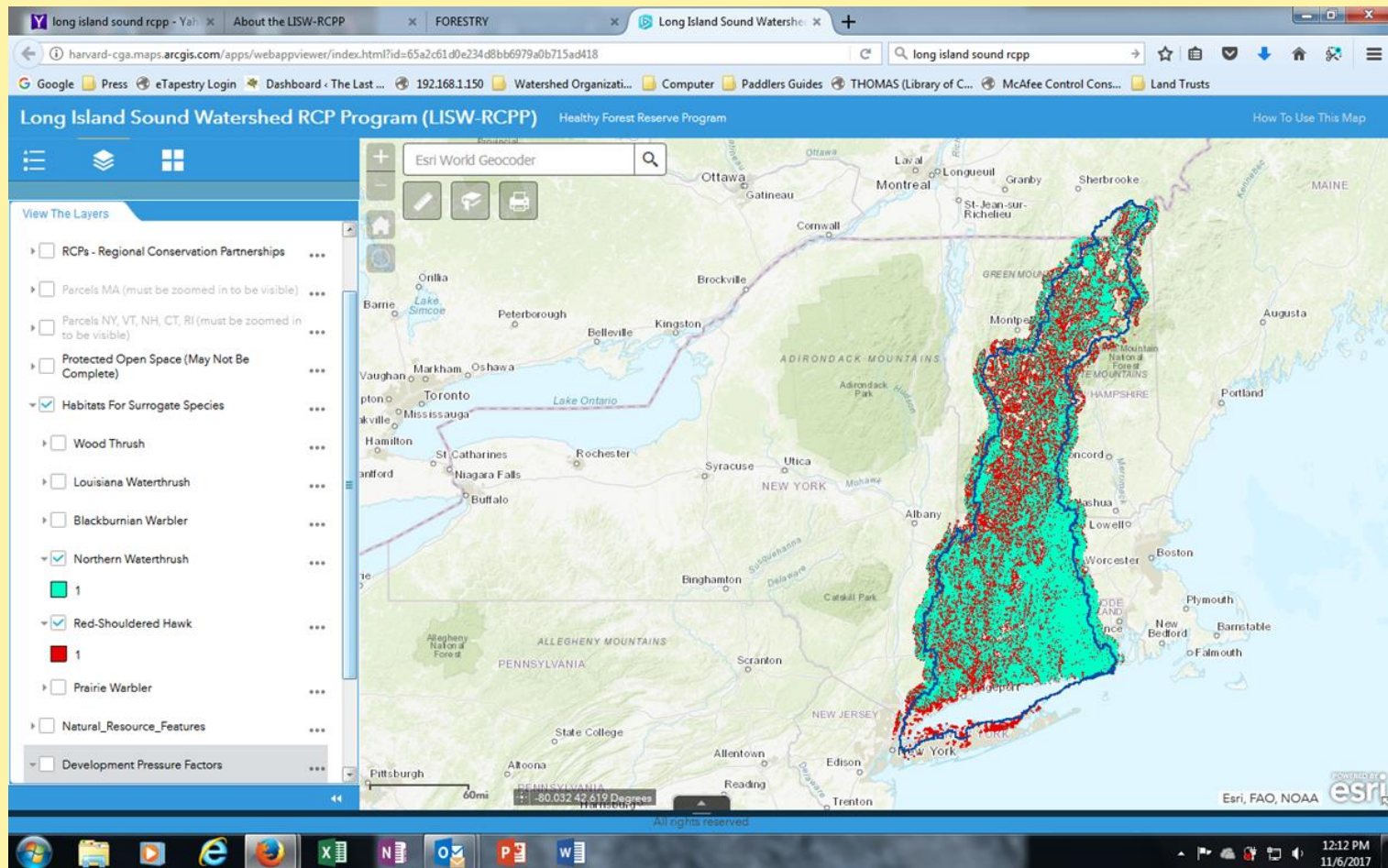


Long Island Sound RCPP – Forestry

<http://www.lisw-rcpp.com/forests.html>

Pre-Screening Map w/ 6 Surrogate Species Habitat

<http://harvard-cga.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=65a2c61d0e234d8bb6979a0b715ad418>



Application Process

- **Landowner works with lead partner in state to develop & submit application**
- **NRCS/FWS/partners conduct field assessment**
- **NRCS develops a preliminary restoration plan**
- **Landowners/parcels that are still eligible after above steps are ranked within each state**
- **NRCS notifies landowner of tentative acceptance**
- **NRCS conducts title search, haz mat due diligence search, NEPA evaluation, appraisal**



- **NRCS sends Option Agreement to Purchase to Landowner**
- **NRCS procures legal boundary survey and baseline property inventory report**
- **NRCS drafts final restoration plan**
- **NRCS obtains title commitment and prepares final documents for closing**
- **Landowner implements restoration plan with NRCS funding for first cycle**
- **NRCS monitors easement**



Potential Ranking Criteria

**Most scores will be derived from a
GIS-based SNEHF Mapping Tool**

- **Long-term (10+) years forest management plan**
- **Number of acres of forestland**
- **Land capable of supporting federally-listed species**
- **Number of acres within or abutting core forest**
- **Amount of protected land near parcel**
- **Ability to maximize protection of contiguous areas**



For more information:

USDA – NRCS Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)

<https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/programs/farmbill/rcpp/>

USDA - NRCS Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

<https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/programs/financial/eqip/>

USDA – NRCS Healthy Forests Reserve Program (HFRP)

<https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/programs/easements/forests/>

Sample HFRP Conservation Easement Deed

https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/nrcs143_006835.pdf

Long Island Sound Watershed RCPP

<http://www.lisw-rcpp.com/>; <http://www.lisw-rcpp.com/forests.html>



Contacts:

Lois Bruinooge and Bill Reid
The Last Green Valley

lois@tlgv.org, bill@tlgv.org

860-774-3300

Ed Hood

**MassConn Sustainable Forest
Partnership**

ehood@opacumlt.org

508-347-9144

Gina DeMarco and Kate Sayles
Northern RI Conservation District

Gdemarco.nricd@gmail.com

Ksayles.nricd@gmail.com

401-934-0840





**Together We Can
Care For It, Enjoy It, and Pass It On!**