



Cooley-Jericho Community Forest Frequently Asked Questions

Community Owned • Locally Controlled • Conserved Forever

Overview: Easton, Sugar Hill, Franconia, and Landaff have an exceptional opportunity to invest in the creation of an 840-acre Cooley-Jericho Community Forest in Easton, to be owned locally and managed by the residents of these four communities. Sugar Hill and Franconia have committed \$5,000 each from their Conservation Funds and Landaff and Easton will consider appropriations at Town Meeting. At all four Town Meetings residents will be asked to authorize their select boards to appoint a representative to the Forest governing group. Town investment, essential in the creation of a community forest, will be used for stewardship and management of the land.

Select Board members and volunteers from Easton and Sugar Hill, plus individuals from Franconia, Bethlehem, Landaff, and Lisbon have been working with the Ammonoosuc Conservation Trust (ACT) for over a year on the project.

Where is the land?

The property encompasses 840 acres in the northwest corner of Easton, sharing boundaries with Sugar Hill and Landaff. Highlighted by the prominent ridgelines of Cole Hill and Cooley Hill, this upland forest is one of the highest-elevation and largest privately-owned properties in the western White Mountains. It is spectacularly beautiful and rugged, with stunning views. It is accessible from Dyke Road, Trumpet Round Road, and Jericho Road in Sugar Hill, and from Jim Noyes Hill Road in Landaff. It may also be reached from the Jericho Trail on Route 116 in Easton.

What is a Community Forest?

A community forest is a permanently protected tract of land, owned and managed by local residents through their towns for the benefit of the local community. It can be owned by a single town, a group of towns, or a community-based organization like ACT. The high level of citizen participation in management and the permanent protection of the land distinguish the Community Forest from the traditional Town Forest, common throughout New England.

What are the benefits for the towns?

Immediate benefits from the Cooley-Jericho Community Forest would include:

- A highly attractive conserved property, **open for public use now and forever**
- **Tax savings** from the avoided costs of community services if this land were developed (road maintenance, emergency services, schools)
- A **scenic backdrop** for Sugar Hill, Landaff, Lisbon, Easton, and Franconia, preserved as a prominent ridgeline, forested by day and etched in darkness into the night sky
- **Prime wildlife habitat**, conserved and open for hunting
- **Recreational trails**, available for residents and visitors
- A natural venue, an attraction to which area **inns and hotels** may direct guests, including those who ride horses, go mountain biking, skiing, and hiking – it's a great place for families
- **A locally managed recreational area that reinforces other parks and venues in the region**
- An ideal **outdoor classroom** for local students, and its management will be used as for ongoing workshops and education for local landowners interested in good land stewardship for wildlife, recreation, and timber income

In the long term, **cash will flow back to the towns** as timber is harvested. Towns will receive revenue proportionate to the dollar amount that each invests in the project over time.

Who gets to use the land?

We all do. Purchasing the land will guarantee that the land will be open for public recreation forever, and the management will be local. Protections for the land, will be specified in a Conservation Easement, held by the New England Forestry Foundation. This Easement will:

- Guarantee public recreational access
- Ensure that the property can never be developed
- Ensure that wildlife habitat and water quality will be protected

Timber will be cut as a source of municipal income to the participating towns, and for the stewardship of the forest. The property will be open to recreation including hiking, snowshoeing, hunting, horseback riding, backcountry skiing, mountain biking, and wildlife observation.

What about using snowmobiles or ATVs on the land?

A state snowmobile trail runs near the property. Depending on local interest, extending a loop through the forest may be considered, depending on topographic, wildlife, and habitat conditions. The Planning Committee has not heard from anyone proposing ATV access, and would have to consider whether ATV use would be compatible with the land and under what conditions. The conservation easement will require that streams, wetlands and water quality be protected, so any ATV use (as well as other recreational use) must not cause erosion or stream bank damage.

How would ACT ownership and community management work?

ACT will own the land on behalf of the participating towns as a taxable property (ACT pays property taxes on all land it owns). A governing committee will be formed of representatives of the participating towns, ACT, and user groups such as mountain bikers, hunters, backcountry skiers, adjacent landowners, horseback riders, and educators. The governing committee will create a Community Forest Management Plan, with guidelines for recreational use, trail building, experiential learning, forest management, property maintenance, ensuring the flow of benefits to the communities.

Why doesn't ACT simply own it without town participation?

Because this is proposed as a *Community Forest*. ACT and our partners on the Forest Planning Committee believe that this land is so important regionally that it should be treated as a community-wide project, rather than a single town or a single organization project. ACT sought funding on that basis, and **this project was ranked #1 in the country** by the U.S. Forest Service. ACT has also received support from highly competitive state funding sources, on the promise of creating a community forest.

How much will it cost to manage the land?

Basic annual stewardship costs are estimated at \$2,500 for taxes, liability insurance, and required monitoring/recordkeeping. A fund will be established to help cover these annual costs. The landowner has pledged \$25,000 to that fund. Additional costs may include trail building, boundary line maintenance, interpretive signs, parking lot construction and maintenance, education and outreach, website, financial accounting and reporting, and fundraising. Some of this work will be done by volunteers, some covered by grants and donations, and some may be contracted to ACT or another service provider. Town tax rates would not be affected.

What is the status of negotiations to buy the land?

ACT, a nationally accredited land conservation organization based in Bethlehem and serving the North Country, has a signed contract, contingent on successful fund raising, to buy the property at the price of \$600,000 (\$714/acre), well below the appraised fair market value of \$730,000 (\$869/acre), making this a bargain sale. The closing deadline is June 30, 2013.

ACT has raised the \$600,000 for purchase of the property itself. Under the terms of the purchase contract, another \$50,000 must be in hand by closing in order to meet immediate operational and management needs of the project, including an updated federal appraisal, natural resources inventory, management plan, legal work, environmental due diligence, boundary line blazing, and related costs. Town and private contributions are needed to reach this goal.

What happens if ACT and the communities do not purchase the land?

The current landowners, who are of retirement age, want to sell the land. They have engineered it for a large-lot subdivision and have also proposed it for a wind farm. This land will most assuredly be lost to the public for recreation and as timberland if it goes on the market and is sold for such development purposes.

Why should we be excited about the Cooley-Jericho Community Forest?

Residents of Easton, Sugar Hill, Landaff and Franconia have a once in a lifetime opportunity to commit a large, high quality piece of northern forest with significant viewshed, recreational, and timber management benefits for the good of generations to come. It would be a landmark event in the conservation of New England's prized natural setting, and a long-term economic investment in the sustainability of our towns.

For more information contact:

Rebecca Brown, Executive Director, Ammonoosuc Conservation Trust, 107 Glessner Road, Bethlehem NH 03574
603-823-7777 rbrown@aconservationtrust.org www.townforest.org www.aconservationtrust.org